

A paramedic named Josh, wearing a cap and uniform, is attending to a young child in an ambulance. The scene is dimly lit with a blue tint. The paramedic's name 'Josh' is visible on his uniform. The child is sitting up, looking towards the paramedic.

**EMS1)**

# WHAT PARAMEDICS WANT<sup>IN</sup> 25

This year's EMS Trend Survey reveals a profession pushed to its limits. From chronic burnout and staffing gaps to a lack of meaningful leadership engagement, personnel are sounding the alarm — and offering a roadmap for change.

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Burnout in EMS: Recognize it, fight it, overcome it

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# FROM THE EDITOR

The 2025 EMS Trend Survey results are more than a snapshot — they're a warning. This year, burnout emerged as the top concern facing EMS professionals, surpassing even long-standing issues like recruitment, retention and funding. The survey data, combined with commentary from EMS leaders and frontline providers, paints a stark picture: the profession is stretched thin, and the workforce is struggling to hold the line.

The articles in this report, produced in partnership with Fitch & Associates, dig into the drivers behind the burnout spiral — chronic understaffing, lack of leadership engagement, limited wellness support — and offer real-world strategies to reverse course. From improving internal communication and leadership trust to implementing stay interviews and workforce wellness programs, these pieces outline practical steps for EMS leaders.

Supporting the EMS workforce can't be solved with recruitment alone. The solution starts with truly listening to your team and investing in their long-term success. That means building better feedback loops; creating advancement opportunities; and developing a culture where people feel seen, supported and valued.

EMS has always adapted in the face of pressure. Now, that adaptability must extend inward. This digital edition aims to equip you with tools and insight to not just manage the crisis — but to lead your agency forward with purpose.

— Kerri Hatt,  
Editor-in-Chief, EMS1

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## CONTENTS

**4**

### **THE EMS WORKFORCE IS SOUNDING THE ALARM**

By Anthony W. Minge, EdD

**12**

### **BURNOUT IN EMS: RECOGNIZE IT, FIGHT IT, OVERCOME IT**

By Corinne Flammer

**17**

### **STOP THE STAFFING SPIRAL: BURNOUT IS DRAINING YOUR WORKFORCE**

By Fred W. Wurster III, MS, NRP

**22**

### **DOES YOUR TEAM FEEL UNSEEN? CLOSE THE LEADERSHIP DISCONNECT WITH 2-WAY COMMUNICATION**

By Carly Strong





Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

WRITTEN BY  
Anthony W. Minge, EdD

With burnout ranked as the top concern, the EMS Trend Survey reveals a profession pushed to the brink — and what must change to protect it

As we continue to evaluate the evolving EMS landscape, several critical challenges persist. In 2025, burnout was officially ranked as the #1 concern impacting EMS, reflecting growing concerns within the field. Survey responses show that burnout affects a staggering 76% of EMS professionals, with 25% of respondents ranking it as the most critical issue in their agency, highlighting the urgent need for action to address the mental and physical well-being of EMS personnel.

## THE RISE OF BURNOUT

Recognizing the growing prevalence of burnout in EMS providers, we added it to our survey this year as a potential option for the question: Rank the following critical issues facing EMS today.

Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted burnout as the No. 1 top concern facing EMS:

- 76% responded burnout is a critical issue
- 51% of respondents ranked burnout in the top 3 critical issues
- 25% of respondents ranked it their No. 1 critical concern

Ranked above retention of quality personnel, funding/reimbursement, and career advancement, burnout is linked to the long shifts, high stress and the emotionally demanding nature of the work.

Burnout can lead to high turnover rates, decreased job satisfaction and compromised





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quality of care. The emotional toll, combined with physical demands, contributes to a significant portion of EMS personnel either considering leaving the field or struggling with the demands of the job. This surge in burnout is compounded by other factors, including:

- Inadequate staffing (25% ranked staffing the most stressful aspect of their job)
- Inadequate leadership support (22% ranked the most stressful aspect of their job)
- The growing prevalence of complex patient populations:
  - Those affected by opioids (29% report having a high impact on EMS in their communities)
  - Those affected by homelessness (31% report having a high impact on EMS in their communities)
  - Those affected by mental health crises (54% report having a high impact on EMS in their communities)

### Respondents rank the critical issues facing EMS today:

(1 being the most critical)

#### 1. **Burnout**

2. Retention of quality personnel
3. Funding/reimbursement
4. Career development/advancement
5. Recruitment of qualified applicants
6. Leadership
7. Provider mental health
8. Education of the workforce
9. Provider safety
10. Wait time/hospital delays



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## INADEQUATE STAFFING AND ITS IMPACT

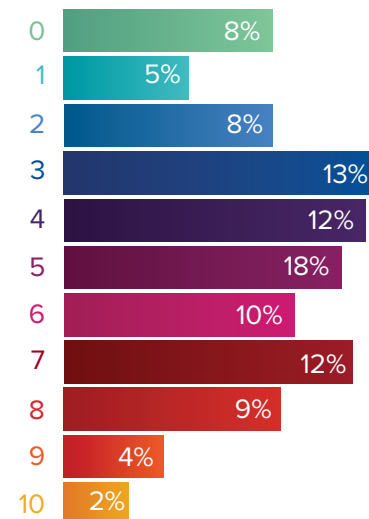
Staffing shortages remain a long-standing challenge, with 59% of respondents indicating that their agency does not have enough personnel to respond effectively to 911 emergency calls. This is nearly identical to the 57% reported in 2024, demonstrating the persistent nature of the issue. Staffing problems are ranked as the most stressful aspect of EMS work, reflecting both the physical strain on providers and the emotional toll of managing overwhelming caseloads with insufficient support.

Inadequate staffing is not just an operational issue, but a key driver of burnout. When agencies struggle to fill shifts or meet the demands of an expanding service area, providers are forced to work longer hours under increased pressure. The resulting stress contributes to the cycle of burnout, where personnel feel undervalued and overburdened.

EMS leaders must prioritize effective staffing strategies, including attracting and retaining qualified personnel, improving job satisfaction and fostering a work environment where employees feel supported. Addressing staffing issues can alleviate many of the stressors that lead to burnout, improving both employee retention and patient care.

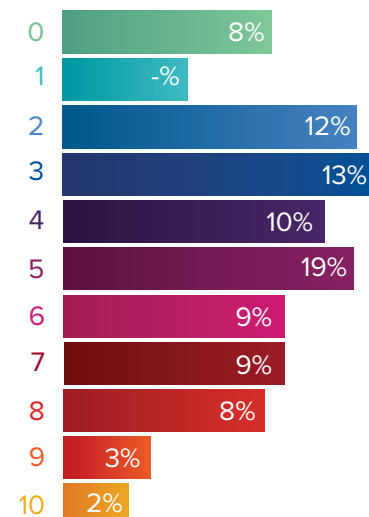
### Please rate the state of EMS provider retention in your organization on a scale of 0 to 10.

