

# What does it take to be a leader in EMS?

As president of the only national association of EMS practitioners, I often ask myself: What is leadership? Solid, strong leadership is a quality that every organization and company seeks and appreciates. “A leader leads by example, whether he intends to or not,” said John Quincy Adams, who also said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

General Dwight D. Eisenhower defined leadership as the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. Management guru Peter F. Drucker, for whom the Award for Nonprofit Innovation is named, further defines:

“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

These are wise words from wise leaders. But how do they apply to EMS? As we enter our 2010 NAEMT election cycle, we all are

asked to select the leaders of our association. It’s an opportune time to consider what leadership means to us in the context of EMS. Leadership is so important to everything we do in EMS, from our actions on the street in our communities and in our EMS agencies, to how we are trained, to the laws and regulations that govern our work within our states and our country.

To better define what leadership in EMS entails, I asked leaders from all sectors of our industry what leadership meant to them. Here are their thoughts:

Leadership entails sound decision-making and then the “guts” to move forward. Decision-making requires a knowledge base of the pros and cons of any decision; however, in the end the decision must be made without knowing exactly how it will affect the organization or individual. Experience in making good decisions helps propel one to make future decisions. However, one does not lead by him- or herself. Leading takes others to believe in the leader’s ability to form a consensus based upon good decision-making.



Patrick Moore  
President

Execution of the decision and the ability to adjust course during the process help build the foundation of leadership.

*William E. Brown, Jr., Executive Director, National Registry of EMTs, and 2009 NAEMT Rocco V. Morando Lifetime Achievement Award Winner*

The NAEMT elections are an opportune time to consider what leadership means to us in the context of EMS.

Leadership in EMS education means taking a stand on an aspect of professionalism that is highly controversial right now: namely, the role education plays in the growth of EMS. Our profession is transitioning from technically focused training shaped primarily by those outside our ranks to training that is being led from within our field through carefully cultivated partnerships. It is an exciting time to be in EMS. We should never stop progressing, but at the same time, we should not leave anyone behind in the process. I am grateful that the “bar” for our profession is being raised.

*Angel Burba, Past President, National Association of EMS Educators*

Leadership in EMS is required at multiple levels. We need imaginative career educators to lead EMS education into platforms uniquely suited to prepare prehospital specialists for their practice. We need administrative leaders to help craft the best organizations for a variety of geographic and political atmospheres. And we need researchers to help us define our practice in terms of what truly affects patient outcomes in field practice.

*Will Chapleau, Chair, NAEMT’s PHTLS Committee*

I see my role as one that strives to collaborate on all levels with the members of our association, who are the leaders of their respective organizations. In doing so, I aim to combine the best ideas, practices and solutions that our members develop everyday to meet the needs of the patients that we serve. In turn, we as an organization look to reach out to others within and outside our organization to work together for the common good of EMS.

*Patrick Ryan, President, Professional Ambulance Association of Wisconsin*

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Leadership in EMS is critical and an area that has not been given the attention it deserves within our profession. Through serving in numerous leadership roles within EMS, I have found that having both the street experience of performing the job of an EMT and the formal education one can only receive from college have been of great use to me. I am able to relate to both the volunteers that I lead as well as confidently interact with those leaders above me, not only within my own organization but across the state and country. To me, leadership in EMS means that you are able to command respect, clearly outline your plan(s) of action, and be inclusive of those around you who have great ideas. To be successful, a leader needs to have education, training and experience.

*Captain Brad Gronke, MS, EMT, Starved Rock Trail Safety*

There are so many qualities that a leader should possess, both in the emergent and non-emergent setting. In the non-emergent setting, it is imperative to always improve your knowledge base. Creating that strong foundation allows you to become a better, more competent practitioner out in the field.

Sometimes we overlook the most important things, such as our crew's well being. A healthy crew is very important, as a leader is only as good as the crew with whom he/she is working.

Being a good leader also means treating others the way you would like to be treated. It is important to help less experienced co-workers. Everyone has to start somewhere, and if you forget what it was like when you started out, it's difficult for you to assist those who are trying to follow in your footsteps.

A leader knows that his/her solution isn't always the best one; being open to suggestions allows others the opportunity to contribute their thoughts, which may differ from yours. Sometimes having a different perspective makes all the difference.

*Chris Honda, Paramedic and 2009 NAEMT Paramedic of the Year*

For EMS or any other business to succeed, there must be leadership at all levels. The newest EMT has an important role to play in leadership, just as the chief or service director does. Leadership is about making good decisions and being a good example and inspiration for others. It is about using that inner voice to guide you and doing what is right even if it's not the easiest thing to do.

Great leaders in EMS are often those who have served in the job of, or have taken the time to understand the needs of, those they lead. While good managers may keep an EMS agency running efficiently, if they do not have the respect of those under them — as a true leader does — the agency will experience turmoil and discontent.

Good leaders inspire rather than manage, and consistently set a good example of doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons. They have a clear vision of where the organization needs to go and empower those they lead to do the things necessary to achieve those goals.

What this means to me as a member of the Board of Directors and incoming president of NAEMT is that to be a good leader I need to have the following traits:

- I have to be passionate about NAEMT
- I have to have a clear vision about where NAEMT should be going as an organization
- I have to be ethical in decisions I make about NAEMT's business
- I have to inspire others to feel the way I do and empower members to step up and be leaders themselves
- I have to lead by example instead of just telling people what they should do

*Connie Meyer, NAEMT President-elect*

## Leadership is about using that inner voice to guide you and doing what is right even if it is not the easiest thing to do.

In summary, leadership requires participation, vision, responsibility, professionalism, experience, compassion, a dedication to learning and education, an openness to ideas, and above all, passion. A good leader must inspire, include and empower others.

Each member of NAEMT can be a leader in EMS by being involved in their national professional association, whether it is through running for office, serving on a committee, leading our education programs, recruiting and mentoring new members, working on national advocacy efforts, or simply by voting in the elections.

Please take the time to review our election candidates' information carefully and vote for those individuals whom you believe will best lead our association.