

The Shift: Why EMS Can't Wait Any Longer

Every 911 call begins with a shift. The tones drop. The pagers alert. And in that instant, someone's world changes forever.

But what about *our* shift?

The one inside of us, how we see ourselves, our profession, and our future?

This is the conversation EMS has been avoiding for too long. Because here's the truth: no one is coming to save us. The shift starts with you.

Why Does EMS Stay Stuck?

I've been in EMS for 32 years, 25 of them as a paramedic. I've built companies, worked countless shifts, trained providers, and coached leaders. Through it all, one question has followed me:

Why does EMS stay stuck?

We have tools our predecessors never dreamed of. We have technology that rivals hospital care. We have more training opportunities than ever before.

And yet...

- We still fight for recognition.
- We still burn out.
- We still wait for someone else to fix the system.

Here's the hard truth: waiting has never saved anybody. And waiting won't save us.

A Profession Without Ownership

EMS has come a long way from the days of funeral homes doubling as ambulance services. Today, we're flying blood products by helicopter, using ultrasound in the field, and transporting at the critical-care level.

Clinically, we've advanced.

Culturally, we're stuck.

We remain fractured by pay models and service types. We're underfunded, overworked, and misunderstood. And worst of all, too many of us cling to a dangerous myth:

"We're just working under a doctor's license."

That belief poisons us. It gives us permission to shrug off responsibility. But when you're in the back of the truck, it's your decision. Your documentation. Your patient.

If you don't own your practice, who will?

The Call That Changed Everything

Years ago, I was dispatched to a burn victim, an 18-month-old girl with scald injuries covering most of her body.

She wasn't crying. She just lay there, wide-eyed and silent.

At that time, my own daughter was 16 months old. In that moment, I wasn't just treating a patient. I was looking at my child.

We worked quickly. Air medical flew her to the burn center. But a few days later, we got word she didn't make it.

That call never left me. Because it reminded me of something we don't talk about enough: EMS isn't about patches or lights and sirens. It's about responsibility. Standing in the gap for someone on their worst day.

The Man in the Arena

That responsibility reminds me of a passage I've carried with me ever since — from President Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

*The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;
who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again,
because there is no effort without error and shortcoming;
but who does actually strive to do the deeds;
who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions;
who spends himself in a worthy cause;*

*who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement,
and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly,
so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls
who neither know victory nor defeat.”*

That’s EMS.

We are the ones in the arena — dust on our faces, sweat on our brow, sometimes blood on our hands.

And yet too often, we act like spectators. We critique. We blame. We wait.

But the arena doesn’t need critics. The arena needs doers. Owners. Leaders at every level.

The Shift Starts With You

This is why *The Shift* exists — not to review protocols or rehash training slides, but to ask the harder questions:

- Who are we as a profession?
- Where are we headed?
- What are we personally willing to own?

And here’s my challenge to you: **Am I the problem, or am I the shift?** Because it can’t be both.

Maybe your shift is mentoring a rookie. Maybe it’s tightening your documentation. Maybe it’s simply refusing to say, *“That’s not my responsibility.”*

Whatever it is — own it.

Because the shift doesn’t end here. The shift begins with you.