(0 = poor state of retention, 10 = excellent state of retention)



### Please rate the state of EMS provider recruitment in your organization on a scale of 0 to 10.

(0 = poor state of retention, 10 = excellent state of retention)





## PROVIDER HEALTH: A GROWING CONCERN

EMS providers' physical and mental health continues to be an area of significant concern. While nearly half (46%) of respondents feel confident in their own physical fitness, only 27% feel confident that their partners are fit enough to handle the rigors of the job. Alarming, 40% of respondents report they rarely or never achieve the CDC-recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week, and 52% do not perform recommended muscle-strengthening activities (twice a week).

The physical wellbeing of EMS providers is critical for their safety and the quality of care they can provide to patients. Unfortunately, agency-level support for physical and mental wellness is lacking. Many respondents report dissatisfaction

with their agency's physical wellness services, with 50% disagreeing that their agency provides adequate wellness support.

EMS agencies are also struggling to support mental health, with 40% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with mental health services offered by their employers. These statistics highlight a systemic issue within the EMS field: a lack of comprehensive support for the health and well-being of those on the front lines. If agencies do not prioritize both physical and mental wellness programs, the long-term impacts on workforce morale, retention and patient care will continue to escalate.

**More: [On demand webinar: Unlock functional fitness](#).** Exercises, techniques and routines designed to maximize readiness, prevent injuries and boost resilience

# PERSONAL — Health —



**46%** of respondents are confident that their physical fitness level prepares them for nearly any situation they will encounter on the job



**40%** report they rarely/never get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity in a week (as recommended by the CDC)



**52%** report they rarely/never perform muscle-strengthening activities of moderate or greater intensity twice a week (as recommended by the CDC)



**41%** report they rarely/never get 7 or more hours per day of sleep (as recommended by the CDC)



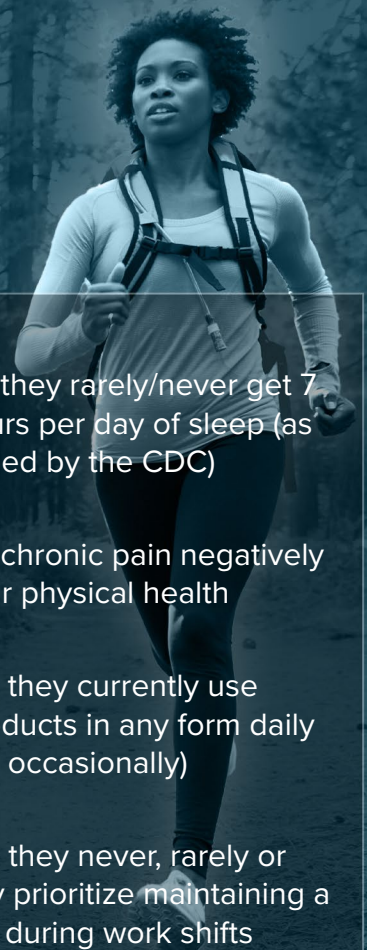
**41%** report chronic pain negatively impacts their physical health



**22%** report they currently use tobacco products in any form daily (another 8% occasionally)



**59%** report they never, rarely or occasionally prioritize maintaining a healthy diet during work shifts





## Scalable tips to boost provider wellness

Public safety wellness expert Mandy Nice, senior CEM, Lexipol, provided the following action steps to improve provider health and wellness.



### Action steps for individuals

- **Start small:** Even 10 minutes a day of stretching, walking or bodyweight exercises can have measurable benefits.
- **Target pain points:** Focus on mobility and flexibility to reduce common job-related pain.
- **Build momentum:** Consistency is more important than intensity. Gradual improvements build lasting habits.

### Action steps for EMS leaders

- **Model healthy behavior:** Leaders should participate in wellness efforts and take care of their own health.
- **Encourage micro-steps:** Add a daily stretch to shift briefings or promote stretching between calls.
- **Support screenings:** Push for annual health checks to identify risks early.
- **Invest smartly:** From onsite workshops to full-scale wellness programs, leaders have scalable options to back their staff's health.

## LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN EMS

Leadership remains a critical issue, though it ranks lower than burnout and staffing in terms of priority. However, dissatisfaction with leadership remains high, with 33% of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with leadership at their agency. This dissatisfaction often manifests from a lack of recognition, support and communication from leaders. For example, over 50% of EMS personnel report that their supervisor rarely or never provides regular recognition, praise or constructive feedback.

Poor leadership directly impacts employee satisfaction, leading to burnout and a lack of engagement. Leadership's failure to recognize the stressors faced by staff and provide adequate support can lead to a disengaged workforce and diminished job satisfaction. As one respondent said, *"Be more directly supportive of employees, make changes when employees express concerns."*

Effective leadership is crucial in creating a supportive work environment. Leaders who listen to their staff, recognize their contributions, and support their physical and mental health are more likely to foster a positive and productive work culture. Agencies must invest in leadership development to ensure that their leaders are equipped to support their teams through the challenges they face.



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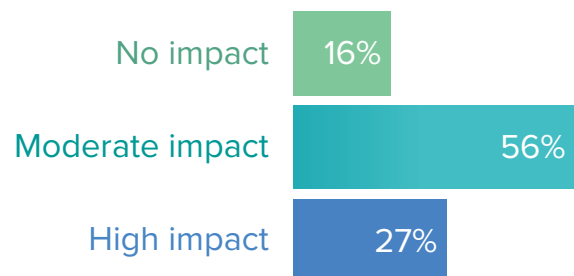
## THE IMPACT OF OPIOIDS, HOMELESS POPULATIONS, AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

The opioid epidemic, the growing homeless population and patients in mental health crises have an undeniable impact on EMS operations. The opioid crisis continues to place a significant burden on EMS, with 27% of respondents reporting that opioid overdoses have a high impact on their community. Similarly, 54% of EMS workers report that mental health crises are a high-impact issue, with many EMS providers feeling ill-prepared to handle these complex situations. Other studies have shown that continual exposure to these patients in crisis, with limited options for improvement or resolution of the causal situation, can lead to compassion fatigue, patient mismanagement and caregiver burnout.

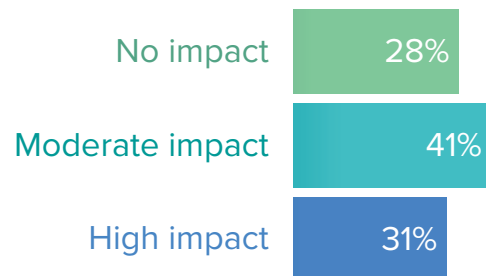
Agencies are beginning to implement specialized response teams to address these growing challenges, with 17% reporting the use of such teams for mental health crises. However, more needs to be done. Increasing the adoption of specialized teams and training EMS personnel to respond effectively to opioid overdoses, homelessness and mental health crises will be essential in reducing the strain on EMS resources and improving patient outcomes.

