RESPONDER TO EMERGENCY MANAGER:

HOW DO THE SKILLS TRANSLATE?

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2

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Abstract

What happens if the emergency responder wants to expand their skills to focus on preparedness, mitigation, or recovery? Perhaps it is time to consider a career shift to become an Emergency Manager. The expanded scope of the emergency management profession will require the new emergency manager to build and maintain a framework of systems to prepare, mitigate, respond and recover. When an emergency responder considers a shift to emergency manager, a common question is "How do the Skills Translate?"

Suggested Citation

Naval officer, paramedic, Air Force MP, firefighter, sheriff deputy, Coast Guard Petty Officer, 911 dispatcher; whatever the uniform, emergency responders possess a unique combination of skills and experiences. Personnel who work in emergency response spend years developing the skills and qualifications to respond to adverse conditions while keeping themselves, the crew, and the community safe from harm. Responders gain additional years of experience applying these skills to unthinkable scenarios, most of which those in civilian life will never encounter. This call to duty is strong and noteworthy, such that it is the topic of research by sociologists. In the book *Response to Disasters,* Fischer states that during times of disaster, "[p]olice and fire personnel stay on the job, putting the needs of the victims and the duty they have sworn to uphold before their own personal needs and concerns." [1] What happens if the emergency responder wants to expand his or her skills to focus on preparedness, mitigation, or recovery? Perhaps it is time to consider a career shift to become an Emergency Manager. As someone who worked for years as a Fire/EMS responder and then made the transition to Emergency Manager, I am using this essay to share my insights on that transition process.

The terms *emergency response* and *emergency management* are often used interchangeably in casual conversation. While the terms sound the same to the public, there are key elements that make emergency management broader than response. The Federal Emergency Management Agency established principles of emergency management in which it offers the following definition:

> Emergency Management is the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters.[2]

This is not to say that one is more important than the other. While both responders and emergency managers provide vital services, they differ in their scope of practice. Emergency responders are more tactical and hazard-specific. Emergency managers foster programs that support numerous emergency responders by creating and maintaining systems that enable the emergency responder community's work. William Waugh, Jr. acknowledged the wide

breadth and scope of emergency management by saying, "[i]n the simplest terms, emergency management is the management of risk so that societies can live with environmental and technical hazards and deal with the disasters they cause." [3]

The transition from responder to Emergency Manager can feel like a shift in identity. A specific focus on motivation will bring clarity and focus during the time of change. This evolution of introspection is critical to pursue a role that will enable future happiness and success. Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic and author of *Discover Your True North*, explores the journey to authentic leadership. George writes, "[l]eaders who have reflected on their stories understand how important events and interactions with people have shaped their approach to the world."[4] Tactical skills and response experiences will enable the emergency managers to build a response framework that enables future responders as a vital link in community preparedness.

Up-and-coming emergency managers need to understand the formal education of professional peers laterally and upward in the organization. City managers and county or state department heads will likely have a bachelor's degree, and in many cases a graduate degree, such as a Master of Public Administration. A bachelor's degree is often the baseline in the private sector, with many leaders having a Master of Business Administration or another relevant advanced degree. A college education is important for the Emergency Manager. Public speaking, critical thinking, research, finance, and writing are vital skillsets for success that are further developed through higher education. Additionally, a well-rounded college education can develop a more global-minded leader who is more politically and culturally aware. These are dramatically important attributes for someone who will be developing programs and systems for the people in their community. This includes people with different ethnic backgrounds, languages, and socioeconomic status. Fortunately, as the profession grows and expands, there are more options for how to earn a degree. Online and hybrid models better accommodate working students who want to pursue higher education.

It is also important for aspiring emergency managers to become familiar with regulations, understand what governs the work at hand, and what assigns authority to the Emergency Manager's role. Responders interested in emergency management should review a policy manual for their respective organizations and read the policy manuals like an Emergency Manager. This will serve as a test to see the framework emerge from the policies as explained in the FEMA definition of Emergency Management. A broader look at a city or county emergency response plan will outline each organization's authorities within the emergency management system. Those in the military need to understand whether the activation orders are Title 10 vs. Title 32. For the tactical responders it may not appear to be different; however, emergency managers appreciate the differences in scope, authority and funding represented by both regulatory frameworks.

