

# Keeping The Best!



## *How To Use EMS Retention Principles*



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## **Preface**

This is the first in a series of EMS personnel retention publications provided by the West Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services and the West Virginia EMS Technical Support Network. This workbook, *Keeping the Best, How to Use EMS Retention Principles*, is intended for the use of emergency medical service leaders throughout West Virginia. It is the first part of a toolkit intended to improve EMS personnel retention efforts on local, regional and state levels.

The *Keeping the Best* series was developed for volunteer, mixed and career agencies to use in order to meet the growing challenges of public demand for improved levels and availability of EMS services. The retention toolkit series was a collaborative effort of the Virginia Office of EMS, the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads and the Western Virginia EMS Council. The principles and tools in this program have been widely used in all types of EMS agencies in the Old Dominion with positive results.

We are pleased to offer these proven tools to West Virginia's EMS community as part of a larger EMS recruitment and retention program. A successful recruitment and retention program depends on all levels of West Virginia's EMS System performing serious self-examination and making long-term commitments to the well-being of our most valuable resource – the men and women who answer the call for help.

Jerry Kyle, Director  
West Virginia Office of EMS  
September 4, 2009





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## Introduction

Let's face it; retaining squad members does not always receive high priority. As a leader, your day is often filled with more urgent and important matters. You only feel the pain when key members leave, and you have to fill yet another hole in your organization. Is there a better way to stay on top of retention? There are several simple steps you can take to improve retention, and presenting these steps is the purpose of this workbook.

### Workbook Retention Tool

The workbook is designed to be used. Write in it. Underline ideas you find useful. Make notes to yourself. This is a personal retention tool for your use only. If you are into repairing cars, think of this workbook as similar to the dog-eared and coffee stained repair manual you refer to over and over again. The material will be presented in a straightforward pattern:

- **Learn** – We will start with your past experiences, present new information and focus on solving current problems.
- **Practice** – Most people only improve if they practice what they have learned. The workbook will give you lots of opportunity to practice new skills.
- **Critique** – The workbook will also give you feedback in the form of self-tests, performance standards and options others have used to improve retention.

We will not tell you what is the “right” or “wrong” thing to do. Since we can't know your current situation, you are in a much better position to determine what is or is not useful. If you can get one or two ideas out of this workbook that works for you, we hope you will judge your time spent as worthwhile.

### Retention Principles

The workbook is grounded on principles. Principles are ideas that can be used in many different situations. Understanding the principles gives you more options when solving current problems. Although our research uncovered quite a few retention principles, we have chosen four to present to you. These four came up the most often when we talked to people about specific programs or actions that worked.

**The Life-Cycle Principle** – Squad members stay longer when leaders take specific actions at specific points in the retention life cycle. Timing is everything!

**The Belonging Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they feel welcome, needed and respected.

**The Success Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they achieve success in important personal goals.

**The Friends & Family Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they develop strong personal relationships within the squad.

**Reality Check** - You might be thinking, "I know that!" And most of the leaders we have met would agree with you. *What separates those who struggle with retention and those who do not is how well they implement these principles.* This leads us to believe that those of you, who know what to do but are unwilling to act, cannot benefit from this workbook. For those of you who are willing to act but need a nudge in the right direction, read on.

## **A Word About Leadership**

A great deal has been said about EMS leadership recently. Some of it has been more negative than positive. What seems to be lacking is a balanced perspective of the true impact of leaders in a squad. Like quarterbacks in football, squad leaders may get far too much blame or praise than they deserve. In our research on successful retention efforts, we have noticed one thing about successful leaders. ***While they all face challenging circumstances, the successful leaders believe and act like they can make a difference.*** They take action instead of looking the other way when problems surface.

## **Why is Retention Gaining Importance?**

At the national and state level, more attention is being paid to retaining certified EMS professionals. A number of factors contribute to the concern that there will not be enough EMS professionals in the future. Four stand out.

1. **The Demand For EMS Professionals Will Continue To Grow** - West Virginia has the third oldest median age of all states, 40.3 years. Residents 65 years of age and older comprise 15.7 % of our population, second only to Florida. West Virginia Medical Command statistics indicate that 41% of interventions reported between 2001 - 2009 were for patients of this age group. This implies most agency call volumes will go up and patients will need more intensive care.
2. **The Potential Pool New EMS Personnel is Decreasing** – West Virginia is one of only three states or territories with a continually declining population with a projected decrease of 4.9% over the next 20 years. Also, the number of persons age 18 and younger is projected to decrease by 4% during this same period. There simply will not be as many potential candidates to enter the EMS workforce in the future
3. **There is Less Time Available to Volunteer** – Several trends impact the time available.
  - Research indicates dual-worker families and families maintained by a single women or man now dominate. The "new" family is a very busy place.
  - Americans are working longer hours and have to get time off from work to volunteer.
  - 44.7% of those who volunteered in the U.S. in 2003 listed lack of time as the reason for not volunteering.

Traditionally, many career EMS personnel have risen from the ranks of volunteer EMS or fire service agencies. The implication is that time to volunteer in EMS, or any other related field, is going to decline.



4. **There is Increased Competition for Available Volunteers** – A 2003 Bureau of Labor Statistics News release indicated that volunteers were involved in the following activities:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% Of Volunteers</b>
Religious	34.6%
Educational/Youth related	27.4%
Social/Community service organizations	11.8%
Hospitals or other health organizations	8.2%
Public Safety	1.2%
All Others	16.8%

The implication is that competition for volunteers is going to get more intense.

In summary, the future looks like:

- Growing call volumes
- Shrinking pools of potential new EMS workforce staff
- Even less time available for public service of any kind.
- More intense competition for members from other groups in the community.

And this makes holding on to good squad members more important than ever.

But even in tough times, there are EMS agencies that are surviving and doing well. Join us as we look for profitable ways to **Keep the Best!**

## Let's Get Started

### Who Should Use This Workbook?

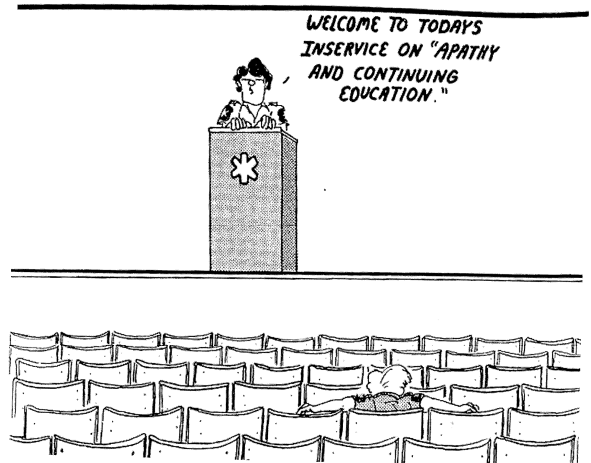
This workbook is designed for EMS leaders who want to improve the retention efforts in their squad. We have in mind three types of leaders who could benefit from this workbook. Check the box that best describes you.

