

FIREFIGHTER LIFESTYLE & HEALTH

# CRACKYL

MAGAZINE

FIGHTING  
CANCER WITH  
YOUR FORK

BULLETPROOF  
FIREFIGHTER

FIRE UNDER  
**WATER**

# DAVID WURTZEL

ONCE YOU GOT IT **GIVE IT AWAY**

IN SEARCH  
OF SLEEP

ARE YOU  
EMOTIONALLY  
STUNTED?

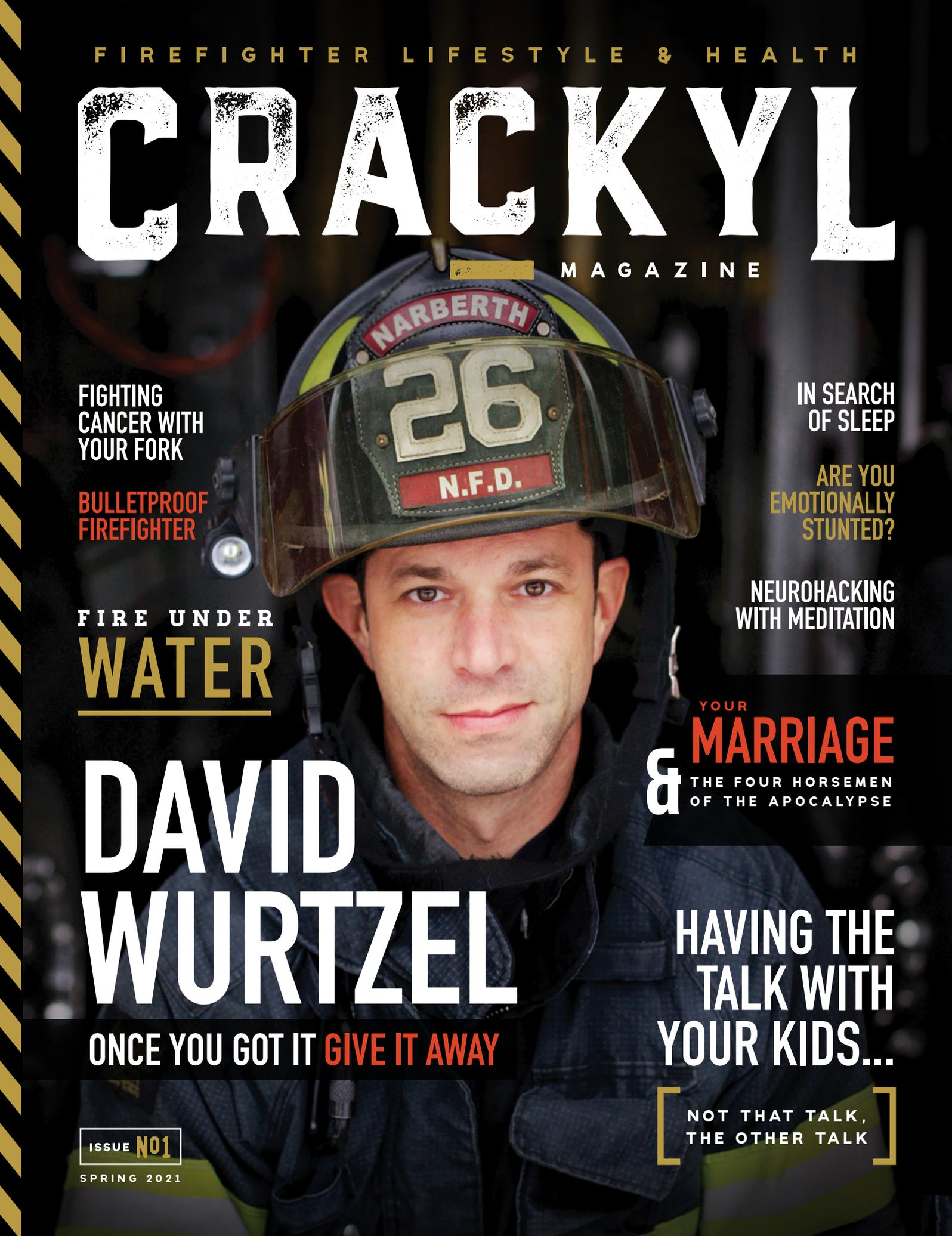
NEUROHACKING  
WITH MEDITATION

YOUR  
**MARRIAGE**  
& THE FOUR HORSEMEN  
OF THE APOCALYPSE

HAVING THE  
TALK WITH  
YOUR KIDS...

NOT THAT TALK,  
THE OTHER TALK

ISSUE **N01**  
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### A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

**CRACKYL** was born from observations I have made in my own career in the fire service. As firefighters, we're expected to be brave, unconflicted heroes, who fight fires and save lives – but by committing to those standards, we sometimes leave ourselves behind. Firefighters often ignore signs of stress and wear because the expectation to be, and appear to be, unbreakable is so high.

For this magazine, we have sourced and combined great minds in a variety of fields to create content that speaks to balancing the six most important pillars in a firefighter's personal and professional life - health, fitness, finance, relationships, stress management and lifestyle. Our goal at CRACKYL Magazine is to have firefighters pick up the magazine, or sign in online, and find a meaningful connection with the content they're reading.

If we want to grow personally and professionally, we first need to acknowledge that we aren't perfect - which is hard for firefighters, as we work in a career with no margin for error. We start the day as a team and end the day as a team: at CRACKYL, we don't want any firefighter to be left behind.

Enjoy the read!  
Cheers,

Kory Pearn  
PUBLISHER

FIREFIGHTER LIFESTYLE & HEALTH  
**CRACKYL**  
MAGAZINE

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ON THE COVER: DAVE WURTZEL  
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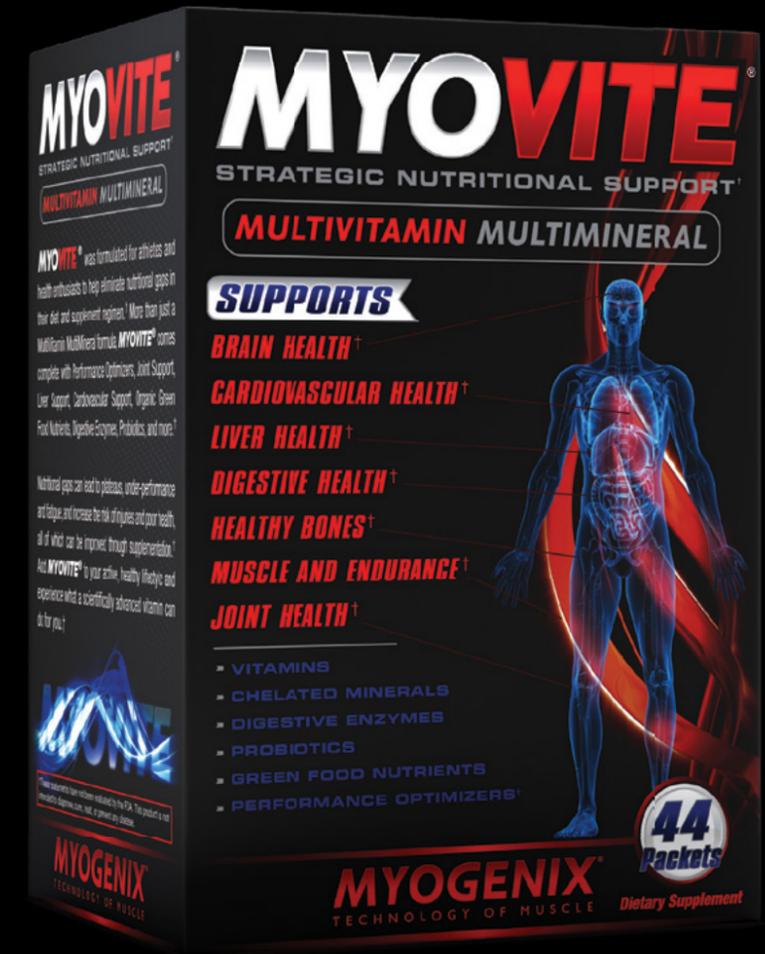


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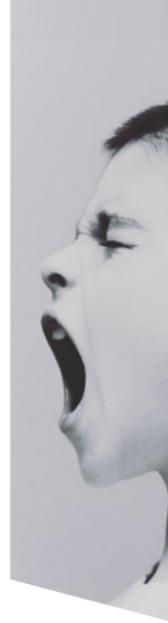
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## WHY THE NAME CRACKYL?

The inspiration behind the name comes from a feeling firefighters experience in the middle of a structure fire when a sudden calm comes over you and when you hear a fire crackling all around a smoke-filled room, but can't see it. The sound of a fire crackling is imprinted on every firefighter's mind, and it roots us in this exhilarating and unpredictable profession. We want CRACKYL to become a sounding board for firefighters throughout their careers.

Firefighters are notorious for sitting around the firehall, discussing their problems and offering advice. But the truth is, many of us don't have the answers. We don't know why we all fight about the same problems with our spouses, never seem to have enough money left at the end of each month, and just can't get along with the co-workers who are the most like us.

At CRACKYL, we want to be the firefighter in the hall who has a lot of those answers and provides accurate, practical, and life-changing solutions to the problems we all face.

## THE SPELLING OF CRACKYL

Although the name CRACKYL was chosen to reflect what a firefighter hears, the spelling also has a unique and specific meaning. The purpose of this magazine is to help firefighters create an immune system for the firehall and the home.

The human immune system is made up of "Y" shaped proteins called antibodies, which are responsible for fighting off illnesses and keeping us healthy. Much as the immune system is a separate function in our body, the letter "Y" functions separately in CRACKYL. It's built into the masthead to symbolize the proactive health and wellness goals of the publication.

The yellow underline beneath the "C" in CRACKYL represents the need for caution and the importance of keeping firefighters in the caution zone of their lives. By staying safely in the yellow, we avoid any preventable tragedies represented by the thin red line. Much like a traffic light, yellow is our last chance to stop before running into a red.