Industry standards are a vital link in this process as well. As Deming points out, "[t]here are regulations made by government, and there are voluntary standards made by committees, and also unguided choices made by enterprises and individuals."[5] The standards are not a regulation but a set of best practices agreed upon by leading authorities in their field. They are often written and published by independent organizations that serve as authorities for their respective industry. Standards are more specific by discipline or industry, but the standard alone is not enforceable as regulation. The governing authority must adopt the standard as

written, which can be achieved by city or county ordinance or state law. In the private sector, the organization must create a policy statement to adopt the standard. For example, a city government could choose to write its building codes and make them the law. Alternatively, it could elect to adopt industry-standard building codes that are written, reviewed, and updated by an external group, such as the Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA) or the International Building Code (IBC). In this scenario, the government adopts the industry-standard as law to make it enforceable.

I have provided a list of regulations and standards organizations below in Figure 1. While this is not an exhaustive list, it represents a starting point for the prospective emergency manager to gain deeper subject knowledge. Additional references are available through the International Association of Emergency Managers, using their webpage and the Resources tab.

Stafford Act	American National Standards Institute's Homeland Security Standards Panel
OSHA Regulations	National Fire Protection Association
Clean Water Act	Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Health Care organizations
Title 10	International Standards Organization (ISO)
Title 32	International Association of Emergency Managers
Oil Pollution Act	International Building Code
Clean Air Act	Building Officials and Code Administrators
Maritime Transportation Security Act	International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Figure 1: Regulations and Standards Organizations

When considering the responder's transition to an emergency manager, it may be possible for an emergency responder or emergency management student to attend a community meeting related to emergency management, such as a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) meeting. These meetings are generally open forum, meaning they are open to the public. Their meeting times and location(s) are often posted on a website or communicated through an email notification process. Another option is to contact the local Emergency Manager and shadow her for a day to learn more about her role, what she finds most rewarding and what is most challenging. Many emergency managers began their career in some form of a responder role, and most are eager to offer their suggestions to an aspiring emergency manager.

5

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During an interview, it is crucial to avoid the pitfall of telling war stories. Field experience is important, as it prepares the emergency responder for this transition. While the experiences will help the new emergency manager be a sharp decision-maker, in the interview, examples of tactical or field operational experience should serve as a bridge in the conversation to highlight how that experience will enable the prospective emergency manager to develop and implement a system or framework. The audience may not be peers in the responder community, instead representing human resources or a team leader from a different department. Too many tales from the field, or too much detail, can be a distraction.

The move from the responder to emergency manager is an exciting journey. The transition brings growth opportunities to develop and maintain programs. The new job scope requires firsthand knowledge from field experience to advocate for all the responders in the system. The pursuit of higher education provides the aspiring emergency manager a more thorough understanding of principles, regulations, and industry standards. As an emergency responder prepares for a change in job scope, it is important to know how to answer the question…
"how do the skills translate?"

About the Author

Bradley R. Hubbard is a Senior Emergency Response Specialist for Shell Oil Company. As a member of Shell Emergency Management, he serves in emergency preparedness and response for on-shore & offshore exploration/production operations in North & South America. Hubbard provides risk management, response planning, ICS training, exercise design/delivery & on-site incident management for Shell assets. Bradley is experienced in industrial firefighting, transportation emergencies, pipeline operations/emergencies, refinery operations/emergencies, Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) distribution terminals, and security & business continuity. Hubbard is part of a global response network for Shell businesses. Bradley earned a B.S. in Crisis and Disaster Management and an M.S. in Occupational Safety Management from the University of Central Missouri. Bradley successfully completed the Emerging Leaders in Crisis program with the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (NPLI); a program at Harvard University. Prior to joining Shell, Bradley worked in the municipal Fire/EMS service as a Lieutenant/Firefighter & EMT; and has maintained his Emergency Medical Technician status since 2002. Hubbard worked as a dispatcher for a county based, multi-agency, 911 dispatch/communications center. Additionally, he worked for the Institute for Rural Emergency Management (IREM) providing emergency management consultancy for the public & private sectors. He may be reached at b.hubbard@shell.com .

6

Responder To Emergency Manager: How Do The Skills Translate?
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Notes

1. William H. Fischer, *Response to Disaster: Fact vs. Fiction and Its Perpetuation: The Sociology of Disaste*r, (University Press of America: 1998): 18-19.

2. FEMA, Emergency Management Principles, FEMA- Emergency Management Institute, 2007.

3. William L. Waugh Jr, *Living with Hazards, Dealing with Disasters,* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000): 3.

4. Bill George, *Discover Your True North: Becoming an Authentic Leader,* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015): 25.

5. E.W. Deming, *Out of the Crisis,* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1986): 297.

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