**Elected Officers** – These leaders are officially in charge. You may have been elected because you were the most competent, the most popular or the only one willing to serve. It doesn't matter. Retention (usually combined with recruiting) will get on your "to do" list sooner or latter.

**Appointed Leaders** – You probably "volunteered" to lead a group to get something done. You may not know this, but you can have more impact on retention than the elected officers. You are where the action is, and your actions have a direct and lasting impact on others. More people will likely decide to stay or go based on what you say or do (or don't say or don't do).

**Squad Member Exercising Personal Leadership** – You are an experienced squad member who has a passion for some aspect of rescue and life saving. People look to you for guidance and help in your area of expertise. What you say carries weight with others. Helping (or not helping) new members learn the ropes can make or break short-term retention efforts.

WELCOME TO TODAY'S EMERGENCY MEETING ON WHY WE CAN'T KEEP GOOD PEOPLE.



### How Much Time and Effort Do You Want To Put Into This Workbook?

What is your appetite for digging into retention principles? Are you ready for a sit down restaurant meal or will some fast food satisfy you? The following questions are designed to help you decide if you need to pay more attention to retention.

Read each statement carefully. Rate each statement on a scale of 1 – 6 based on your **personal experiences** with the squad rather than what you consider to be general responses from others.

#### 1. The number of calls made by my squad last year is growing...

Less than 5% a year. <b>1</b>	About 10% a year. <b>2</b>	About 15% a year <b>3</b>	About 20% a Year. <b>4</b>	Above 20% a year. <b>5</b>	Don't Know <b>6</b>
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**2. The turnover rate last year for certified squad members who make calls is...**

Less than 5% a year. <b>1</b>	About 10% a year. <b>2</b>	About 15% a year <b>3</b>	About 20% a Year. <b>4</b>	Greater than 20% a year. <b>5</b>	Don't Know <b>6</b>
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**3. The average length of service for a certified squad member is...**

Greater than 5 years <b>1</b>	About 5 years <b>2</b>	About 3 years. <b>3</b>	About 2 years. <b>4</b>	Less than 2 years. <b>5</b>	Don't Know <b>6</b>
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**4. How difficult is it to recruit new squad members?**

We currently have a waiting list. <b>1</b>	We recruit only once or twice a year. <b>2</b>	We recruit only when we have an opening. <b>3</b>	We must actively recruit on an on-going basis. <b>4</b>	We seem to always be behind in recruiting. <b>5</b>	We have a difficult time with recruiting. <b>6</b>
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**5. How long does it take to train a new member to make calls on his/her own?**

Less than 4 months. <b>1</b>	About 4 months. <b>2</b>	About 6 months. <b>3</b>	About 8 months. <b>4</b>	Greater than 8 months. <b>5</b>	Don't Know <b>6</b>
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**6. How effective are the current retention programs in keeping good people?**

<b>Very Effective.</b> We measure and review programs yearly. <b>1</b>	<b>Effective.</b> Feedback from members is positive. Programs are well run. <b>2</b>	<b>Somewhat effective.</b> But we have to constantly come up with new programs. <b>3</b>	<b>Somewhat ineffective.</b> Program's strength varies greatly with the individual assigned. <b>4</b>	<b>Needs improvement.</b> Programs seem to die soon after implementation. <b>5</b>	<b>Not Effective.</b> We seem to lose members no matter what we do. <b>6</b>
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**Scoring Guide** - Let's take stock at this point. If you rated any question 4 or higher, this may indicate a potential problem.

The first three questions deal with your squad's ability to cover your calls. If you have a high rate of growth in calls combined with high member turnover and inexperienced people, it's only a matter of time before you get into trouble. If you answered these questions by saying, "I don't know", then you could easily get blind-sided by a lack of good measurements.

The next two questions deal with how quickly you can find and get new members up to speed. If you are in a high growth situation, you should constantly be looking for ways to speed things up. This is where retention efforts can help you. If you can keep people from walking out the back door, you need fewer people coming in the first door.

The final question deals with how effective your retention efforts are. Programs dying from a lack of proper care and feeding seems to cause squads the most pain. Attention to the programs wanes as more urgent problems suck up time and resources.

Now, we have a final set of questions to ask you.

Use the following rating scale to answer the statements. The definitions for the numerical responses you can select are:

- Strongly Disagree (1)** – There is almost no evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad.
- Disagree (2)** – There is little evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad.
- Somewhat Disagree (3)** – There is both positive and negative evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad with *my most recent experience* being **negative**.
- Somewhat Agree (4)** – There is both positive and negative evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad with *my most recent experience* being **positive**.
- Agree (5)** – There is evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad.
- Strongly Agree (6)** – There is a great deal of evidence that this statement is accurate for the squad.

Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
1. Members feel they are making a real contribution to the squad.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Cliques and interpersonal conflicts are not a problem in the squad.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. New members are given a realistic picture of what it is like to provide emergency medical service.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Leaders know the signs of burnout and have a plan in place to address it before it become serious.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Squad leaders listen to members' ideas and take them seriously.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Members work in a low hassle environment. Barriers to getting the work done are identified and quickly removed.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. When members are having problems, others come to their aid.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Members who are disruptive to the smooth functioning of the squad are quickly asked to change their behavior or leave.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Leaders spend more attention to what members are doing right than what they are doing wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Squad leaders act as role models for behaviors supportive of retention.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Scoring Guide** – If you rated any question 3 or lower, go back and take a hard look at it. A score of 3 or below may indicate that you are not using the principles presented in this workbook or are not using them in a consistent fashion. Below are the questions that relate to each individual principle.