## MISSION STATEMENT & GOALS

We want CRACKYL to be available and accessible to every firefighter across North America and beyond. Regardless of whether you're a volunteer firefighter or are paid to do the job, we have ensured that everything inside our magazine is tailored to you. As firefighters, we spend the majority of our time working together and at CRACKYL we want to extend our team to include you and yours. We are thankful for your support and look forward to continuing to serve you and your team.

Stay safe.

*The Crackyl Team*



# THE BULLETPROOF FIREFIGHTER

Ever wonder why some people can handle stress and trauma and others can't? Some people see horrifying things and move on as if nothing had happened. Others can't seem to shake the experience and become mentally and emotionally haunted by it. The experience can spill over to affect their job performance, home life, and even mental and physical health. Why is that?

**F**irefighters are exposed to unusually high numbers of traumatizing events, so it's not surprising that they are at higher than average risk for psychological difficulties related to their profession. However, a firefighter doesn't have to develop full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to end up with consuming mental or emotional struggles that can affect health, home, work, and happiness.

Struggling to make sense of dreadful experiences can turn into mental torment. Ruminating on the experience, second-guessing our actions during the event, survivor guilt, trying to understand why such things happen, or just reliving the event can become unwelcome intruders into our thoughts and dreams.

Even without full-blown PTSD, firefighters can experience some of the symptoms and develop anxiety, depression, or other problems that can knock their feet out from under them. Such distress carries a high risk of substance addiction, as affected individuals may turn to alcohol or drugs to numb the insufferable thoughts and memories. Oh, to be emotionally bulletproof!

There's a field of study in psychology that looks at what makes some people susceptible to stress and anxiety and others seemingly bulletproof. Psychologists refer to the ability to bounce back from traumatic experiences as resilience. Psychological resilience is the capacity to withstand mental or emotional shock without suffering enduring ill effects.

Being resilient doesn't mean that we aren't bothered by hardship or traumatic experiences, and it's not about being emotionally numb, or suppressing and hiding emotional distress. The goal is not to become unfeeling robotic rescuers. Rather, resilient people have the ability to put upsetting experiences in the proper place in their mind without allowing past experiences to become a source of disruption to their thoughts, behaviors, and ability to function properly.

Of course, each of us has our own levels of resilience. It depends on our genetic make-up, past life experiences, and personality. Most people don't really need much psychological resilience to get through life, because their negative experiences are few and relatively benign. For emergency first responders, however, a high level of resilience is a must. The good news is that healthy psychological resilience can be learned and honed by anyone.

The key to developing psychological resilience is knowing how to put in place specific supports, so that lasting negative effects from troubling experiences can be avoided, and a measured psychological reaction to duty-related trauma can be learned and improved with experience. Psychologists refer to this learning experience as "post-traumatic growth"

(PTG). PTG not only helps people become more resilient to repeated traumatic experiences, it protects them from developing mental or emotional problems, including PTSD and addiction.

## WHAT MAKES SOME PEOPLE SUSCEPTIBLE TO STRESS AND ANXIETY AND OTHERS SEEMINGLY BULLETPROOF?

This ability to develop positive growth from trauma rather than ending up emotionally traumatized is why many experienced firefighters have become very good at recovering after gruesome calls. However, PTG doesn't occur from trying to suppress our natural reaction to disturbing experiences, and it doesn't come naturally to most people. Fortunately, we know a lot about how to foster PTG.

**Behavioral science studies have identified the two traits that are the most effective for developing and enhancing PTG and resilience: (1) being open to new experiences and ideas, and (2) being socially outgoing. Let's look at each of these.**

Open-minded people are more likely to reconsider their belief system when it is challenged by witnessing or experiencing horrifying events, and therefore have an easier time getting their head around the harsh realities of fire and rescue work. This means recognizing that horrible events and outcomes are an inescapable part of real life, and accepting that we can't change that. This may require reconciling what we witness with our previously held beliefs about the world around us, with God (for some people), and with our own vulnerabilities and mortality.

Being open-minded also requires people who face traumatic experiences as part of their profession to recognize that even the toughest among us are subject to human emotions, and that acknowledging and confronting our struggles are not signs of weakness. Taking care of a psychological injury after a difficult call is no more a weakness than is taking care of a physical injury.

Being socially outgoing bolsters PTG and resilience, but that doesn't mean being a social butterfly or having huge numbers of friends. Rather, it is the meaningful, close relationships that count. The obvious choice is other firefighters because of

the close professional fellowship and the shared experiences: they are more likely to get what we are going through. However, it's also helpful to find someone from outside that world, such as a spouse or a family member. They don't have to completely understand our struggles. The important thing is that we have people in our lives who we trust and feel comfortable and safe opening up to about what's bugging us.

But a good social support network will enhance PTG and resilience only if we use it. Sucking it up and being the indomitable firefighter can be harmful when it comes to dealing with pain. When we are hurting we must get it out. We should connect with our support system and express our bothersome thoughts and feelings rather than suppressing them. Using denial and distraction to avoid our struggles – avoidance-coping – is a dangerous risk factor for PTSD and may be a prelude to dysfunctional coping mechanisms, such as substance use. Conversely, when we make ourselves available to others who need to talk, it strengthens our own resilience and PTG.

It sounds absurd to suggest that a first responder should seek ways to give back to help strengthen resilience and PTG. After all, who gives back more than firefighters who regularly risk their lives for others? However, studies have shown that even among firefighters, altruism that goes beyond duty-related work is strongly associated with psychological resilience, as well as healing from mental and emotional scars from past traumatic experiences. Looking for opportunities to volunteer and give outside of work helps us.

Studies into PTSD have shown that altruistic acts in areas that are specifically related to the source of distress are most helpful. A firefighter who has been struggling since a call that had a bad outcome involving children, for example, may benefit most by volunteer work that is directed at helping kids.

Anybody embarking on a career as a fire and rescue professional can expect to encounter duty-related situations with potential for mental and emotional trauma. Putting in place supports for psychological resilience and PTG is a wise precaution to ensure good health and function. Of course, there are other ways to take care of our psychological well-being: watch for articles on psychological health in upcoming issues of CRACKYL.

By Danielle Cook Kawash, MS, RD, NBC-HWC

# FIGHT CANCER WITH YOUR FORK

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE GET CANCER? WHY DO OTHERS AVOID IT? IT'S NOT SIMPLY A MATTER OF GENETICS.



It's estimated that only 20 percent of health outcomes are the result of simple genetics – the hand we're dealt at birth. The question is... how can we leverage that other 80 percent in order to avoid cancer? We can get savvy and take action in three categories: identification, avoidance and resilience.

**IDENTIFICATION** includes getting a quality – and I emphasize quality – yearly physical and taking the time to assess honestly how your body is feeling. Firefighters are conditioned to be tough and live with discomfort, but that attitude can lead you to ignore early warning signs of cancer and other health concerns.

**AVOIDANCE** means limiting your exposure to carcinogens at work and at home. The good news is that your department likely has policies and procedures to help with that when you're on the job. But there are plenty of toxins outside of work, and you're continuously exposed to potential carcinogens in food and household products. By avoiding these, you reduce your "total toxic load," and help your body remove toxins before they can harm you.

The third category is **RESILIENCE**. Did you know that we all have cancer cells in our in our bodies? The good news is that those cancer cells grow, divide and multiply only if they're in a friendly environment. So how do you make your body hostile to cancer cells? You already have a powerful weapon in your arsenal that will keep you healthy if you put it to work – your fork. What you eat can either feed cancer cells or help you kill them.

## THE HEALTHY FORK



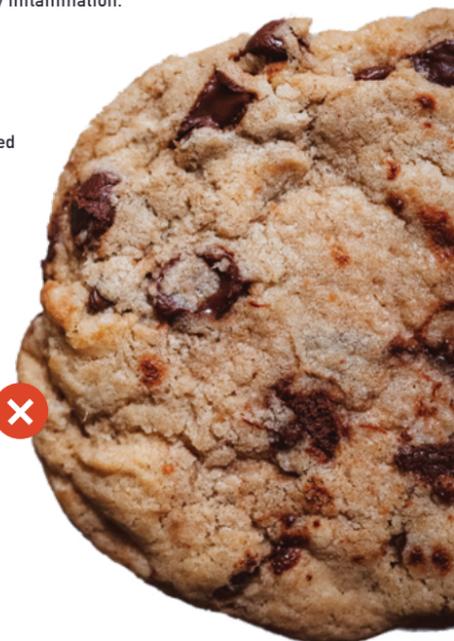
**REDUCE ADDED SUGARS**  
Sugar is fertilizer for cancer cells. It's the preferred fuel for their growth and a signal to grow and multiply. Sugar weakens your immune system and reduces your body's ability to kill cancer cells.



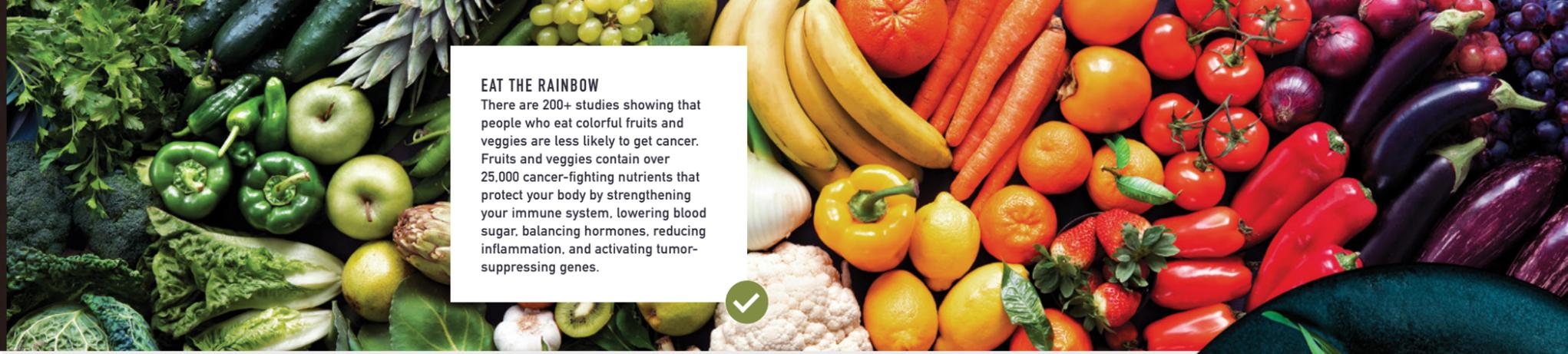
**REDUCE INDUSTRIAL SEED OILS**  
These include soy, corn, cottonseed, safflower, and rapeseed (canola) oil. They're high in Omega 6 fatty acids, which ignite chronic inflammation in your body. New research shows that as many as one in five cancers are caused or stimulated by inflammation.