### How much of an impact are the following issues having on EMS in your community?

#### Opioid overdose epidemic:



#### Homeless patient populations:



#### Patients in mental health crisis:

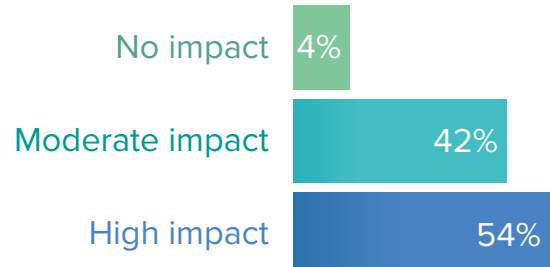




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## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IN EMS

While many emerging technologies hold promise for EMS, their adoption is still in its early stages. Only 6% of agencies are currently using AI tools for clinical care or documentation, and 14% are using whole blood in the field (although at the time of writing this article, this appears to be more rapidly expanding in some major metropolitan areas, such as Fort Worth, Texas).

### **More:** [Tracking the whole blood landscape](#)

These technologies could enhance operational efficiency and improve patient care, but their widespread adoption requires significant investment and training.

In the coming years, EMS agencies must embrace innovative technologies that can streamline operations, improve care quality, and lessen the burden on their staff. This includes the potential of AI tools, advanced medical equipment and telemedicine to enhance service delivery and patient outcomes.

## How is your agency using or offering the following?

	Using	Planning to adopt
Telemedicine/video consults with physicians or other providers	12%	6%
Nurse triage of 911 calls in the dispatch center	6%	3%
Arranging alternative means of transportation (taxi, ride-share, etc.)	8%	4%
Ambulance transport of 911 patients to alternative destinations (urgent care, mental health, detox from alcohol or opioids etc.)	12%	5%
Specialized response teams to patients with opioid use disorders	9%	4%
Leave-behind Naloxone	31%	4%
Connecting patients to recovery services	23%	7%
Medication to treat opioid withdrawal symptoms	14%	5%
Specialized response team to patients experiencing a mental health crisis	17%	6%
AI tools for clinical care or documentation	6%	6%
AI tools for dispatch/resource management	10%	6%
Pre-hospital ultrasound	9%	8%
Mechanical CPR	73%	5%
Whole blood	14%	17%



## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

The real trend here is identifying the myriad challenges the profession continues to face. This year, burnout and inadequate staffing are at the forefront. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes improving leadership, investing in workforce wellness, supporting physical and mental health, and leveraging emerging technologies.

EMS agencies that prioritize these areas will not only improve their quality of care but also foster a healthier, more resilient workforce capable of meeting the demands of this essential service. Reaction to or lack thereof will determine whether this is a crisis dooming our future or a challenging opportunity to be accepted, poising this noble profession for continued success.

*The time to act is now! 1>*

---

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony W. Minge is senior partner, Fitch & Associates, coordinating the firm's educational offerings and responsible for reimbursement, compliance and membership consulting services. He serves as the program co-chair for the Pinnacle Leadership Forum and as the partner responsible for the Ambulance Service Manager and Communications Center Manager certification programs. He has a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, an MBA in Strategic Leadership and a Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership.

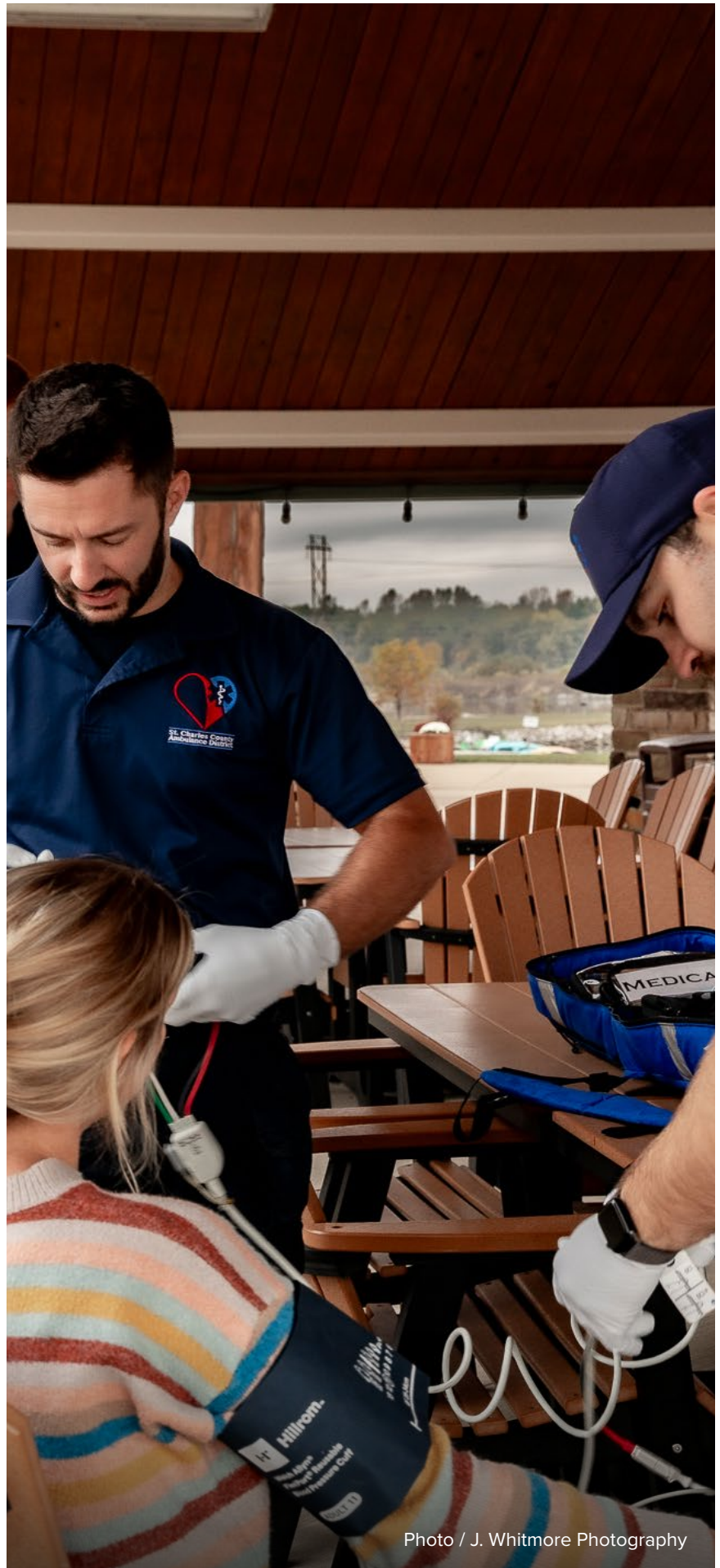


Photo / J. Whitmore Photography





## ***SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS***

Based on 1,207 responses to the  
*“What Paramedics Want in 2025”* EMS trend survey

**Gender:** 72% identify as male; 26% as female; and 2% as non-binary, self-described or declined to answer.

**Race/ethnicity:** 88% identify as white; 3% Hispanic/Latino; 2% Black; 1% Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native.

**Certification level:** 62% are paramedics. EMTs make up 13%, critical care paramedics 8%, AEMTs 5%; and the rest hold flight, community or technical paramedic credentials.

