



Monday Night [under the] Lights

2016

Happy Monday...

Friday falls on a Monday this week.

And for really good reason...

This is EMS Week. It's the one week out of the year specifically dedicated to recognizing what the EMS profession and all of its phenomenal practitioners do to keep our world safe, healthy and always one step ahead of the Big One.

National EMS Week was started in 1973 by President Gerald Ford. The theme this year is **Called to Care**. Very fitting, I think.

It's always a bit tough for me to communicate exactly what I want to say to you during EMS Week. There are so many tremendous aspects of your professional lives. I feel like all of us who chose a career in EMS have this special bond. There's a collegiality and an understanding we seem to have about each other, even if we've never met. It's really impactful for me and has been all of my career.

So, my big communication challenge is that I don't want what I say to sound insincere or trite. I don't want you to think my respect and writings today are a "mandatory memo" commemorating EMS Week 2016.

He has to say that – It's EMS Week, duh...

Have a nice day!!

You look GREAT in that color!!

I hope you get my drift.

So I want to tell you how the world thinks about you in a little different way.

What if we could bring everyone together who had any interaction (or any future interaction, which essentially means the entire population, but we don't have room for that) into a room like CNN and Fox News do, and we could ask them a question about how they feel about EMS – about you. About what you do and *how you do it*.

People would have a chance to speak their minds. Some based on their experience, others based on what they may believe or hear from others. People seem to get pretty honest during those things (a nice contrast to the politicians they are usually talking about, but I digress).

So, here we go. I want to tell you what I think the world would say about EMS (you) on this, the week that honors you for what you do and how you do it...

And what I think they would say is based on years and years of hearing people all over say these exact things. It's like I'm reporting the news.



By the way, it helps to imagine a really nice studio, with great lighting and a roving camera with a Star of Life prominently displayed in the background... There would also be a huge graphic of an ambulance fully lit, and at a perfect angle.

Because I am not the most attractive moderator on the planet, you also have to imagine a striking co-moderator (gender of your choice) working with me... The contrast, you quietly think to yourself, is palpable.

Powerful music with significant bold horns and drums opens the discussion...

WELCOME TO EMS WEEK 2016.

“Folks, you have a unique and important opportunity to speak directly to the men and women who have chosen a career dedicated to caring for you, your families, your communities and this country in the toughest moments of our lives. This week, we give our deep and personal thanks to each and every one of them, whether they are First Responders, EMTs, Paramedics, Nurses, Physicians, Dispatchers, Administrators, Support Professionals, career, volunteer, fire-based, non-governmental, hospital affiliated, municipal third, private, emergency, IFT, CCT, SCT, ground, air or anything in-between... We appreciate them more than they'll ever know. And now, I give you a chance to tell them exactly how you feel...”

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- Up walks the lady who you transported after that minor wreck who was scared, sobbing and didn't know what to do or what was happening. She'd say "thanks for talking to me so much in your calm voice and answering my dumb questions. I was pretty freaked out and you just kept reassuring me. I was worried I was really hurt. It was silly, but I looked at the expressions on your face so I could find comfort."
 - If we asked the parents of the 6 month old child that they found pulseless and apneic who you resuscitated, they would tell you that you and all your partners will forever be the most cherished members of their family. They'd remembered your names, but you would have forgotten theirs. They will tell their child about you the rest of their lives and grin from ear to ear with watery eyes every time they tell their son his story. It's the one where you are his true heroes that he never met.
 - The man who was having chest pains at work during a particularly nasty presentation (I think it was budget) who was embarrassed by all the commotion in his office and was refusing to go with you, would tell you how much he appreciated the soft, quiet whisper to him that you were worried about him and "if it were me, I would go get checked out". Your personal interest convinced him to go and he was revascularized quickly and lives a healthy, normal life (although his dietary changes make him less fun to go to lunch with).
 - The homeless guy in the back wants to tell you thanks for not treating him like a non-person, someone who didn't matter. He says you always greet him by name and ask him what happened. You're not judgmental and while you question him about what's going on this particular time, you always seem to make an effort to figure out something better for him. He knows that you know he'll probably always be in the situation he's in but he appreciates you trying to make it just a little bit better. He feels safe with you. He also has a blanket you left with him months ago when it was a bit chilly out.