**AVOID TRANS FAT**  
These man-made fats are listed as hydrogenated, partially hydrogenated, or shortening in a product's ingredient list. This type of fat is so inflammatory, it's recommended that we completely avoid it.

**REDUCE PROCESSED FOODS**  
Highly processed foods are full of the three ingredients above, which you now know fuel the growth of cancer cells.



**AVOID COOKING ON HIGH HEAT**  
Cooking food, especially meat, on high heat (grilling or frying) can also increase your cancer risk. High heat produces carcinogens and advanced glycosylated end products (AGES), which increase cancer risk and accelerate the aging process.



**EAT THE RAINBOW**  
There are 200+ studies showing that people who eat colorful fruits and veggies are less likely to get cancer. Fruits and veggies contain over 25,000 cancer-fighting nutrients that protect your body by strengthening your immune system, lowering blood sugar, balancing hormones, reducing inflammation, and activating tumor-suppressing genes.



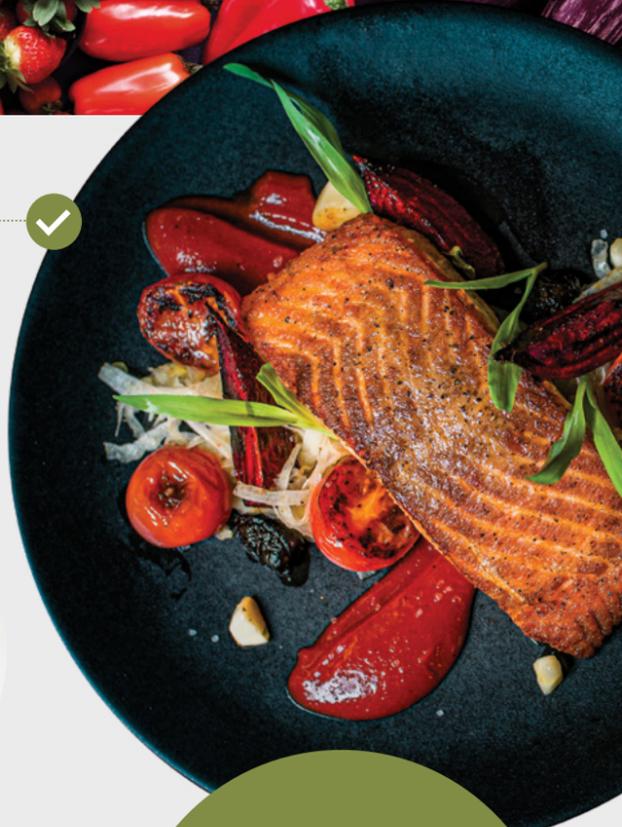
**REDUCE TOXINS FOUND IN FOODS**  
These include pesticides on conventionally-grown produce, antibiotics and hormones used in livestock and poultry, heavy metals, and BPA. These toxins damage cells, increase inflammation, disrupt hormones, and weaken your immune system.

**ADD CANCER-FIGHTING FOODS TO YOUR PLATE**

If you're wondering what's left that you can safely eat, the good news is that you don't have to change everything at once. Start by adding cancer-fighting foods to your plate and you'll soon crowd out those foods that feed cancer.

**ADD HERBS AND SPICES**  
Cancer protection starts with your spice rack! For example, turmeric contains curcumin, which is anti-inflammatory and inhibits the growth of cancer cells (it's more potent eaten with pepper and olive oil). Saffron contains crocins (water-soluble carotenoids) that may inhibit tumor growth, and garlic contains allium, which boosts the immune system and slows cancer cell growth.

**EAT FISH TWO TO THREE TIMES A WEEK**  
Fish is rich in Omega 3 fatty acids, which help to reduce inflammation and lower stress hormones such as cortisol, which, when elevated, can increase your risk for cancer.



**LIMIT ALCOHOL**  
Excessive alcohol consumption increases inflammation, alters your gut microbiota, weakens your immune system, and damages cells. Limit alcohol to a few drinks a week.



**AVOID OVEREATING**  
Overeating can lead to weight gain and inflammation – both risk factors for cancer.

Get started at dinner tonight by filling your plate with colorful fruits and vegetables. Just taking this one step can make a big difference towards creating a healthy new diet.

**ADD NUTS AND SEEDS (IN MODERATION)**  
Nuts are loaded with important cancer-fighting nutrients such as magnesium, polyphenols, and antioxidants. But keep your portions to two small handfuls daily, as most nuts are high in Omega 6 fats.



**ADD FERMENTED FOODS**  
Fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, kombucha, and sauerkraut are teeming with beneficial bacteria that keep your gut healthy and your immune system strong, while balancing your hormones.

**CHOOSE ORGANIC OR FREE-RANGE PRODUCE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS**  
When possible, consume organic produce and meat that has not been given antibiotics or hormones. For tips on which produce is worth buying organic, take a look at Environmental Working Group's Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 list found on [besthealthmag.ca](http://besthealthmag.ca)

**ADD PREBIOTIC FOODS**  
Prebiotic foods such as Jerusalem artichokes, garlic, onions, leeks, shallots, asparagus, and garbanzo beans feed the beneficial bacteria in your gut.



**COOK FOODS ON LOW HEAT**  
The healthiest methods of cooking are steaming, baking, slow cooking, and poaching. If you barbecue or cook on high heat, eat some dark green veggies with your meal for protection.





# Drawing on an Opportunity:

## A CONVERSATION WITH ARTIST & FIREFIGHTER PAUL COMBS

By Julie Fitz-Gerald

Life presents each of us with opportunities, but jumping on them takes courage and a willingness to wade into the unknown, just to see what might work out. For Paul Combs, an award-winning illustrator, artist and retired firefighter with 25 years in the fire service, saying yes to those opportunities has made all the difference.

Combs sat down with CRACKYL to talk about life, the fire service, and the conversation-stirring cartoons that he creates from his home in Ohio.

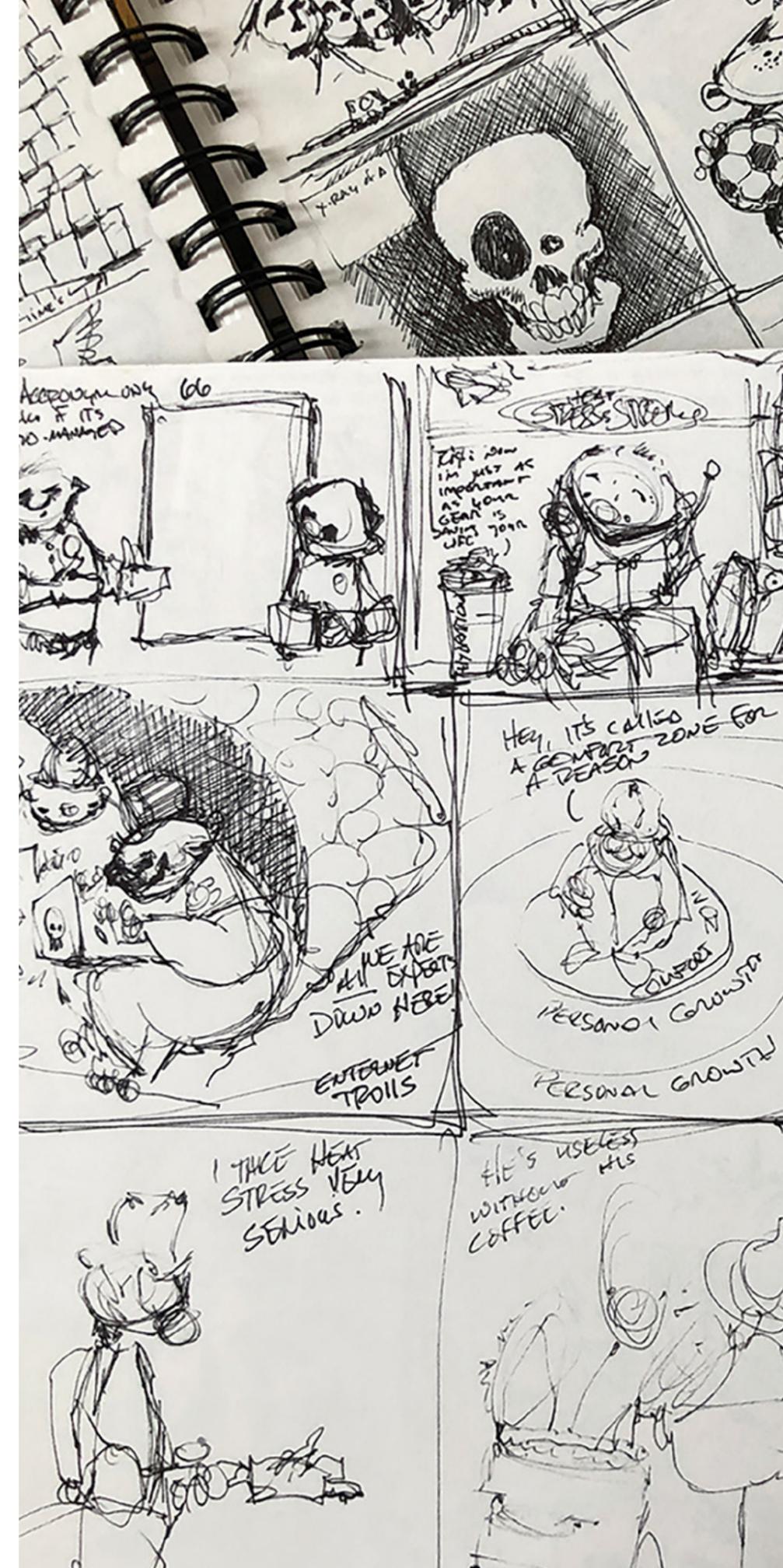


**CRACKYL:** Paul, what came first - art or firefighting?

**COMBS:** Art! I have been an artist since I could hold a crayon. It is the only thing I have ever really known. I created my first comic book when I was 10. For me, art is like breathing. I actually stumbled into firefighting when I was in my late 20s. My buddy's uncle was a retired firefighter and he had a room dedicated to all his firefighter memorabilia and awards. I asked what it was like to be a firefighter and two hours later he had talked me into being one. I called my local fire department, asked for an interview and the minute I walked in the door - the ambiance, the smell - I just knew I was home. It all happened within a 24-hour period.