<b>Question # 3, 4</b>	<b>The Life-Cycle Principle</b> – Squad members stay longer when leaders take specific actions at specific points in the retention life cycle. Timing is everything!
<b>Question # 2, 5</b>	<b>The Belonging Principle</b> – Squad members stay longer when they feel welcome, needed and respected.
<b>Question # 1, 6</b>	<b>The Success Principle</b> – Squad members stay longer when they achieve success in important personal goals.
<b>Question # 7, 8</b>	<b>The Friends &amp; Family Principle</b> – Squad members stay longer when they develop strong personal relationships within the squad.
<b>Question # 9, 10</b>	<b>The Leader’s Role in Retention</b> – Leaders improve retention when they <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take their status as a role model seriously</li> <li>• Spend time coaching others</li> <li>• Understand their blind spots</li> </ul>

Hopefully, these questions now give you a better idea of what lies ahead.

## **Developing Your Retention Muscles**

Whatever your interest in improving retention, successful retention is a long-term effort. Like getting and staying in shape, improvements in retention will take some work. And yes, there may be some soreness the first time you exercise your retention muscles.

Think of this workbook as a warm up exercise before you get into the heavy duty lifting. Here is how best to warm up:

1. **Systematically work your way through the sections.** Jumping around may confuse you and, quite frankly, we didn't design the workbook to be used that way.
2. **Read one section at a time.** We know you don't have much free time so we tried to get to the point quickly.
3. **Complete the exercises.** Practice is an important part of learning in this workbook. Use the workbook to practice what you want to do.
4. **Commit to use the ideas presented that make sense to you.** We have an exercise at the end of each section that helps you get started. It's called, "Day In The Life."



Let's get focused. Please take a few minutes now to answer two important questions.

- **What really bugs you about the way squad retention efforts are done now?**
  
- **If you could improve only one area of retention in your squad, what would it be? What can you do to make it better?**

**Reality Check:** You might be thinking, "I don't know how to make it better. If I did, I wouldn't be reading this workbook!" We see your point. Look at it this way. Ask yourself three questions to get the juices flowing:

1. **What can I ask people to stop doing that would improve the situation? For example, if older members think it's fun to "initiate" new members, then you could ask them to stop.**
2. **What can I ask people to start doing that would improve the situation? For example, you could ask members to teach new members a specific skill.**
3. **What can I ask people to change that would improve the situation? For example, you could change the new employee orientation program to integrate new members faster.**

**If you can't think of anything to write down, move on. You will have plenty of opportunities to work on real problems in the workbook.**

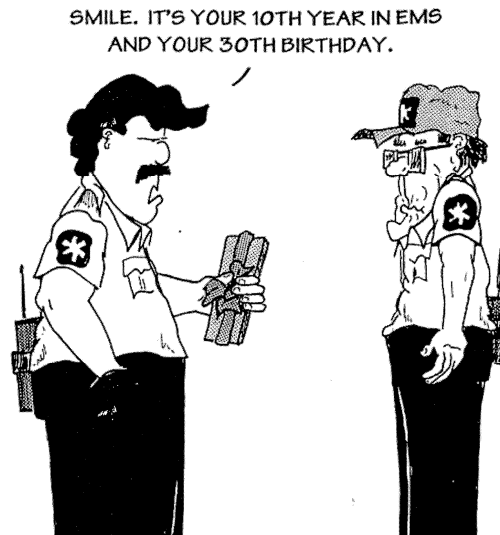
Is there anything in the workbook that will help you improve retention issues important to you? Let's find out.

## The Life-Cycle Principle

How long should we expect a squad member to stay with us? One year? Five? Ten? This is a very important statistic to know because it determines how you approach your retention efforts. If, for example, the average length of time a member stays with you is ten years, you will be doing radically different things than if the average is one year. The national average, by the way, is 2.2 years for EMTs. If your members stay with you longer than that, consider yourself lucky, good or both.

Members don't just look at their watch one day and say, "Hey, I've been here five years, looks like its time to be moving on!" They usually walk slowly out the door unless something dramatic happens, like a contentious officers' election. Then, the ones who didn't win often leave with their followers.

For our purposes, we like to view squad members like clocks with retention springs in them. We can't see these springs, and we can't directly wind them back up (only the individual can do that). But we know they slowly wind down over time and stop ticking. There are exceptions. Some people are like that pink bunny beating the drum on TV. They keep going...and going...and going.



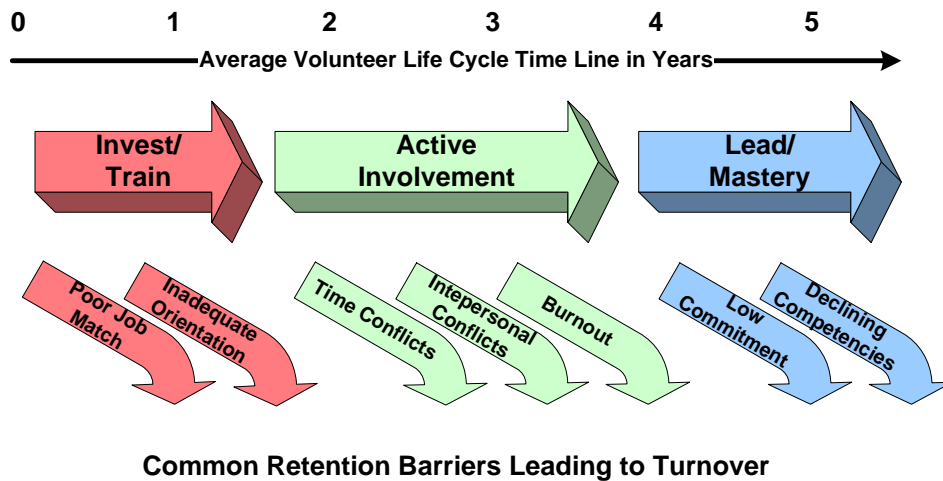
Given that members have retention springs only they can wind up, the job of the leader is to take actions that extend the time before the spring winds down. To put it another way:

**Squad members stay longer when leaders take specific actions at specific points in the retention life cycle.**



## Life-Cycle Model

Here's how this principle looks graphically.



Notice that squad members go through three major phases over time:

- **Invest & Train** – In this phase, squad members go through training and are prepared for service. This phase, people tell us, can last from 7 to 18 months. The major retention barriers in this step are poor job match and inadequate orientation.
- **Active Involvement** – In this phase, squad members become active in service delivery. If they are successful in the job, this can lead to high job satisfaction that reinforces commitment to the squad. The major barriers are time conflicts with work, family or school, interpersonal conflicts with other members and burnout.
- **Lead & Mastery** – In this phase, squad members decide how deeply they want to be involved in the squad by taking on a leadership role or by developing a higher level of technical mastery. The major barriers include waning commitment and falling behind technically.