- The triage nurse tells you she appreciates your smiling faces, your to-the-point patient reports and your ability to always answer the “how sick do you think he is” question with precision when beds are tight. She also appreciates that you ask what happened to one of the earlier patients you brought in (in a HIPAA appropriate way of course). It tells her you truly care – you aren’t just a taxi service.
- Randy Strozyk had something he wanted to tell you but right when he was about to bring it up, he said the voices told him not to.
- The cop across the room said he appreciates you always looking out for them. Many years ago, you told them about tourniquets and told them they needed to get them. You’ve answered his questions about the AED, looked at a laceration he got years ago and have always respected the tough situations where medicine and law collide. He knows you have his back (and he has yours).
- The Trauma Surgeon mentioned how much your focused efforts over the past few years have helped improve the morbidity & mortality in the community. He recognizes that constructive criticism is designed to help, but sometimes feels demoralizing. He thanked you for taking it to heart and making sure everyone else you worked with knew about it too.
- The lady in the wreck from earlier just stepped up again and remembered that she wanted to add how grateful she was that you went back to her car while she was on the stretcher & backboard to get her laptop and her iPhone, even when you had to look for it. She said you recognized how important that seemingly small detail was for her.
- A woman stepped up with tears in her eyes and remembered when you attempted to resuscitate her special needs daughter at age 14 when she arrested in the living room of their house. She remembers how diligently you & your partner worked to try and save her, but were unsuccessful. Before you ceased your efforts, your partner talked to her and let her know exactly what you had done, that the efforts were futile and the medical control physician recommended stopping. He asked them if they were OK and she nodded. But what she wanted to tell you is that she saw you crying on the tailboard of the engine outside – after the call.



To her, your tears confirmed that this wasn’t just another cardiac arrest call to you. Your tears gave her great comfort that the human being trying everything they could to save her daughter wept tears of sadness too. She will remember the odd comfort of that difficult moment as long as she lives

- Your EMT Instructor wants you to know how pleased he is that you second guess what you did on difficult calls and you always seem to ask a million questions about everything. He reminds you that medicine must always be refreshed, learning is constant and those that always ask questions have more answers than anyone else.
- Your parents are here. *Wow*. They want you to know how proud they are that you chose a profession that helps people during the toughest times of their lives. They brag about you every chance they get and love to tell their friends what you do. Moms and dads spend their parenting lifetime filling a toolbox for their kids to use when they get out on their own. Now they know you actually paid attention. They also reminded you that you haven't been by to see them in a few weeks...
- Your partner wants you to know how much it means to her that you ask her how she's doing – especially when she's tired and things aren't going too well in her personal life. Partners have a special bond. It means a lot when you know someone is there that knows what you go through in this crazy profession. She loves your frank discussions and wants you to know that just the fact that you ask has made a difference over the years. Its "safe place" discussion that's helped her navigate some rough waters.
- The Mayor just came in – He apologized for being late. He wants you to know how thankful he and the other City Council Members are that you represent the City so well. People see you as a safety net, he says. Your appearance, actions and approaches reflect directly on the leadership of that community. When the community feels safe, it helps people thrive.
- You've been watching your spouse and kids in the back of the room. You just caught their eyes and they all gave you a huge smile and two thumbs up. They feel exactly what others are saying about you...
- The QI coordinator just popped in and has one chart you need to complete before you go (hey – I have to make it realistic, right?!)
- An older woman walks forward with a slow, purposeful, cane-supported limp. You recognize her from her weekly transports back & forth to PT after her stroke. You've actually never seen her walk on her own (she was always on the stretcher) but you remember giving her encouragement with every trip. When she'd tell you that she'd never walk again, you always told her that she would and all that hard work would be worth it one day. You were impressed at how far she'd come. She looked you right in the eye and with her broken, purposeful speech she said "thank you" and turned around to walk slowly and purposefully back to her seat.
- Some stranger steps up and says she's always wanted to ask an EMS person a question. "What's that"? You respond...

What's the grossest thing you've ever seen? You knew it was coming.

- Your neighbor says he wants to thank you for all the many questions over many years about everything and anything health related. And thanks for helping him navigate the healthcare system when his mother was sick. “You always seem to know the nitty gritty details of how medicine works here” he said. You nod.
- Finally, a lady steps up and says that she speaks for everyone there when she tells you with tremendous sincerity how grateful the world is for *Ambulance Drivers...*

Ambulance Drivers? Did she really say that?

For a split second you cringe but then you look around the room and realize that very few people who aren't in EMS know what we do, think like we think and use the right words to describe what we do. It's our special world.

And they need our world. That's why they appreciate it so much...

So, the music plays a powerful closing song and the CMO Moderator (the less attractive one) turns and says...

“My deepest thanks to each and every one of you for choosing a profession of honor & service. Your work is often thankless, always challenging, occasionally unbelievable but always, always impactful & rewarding”.

I'm proud of you. I'm proud to be your colleague and I'm proud of what you've done to move the needle in medicine.

To quote someone near & dear to me, you make a difference & you have a blast doing it.

Happy EMS Week to all of you. The world wraps its arms around you in thanks...

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