**CRACKYL:** How did you get started with your fire service artwork?

**COMBS:** Kind of like firefighting, I fell into cartooning by accident. I was working for an ad agency while on a two-year break from firefighting, and they wanted me to do an editorial cartoon about another ad agency, as a joke. In the process of researching and trying to find a style, I fell in love with the cartooning craft. With fine art, if you ask five fine artists to do a portrait, you're going to get five portraits that look similar. But if you ask five cartoonists to do the same thing, you're going to get varying styles that look very different. It is such a unique art that I just fell in love with it.



1 THUMBNAIL



**CRACKYL:** Do you remember the first drawing you ever shared? What was the reaction?

**COMBS:** I was living in Tampa, Florida at the time, out of the fire service and missing it like crazy, and just by chance I did an editorial cartoon for the Tampa Tribune on the Fire Act that was starting to go through Congress. My boss at the newspaper knew that I had a fire background, so she agreed to run it in the paper, and that evening I approached firehouse.com to see if it would be something they would want to run. Within a couple of hours, they called me and I had a contract to do two editorial cartoons a month for the fire service. It is funny how these opportunities in life come about. The reaction to it was good. There have been fire cartoonists in the past, but no editorial cartoonist with a social or political point of view.

**CRACKYL:** How do you feel your drawings have affected the fire service?

**COMBS:** I don't really know. I think my work has started conversations, which is what it is meant to do. Firefighters sitting around the kitchen table at the firehouse open up the cartoon and it starts a conversation on the topic. I hope that's the impact I've had. I purposely kept myself in a bubble, even at my own fire house, and I never brought up the cartoons. It was always a running joke that I might put someone in a magazine, but that's where it ended. I was just Lieutenant Combs. I can draw, but so can a lot of people and just by chance in life I have stumbled onto things. Being an introvert, I've purposely kept myself in that bubble.

2 BLUELINE DRAWING



**CRACKYL:** Where do you get your inspiration from?

**COMBS:** From a lot of places. You don't always know where inspiration comes from and it's kind of scary to start naming it, in case it goes away. As an artist, I am a sponge in my surroundings. It could be a gesture or a word that converges with something else that turns into an idea for a cartoon. I carry a small black sketchbook with me everywhere I go. Every cartoon I have ever done is in one of those black books and I have a collection of five already; small thumbnail ideas, fragments of ideas from five years ago, and they often resonate now, so I continually revisit those books. Inspiration comes from an emotional connection to the things around you.

**CRACKYL:** How many drawings have you published?

**COMBS:** I hit the 500 mark in April. I have been doing this for over 15 years now.

**CRACKYL:** How do you find a work/life balance?

**COMBS:** Being an artist and being someone who is creative, I never quite turn off that switch. It's on all the time. When I'm watching TV or I'm on vacation, I always have my sketchbook. I never consider it work. Art to me is like breathing, so it's always there. My wife, bless her heart, knows there are times when I'm in that zone – there is an ebb and flow to that creativity – so when the tide is in, I can't turn that off. After 28 years of marriage, she has learned to live with this crazy artist.

3 INK DRAWING



**CRACKYL:** What is the best thing that has come from uniting your love of firefighting with your talent for drawing?

**COMBS:** I think it comes back to having the two best jobs in the world. You either go to the fire house or you go to the studio. I'm incredibly blessed to have had those two things in my life. Since retiring from the fire service, I miss my guys on the truck, I miss the calls, I miss the rush – I still have not figured out how to replace that. I totally do not miss the BS and the politics that go on in the fire house though. I am ready for that to be over. But firefighting and art to me are like conjoined twins. I cannot have one without the other. I do work outside of each, but to me they are together.

**CRACKYL:** Do you have any upcoming projects that you're working on?

**COMBS:** I'm currently working on my first children's book with Frank Viscuso called *Sprinkles the Fire Dog*. It's about firefighting, leadership, being strong, not getting pushed around and finding your voice. Frank is a retired fire chief from New Jersey and a best-selling author and I'm handling the illustrations. We're hoping to launch it in 2021, in time for the FDIC International Convention.

4 SCANNED DRAWING PAINTED DIGITALLY



*finished cartoon*

# NO *Adventure* WITHOUT ADVERSITY

By Captain Barold Brock

**It's said there's no adventure without adversity. We proved that true on a mountain pass in Colorado.**

There's a world of people who fall into the five-day-a-week work rut, mow the lawn on Saturday and put their feet up on Sunday. Luckily, we firefighters who have a love of adventure can avoid that trap by taking advantage of solid pay checks and a schedule that offers us time to explore. We know that real regret stems from opportunities not pursued.

No one wants to hear a story about a perfect vacation that featured only sunny days and icy margaritas. Captivating stories are all about imperfect days, near misses, and hurricanes - although if you stick to the Hollywood formula, the tale should wrap up with a happy ending.

Our tale began as a typical dream to see some of the Continental Divide and the deserts of Utah, on motorcycles - an exciting option for extended travel and adventure. Pickup trucks may have heat and radios, but adventure bikes combine camaraderie and outdoorsy-ness, and run

the gamut from comfortable to hardcore. The fact that you can count on fifty mpg average really helps to tip the scales.

So, there we were...my buddy and I on the top of one of Colorado's many mountain passes. Riding dual sport machines (often referred to as adventure bikes), we quickly realized that even in June, snow plowing was in full swing and the pass wasn't clear. Almost but not quite.

The mountain was angry that day, my friends. As we rode through a trough of plowed snow eight feet high, I could barely see my buddy through the blizzard. High altitudes and carburetors seldom happily coexist. With a distinct lack of power and my own unsuccessful demonstration of knot-tying skill to secure luggage, I first thought of turning around. Higher still, with one underpowered bike lying on its side and an impressive display of baggage scattered on the trail, I realized ... this is adventure! I thought again about turning around but kept reminding myself that there is no adventure without adversity.

We aren't tourists in this life, but travelers. I found myself oddly comforted by the thought that I was too old to die young at this point.

We pressed on and eventually, near the precipice, met the heavy snow-removing equipment. Much like good marines, we wanted to adapt and overcome, but this obstacle conveniently removed the disgrace of retreating and forced a decision upon us.

The timing was good. I had already begun to contemplate whether fewer fingers and toes would be deemed as sexy as the one-eyed pirate look!

We decided to turn around and headed back to a lower altitude, remembering that discretion is the better part of valor. We began the ride of shame, beaten and disgraced at the end of our unsuccessful attempt at the summit.

Even at that lower altitude, we were still frozen but suddenly...there it was. In a beam of sunlight at the side of the motorway, was a sign that read: Hot Springs. With rising optimism, we found the front counter and asked if we could

go in and stave off hypothermia. Happily, we discovered that we could rent time in the Grotto by the hour, but with some important provisos. We were told that the Hot Springs community was free-spirited and considered clothing optional. Given that our options at that point were to warm up or die, we decided to jump in and soon found ourselves neck deep in a hippie commune stew - wearing our best Hawaiian shorts. Good times.

The best thing about adventure travel is that, if it's done properly, you'll be uncomfortable, exhausted, hungry, scared and may even resort to sucking your thumb. Much like going to prison for a short stint, adventure greatly improves your appreciation for the comforts of civilization and, eventually, of home.

Signing off for now, urging you to consider that attitude is everything—and that it takes a village to raise an idiot.

*Happy Trails*

||

I FOUND MYSELF  
ODDLY COMFORTED  
BY THE THOUGHT  
THAT I WAS TOO  
OLD TO DIE YOUNG  
AT THIS POINT.

# DON'T IGNORE THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR FINANCES

By Matthew Broom, Host of The 24/48 Podcast

**THAT MOMENT WHEN YOU DECIDE TO TAKE A SMARTER APPROACH TO YOUR MONEY WON'T ARRIVE GRADUALLY. IT WILL HIT YOU IN AN INSTANT. YOU'LL WAKE UP, HAVE A "F\*CK THIS" MOMENT, AND DECIDE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.**

**S**tress and anxiety have probably been building and compounding over time, right alongside your credit card debt – but the decision to change will still happen in a heartbeat. You'll have reached what's called the tipping point – the moment your trajectory changes and you decide to get on the path to financial freedom.

Too often, we prolong our poor money habits because we're deceiving ourselves and distorting reality to increase our comfort. We tell ourselves a soothing story about how we can afford this house, pay off our bills, and find a way to retire someday. Then, someday becomes never, the house gets bigger, and the bills keep rolling in.

We have to stop fooling ourselves. Feeling financially stressed? Don't trick yourself into thinking it will all work out because it won't – not unless you decide to take action. According to the Retirement in America study performed by Ramsey Solutions, "...nearly half of us aren't saving for retirement, and those who save, aren't saving enough."