## **Invest/Train Phase**

Before we go any further, let's see how this might apply to your squad. Below, we have listed those programs or actions that many squads see as a minimum requirement to extending the time members stay with them.

Rate your squad using the following scale:

**High** – We do this and do it well.

**Medium** – We do this now, but not consistently. There is room for improvement.

**Low** – Maybe I'd better take a harder look at this.

<b>Current Actions/Programs for the Invest/Train Phase</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1. Our recruiting program screens out applicants who are not a good match for this squad or rescue work. We have at least 10% who get screened out.	
2. All new members within the first 30 days of joining the squad go through a standard orientation program that integrates them into the squad and clearly explains our rules, policies and practices. Over 95% of new members successfully complete this orientation.	
3. All new members get certified within the first 120 days of joining. The completion rate is over 80%.	

So, how did you do? Are you doing more than this during the invest/train phase? Great!

Now go back to the areas where you have concerns. Pick one and spend some time understanding why it's not working the way it should. Put it on your "watch list" for now.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, "Where did you get those standards? I don't remember reading anything about those standards!" OK. You caught us. We couldn't find any common standards so we made them up. Isn't it interesting that we have lots of technical standards but none for retention? Go figure.**

**Here's our point of view on this. First, we feel it is important that you set standards for programs so you can measure your progress. So if you don't like our standards, use ones that make sense to you. Second, if you believe like we do, that members' retention springs are winding down, then it makes sense to get them productive as fast as possible. Time is not on your side.**

## Active Involvement Phase

Rate your squad using the following scale.

**High** – We do this and do it well.

**Medium** – We do this now, but not consistently, and we could improve.

**Low** – Maybe we should take a harder look at this.

<b>Current Actions/Programs for the Active Involvement Phase</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1. We have an on-going process that allows squad members to bring time conflicts to our attention before they become a problem. About 15% use it each year.	
2. We work with solid, performing squad members to resolve time conflicts. We are constantly looking for new ways to be flexible. We have lost less than 5% of our members due to time conflicts.	
3. We move quickly to resolve interpersonal conflicts. All leaders down to the shift level are trained in conflict resolution techniques. We have lost less than 5% of our members due to this problem.	
4. The leaders know the signs of burnout and have a plan in place to address it before it becomes a problem. We have lost less than 5% of our members due to burnout.	

The goal in the active involvement phase is to have a “win-win” situation with the members and the squad. There is a lot of give and take required to make this work and to keep either party from taking a “my way or the highway” position. Win-lose approaches rarely work.

See anything here that needs watching? Add it to your “watch list”.

## Lead/Mastery Phase

Rate your squad using the following scale:

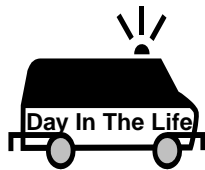
**High** – We do this and do it well.

**Medium** – We do this now, but not consistently, and there is room for improvement.

**Low** – Maybe I should take a harder look at this.

Current Actions/Programs for the Lead/Mastery Phase	Rating
1. Annually, we identify the high potential members and reinvest in them to prepare them for leadership roles or to move them to mastery in technical areas they are passionate about. About 15% of the members are seen as having high potential and receive reinvestment.	

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “Shouldn’t we be trying to get all our members to this level? And won’t I create some hard feelings from those we don’t reinvest in?” Yes...but do you have the time and resources to reinvest in everyone? Hopefully, you are picking people who are already seen as leaders by their peers and are worthy of special attention.**



Did this section provide you with any useful ideas? Did you find any programs or issues in your squad that require immediate attention? Write one down now in the Actions for Improvement column. Notice that there is a second column, Expected Outcomes. An expected outcome is the result you expect when you take action. Be clear about what you want up front. It can save you a lot of wasted time and false starts. So, every time you think of an action, say to yourself, “Begin with the end in mind.”

Actions for Improvement	Expected Outcomes

# The Belonging Principle

Take a moment to think about all the groups you have joined during your lifetime. Do you remember the groups your parents made you join, and the ones you joined in high school? What about the ones you are involved in now? For most of us, the number of groups we belonged to in our lifetime can be quite large. We're a nation of joiners!

Now think about the groups you joined and stayed with for more than a year or two. Is the list getting shorter? It should, since our needs change over time. What is the most important group you belong to now? Exclude your family.

Write the name of that group below. Go ahead. We'll wait.

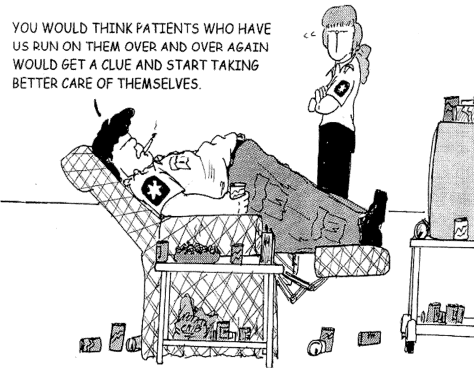
Most Important Group I Belong to Now

Look at the reasons you stay with this group. What are the top three?

Three Reasons Why I Stay
1.
2.
3.

**I LIKE IT HERE. IT FEELS JUST LIKE HOME.**

Page 1 of 1



## **Welcome, Needed and Respected**

If you are like other people, many of your reasons for staying can be grouped into three categories:

1. You stay because you feel **welcome**. You may have listed things like:
  - I feel at home here.
  - The people are friendly.
  - We do a lot of activities together.
  - There are no cliques here. Everyone talks to everyone else.
2. You stay because you feel **needed**. You may have listed things like:
  - I feel like I'm contributing to the success of the organization.
  - I feel like I am doing something important for the community.
  - I feel like others are relying on me for help.
3. You stay because you are treated with **respect**. You may have listed things like:
  - People listen to my ideas and take them seriously.
  - I have been asked to lead the organization or be responsible for important activities.
  - I am trusted to do the right thing. No one is looking over my shoulder all the time.

You may have also listed other reasons for staying that relate to the Success Principle and the Friends & Family Principle, which deserve a separate section of their own.

