

Wellbeing in Today's EMS Agencies

Common states of wellbeing activities in first responder agencies

1. We don't need this. Everyone is okay.
2. We need this but not now. Everyone's not okay but we don't have the will, time, energy or leadership to do anything now.
3. It's just a training issue. We do education/training on stress, physical health, critical incidents, PTSD, depression and suicide.
4. Houston, we have a problem. We need to do something now (crisis, tough call, DWI, divorces, losing staff, a suicide)
5. We got the program. We have everything in place. Stress/resilience training, peer support, CISM, EAP, friendly Mental Health Professionals.
6. We proactively cultivate an ongoing culture of wellbeing and living well. Leaders believe it's essential. Leaders practice wellbeing. Selfcare and wellbeing is an organizational and personal priority and expectation. From hiring to retiring wellbeing is programed into everything we are and do (leadership, hiring, onboarding, operations, education and training, fun get togethers, station life, family life, conversations, evaluations, accountability and rewards. This is not something to check off the list. We do it every day. This is something our agency is known for. This takes time, attention, passion and leadership.

So how do we create a culture of wellbeing in our agencies?

A. Find your why.

You must have a great reason for promoting wellbeing. Prevention and survival are important. But survival is not enough. Keeping people from getting stressed, depressed, becoming drunks, developing PTSD, or killing themselves is good. But it's not enough. People didn't join up to just survive a stressful job. If you don't have a why, efforts will fizzle out. Your why must connect to helping people realize more satisfaction and fulfillment in the role and in their lives.

B. Come from a positive place and vision.

Wellbeing is about satisfaction, more joy, more growth, more depth, more compassion, more fun and more success with the stuff that really matters. Wellbeing is about more positive emotion, more engagement with the good stuff, optimism, better relationships, balance, a sense of control, bouncing back sooner, being able to rock and roll with the tough stuff, growth, maturity and becoming a better version of yourself.

- What's the promise of First responder work?
 - Participate in adventurous and consequential events
 - Do hard stuff and get your mettle tested over and over
 - Experience amazing camaraderie
 - Get your ass kicked by set-backs (grow up and right size the ego)
 - Get reminded that life is precious, fragile and limited

- Learn what really matters (don't sweat the small stuff)
- See *real* suffering
- Learn about deep empathy
- What's the potential pay off
 - Deep sense of satisfaction
 - Become the best possible version of yourself
 - Find wisdom about life
 - Learn balance
 - Be able to really *really* appreciate what matters
 - Find inner joy and peace

C. Build wellbeing and living well into every part of your organization. Make it an expectation. See that it shows up in hiring, onboarding, every training, every meeting, performance evaluations, budget, family get-togethers, in conversations, in actions, in scheduling and what you say *yes* to and what you say *no* to.

D. Proactively lead it. Because first responder work is often about reacting to crisis, wellbeing and living well will have a tendency to be put aside. Notice how this works in your personal life. We have to come back to wellbeing and living well *again* and *again* and *again*. This return to wellbeing, reminding people to care for themselves, not forgetting to push against all the stuff that makes a great first responders – takes a leader. Be the leader!

You can't effectively teach what you have not experienced and what you do not practice. It has to start with someone in the organization who actually believes and practices. A wellbeing culture needs a leader.