You don't have to wait for stress and anxiety to push you to your tipping point. You can make the decision to take control of your finances any time – including right now.

## MAKE THE DECISION

Changing poor money habits takes commitment and a conscious decision to do better. It doesn't just happen. You have to really want it.

Once you've committed, you'll want to be consistent with the expectations you've set. You've created a goal, and you're not going to disappoint yourself.

When you're tempted to book your annual vacation at that beautiful beach house you really can't afford, it's going to take self-discipline to stay the course and say no. Almost no one goes through life thinking they're going to run five or ten or twenty miles a day – every day – just for the fun of it, but those who've committed to running a marathon make the self-disciplined decision to lace up their shoes.

Instead of trying to keep up with the Joneses, therefore, and staying trapped in the everyday rat race, commit to being different. Decide to make financial stewardship a priority, destroy your debt and build wealth.

Don't ever think that you're "just" a firefighter. So am I! Your circumstances don't dictate your outcome but your attitude and actions will.

## HERE'S WHERE TO START

Decide to take control of your finances and start by asking yourself three key questions:

1. **What can I do to improve my finances?**
2. **What do I want to achieve?**
3. **What will make that happen?**

**Then answer those questions honestly.**

Write down everything that comes to mind over the next few minutes. It doesn't have to be profound – just write down every thought you have. Now pat yourself on the back, grab a cold one (if it's after breakfast), or do whatever you need to congratulate yourself for taking the first step. Then walk away from the list.

After a while – 30 minutes, maybe – come back to your list and ask yourself, "What is the single most important thing that I can do to improve my finances?"

Prioritizing is crucial. If you have five priorities, you really don't have anything. What you need is a single priority. Don't try and do it all. There's a reason Jocko Willink and Leif Babin included Prioritize and Execute as one of the "Laws of Combat" in their best-seller *Extreme Ownership*. It works on the battlefield, at the fire department, at home, and it will definitely work for your finances.

Once you know what your top priority is, you'll know where to focus your energy.

## FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins often says, "Where your focus goes, your energy flows." You need a single focus so all of your energy will flow towards it. You can really move the needle when you are only focused on one gauge.

For example, if your top priority is to get out of debt, don't worry about your retirement savings. When that crushing monthly payment monkey is finally off your back, you'll be able to supercharge your retirement savings.

Now create a step-by-step plan to accomplish your priority.

If getting out of debt is your top priority, your plan may look like this:

- Stop using credit cards
- Analyze cash flow (budget)
- Save a starter emergency fund (one month's expenses)
- Apply all extra cash flow to debt paydown until debt-free

By becoming laser-focused, you can analyze, plan, execute, and evaluate without being distracted.

Before you start down this new path – certainly, a path less traveled – you need to understand that we all have financial skeletons in the closet. If you want to make a lasting and positive change, you'll have to face them.

## DON'T IGNORE THE TRUTH (...EVEN IF IT SUCKS!)

British novelist Aldous Huxley said, "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored."

Be self-critical. We all have bad habits and we can all do better. When we fail, it's easy to blame luck or circumstance but the odds are, we probably did something stupid. We all make mistakes and we have to own them.

Reaching financial freedom does not take superhuman intellect, but it does take discipline, humility, and commitment. Don't be afraid to kick your stupid tobacco habit and don't be embarrassed if your children don't have designer clothes. Don't be ashamed to sell your fancy car and drive a used vehicle you pay cash for.

We do unwise things with money all the time. The important thing is to realize the stupidity and course-correct – quickly. It's easy to detect the mistakes of others but turning the mirror on ourselves can be one of the most challenging things that we do.

**Remember: It's better to stand financially naked in the auditorium of your mind, examine all your defects, and make positive changes than to reach retirement age and wish that you had.**

# SEALS, LIZARDS, FISH & FIREFIGHTERS

FIGHTING THE  
BRAIN BATTLE

By Ryan Seeley



Feel like you might be suffering from “lizard brain”? **You are.**

The more primitive parts of the human brain – the brain stem, cerebellum, and basal ganglia – are shared by lizards and humans. Our lizard cousins, like us, inherited these brain elements from fish to help handle basic body functions such as breathing, eating, and various other survival needs. More importantly, these basic brain parts serve the primal fight-or-flight instinct. (Fun fact: they also handle mating but that’s a topic for another time.)

**AS WELL-KNOWN AMERICAN AUTHOR SETH GODIN PUTS IT, OUR LIZARD BRAINS ARE “HUNGRY, SCARED, SELFISH AND HORNY.”**

As first responders, we’re often faced with situations where we must overpower our lizard brain instincts – the ones that tell us to run from danger and avoid situations that are frightening. Anyone who has dealt with the challenges of emergency rescues knows that heading into danger, rather than running from it, involves overcoming our most basic instincts. Our lizard brain can’t be allowed to win.

Fortunately, unlike lizards, we have evolved higher brain functions that can enable us to override primitive instincts. Although our spouses

might have doubts from time to time, we are, in fact, smarter and more evolved than either fish or lizards. Humans have developed far more complex brain circuitry so that our lizard brain areas are encircled by a group of structures known as the limbic system. This system gives us the ability to regulate emotions – including fear and anxiety – and to influence their effects on our actions. We also have a cerebral cortex, which allows us to perform higher functions, such as planning, reasoning, and calculating. Together, these vital brain structures help us to control our primitive fight-or-flight instincts and make decisions that are complex. By contrast, those lizard cousins of ours simply respond by reflex and instinct.

Firefighters are called upon to overcome their lizard brains on a regular basis, despite the fact that those instincts for self-preservation are strong – especially in high-adrenaline, dangerous situations. If we take a moment to let the base instincts pass, however, and use our higher brain functions, we can do what we need to as firefighters, regardless of the threats. **Our higher brain functions give us emotions of love and compassion, as well as motivations that come from careful thought, which can overcome the lizard brain.** Many people aren’t swayed by their higher brain functions, and focus on self-preservation rather than on the

greater good and while no one can blame them, firefighters simply can’t operate that way.

As Greek philosopher Aristotle once noted, the definition of courage is twofold: (1) recognition that a cause is worthwhile; and (2) that an individual faces danger with the full knowledge of what the potential outcome might be.

**It’s important not to confuse courage with risk-taking.**

**NEUROSCIENTISTS WOULD ARGUE THAT RISK-TAKERS BEHAVE IRRATIONALLY, WHILE COURAGEOUS PEOPLE MAKE THE DECISION TO TAKE ON CHALLENGES FOR THE GREATER GOOD, NO MATTER HOW GREAT THE RISK TO THE SELF.**

Scientists refer to the object of peril as a “**decision point**” and label acting courageously as “overcoming fear,” but what we’re actually doing is overcoming the lizard brain.

Conquering fear is neither simple nor easily learned. There was probably no single event in your past that gave you the ability to overcome fear as a firefighter; rather, your courage has accrued over the years. Your choices in each situation and the outcomes of every challenge you’ve faced have built your ability to do this challenging job. Researchers call the development of this capacity for courage “making fear-overriding

decisions over time.” To a large extent, science suggests that when it comes to courage, we are more the product of our environment and experiences than of our brain composition. **We are simply not born courageous.**

If you google “lizard brain”, you’ll find endless talks, blogs, and motivational speeches about overcoming fear. These are all designed to encourage civilians – i.e. non-firefighters – to resist the fears that prevent them from achieving their goals. Courage, in that context, involves taking risks in business and in their personal lives, not rushing into a burning building. Those folks have the luxury of taking time to mull over their courageous decisions, knowing their lives are not at stake. Firefighters aren’t afforded that luxury. When the siren goes off, you gear up to face the unknown.

Even when we, as firefighters, have learned to overcome fear, the lizard brain continues to assert itself, tempting us to run from danger – and it operates twice as fast as our higher brain functions.

**THIS MEANS THE INITIAL RESPONSE TO A THREAT WILL ALWAYS BE THE URGE TO RUN FROM IT. THE TRICK IS TO ALLOW THE NON-LIZARD LIMBIC SYSTEM OF THE BRAIN TO TONE DOWN THE FEAR RESPONSE BEFORE ACTING.**

Firefighters are experts at overcoming the instincts of the lizard brain; however, having a few tools in our back pockets can help us remain in the fight when the going gets tough. Overcoming our lizard brains is quite simply what makes us who we are.

“  
OUR LIZARD BRAINS ARE

**HUNGRY, SCARED, SELFISH & HORNY.**”



## OVERCOME YOUR LIZARD BRAIN

U.S. Navy SEALs use four techniques to optimize the ability of the brain to overcome lizard brain reactions to danger, and we firefighters can add them to our arsenal as we operate in the face of danger.

1

### GOAL SETTING

In the middle of the inferno, your lizard brain is firing on all cylinders. Subconsciously, you’re fighting to maintain your inner balance by keeping in mind goals that can range from getting home safely, to buying a new car. or, as Aristotle would suggest, seeing that your actions are for a worthwhile cause. Whatever your goal, focusing on the positive keeps you grounded in your task.

2

### MENTAL REHEARSAL

Visualizing a challenge and mentally overcoming it helps you face down the real threat when it occurs. Plans may change the second an operation starts, but mentally rehearsing endless scenarios will ready you for any eventuality.

3

### SELF-TALK

SEALs say that positive self-talk is encouraging and keeps lizard brain negativity at bay. Psychologists agree.

4

### AROUSAL CONTROL

Nope, this isn’t what you think! In a nutshell, when our bodies undergo stress, we breathe rapidly, pushing oxygen away from our brains and into the areas we need for flight. Switching to deeper and longer breaths sends more oxygen to the brain, thus boosting our cognitive functions and helping us stay ready for the fight.

