

## What Matters More: the stuff on the outside of a uniform, or the stuff on the inside?

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Next time you're getting dressed for work, take an extra moment for a good look in the mirror. What—and whom—do you see looking back at you? Look that person in the eye, take a deep breath, and ask some tough questions:

*What if today's shift brings me face-to-face with a mother whose teenage son has hanged himself in the basement? This is a moment she's going to remember forever. The way I break the news, the look on my face, my body language—those all matter as much as my words. Am I ready for that?*

*What if today I find myself with a partner who cuts corners, who drives irresponsibly, whose personal triage system involves treating people differently based on the color of their skin, the shade of their religion, the hue of their sexual orientation? Am I prepared to do what I know is right?*

*What if today's shift brings nothing but mundane, routine calls that don't use my skills or challenge me? Will I be professional and courteous, but nothing more? Or will I find or make opportunities to be the best part of someone's day?*

*What if today is the worst shift of my entire career? What if I find myself utterly exhausted, annoyed, sore, uncertain, discouraged or afraid? Where will I look for strength when mine is used up?*

Now, are you ready for a shock? The answers to these questions really don't matter. What does matter is that you're willing to ask them honestly and reflect on what they mean. What matters is acknowledging that sometimes you're going to come up short, sometimes you're going to be unsure of yourself, and sometimes even your best isn't going to be enough, and you're going to fail. In fact, if you answered those questions easily and with confidence, you're probably fooling yourself.

What matters is acknowledging that the stuff on the inside of the uniform will never live up to the stuff on the outside. The stuff on the outside is a legend, a myth, a façade. The stuff on the inside is human.

What matters is how you face that realization, and how you find the balance between the human you are with the superhuman the rest of the world expects you to be.

And where the two intersect, at the crossroads of human and superhuman you'll find EMS Strong.

EMS Strong is what draws a special few together to do incredibly important work, often under difficult circumstances, and many times with little thanks.

EMS Strong is the bond you share with fellow first responders. Sometimes that bond is expressed in a silent nod of recognition, and other times it takes the form of war stories shared for the umpteenth time. But it's always there.

EMS Strong is the knowledge that you're a part of something very special. It's the belief in something bigger than yourself—bigger than your level of certification, bigger than the color of the patch on your shoulder, bigger than the logo on the union card in your wallet.

EMS Strong is the well from which you draw the fortitude to maintain your composure when the going gets tougher than most people can imagine.

EMS Strong is the willingness to keep learning and growing, as an individual and as part of a profession that's evolving into a true partner in the healthcare continuum.

EMS Strong is what allows people to trust you with their secrets, with their nakedness, with their safety, with their very lives or the lives of the people they love. And it's what makes you able to accept the burden of that trust.

EMS Strong is what draws you to help, what empowers you to face danger when others are running away. It's there in those moments, big and small, when you find out what you're made of. It's what makes you proud. It's what keeps you humble.

EMS Strong is precious, but it doesn't belong to you. It's on loan to you, and you need to pay it back with interest for future generations.

EMS Strong is us.

EMS Strong is you.

Now, stop talking to yourself in the mirror. It's time to get to work.