Your experiences lead us to our second principle of retention:

**Squad members stay longer when they feel welcome,  
needed and respected.**

## **Belonging Means Different Things To Different People**

So, exactly what do we mean by welcome, needed and respected? If we asked ten different people, we might get ten different answers. For our purpose, we like the following definitions:

- **Members feel *welcome* when all members accept them into the squad.** This, by the way, does not happen just at the start of membership. This feeling has to continue throughout the relationship. And unfortunately, some members “wear out their welcome.”
- **Members feel *needed* when they are asked to contribute to the squad’s success.** The feeling deepens as the squad comes to rely upon them. Don’t confuse asking members to do jobs that no one wants to do as fulfilling this need.
- **Members feel *respected* when others value what they do or say.** This is such a strong need that high levels of disrespect can result in people “going postal.”



### **The Newlywed**

John has been with the squad for three years and is very active in the organization. He is seen as a “go to” person when you want to get something done right the first time. Recently, he married a local girl and from the smile on his face, it is clear they have started a family. John has also received a promotion at the plant, and it is taking up more of his time. Because of marriage and work, he is not spending much time with the squad.

You are concerned that John may decide that he can't keep the call schedule he maintained in the past and will drift away from the squad.

#### **How Can We Let John Know He Is Needed?**

What can we ask John to do in this situation to demonstrate that he is needed and still be sensitive to the personal demands on his time? Is there some special skill that he loves to use that will keep him involved?

Jot down some notes in the boxes below.

<b>Actions to Demonstrate John Is Needed</b>

### **The Average Joe**

Joe has been with the squad for about 5 years. It took him some time to get the hang of how things are done, but he has now demonstrated he can do the job. He shows up for meetings, pulls his shifts and does what is asked of him. It is easy to take Joe for granted and in some ways you rely on him to always be there. You have never spent much time with Joe so you don't know him well.

Recently, you have had some unexpected turnover in experienced members and are beginning to wonder if Joe might be next.

#### **How Can We Show Respect For Joe?**

Like Rodney Dangerfield, Joe might feel he “gets no respect.” Now might be a good time to pay more attention to the “average Joes” in the squad. Over a cup of coffee, let Joe know you appreciate his reliability. Find ways to seek out his opinion on things that impact him.



Jot down some notes in the boxes below.

<b>Actions to Demonstrate Respect</b>

### **The Burn Out Casualty**

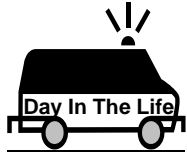
Fred has been the one of the most active members in the squad. He is gung ho about everything he does. Not only does he pull his own shifts, but he also volunteers to take on additional shifts in an emergency. He is involved in several projects in the squad, and you have been grooming him to become an officer. Recently, Fred came to you and confidentially let you know he was exhausted and felt his performance was slipping. In retrospect, the signs of burn out were evident for some time, but now it is clear that something must be done.

You know you need to give Fred time off to heal, but don't want to lose him completely.

This is a tough situation. If Fred loses contact with the squad, it's likely he will be gone for good. Like many burnout casualties, Fred will feel he has let the squad down. Make sure Fred knows he is still respected. Give him some say in how his duties are transferred to others. After he has healed, ask Fred to come back and help you analyze, understand and change the reasons leading to his burnout. You may unintentionally be doing something that is causing burnout.

Jot down some notes in the box below.

<b>Actions To Maintain Fred's Sense of Belonging</b>



Let's take a look at how and where you can best put the belonging principle to work. First, take a look at the squad's programs/activities that use the belonging principle. This list should include things like new member orientation, special programs of welcome, programs that link what members are doing to squad success and "rights of passage" where the squad acknowledges that the member has earned the right to belong or to be held in higher esteem. How satisfied are you with them? Use the scale to rate each.

**High** – We do this well.

**Medium** – We don't do this consistently well. We could improve.

**Low** – Maybe I'd better take a harder look at this.

Programs/Actions to Strengthen the Belonging Principle	Low	Medium	High
1.			
2.			
3.			

Pick an important program for improvement. What one action could you take to improve this program? What would you do and what would be the expected outcome?

Action to Take	Expected Outcome

## The Success Principle

When your squad members get together, what do they talk about? Sports? Cars? Hunting and fishing? What their kids are doing? What's going on in the community? One common theme will likely be who's winning and who's not. Americans like to think of themselves as winners, and they join and stay with organizations that help them feel like winners.

When we asked people why others leave their squads, they told us that their organization often has too many barriers to making them feel successful. These barriers might include:

- Wasting their time in “make work” activities
- Being inflexible on scheduling
- Going on calls to help people who are abusing the service
- Requiring excessive time to meet certification requirements
- Taking direction from a leader with an outdated leadership style

**FOR SOME PEOPLE SUCCESS IS A NEW PATCH.**

DON'T BE TOO IMPRESSED. HE GOT 'EM DOING DETOX TRANSFERS.



Do any of the items ring true about your squad? How high is the “hassle factor” to getting things done? Is it driving good people away? What do you think are the serious barriers to winning in your organization? They usually come in the form of rules, procedures (the way we do things around here) and yes, some people.

**Reality Check – You might be thinking, “The biggest hassles I have come from outside the squad.” Others have told us the same thing. But think about those hassles that are more under your direct control and that you might be able to change.**

**What Are The Current Internal Barriers to Success That Are Driving Good People Away?**

Let's use the remainder of our time working on ways to identify and reduce these barriers.

This brings us to our second principle of retention:

**Squad members stay longer when they achieve success  
in important personal goals.**

How do we put this principle to work? We suggest you take action in the following areas:

- Find out what's bugging people
- Keep the give/get checkbook in balance.
- Hook them on life-long learning

**Find Out What's Bugging People**

This is a one-on-one exercise. Start with your leadership team – those people who are responsible to you. (If you are using this workbook to improve personal leadership, start with the people you spend the most time with.)

Get some quiet time together and ask the person, “***What can I do to help you be more successful?***” Then sit back and listen. Listen until it hurts. While you are listening:

- **Try not to interrupt.** Let the person tell their story. ***Word of warning:*** The first time you do this, you are going to hear a lot of whining and stories about something that happened a long time ago. Don't be put off by this. It may not be pleasant, but people may have a lot of stuff to get off their chests. And you are not going to get anywhere until they have had their say.
- **Restrain from attacking each problem or issue as it comes up.** This will divert the conversation, and you will not get the whole story. Problem solving can come later. The funny thing about some people is that they get uncomfortable talking about their needs and want to end the conversation before all the issues are on the table. You may have to push them a little.
- **Keep the focus of the discussion on the person in front of you.** If they wander off on a tangent about other people's needs, guide the discussion back to their personal needs for success.