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

**Y**ou don't have to be a biblical scholar to know that when the four horsemen of the apocalypse show up, you're in deep trouble. According to the Book of Revelation, the four figures symbolize the beginning of the end of the world. We're told that we need to keep our eyes peeled for a rider on a white horse

who represents conquest, a red horse which heralds the coming of war, a black horse which foretells famine and a white horse with a rider who announces the arrival of a plague. These are definitely four guys we'd rather not have arrive, but at least we'll know what's coming if we see them on the horizon.

What if there were four horsemen of the apocalypse for relationships? Could being able to identify really serious conflicts enable us to deal with them as soon as they arise, saving both us and our partnerships?

**Maybe.**

## MARRIAGE MENDING MYTHOLOGY

The advice we've all been given about working through marital problems doesn't always work as planned. Consider these top four marriage-mending myths:

- 1 SHOWING EMPATHY**  
by using reflective listening will solve all your problems. Maybe not. Simply repeating, "I hear you saying that you're angry" won't make your partner any less angry!
- 2 REFUSING TO SHOW ANGER**  
or any other negative emotion will reassure your partner. Absolutely not. If you suddenly stop admitting to feeling normal emotions like frustration or anger or disappointment, your partner will have no idea what's going on in your mind.
- 3 USING "CONTINGENT POSITIVITY"**  
as a strategy to reward "good" behavior. If you treat your partner kindly and lovingly only as a reward for something he or she has done for you, you'll be setting up a tit-for-tat system that will lead logically to treating that partner unkindly as punishment for things left undone. In a healthy relationship, partners should always treat each other with loving kindness.
- 4 BICKERING IS BAD**  
and should be stifled at all costs. Wrong. In any relationship, there will be differences of opinion and those issues need to be discussed and resolved. As long as you remain polite and focused on the problems rather than the personalities involved, the odd squabble can clear the air.



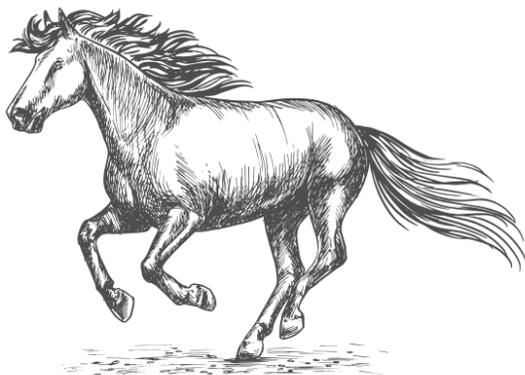
Marriage counsellors agree that there are four patterns of behavior that can signal the death knell for a relationship if allowed to go unchecked. The deadly four include: **criticism**; **defensiveness**; **contempt**; and **stonewalling**. Have a read and see if any alarm bells start to ring.

## NO1 CRITICISM.

This doesn't refer to criticism in the usual sense, such as: "You could have done a better job of cleaning up the kitchen." That's a complaint. Criticism suggests that there is something globally wrong with your partner – an unchanging part of his or her character. Truly critical comments always elicit defensiveness, because they're essentially an attack on someone's very character, and on who they are. Beware: a complaint can easily transform into a criticism. For example:

**"YOU'VE BEEN HOME FOR AN HOUR, AND YOU HAVEN'T ONCE ASKED ME ABOUT HOW MY DAY WAS. WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? WHAT KIND OF A SELF-CENTERED JERK ARE YOU?"**

The first sentence is a complaint. It's a legitimate observation that the other person can do something about. They can apologize for the oversight and ask how the day was. The next two statements are criticisms, and the recipient has no way out but to become defensive and angry. Often a criticism begins with "You always"... or "You never"....



## NO2 DEFENSIVENESS.

Reacting defensively, usually by countering one complaint with another, only escalates nasty situations. Often people react defensively in the heat of the moment and later regret what they've said. Taking a moment to let the raw emotion pass can allow the higher brain functions to kick in enabling us to respond in a more constructive way – but anger often prevents this important step.

## NO3 CONTEMPT.

Making any statement or displaying behavior designed to put you on a higher plane than your spouse is a clear sign of danger. If you mock your partner by repeating what he or she says in a derogatory manner, or if you make contemptuous facial expressions, roll your eyes, belittle or poke fun at the other person – particularly in front of others – you could be doing serious relationship damage.

## NO4 STONEWALLING.

If you or your partner withdraw from an interaction and give none of the usual cues that signal that you're listening and involved, you're in dangerous territory. People who are stonewalling look away or and make it clear that they aren't paying attention. They may cast quick glances at others as if to say "Is he/she still at it?", simply walk away, or hang up the phone in mid-conversation.



**THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF A RELATIONSHIP APOCALYPSE TEND TO COME IN SEQUENCE, STARTING WITH CRITICISM – BUT THE WORST OF THE LOT IS CONTEMPT. CONTEMPT IS JUST TOXIC AND CAN EVEN BORDER ON ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR.**



The four horsemen of a relationship apocalypse tend to come in sequence, starting with criticism – but the worst of the lot is contempt. Contempt is just toxic and can even border on abusive behavior. In general, we all hate being mocked, and – this is key – we don't mock the people we love or respect. Contempt almost never occurs in stable, happy marriages, and it is the single most reliable predictor of divorce. If you see a

horseman bringing continuous contempt into your relationship, the end could be imminent.

The other three horsemen may appear from time to time, even in stable, happy marriages but the important difference is that the damage they do can be more easily and quickly repaired. Commenting on the communication itself, responding with kind words to diffuse the situation,

or softening complaints by expressing appreciation for each other can all help.

If repair attempts aren't effective and the situation escalates, professional help may be needed to send the four horsemen on their way. What's vital is recognizing that their appearance in your relationship is a signal that things need to change before the end days arrive.

# BOMB-PROOF YOUR LOWER BACK

By Amber Bowman

**FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENTS LIKE SQUATS, LIFTS, LUNGES, PRESSING, AND PULLING PATTERNS CAN PREPARE YOU FOR A HEALTHY CAREER AND AN EVEN HEALTHIER RETIREMENT.**

It's a work day. You wake up early and jump in your vehicle for the morning commute to the hall. You're eager to connect with your crew and catch up over a cup of coffee. You walk through the door, bend over to grab your gear and wham – your lower back tightens up. You know that means trouble.

Lower back pain still contributes to more than 50 percent of all line-of-duty injuries for firefighters, causing lost work time and medical expenses, and interfering with quality time with the family. It's incredibly frustrating.

Though very common, lower back pain is easily preventable with regular daily movement maintenance, including developing healthy mobility and flexibility, along with stability and strength training.

Let's dive into Phase One of our Fit by Fire Lower Back Injury Program to start bomb-proofing your back. As we examine these injury prevention strategies, we'll build a two-part bomb-proof back plan.

The first part of our plan has us working on creating mobile joints and functionally flexible muscles and improving our posture with the Fundamental Three Mobility Drills. We'll then tackle multi-dimensional torso toughness by including the Foundation Four Core Exercises.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL THREE MOBILITY DRILLS FOR LOWER BACK PAIN INJURY PREVENTION

Each one of these amazing stretches will help to improve the flexibility of the musculature around the hip and shoulders to take unnecessary stress off the lower back. They also work to improve toe-to-fingertip mobility across commonly critical firefighter-related movement. Perform each for approximately 30-45 seconds. You can move through all three and then repeat for two to three rounds.



SAMSON STRETCH

1

### SAMSON STRETCH

Starting from a standing position, take a long lunging step. Allowing the back knee to drop, lace your fingers and extend your arms overhead, reaching your palms to the ceiling. As you stand back up, relax your arms and repeat the process with the other leg.

#### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Brace your belly so as not to over-extend your back.
- Engage your glutes as you push your hip forward at the bottom of the lunge.
- Try to extend your arms fully in line with your ears.
- You should feel a gentle stretch through the shoulders and the front of the hip on the back leg.
- Make sure your front heel is firmly planted. If not, you may need to lengthen your stride.

2

### SPIDERMAN STRETCH

This is a two-part stretch that starts in a high plank position.

**PART ONE:** Stepping one leg forward, lower that leg's heel down to the ground while keeping the back leg off the ground. Slowly drop the inside elbow down as close to the ground as you comfortably can. This should be the arm that is closer to the forward leg.

#### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Try to reach closer to the ground with every rep.
- Keep the back leg as straight as possible.
- Push the hips down as you press with your elbow.
- Go slow and steady on this one.

**PART TWO:** Once you have reached down to the ground with your elbow, use the same arm and reach it towards the ceiling. Maintain the same leg position.

#### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Looking up at your hand will help open your chest.
- Keep your hips pressed down as you reach.
- Brace your belly so the rotation happens through the shoulders and upper back.
- Keep your upper traps relaxed.

Once the sequence is complete, bring both hands to the ground, move your leg back to achieve a high plank and then repeat the process on the other side.



SPIDERMAN STRETCH: INSIDE ELBOW

SPIDERMAN STRETCH: SAME SIDE REACH



COBRA



DOWN DOG

3

### COBRA TO DOWN DOG

Another two-part stretch, but this one is more of a flow.

**PART ONE:** Starting from a high plank, slowly drop your hips to the ground.

#### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Keep your shoulders down and back relaxed.
- Brace your belly so as not to overextend your back.
- If this causes too much strain, simply lower yourself down to your elbows.

**PART TWO:** From here, lift your hips as high as possible, keeping your arms extended and as in-line with your ears as possible. You can drive your heels into the ground for an additional calf/achilles stretch if desired.

#### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Drive your hips high by pushing firmly into the ground.
- Keep your legs straight as you drive your heels down.



## 1 HIP BRIDGE

In this exercise, we are looking to develop strong glutes, hamstrings, and back musculature. This exercise also helps to offset the negative impact sitting has on our bodies. Start on the ground with a shoulder-width stance. Next, as you lift the hips, drive down through your heels, creating one straight line between the knees and shoulders.

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Brace the belly so as not to over-extend the lower back.
- Look to achieve a 90 degree bend at the knee.
- Lift high enough that you feel you are able to squeeze your glutes.
- Arms should be kept at the side for stability but not for pressing assistance.