**Experience:** 10% have 0-5 years in EMS, 13% 6-10 years, 25% 11-20 years, 23% 21-30 years and 30% more than 30 years of experience.

**Education:** 32% have a high school or vocational education, 29% hold an associate degree, 26% have a bachelor's degree, 12% report a master's degree and 2% have obtained a doctorate.

**Geographic distribution:** 27% serve urban areas, 31% suburban, 38% rural and 4% super-rural areas.

**Primary EMS role:** 49% are ground field providers, 14% serve in supervisory or managerial roles, 14% are in chief or administrative positions, 5% are educators, 5% are dispatchers, 3% work in quality improvement, 3% are flight medics or nurses and less than 1% are medical directors.

**Primary current roles:** 23% work in administration/management roles, 45% ALS 911 response, 2% ALS interfacility transport, 7% BLS 911 response, 1% BLS interfacility transport, 1% community paramedicine, 4% critical care transport, 6% field supervision, 1% quality assurance/improvement, 1% support (fleet, PIO, billing) and 5% in training roles.

**Organizational model:** 18% work in fire-based agencies, 15% hospital-based, 17% non-profit, 18% private for-profit, 21% public third-service, 10% public utility, and 1% federal or military EMS systems.





# BURNOUT IN EMS

**RECOGNIZE IT  
FIGHT IT  
OVERCOME IT**

WRITTEN BY  
Corinne Flammer

Burnout tops the list of critical concerns. Discover how to recognize the signs and address root causes, to prevent and reverse burnout

Burnout — we’ve all heard of it, and many of us have felt its heavy weight. Whether whispered about among experienced providers or discussed openly in training sessions, burnout has become a defining concern in the EMS profession. In fact, in this year’s What Paramedics Want EMS Trend Survey, we added burnout as a potential response to the question, “Rank the critical issues facing EMS today,” and it shot to the top of the list.

But what exactly is burnout? How can we recognize it — in ourselves and [in others](#) — and, more importantly, [how can we address it](#) before it takes a permanent toll?

## WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is a recognized medical condition with an ICD-11 classification. According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), burnout is:

*“A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed ... characterized by three dimensions:*

- *Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion*
- *Increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job*
- *Reduced professional efficacy*

*Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context.”*

This definition frames burnout as a serious occupational phenomenon — not a passing phase or mere dissatisfaction.



Photo / J. Whitmore Photography




In EMS, where stress is a daily expectation, it's essential to understand that burnout doesn't arise from a single critical incident. Instead, it builds over time through chronic dissatisfaction, relentless demands and unaddressed emotional exhaustion. Even small, everyday stressors, when unrelenting, can push us toward burnout.

### ARE YOU JUST TIRED — OR BURNED OUT?

Recognizing burnout begins with assessing your overall happiness and satisfaction. Everyone has rough days, but if you find yourself persistently exhausted, emotionally detached or unable to find joy in any part of your shift, you may be experiencing burnout.

Small frustrations — like a missed lunch break — that once rolled off your back, now feel overwhelming. Jokes from coworkers that once made you laugh, now only annoy you. When nothing about the job feels rewarding anymore, that's a major red flag.

**Coworkers often spot the signs first:**

-  Irritability
-  Anger
-  Rigid, narrow thinking

These behaviors, while frustrating, are sometimes cries for help signaling deeper struggles with burnout.

### BURNOUT KEY PATTERNS



**Early-career providers:**

(0–10 years)

- Often experience disillusionment early due to understaffing, lack of support and unclear advancement paths
- High risk of exit if exposed to burnout culture early



**Mid-career providers**

(11–20 years):

- Tend to face career stagnation, compounding burnout
- Report frustration with lack of recognition and few paths to promotion



**Veteran providers**

(20+ years):

- Exhibit symptoms of cynicism and fatigue, particularly from poor leadership, policy inertia and constant system strain
- Many express EMS is no longer a sustainable long-term career unless things change

**More:** [10 red flag phrases that signal first responders are struggling with stress](#)





Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

## STRATEGIES TO STAVE OFF BURNOUT

If you're experiencing symptoms of burnout, try these three strategies:

**1 Reconnect with your “why.”** One of the most effective antidotes to burnout is reconnecting with your purpose — your “why.” Why did you enter EMS? Was it to make a difference? To help those who couldn't help themselves? To be part of something bigger?

Think back to the pride you felt when you passed the NREMT or state certifying exam, or first put on your uniform. Those moments of accomplishment were fueled by meaning and connection. Finding that sense of purpose again can be a powerful tool in pulling yourself out of burnout.

Don't be afraid to ask a trusted colleague to help you remember your “why.” Conversations that foster workplace connection are proven to strengthen resilience.

**2 Practice gratitude.** Gratitude isn't just a feel-good practice; it's a scientifically backed tool to rewire your brain. Studies using fMRI imaging show that focusing on gratitude strengthens neural pathways associated with positive thinking.

Simple daily practices — like naming three things you're grateful for after each shift — can gradually shift your outlook. Over time, positivity becomes your default setting, rather than negativity.

**3 Step back to see the bigger picture.** Taking time away is another critical strategy. Even short breaks or real vacations (not picking up extra shifts) provide valuable perspective. Distance allows you to reset, reflect and return with a renewed view of your role and career.

**More: [One for the Road: When is it time to quit your EMS job?](#)** Is your constant state of alert bordering on burnout? Have the discipline to know when to give yourself a break

# Underlying causes of *BURNOUT* across *ALL ROLES* and *EXPERIENCE LEVELS*

## TOP DRIVERS:

Inadequate staffing  
(**59%** report their agency doesn't have enough personnel)

Long, irregular shifts  
(common among all experience levels)

Lack of physical and mental health support (**52%** dissatisfied with wellness support)

Leadership shortcomings: **33%** are dissatisfied with agency leadership; many report lack of recognition, transparency or fairness

Lack of sleep and chronic stress are major physiological contributors to burnout

Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

## ORGANIZATIONAL BURNOUT: LEADERSHIP'S ROLE

While individual strategies are important, burnout is also an organizational problem. Leadership plays a critical role in either contributing to or alleviating burnout among providers.

It's telling that following burnout, the next critical issues concerning survey respondents were organizational: retention, funding and career development. Leaders must recognize that burnout isn't just an individual failing — it's often the symptom of systemic issues.

## BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

If you're an EMS leader, here's how you can start building organizational resilience:

**1 Foster true transparency.** Many survey respondents expressed frustration that leaders manage, but don't truly lead. Closing

that gap requires listening, involving employees in decision-making, and being open about challenges and solutions. When employees feel heard and see tangible changes, organizational trust — and resilience — grows.

**2 Promote fairness.** Opportunities for promotion and responses to mistakes must be consistent, fair and based on merit, not favoritism. Growth requires mistakes, and addressing them constructively, not punitively, fosters both learning and loyalty. Likewise, providing pathways for professional development strengthens employee engagement at every level.

**3 Recognize good work.** Positive reinforcement is powerful. Recognition — whether a simple "thank you" or formal awards — builds momentum. It strengthens employees' connection to their work and can be the lifeline someone needs when standing at the edge of burnout.





Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

## MOVING FORWARD: BURNOUT IS NOT PERMANENT

The good news is that burnout doesn't have to be permanent. Recovery begins with choice — the choice to address it, personally and organizationally. For individuals, it means rediscovering purpose, practicing gratitude and giving yourself space to heal.

For organizations, it means creating cultures of transparency, fairness and celebration.

Burnout is real — but so is resilience. Together, we can rebuild not only ourselves, but also the EMS profession into something stronger and more sustainable than ever. **1**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Corinne Flammer is New Jersey's first EMS mental health resilience officer for Saint Clare's Health, in Denville, New Jersey. She has over 30 years of EMS experience as a paramedic, educator and FTO. She is a sought-after speaker, author and podcast guest, as she shares her passion for first responder mental health. She holds a master's degree in psychology, focusing on trauma and crisis response.

**More:** [Breaking the culture of silence.](#)

Most likely, you know at least one caregiver who is struggling, but you're reluctant to act



# 10 ACTIONABLE STEPS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

| By Chad Premo

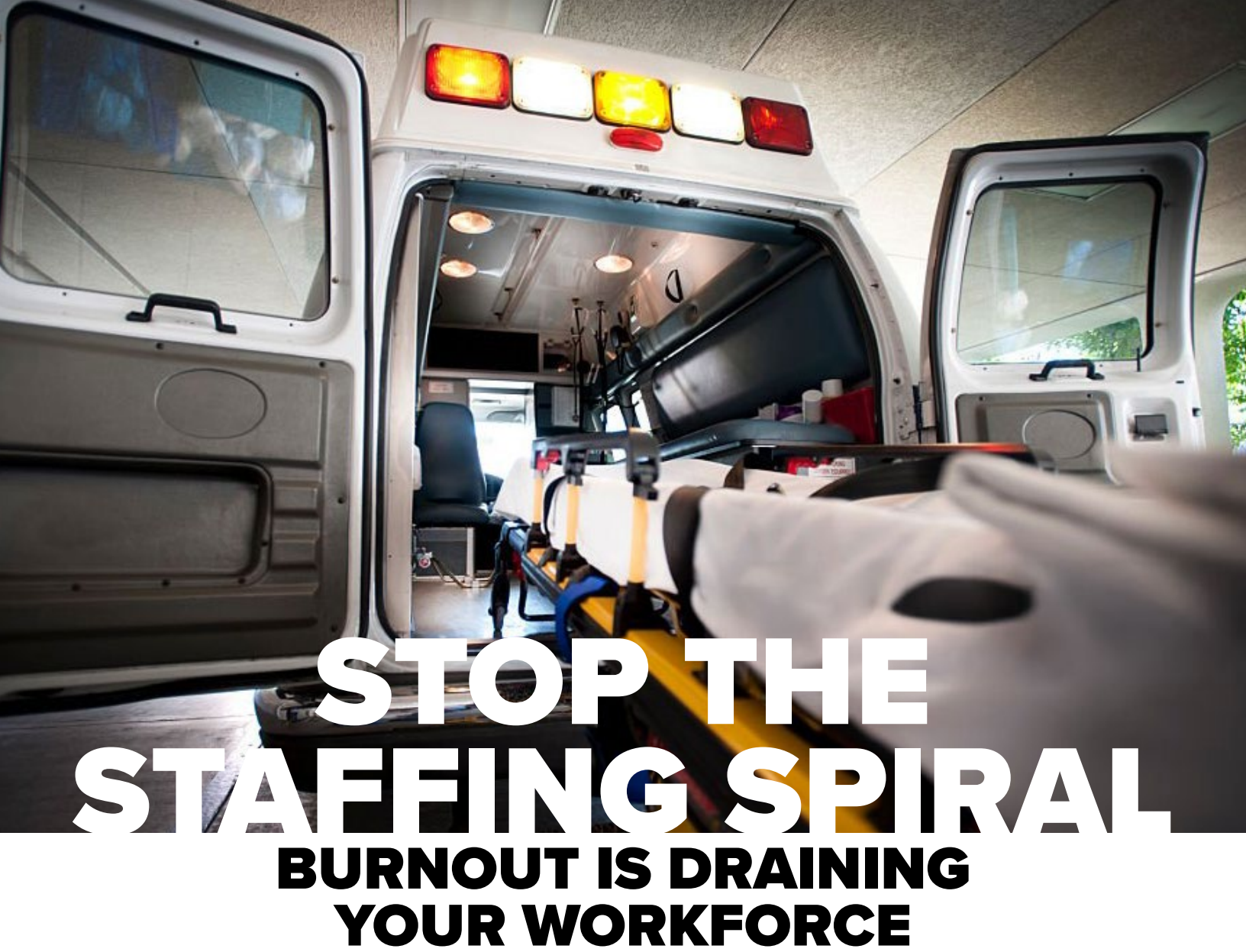
EMS providers face significant mental and emotional strain due to high-pressure environments and dual-industry responsibilities. These 10 steps offer practical ways to protect personal well-being and support a healthier EMS culture:

- 1. Engage in peer support.** Connect with colleagues who understand the job's challenges. Peer programs, debriefs and informal conversations can reduce isolation and foster community.
- 2. Advocate for transparent leadership.** Push for open communication, clear decision-making and regular feedback. Leaders who listen and acts build trust and reduce workplace stress.
- 3. Prioritize self-care.** Regular exercise, healthy eating and downtime aren't luxuries — they're necessities. Taking care of yourself boosts resilience and job satisfaction.
- 4. Utilize mental health resources.** Don't overlook support programs like EAPs or counseling. Seeking help is a proactive step toward mental wellness, not a sign of weakness.
- 5. Establish a consistent sleep routine.** Quality sleep is critical. Stick to regular sleep and wake times, limit caffeine and screen use, and create a restful environment.
- 6. Set boundaries to prevent burnout.** Know your limits. Say no when needed, limit excessive overtime, and advocate for recovery time to maintain long-term mental stamina.
- 7. Pursue professional development.** Continued learning, mentoring and skill-building provide a sense of progress and purpose, fueling career satisfaction.
- 8. Practice effective stress management.** Build routines that include stress-reducing practices like deep breathing, journaling, physical activity or hobbies.
- 9. Foster a supportive community.** Surround yourself with people who care. Strong personal and workplace relationships improve emotional balance and resilience.
- 10. Be proactive in organizational change.** Support policies and practices that improve workplace culture. Giving feedback and advocating for change helps shape a mentally healthier environment for all.

Visit our [full What Paramedics Want coverage](#) for more actionable steps for improving EMS.