As you get to the end of the conversation, now is the time to ask the second question, “***What is one thing we can do together now?***” This gets us closer to the pay off. Resist letting the person hand a problem or issue off to you. This is a “work together” exercise.

Pick something that can be accomplished in the next month. Figure out who is going to do what and when and agree on the desired outcome. Write this all down on your calendar or day planner for follow up if that's your style. This seems to work for most people.

Now consider how many of these conversations should you have. **One.** If this approach is new to you, one is plenty. Use it as a test to see if this process works for you. **If it works, do more of it.**

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “Why don’t we just bring this up at a team meeting, get everything out on the table and resolve it?” If this works for you, great. What others have found is that this kind of exercise can lead to a long list of problems with an even longer list of solutions that don’t get implemented for one reason or another. The lack of results can be frustrating to the team, and when you bring the topic up again, all you may hear is silence.**

Who is a good person to have this conversation with next week?

Success Discussion With...	I Am Going to Set Up Time For This On...

**Keep The Give/Get Checkbook In Balance**

When members join the squad, they start a personal checkbook that might look like this:



What I Will Give to the Squad	What I Expect to Get in Return
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend meetings</li> <li>• Become certified</li> <li>• Pull shifts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make friends or spend more time with friends.</li> <li>• Learn skills I can use.</li> <li>• Feel good about serving the community.</li> </ul>

As a leader, your job is to find out what is written in the checkbook and do what you can to keep it in balance. When this checkbook gets too far out of balance, people leave.

How do you find out what’s in the checkbook? You have to ask them. When do you ask them?

- **During the recruiting process** – You need to weed out applicants who have unrealistic expectations about EMS work. How are they going to react when a patient throws up on their shoes? A good question to ask after you have given the applicant an accurate job overview is, “What kind of job environment would be fun for you and that you would look forward to coming to each day?”

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “Wait a minute! I don’t want to run people off before they even get to know us. Sometimes I can’t be choosey.” For squads finding it hard to recruit members, this may be the case. If this is your reality, set a go/no go point early in the new employee orientation to decide if the new member is a keeper.**

- **At the end of the first 90 days** – This is when the honeymoon is about over. The new member should now have a good grip on the way things really are, and is in the process

of weighing it against their expectations coming in. A good question to ask at this point is, “What has surprised you the most about the work we do?” Positive surprises like, “I really like to go on calls” will give you an insight into expectations fulfilled. Negative surprises like, “This training program is boring and is taking too long” will give you insight into an unbalance in the checking account.

- **At least annually** – Does this sound like work? Yes it is. Especially if you have a lot of members. Don’t think you have to do this all by yourself. Train others to help you.

You are checking in annually to see if things have changed with the members’ needs and expectations. They **will change over time**, and you are taking this time with them now to avoid any nasty surprises. A series of good questions to start the conversation is:

- What has been your level of satisfaction over the past year on a scale of 1 to 10?
- What has kept you from rating it higher (assuming the answer to the first question is not “10”)?
- Why have you not rated it lower?

This discussion could lead naturally into action steps to address serious imbalances in the checkbook.

What are you doing now to assess members’ checkbooks? How satisfied are you with the results? Rate yourself using the following scale:

**High** – I have a good handle on members’ give/get checkbooks.

**Medium** – We do this now, but not consistently, and there is room for improvement.

**Low** – Maybe I’d better take a harder look at this.

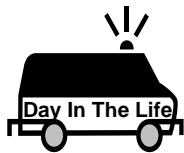
Current Actions/Programs Dealing With Members’ Checkbook	Rating	What I’m Going To Do Next

## **Hook Members on Life-Long Learning**

This should be a no-brainer. EMS professionals tell us that learning new things is one of the attractions to the job. Because it is important, they also tell us that barriers such as inflexible training schedules and long travel distances to training are frustrating. From a retention point of view, a really solid, high quality on-going training program is a must. This is an all hands exercise. Everyone should be involved in training at some point in the year.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “This is not as easy as it looks. We are short staffed, and just running our shifts is a full time job. Besides, we have some old timers here who aren’t very interested in spending extra time on training.” We hear this a lot. Hopefully, this is just a phase you are going through that will lead to better times. Long term, you need to pay attention to the “brain drain” that might develop as experienced members move on and are replaced by rookies new to the business. If left unchecked, this trend could spell disaster for the squad.**

**As for leaving the old timers alone, make sure they stay up to date and don’t fall behind. The general public, especially those over 65 years of age, keep raising the bar on what they expect from you in service. Failure to keep up can also raise questions from the public about the competency of volunteers providing this service.**



Let’s summarize what we have presented in this section.

The principle we are working with is – **Squad Members stay longer when they achieve success in important personal goals.**

The practices recommended are:

Find and reduce the barriers to success in your organization by:

- Finding out what is bugging people
- Keeping the give/get checkbook in balance
- Hooking them on life-long learning

Now take a few minutes to look over the notes you have made so far and see if there are no more than one or two ideas that have the potential to help you.

<b>Actions for Improvement</b>	<b>Expected Outcomes</b>

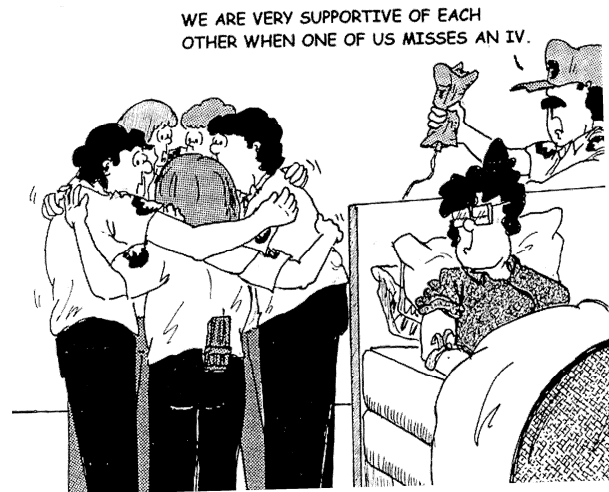
## The Friends and Family Principle

At one of the meetings we held with EMS professionals, we asked if the participants had developed strong and lasting friendships in the squad. One woman raised her hand and said, "Yes, and I married him." This isn't exactly what we had in mind with the Friends and Family Principle, but it's close.

You might say that developing strong and lasting friendships is a result of running a high quality, successful squad, and we can't argue with that. But there seems to be more to it than that.

Successful squads start out with this end in mind and:

- Create an atmosphere that *breeds* the formation of friendships and a family feeling.
- Step in when there are the inevitable challenges to this atmosphere and *protect* it.