## HIP BRIDGE SINGLE LEG PROGRESSION

A great progression to the hip bridge is working towards a single leg lift. This exercise has the same mechanics as the hip bridge, but one leg lifts while you press the free foot towards the ceiling.

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

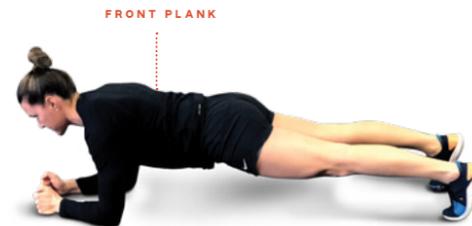
- Make sure to keep the knee of your working leg stacked directly over the foot.
- Wider hand placement can be used for lateral stability.
- Extra focus might be required to keep the hips square to the ceiling.

## 2 SIDE PLANK

Learning to brace against lateral flexion is key in protecting the lower back against injury. Keep the body in one straight line, with one arm stacked directly under the shoulder and legs.

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Keep a neutral head/neck position by looking forward, not down.
- Try not to let the hips sag behind by keeping your glutes tightly braced.
- Side planks can be very tough for beginners. Regressing this exercise by bending the knees can make this much more achievable.



## 3 FRONT PLANK

It is a classic for a reason! The front plank should be the first step in developing a strong core as it focuses primarily on the anterior muscle of the abdominals. The front plank requires tension throughout the whole torso, so stack the arms directly under the shoulders and keep your feet hip-width apart while maintaining a flat back.

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Engaging your glutes will help to position the hips correctly.
- Looking down will ensure a neutral neck and reduce strain.
- Brace the belly as if you were anticipating being punched in the gut.
- Front planks can be the basis for a whole list of amazing core-focused exercises.

## ALTERNATING SHOULDER TAPS

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Make sure to resist any hip side-to-side movement or rotation.
- Performing this slowly and with control will give you the best results.
- The distance between the feet will greatly change the intensity of the exercise.
- The narrower the gap, the harder the exercise.

## 4 ANTI-ROTATION HOLDS

Your secret weapons for building a bomb-proof back are definitely the Anti-Rotations. They combine all the benefits of front and side planks, while adding contra-lateral (across body) stability and strength. Using a band or cable, start by walking out into tension with hands directly in front of the body. Press and hold against the side pulling force.

### KEY POINTS OF FOCUS

- Press arms to full extension at chest height.
- Keep your shoulders back and down.
- Keep the belly braced as if someone is going to punch your gut.
- Start with light resistance to learn the mechanics without overcompensating.



A big mistake many novices make is to jump right into core exercises that are complicated or gimmicky. Everyone should be able to perform each one of these movements comfortably for over 60 seconds before jumping into more complex options.

If you are lucky enough to be able to perform this routine before shift, that's great! If not, completing it two to three times a week would be a great start towards a healthier and stronger back. Consider adding this to your warm-up routine when you work out at home or at the gym.

Once you feel you have conquered this phase, add other firefighter-specific mobility and strength exercises to your routine. Functional movements like squats, lifts, lunges, pressing, and pulling patterns will help you prepare for a healthy career and an even healthier retirement.

CHECK OUT [FITBYFIRE.COM](http://FITBYFIRE.COM) FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INJURY PREVENTION AND WORKOUTS FOR FIREFIGHTERS



# ANNETTE ZAPP IS THROWING A LIFELINE TO BETTER HEALTH

By Julie Fitz-Gerald

/// THESE SMALL STEPS ADD UP TO BIG BENEFITS, WITH THE SUSTAINED EFFORT OVER TIME RESULTING IN A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND THINKING.

NAME: ANNETTE ZAPP  
YEARS IN FIRE SERVICE: 16 YEARS  
ACTIVE OR RETIRED: ACTIVE  
LOCATION: CHICAGO



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**B**eing a 16-year veteran of the fire service, a lieutenant at a busy fire hall in the suburbs of Chicago, and a fitness coach and trainer for over 25 years, Annette Zapp is an expert on all things fire and fitness.

Combining her passion for health and fitness with her successful career as a firefighter was a dream brought to life five years ago, when Zapp launched FireSQ Fitness. Through her business, Zapp is on a mission to give firefighters the tools they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives, both physically and mentally – something that she has witnessed many colleagues struggle with.

“Five years ago, the biggest challenges facing firefighters were heart disease, strokes, and obesity. Those are still challenges but the unfortunate fact of the matter is that today, a lot more of our firefighters are dying by suicide than any other way, so mental health challenges need to be addressed,” Zapp explains.

Zapp has done some serious legwork to understand physical and mental health challenges and how they can be overcome. She holds a master’s degree in biochemistry and molecular biology, is an adjunct professor at the University of Denver in the Sport Coaching Master’s program and is a proud veteran member of the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support team. Recently, Zapp served on a panel of experts who revised the U.S. National Strength Conditioning Association’s (NSCA) Tactical Strength and Conditioning (TSAC) Practitioners course, and she was appointed to a First Responders Suicide Task Force in the Illinois State Senate.

So why are firefighters facing such monumental challenges with their physical health and mental wellbeing? “It all ties back to sleep, nutrition, movement, and mindfulness training,” says Zapp. “Mental health challenges are huge because these men and women come into the fire service ill-prepared for the trauma they’re going to see, and they don’t know how to deal with it. The fire service is like a big frat house: it’s like a contest to see who can sleep the least and be the toughest and eat the worst, because they think it’s funny. They don’t realize that every single meal, every night of sleep, is feeding information to the body.”

Zapp’s approach when helping departments implement health programs is no-nonsense and starts with the basics. Understanding how firefighters tick is her secret weapon. “Firefighters are extremists. They’re all or nothing. They’re on the wagon or off the wagon. They’re perfection or a shitshow,” she says. “They decide, ‘Ooh, I’m getting a bit fat. I need to lose weight,’ so they change everything in their lives. They train at 5 a.m., cut out alcohol and have a laundry list of 10 things they are going to do, but it’s not sustainable. So instead of making one mistake and picking themselves back up, they fall off the wagon hard and abandon it.”

## IT ALL TIES BACK TO SLEEP, NUTRITION, MOVEMENT & MINDFULNESS TRAINING.

Another problem: “They listen to each other’s bullshit. If Fred lost 20 pounds in 30 days on the Keto diet, they all jump on the Keto diet. It can work for some people, but it’s generally not sustainable so they fall off and hop on the next trend.”

Basically, firefighters are pre-wired to fail before they even start because of this shared “all or nothing” attitude. A better approach, according to Zapp, is to make small, manageable changes over time.

“Number one, they need to realize that they’re not superhuman. They’ve been fed this bologna of ‘sleep when you’re dead,’ but it’s not true. Of course, they can’t control it on duty, which is why they need to control it very tightly off duty.”

Instead of going out partying on your nights off, stay in and prioritize the sleep that you missed out on when you were working. Zapp suggests other tips to ensure you are getting enough zzz’s, including losing one of your side jobs and creating a routine for yourself that centers on a decent bedtime. “Don’t leave

it to chance,” she warns, noting that chronic lack of sleep among some male firefighters has led to extremely low testosterone levels, as well as to a total lack of energy.

Next, Zapp says to look at your overall routine and determine your worst habit. Is it eating high-fat foods regularly? Is it being completely sedentary when you’re off duty? “If people are sedentary, but eat well, then we work on getting them up and moving, doing something they enjoy, something simple with their kids. Conversely, if their eating habits are a disaster, then we work on something small with their diet first. It’s about tiny steps in the right direction, rather than a radical get-fit-in-10-days approach.”

Small steps add up to big benefits, with the sustained effort over time resulting in a new way of living – and thinking. “They’re obviously going to feel better, they’ll look better, but beyond that they’re going to have more longevity beyond retirement. Many commit 30 years or more to the fire service and don’t experience many years of retirement before they die, thanks to an unhealthy lifestyle.”

Another reason to take care of your health: “Firefighters who are more fit get injured less,” says Zapp, “and those who take good care of themselves enjoy a happy and wholesome home life because they look better and they feel better.”

Zapp’s health and fitness company has provided coaching to many fire departments across the U.S. with a goal of improving the physical and mental health of firefighters daily. It’s not all or nothing – it’s sustained action for a healthy life because there really isn’t any downside to taking control of your health.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS, PLEASE CONTACT THE U.S. NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE AT 1-800-273-8255; CANADA SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICE AT 1-833-456-4566. OR YOUR LOCAL PEER SUPPORT (ON A DEPARTMENT OR STATE BASIS).



## THE ABCs OF PET CPR

We'd love to think that nothing bad could ever happen to our furry companions, but the reality is that animal emergencies occur. Being prepared for them – just as we are for the human variety – can mean the difference between losing your animal to choking and having him around for a good, long life. Much like humans, animals have airway risks and knowing how to identify one can enable you to apply vital interventions.

### WARNING SIGNS

Pay attention to hazards on and around the victim and be aware of contributing factors that may be invisible, such as inhalants, ingestibles, and more. Understanding the contributing factors to the overall presentation of your animal is key to performing a successful resuscitation. These two symptoms can be an indication that an emergency response is required.



DILATED PUPILS

PALE / GRAY LIPS & GUMS



### START BY CHECKING YOUR ANIMAL'S ABCs:

#### AIRWAY



##### NO.1: ASSESS AIRWAY

If the obstruction can be seen, sweep finger from side to side to try and remove it safely **but avoid pushing it further down the airway.**



##### NO.2: HEIMLICH MANEUVER

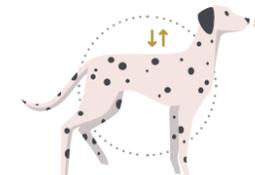
If the obstruction is unseen, hold the animal with its tail against your legs and its back against your chest. Wrap your arms around the abdomen, right below the ribcage. Immediately administer **five** thrusts.