# STOP THE STAFFING SPIRAL

## BURNOUT IS DRAINING YOUR WORKFORCE

WRITTEN BY  
Fred W. Wurster III, MS, NRP

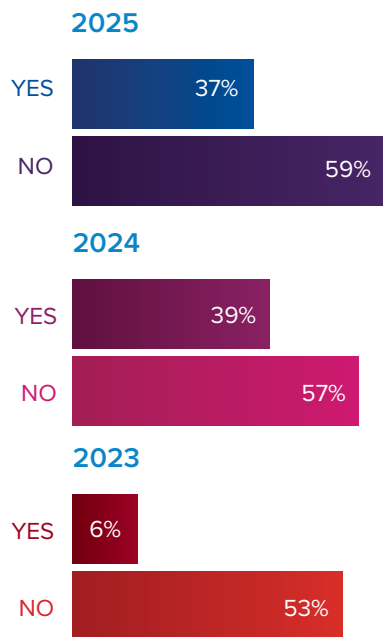
Staffing shortages, weak feedback loops and outdated incentives are driving talent away. Stay interviews and engagement plans could be the solution.

For several years, recruitment and retention have dominated respondents' top concerns in the "What Paramedics Want" EMS Trend Survey. While in the 2025 survey, the newly

added choice — provider burnout — surpassed retention as the most pressing EMS concern, as respondents' comments and responses illustrate, staffing and burnout go hand in hand.

Survey respondents and EMS providers nationwide, in conversation and in social media discussions, frequently reference burnout, whether personally experienced or observed among colleagues. This widespread issue, compounded by similar trends in the broader healthcare system, underscores the fragility of human capital within EMS agencies and healthcare as a whole.

## Does your department have enough personnel available to respond to 911 emergency calls in its service area?



A 2019 Forbes article titled, [“Burnout is sabotaging employee retention: Three things you must know to help”](#), reported that 46% of HR leaders surveyed attributed 20-50% of annual workforce turnover to burnout. The impact of burnout on workforce stability is significant. EMS leaders routinely witness its effects through communication and emotional intelligence challenges, making it one of the most critical issues facing the profession today. Addressing burnout effectively requires a balance of vulnerability and confidence in leadership, fostering an environment where employees feel supported and inspired.

## CLOSE THE REVOLVING DOOR WITH STAY INTERVIEWS

Losing top performers and potential mentors to burnout creates a vicious cycle: when new employees encounter a work culture characterized by burnout, they are more likely to leave quickly rather than invest in their roles and relationships. Implementing stay interviews as a proactive retention tactic can help break this cycle. Despite extensive research supporting







Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

regular feedback, many EMS organizations still rely solely on annual performance reviews.

However, the nature of EMS — its distributed workforce and rotating schedules — makes annual reviews particularly challenging. Regular, ongoing feedback fosters stronger relationships between employees and supervisors, increasing transparency and trust. To enhance employee engagement, performance and retention, EMS organizations must transition to a continuous feedback model. Leaders should assess how frequently supervisors interact with employees and provide performance-related support. Increased engagement from frontline leadership correlates with lower turnover rates. While annual performance reviews need not be eliminated entirely, they should evolve into more meaningful discussions that build on a foundation of regular feedback and strengthened relationships.

Additionally, EMS organizations must empower employees by involving them in workplace governance, fostering a sense of ownership in their roles. Hospitals designated as Magnet institutions by the American Nurses Credentialing Center implement shared governance models, which engage employees in policy development

and clinical care decisions. Mechanisms such as nursing councils and clinical career ladders allow staff to actively shape their work environment.

EMS organizations should consider adopting similar approaches, creating opportunities for employees to contribute to decision-making and problem-solving within their departments. By prioritizing ongoing feedback, strengthening leadership-employee relationships and fostering shared governance, EMS organizations can mitigate burnout; improve retention; and cultivate a healthier, more sustainable workforce.

The successful implementation of stay interviews can act as a litmus test for organizations to determine retention strategies. [Stay interviews can identify trends, behaviors and problems that hinder employee engagement.](#)

The driving forces behind successful stay interviews are open communication, direct feedback and relationships.

**More:** [Asking the right questions to improve retention.](#) Stay interviews help employees feel valued, respected and supported, improving their engagement and motivation



Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

Respondents from agencies that lack adequate personnel for 911 response were:

- **200%** as likely to describe retention at their agency as poor
- **150%** more likely to have experienced a work-related injury in the past year
- **180%** more likely to have missed 4 or more days of work due to work-related injury in the last year
- **70%** more likely to report marijuana use in the previous 30 days
- **150%** more likely to sleep poorly

## CRAFTING AN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Developing an action plan after conducting the stay interviews is as important as actually conducting the interviews themselves. Conducting interviews without synthesizing the data is a waste of valuable time and money.

An employee engagement plan should:

- Easily define the problem or concern
- Utilize organizational metrics or data coupled with feedback
- Determine the resources needed and any potential constraints
- Identify timeframes and measurable outcomes

Retention plans work best when customized to individual members, if possible. If the organization is not able to customize a retention plan, grouping commonly themed member



concerns together will help to ensure that each member feels as though their concerns were heard.

Retention heat maps synthesize member feedback in a visual, actionable manner. Outline the employee's name, their likelihood of leaving the organization (organized by timeframe), and describe the retention plan that will be implemented for that employee.

Retention Heat Map

Leader: Rodriguez	Perf Rating 5 Hi, 1 Lo	Green 1+ years	Yellow 6-12 Months	Red 0-6 Months	Retention Plan
Kim Johnson	4				Provide mentor for ...
Burt Brown	5				Develop skills for possible promotion to ...
Cindy Stone	3				Pleased with current role & circumstance
Ralph Jimenez	2				Coaching for performance

## SATISFIED PERSONNEL ARE THE BEST RECRUITMENT TOOL

Building an environment that is safe, fair and equitable for all to work in is paramount to organizational success and sustainability. EMS organizations must invest in their current personnel in a way they may have never thought of before.

With today's generational diversity, giving someone off for a holiday or paying them overtime pay to help cover an open shift are outdated solutions.

Today's generations desire to be more engaged, more understood and more involved in designing and driving their work experiences. Stay interviewing allows organizations to create an atmosphere that allows for collaboration.

Similarly, EMS organizations must move away from the use of sign-on or attraction incentives and transition that money to focus on retention of its current staff. Sign-on bonuses create a feeling of resentment among the current staff who have pushed through hard and trying times. Investing in the staying power of keeping employees and members is far more valuable than enticing eligible workers to come to an organization. Let the power of an experienced, veteran team sharing their positive experiences be free advertising for recruitment. 1)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [“Love ’em or lose ’em: Getting good people to stay”](#)  
by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans
- [“The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations”](#)  
by James M. Kouzes, Barry Z. Posner
- [“The stay interview: A manager's guide to keeping the best and brightest”](#)  
by Richard Finnegan

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred W. Wurster is a senior associate, Fitch & Associates, with nearly 30 years career and volunteer fire and EMS experience, and over 20 years of experience in progressive leadership roles in emergency services organizations. He most recently served as EMS Chief for a seven-hospital health system in southeastern Pennsylvania.