Why is this principle important to retention? Research from The Gallup Organization may clarify this. In 1998 they launched a massive investigation to determine the link between employee satisfaction and business performance. The research covered over 2,500 business units and 105,000 employees. Known for their surveys, the Gallup fine tuned hundreds of questions to measure this link and came up with twelve questions. Two of the twelve relate to this principle. They are:

- Do I have a best friend at work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?

Their research showed, among other things, that high, positive ratings on these two questions are related to high performance that includes high retention.

We didn't need this research to know this principle is important. EMS professionals across the state kept bringing it up. So here it is:

**Squad members stay longer when they develop strong personal relationships within the squad.**



Think of the practices related to this principle as being like farming:

- **Till the Soil** – The soil in this metaphor is your current squad environment. Is it full of rocks and so inhospitable no one can break through it? Or is it rich in those ingredients necessary for life?
- **Plant the Seeds** – Members are like seeds. Leaders need to carefully select the right new members who can add to an environment of friends and family. This should be a requirement for membership.
- **Fertilize and Water** – Leaders need to support activities and values that keep the friends and family environment alive.
- **Get Rid of the Weeds** – Regular weeding out of those who do not support a friends and family environment is a part of good leadership.

### Till The Soil

Your squad environment, like the soil, dictates the success of the principle of friends and family. Let's take a sample of your environment and send it in for analysis.



Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your squad?  
Circle the number that best reflects how you feel.

5. I strongly agree with the statement.
4. I agree with the statement.
3. I can go either way with this statement.
2. I disagree with the statement.
1. I strongly disagree with the statement.

Statements About The Squad Working Environment	Disagree					Agree				
1. Often, members have best friends in the squad.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Leaders care about individual members as persons.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3. Cliques are not a problem in the squad.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4. Cooperation among groups in the squad is high.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5. Interpersonal conflicts among members are resolved quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6. When members are having problems, others come to their aid.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7. There is little competition among members for resources.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8. Individual strengths and weaknesses are recognized and accepted.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Based on this brief survey, what is the overall rating of the squad (check one)?

- The squad environment clearly supports the development of strong personal relationships and a family feeling.
- The squad environment is ok. We could do better in some areas.
- The squad environment makes it difficult to develop strong personal relationships.

Do you see some areas for improvement? List one or two below.

Areas for Improvement	Exactly What Needs to be Improved?

### **Plant The Seeds**

We've mentioned this before, but it should be brought to your attention again. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by being choosy about who gets invited to join the squad. Make sure you bring in people who will fit well in and support a friends and family environment.



How can you tell if they have this trait? Ask them. Explain the desired behavior required and ask them if they would like to work in this kind of environment. Pay particular attention to their eyes and less to what they say. If their eyes light up, you know you have a winner.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “You must not be looking at the same applicants we get. A lot of them are young and don’t have this friends and family value. They are way into themselves and their own crowd.” We knew you would bring this up sooner or later.**

**Concerns about this younger generation revolve around work ethic, acceptance of authority and dedication. What some research has shown, however, is that they are drawn to situations that have a “family feeling” because many of them never experienced the security and love of a close family. This may be your way to get to this group.**

## Fertilize and Water

Leaders need to consistently support a friends and family environment for it to survive and prosper. We suggest you focus on two actions here.

- Hold one monthly activity that gets people together to have fun. Not sure what that activity should be? There is at least one person in every squad who has made a career out of having fun. Put that person in charge of the activity and rotate the job to keep it fresh.
- Go to that activity and observe who shows up. Is it the same crowd time after time? Think of ways to get more people involved. People usually have to be close enough to physically touch each other for relationships to develop.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “My job isn’t to be the social director around here. I’ve got more important things to do.” You do have more important things to do...in the short term. But as the Gallup organization discovered, there is a link between a family and friends environment and performance. Why not take advantage of it?**

## Get Rid of the Weeds

In almost all squads there are individuals who are death to a friends and family feeling. There is something about them and when they enter a room, the temperature goes down twenty degrees. This isn’t going to be fun but this person needs to know that their behavior (be as specific as you can) needs to change because it is affecting the harmony of the squad. No one likes to have this conversation, but don’t put it off. Set a “stay or go” decision date and stick to it.



Let’s make some decisions. What are one or two actions you can take in the next month to use this principle?

Actions for Improvement	Expected Outcomes

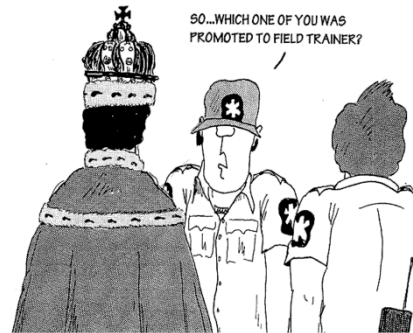
## The Leader's Role In Retention

As we said in the introduction of the workbook, squad leadership has recently come under the microscope. When people are unhappy about something, they often blame the leader. You are a convenient target. Sometimes they are right on the mark, and sometimes they are off by a mile.

Here's our view about leaders and retention. You can be a leverage point in making things better or worse. You can't make chicken salad out of chick poop, but you can make a difference if you think and act like you can. Here are some suggestions.

**SO...WHICH ONE OF YOU WAS ELECTED AN OFFICER?**

Page 1 of 1



### **Take Your Status as a Role Model Seriously**

Members watch leaders closely. They often will hold you to a higher standard than they hold themselves. Leading by example may be an unspoken expectation of your squad. Your behavior impacts how members think and what they do. If you worked at a Disney theme park, you would learn “on stage” behavior and “off stage” behavior. Consider yourself to be “on stage” when you are dealing with squad members and are at the station. No, we don't want you to fake it. Everybody will know when you are putting them on.

For example, be careful what you say. There is a lot of joking around that takes place in the squad room. People expect it. Just make sure it doesn't go too far. Practical jokes that injure someone's dignity and respect hurt the squad. Don't give the green light to this behavior by your own actions.

### **Spend Some of Your Time Coaching Others**

Because of your time limitations, practice coaching “on the fly.” Spend most of your coaching time “catching people doing something right.” When they do something wrong, they usually hear about it fast. What you need to do is:

1. Go to the person who has just done something right. The sooner you give the feedback the better.
2. Tell them what they did right. Be as specific as possible.
3. Tell them why it is important – connect the good behavior to the success of the squad.
4. Thank them and ask them to keep doing it.