Photo / Mark Corum/Hall Ambulance

# DOES YOUR TEAM FEEL UNSEEN?

## CLOSE THE LEADERSHIP DISCONNECT WITH 2-WAY COMMUNICATION

WRITTEN BY  
Carly Strong

Break the one-size-fits-all approach and build trust through personalized, people-first communication

Throughout my life, I've often heard the phrase, "Communication is key." It wasn't until I began moving into supervisory and management roles in EMS that I truly understood just how powerful — and complex — that key can be.

As a leader, I've always believed in the importance of clear communication and

transparency. I did what many well-intentioned leaders do: I sent detailed emails, hosted town halls and addressed staff during our quarterly mandatory meetings. In my mind, I was checking the boxes: communicate early, often and thoroughly.

But despite these efforts, I started hearing something that caught me off guard — employees felt like they *weren't* being informed.

This feedback made me pause and reflect: If I was doing all the "right" things, why weren't they landing?

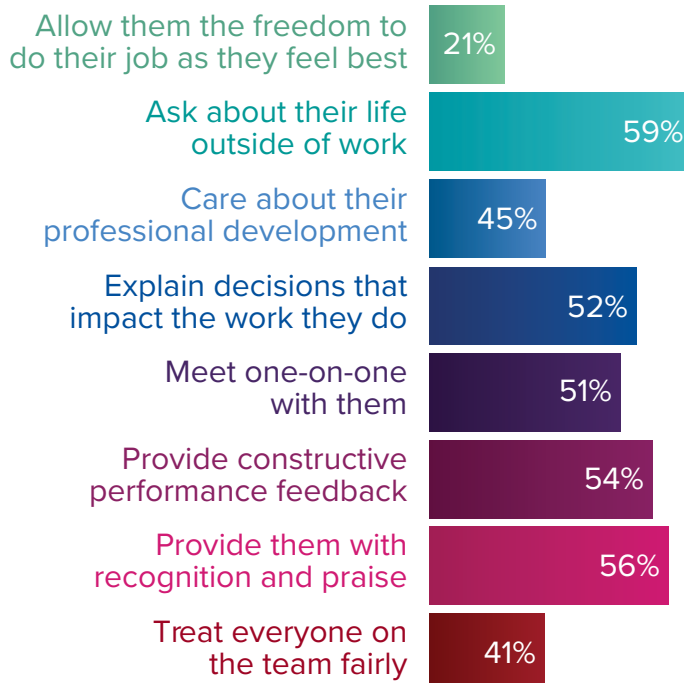




Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

## Supervisor Support Metrics

**Respondents report their supervisors rarely or never:**



## The problem: Communication ≠ connection

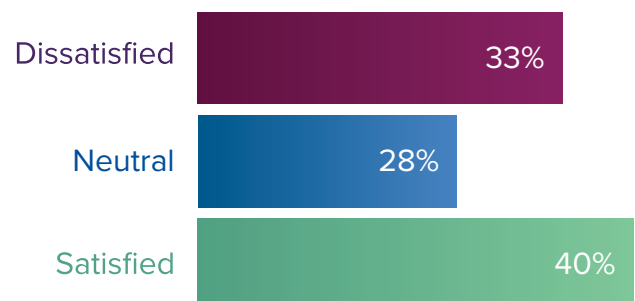
What I came to realize is that while I was communicating, I wasn't always connecting. We often assume that just because we've sent the message, it's been received and understood.

But not all humans absorb information in the same way. Some prefer reading, others are visual learners, and many respond best to in-person conversations. If we stick to just one method — or just one messenger — we risk leaving parts of our team behind.

When I started asking employees how they preferred to receive updates, it became clear: we needed to diversify not just the **how**, but also the **who** behind our communications.

## Leadership satisfaction: The power of the whole team

**Rank how satisfied you are with leadership at your current agency:**



One of the most overlooked assets in communication is your leadership team itself.



Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

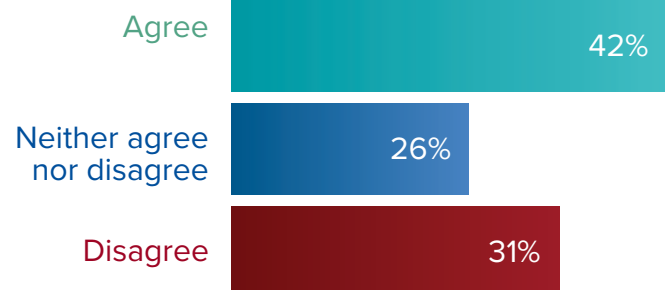
Every supervisor, manager or team lead brings a different personality, style and approach to communication. That's a strength; not a challenge.

Involving a variety of voices across departments helps create more touchpoints with staff and more opportunities for the message to resonate. It also reinforces unity. When your billing supervisor, field ops manager or HR rep are all echoing the same message — each in their own way — it signals that communication isn't siloed. It's organization-wide.

And sometimes, the unexpected messenger is the most effective one. For example, our community relations manager might not seem like the go-to person to remind crews to clean up after themselves at the hospital, but his upbeat, creative style always grabs attention. He makes even the less exciting reminders feel worth reading. That kind of personality and creativity can make all the difference in message retention.

**More:** [Field supervisors: Bridging the gap](#). Link field providers to organization vision by involving field supervisors in decision making and administrative training

## My agency leadership recognizes the stressors faced by staff:



## Turning feedback into action

With employees spread across two states and three different geographic locations, senior leadership knew that staying connected and fostering engagement wouldn't be without its challenges. To bridge that gap and ensure every voice was heard, we launched an employee engagement survey. But we didn't stop there, because listening is only the first step.

To show our teams that their feedback truly mattered, our leadership team set aggressive internal deadlines to review the survey results and identify the top five priorities raised by





Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

employees. We moved quickly to implement changes where we could and developed a clear action plan for the rest, and then communicated that plan back to our teams.

To keep the tone approachable and engaging, we shared survey updates in small, fun bursts through our employee app. These bite-sized messages made it easier to digest the information while keeping the conversation going in a light, positive way. It wasn't just about checking a box; it was about showing our people that they were heard, and that their input drives real change.

Be present, be human

As often as possible, we need to get out there and talk with our employees, especially when there are changes to their workflow or routines. This isn't just about delivering updates; it's about connection. Be relatable. Think back to a time when you were faced with a change that felt uncomfortable or unclear: share that. Opening up helps break down the invisible wall between

“us” and “them.” It shows that you’re not just a supervisor; you’re someone who understands the challenges they’re navigating. And most importantly, show team members they’re not alone. Reinforce the idea that they have a whole team supporting them, and that it’s OK to ask questions or share concerns. Encouraging two-way communication not only eases the transition; it builds trust and strengthens your culture.