This should take you about a minute. You don't have to do it a lot, maybe only once a day. Don't make a big deal about it. But do it consistently.

How might this play out in real life?

<b>Leader</b>	<b>Squad Member</b>
Larry, I want to talk to you.	Now what did I do?
Well actually, you did something right. I know you're tired but I appreciate that fact that you restocked the truck after your run.	That's what I'm supposed to do. No big deal.
It's a big deal to me. If it's not done right, someone has to come behind you and make it right. That slows everyone down.	OK. I see what you mean.
Thanks for doing your part. Keep it up.	OK. No problem.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “Larry’s a big boy. He knows what he is supposed to do. I don’t have to keep patting him on the behind.” You’re right. Larry is an adult and should be self motivated to do a good job. Your only role here is to nudge him in the direction he is already going. By the way, others are listening to this conversation, and they can be positively influenced by what you say.**

### Understand Your Blind Spots

Have your spouse or friends ever told you that some of your behaviors drive them crazy? If you're not perfect, you have gotten some feedback around this. It may be the same with your leadership style. Are you doing some things that turn people off and impact retention? How do you know?

What might be some things you do as a leader that may run people off? Here is a list of behaviors that could cause you problems as a leader:

- Treating every question about what you say or do as an attack on you personally
- Cutting people off before they finish what they want to say
- Spending most of your time with a small group of members
- Seeming to be only concerned with results
- Wanting things done your way all the time
- Showing little respect for members' personal obligations away from the squad
- Making exceptions to rules for a chosen few members
- Preferring the old, established ways to doing things vs. being willing to explore new ideas
- Viewing change as a threat rather than an opportunity
- Avoiding problems in the hope that they will go away on their own
- Not following through on commitments made to others

Be honest. List one or two of your questionable leadership behaviors below.

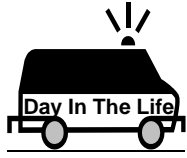
What I do	Impact It Has on Others

Here is what we suggest you do to improve:

1. Take a three by five card and write down one behavior that you are going to change.
2. Put it in your pocket each day. Yes, each day.
3. At the end of the day, pull it out. If you did do something differently, write down the date.
4. When you have ten dates written down on the card (this may take some time), ask a friend in the squad if they noticed anything different about your behavior. Don't be surprised if they so no. If people expect you to behave a certain way, they don't usually notice a change immediately.
5. Ask the friend to keep track of the time when they notice you do it differently and let you know.

**Reality Check – You may be thinking, “I’m not comfortable with this approach. I’ll just work on these changes by myself.” We’re not surprised you feel this way. This approach makes most people uncomfortable the first time they use it. It involves admitting that you may be part of the problem and asking others for help. Another concern is that you may be showing weakness as a leader. Here’s our first point: *Most people need feedback on their behavior because we are not good at understanding the impact of our behavior on others.***

**The second point is that *most of our behaviors are habits formed over a long period of time. Breaking bad habits takes a sustained effort over time. It is a no pain, no gain kind of game.***



Let's make some decisions. What are one or two actions you can take in the next month to improve your leadership in retention?

Actions for Improvement	Expected Outcomes

## Putting It All Together

Let's spend the last few minutes reviewing the points we have made about improving retention in your squad. First, it's a long-term effort, like getting and staying in shape. Having an annual retention party won't get it done.

Second, squad members have retention springs in them that wind down over time. Sooner or later, they are going to leave. Your job is to keep them productive longer. You do this by anticipating and reducing known barriers to retention when they occur at predictable points in the retention life-cycle.

Predictable Barriers	Phase Where They Often Occur
• Poor job match	Invest/Train
• Inadequate orientation	Invest/Train
• Time conflicts	Active Involvement
• Interpersonal conflicts	Active Involvement
• Burnout	Active Involvement
• Waning commitment	Lead/Mastery
• Outdated competencies	Lead/Mastery

Third, there are some sound principles that can produce amazing results with little extra effort:

- **The Belonging Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they feel welcome, needed and respected. This means that:
  - ✓ Members feel *welcome* when all members accept them into the squad.
  - ✓ Members feel *needed* when they are asked to contribute to the squad's success.
  - ✓ Members feel *respected* when others place value on what they do or say.
  
- **The Success Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they achieve success in important personal goals. To use this principle:
  - ✓ Find out what's bugging people
  - ✓ Keep the give/get checkbook in balance
  - ✓ Hook them on life-long learning
  
- **The Friends & Family Principle** – Squad members stay longer when they develop strong personal relationships within the squad. To use this principle:
  - ✓ **Till the Soil** – The soil in this metaphor is your current squad environment. Is it full of rocks and so inhospitable no one can break through it? Or is it rich in those ingredients necessary for life?
  - ✓ **Plant the Seeds** – Members are like seeds. Leaders need to carefully select the right new members who can support an environment of friends and family.



- ✓ **Fertilize and Water** – Leaders need to support activities and values that keep the friends and family environment alive.
- ✓ **Get Rid of the Weeds** – Regular weeding out of those who do not support a friends and family environment is a part of good leadership.

Finally, squad leaders can positively influence retention when they believe and act like they can make a difference. They do this by:

- Taking their status as a role model seriously
- Spending some of their time coaching others
- Understanding their blind spots in personal behaviors that drive members away

Now let's return to the start of the workbook where we asked you to identify one area of retention for improvement. Let's revisit the question to see if you found an answer to your question.

- **If you could improve only one area of retention in your squad, what would it be? What can you do to make it better?**

We hope we have given you enough insight into retention to lead you to action that leads you to results. *Insight – Action – Results*. That's what it's all been about from the beginning.

Good luck, and let us know if we can help!

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## Resources

Office of Emergency Medical Services,  
West Virginia Trauma and Emergency Care System  
Bureau for Public Health  
350 Capitol Street, Room 425  
Charleston, West Virginia 25301  
304-558-3956  
[www.wvoems.org](http://www.wvoems.org)

West Virginia EMS Technical Support Network  
4921 Elk River Road  
Elkview, West Virginia 25071  
800-525-6324

National Highway Traffic Safety Highway Administration  
EMS Division  
[www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/ems/index.html](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/ems/index.html)

United States Fire Administration, Department of Homeland Security,  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
Use the search feature to order or download fire and EMS recruitment and retention related  
publications  
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/applications/publications/>

National EMS Management Association (NEMSMA)  
[www.nemsma.org](http://www.nemsma.org)