When I approach my supervisor with a problem, I trust they will listen:

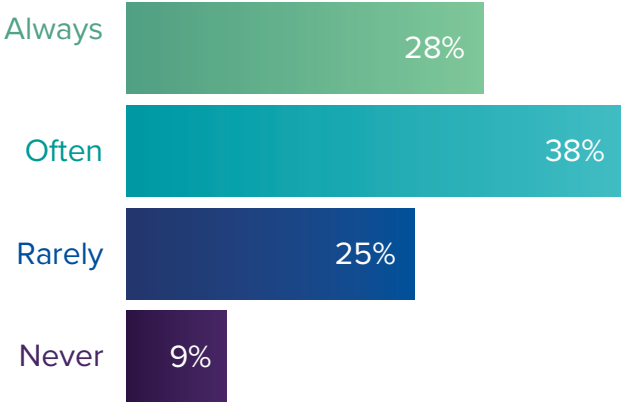






Photo / Mark Corum/Hall Ambulance

## Beyond email: Leveling up your communication strategy

We won't always have the luxury of a face-to-face conversation. But there are ways to enhance how we communicate that don't take more time — just more intentionality.

Here are a few simple, yet powerful strategies to improve internal communication and team engagement:

- **Leverage tech.** Use a company app for fast updates, recognition shoutouts and engagement activities. Make it fun, not just functional.
- **Keep emails short and sweet.** Use emails for the basics, but have supervisors follow up in person to confirm receipt, answer questions and create space for dialogue.
- **Match message to messenger.** Choose the right leader for the right situation. Let different members of your leadership team deliver messages based on their strengths and relationships with the team.

Just like we deploy the right resource to the right patient in EMS, we should apply the same approach with our teams.

Communication doesn't have to fall solely on one manager or one department. Let's use our full bench of leadership to engage, inform and support our employees in meaningful ways.

The result? A workforce that feels seen, heard and informed — not just talked to. **1**

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carly Strong is the chief operating officer for SEMSA/Riggs Ambulance Service in Merced, California. Earlier in her career, Strong served as a firefighter-EMT in the U.S. Forest Service while earning her paramedic certification. After being hired by Riggs, she transitioned to the agency's tactical EMS program, where she spent 10 years as the team leader before moving into administration.



# ***‘Make me feel like I matter’***

WRITTEN BY  
Rachel Engel

## **Providers sound off on what they really need from leadership**

It's time for an industry-wide conversation about burnout and how it's affecting EMS personnel. In the What Paramedics Want in 2025 EMS Trend Survey, providers opened up about the toll their workload is taking and shared what their agencies could do to acknowledge and address it.

### **Leaders: Solve staffing/excessive work hours**

- “Stop using forced overtime as a normal practice for filling open shifts.”
- “Let us have mandatory down time each shift. Running us 22 out of 24 hours is dangerous!”
- “Hire additional personnel to decrease everyone's overwhelming workload.”
- “Retain quality personnel, listen to the crews.”

### **Leaders: Pay us a thriving wage**

- “Better pay. It would take a massive load off my home life.”
- “Pay me enough to not need 4 jobs.”
- “Pay. No one can make this a career.”

### **Leaders: Take stock of your stewardship**

- “Empower the staff by listening and implementing solutions as well as evolving ahead of the curve instead of always being reactionary.”
- “Have our administrators, finance personnel and HR personnel truly comprehend what EMS providers actually do so they can provide the actual level of services needed from those departments in our agency.”
- “Get rid of the burnt-out leaders or move them out of management positions.”

### **Leaders: Support us**

- “Make me feel like I matter.”
- “Treat us like people, not robots.”
- “Provide better mental wellness program.”
- “Our upper management only care about numbers, not people.”
- “Support for work-life balance and family needs.”

### **Leaders: Trust us to do our jobs**

- “Allow me to do my job.”
- “Trust that I am going to do my job without constant micromanagement.”
- “Give employees direction, then give them freedom to do the job.”

### **Leaders: Help us develop our careers**

- “I would love more training and education advancement opportunities at my organization.”
- “Develop a robust retirement program that allows for both a stable retirement option, or avenues to continue in EMS in another role.”
- “Provide a clear path for advancement.”

### **Leaders: Recognize our dedication**

- “Develop an award and recognition program for staff.”
- “Acknowledge achievements or offer an honorary food benefit.”
- “Appreciation of the work and hours required.” **1**

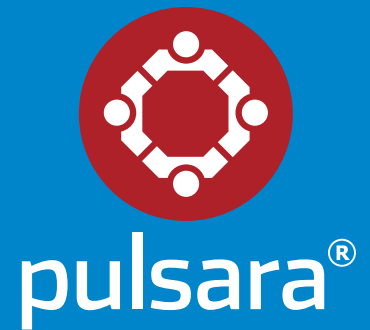
## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel Engel is an award-winning journalist and the senior editor of EMS1 and FireRescue1.

Photo / J. Whitmore Photography

# About the Sponsor: PULSARA

Pulsara is the healthcare communications and logistics platform enabling EMS professionals to communicate with each other and the hospital during patient events and incidents. EMS teams can use mobile and browser-based devices to instantly alert downstream members of the care team with vital patient information before arrival at the hospital. The steps are simple: Create a patient channel; build your team; and communicate using live audio/video calls, secure messaging, images and more. From individual patient events to mass casualty incidents, Pulsara's fast and flexible platform allows you to triage, track patient movement, and manage emergency response at any scale.



Learn more at [pulsara.com](https://pulsara.com)

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Learn more at [fitchassoc.com](https://fitchassoc.com)



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## LEARN MORE



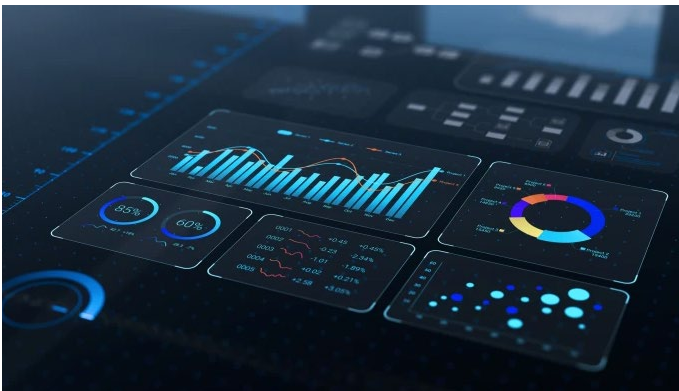
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Building mental and physical resilience isn't just important — it's essential for EMS professionals. If your program isn't gaining traction, these 5 roadblocks could be to blame.



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### The \$21M Texas EMS recruitment and retention initiative

State EMS Director Joe Schmider on how Texas' data-driven plan brought in 10,915 new providers

1

Access additional analysis of the What Paramedics Want EMS trend survey here:  
<https://www.ems1.com/ems-trend-report>

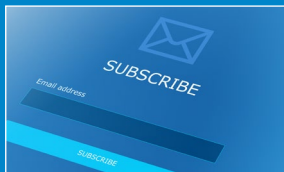
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A photograph showing the interior of an ambulance, viewed from the open rear door. The interior is dimly lit with blue ambient lighting. Medical equipment, including a gurney and various monitors, is visible. The EMS1 logo is overlaid in the center.

**EMS1**

Visit [EMS1.com](https://www.ems1.com) for the additional analysis on  
“What Paramedics Want in 2025” survey.

A photograph showing the interior of an ambulance, focusing on the gurney area. The gurney is partially visible, and the overall lighting is blue. A yellow text box with the website address is overlaid in the center.

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