##### NO.3: FIVE SHARP BLOWS

If the Heimlich does not work, give **five sharp blows** with your hands between the shoulder blades. Then do another quick airway re-assessment. If airways are clear, check breathing.

#### BREATHING



##### NO.4: CHECK FOR BREATH

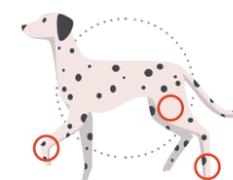
Place your hands on the animal's ribcage and assess for chest rise and fall. If that doesn't work, try to feel breaths coming through the animal's mouth/nose.



##### NO.5: TWO RESCUE BREATHS

For cats and smaller dogs, give **two rescue breaths** while covering its nose and mouth with your mouth. For medium to large dogs, close its mouth and breathe directly into its nose.

#### CIRCULATION



##### NO.6: CHECK CIRCULATION

Place your middle and index fingers on the animal's **wrist, inner thigh, or below the ankle.** If no pulse can be located, start compressions.



##### NO.5: START COMPRESSIONS

Lay the animal on its **right side.** Place your hand over its ribs **behind its elbow** on their chest. For cats, use a one-handed squeezing motion. Compression to ventilation ratios can be found to the right.

## COMPRESSION TIPS

Canine and feline CPR is similar to human CPR, but varies in the depth and number of compressions.

Repeat the following processes until signs of life are restored. Resuscitation efforts should be stopped after 20 minutes.

### CATS & SMALL DOGS UNDER 30 LBS

5 compressions per breath

.5-1" depth of compression

### MEDIUM TO LARGE DOGS 30-90 LBS

5 compressions per breath

1-3" depth of compression

### EXTRA-LARGE DOGS OVER 90 LBS

10 compressions per breath

1-3" depth of compression

# EMOTIONAL STUNTING

CAN'T WE  
ALL JUST  
GROW UP?

WE'RE ALL  
ADULTS HERE,  
AREN'T WE?  
OR ARE WE?

Do you sometimes think your partner behaves like a spoiled child?

Might they describe you the same way?

Do arguments that start small quickly escalate to shouting matches, crying and stony silences?

Are you frustrated because no matter how loudly you make your point, no one ever hears what you're trying to say?

When things go off the rails, are you quick to assign blame?

Do you or your partner often have to apologize for cruel things said in the heat of the moment?

Do you bully others to get your way?

Do you feel bullied by your partner or your colleagues?

Are you always trying to be the strongest, the smartest or the most successful in any group, even if that makes others uncomfortable or resentful?

If any, or all, of these examples seem familiar to you, you'll be surprised to learn that this entire can of psychological worms may be attributed to a single, surprising cause: emotional stunting, the technical term for the failure to achieve an adult level of maturity. Like a plant deprived of the space, nutrients, water or sunlight that it needs to grow, an emotionally-stunted personality reaches a certain stage and then stops, unable to finish the maturation process. Many people dealing with emotional stunting grow adept at covering their problem and may appear to function on an adult level. A closer look, however, shows that they not only face, but often create, ongoing difficulties caused by the inability to respond to life events in a fully mature way.

Emotional stunting can be the result of seemingly contradictory factors that range from smothering parents who refuse to allow independence to neglectful parents who withdraw love and support at critical developmental stages. Sometimes, emotional stunting is the result of traumatic events so painful and damaging that normal emotional development is derailed. Whatever the cause, the outcome is often dysfunctional relationships and difficulty living, working and dealing with others.

## ARE YOU THE STRONG, SILENT TYPE?

Our culture has an unhealthy tendency to glorify heroes who seem emotionless and immune to grief, anguish or sadness - but while they make great movie characters, they're terrible friends or partners. **Emotions are embedded in our higher brain functions and suppressing them is next to impossible and won't make them go away.**

Often, emotionally stunted people refuse to allow themselves to grieve after a significant loss or trauma, such as a serious injury or illness, or the death of a loved one - and that's an unfortunate mistake. Sharing pain with others is a vital means of releasing pressure and is crucial to allowing us to move through the healthy stages of grieving to reach a point of acceptance. This need to work through emotions is particularly important for first responders following a traumatic call. To ignore that process can lead to long-term difficulties in coping with the demands of our jobs.

It's not only negative emotions that need to be faced and dealt with head on. **The ability to express and validate loving emotions is essential to maintaining our closest personal relationships.** We have to be able to share our most intimate feelings with our loved ones, in ways that are both nourishing and constructive, and respond when our partner does the same.

## LET'S GET GROWING

If emotional stunting is an issue in your life, what are your options? Can growth still be fostered? Can emotional maturity be reached?

It can - but it won't be easy. As is the case with so many issues in our lives, the first step is identifying and admitting that there is a problem...and that can be tough. Take an honest look at the examples of emotionally stunted behavior at the beginning of this article. Recognize any?

If the behaviors are yours, acknowledging them is an important step. Congratulations! Next step? Planning positive alternatives.

If your instinctive response to any frustrating situation is to lose your temper, shout, or slam doors, plan an alternative now - while you're calm and rational. Maybe you could remove yourself from the cause of your frustration, count to ten before speaking, or take five deep breaths to bring calm to the moment. Picture yourself making these changes and be ready the next time frustration strikes. You might not be entirely successful right away, but simply accepting that there is a better way to handle things is propelling you towards a new level of maturity.

What if the emotionally-stunted person is your wife, husband or perhaps a member of your team? What's the strategy in that case?

It's easy to love childlike behavior when it's entertaining or if it stirs your protective, nurturing instincts. It's less easy when childish antics spark conflict or leave you feeling like the only adult in the room. But there are strategies to improve tough situations.

Start by deciding not to be surprised - you've dealt with childish behavior before and the shock has probably long since worn off. Decide not to take responsibility. **Rather than trying to prevent or change someone else's actions, focus instead on changing your own reactions.** Try removing yourself from situations where your spouse or partner is creating emotional turmoil and establish boundaries that make clear what you are and aren't willing to accept. Don't be drawn into battles, don't escalate situations by losing your temper, and don't descend into name calling or retreat into silence - instead, choose not to engage.

Will any of this be easy? No. But making positive change never is. In happier days to come, you might look back and call these strategies taking the high road, or tapping into your better self...or you might just call it becoming an adult.

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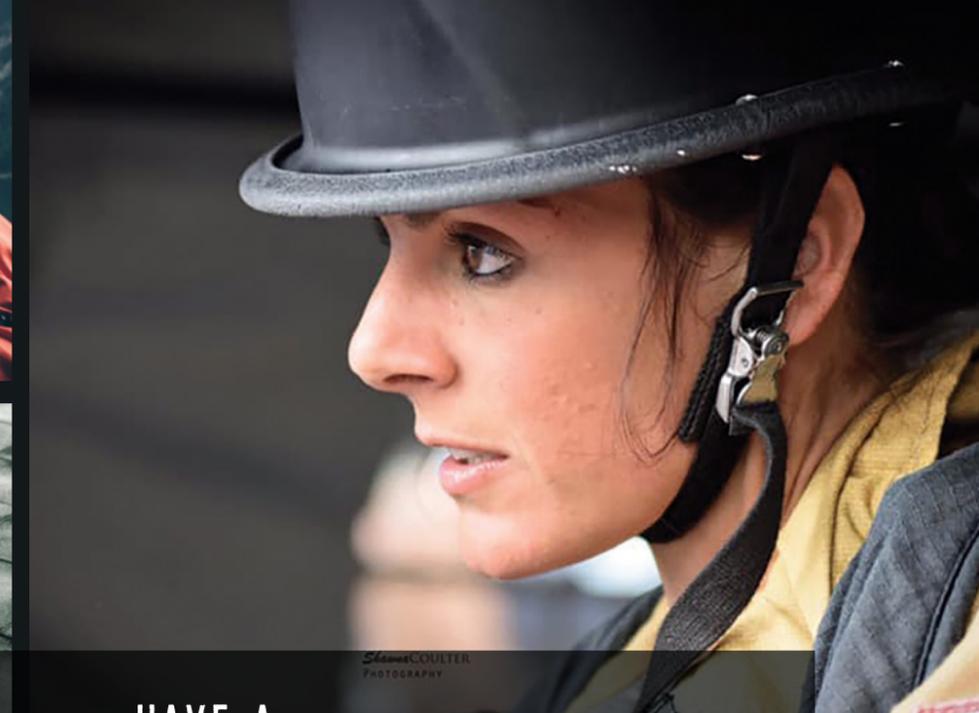
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## HAVE A GREAT PHOTO YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH US?

WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR DYNAMIC PHOTOS OF FIREFIGHTERS BEING FIREFIGHTERS

Your shots might be taken at the fire station, the golf course, a bbq, a baseball game, a fundraiser, while you're on a trip, working out or spending time with your family. Choose your best shots and send them to us for a chance to be published in CRACKYL magazine, in our enewsletters or on our website!

**DETAILS:** Images should be 300 dpi minimum for print. Submit high-resolution photos as JPEGs (RGB or CMYK)

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# ARE YOU PREPARED FOR RETIREMENT?

SAVING FOR THE FUTURE IS A BIT LIKE BUILDING A THREE-LEGGED STOOL

By Fire Chief Kris Kazian

When we begin our careers, retirement seems like a distant oasis, the place where we'll enjoy our reward after years of hard work. We'll relax, and spend the rest of our lives traveling, living large, and doing all the things we put off while we were working.

The trick is reaching that oasis—and, with any luck, finding what we're hoping for. Despite our best early-career intentions, life has a way of happening and can have a dramatic effect on our future. We must be very intentional in our efforts if we have specific goals and expectations for retirement and it's never too early—or too late—to start.

Making retirement dreams come true involves calculated planning, hard work, sacrifice, and solid investing. All sorts of factors can influence your plans along the way, such as your marital status, whether your spouse also has a career, the number of children you have, the size and cost of your home(s), the trucks and boats and other toys you might buy, and the lifestyle you choose during your working years. Have some fun today, but don't forget to secure your future.

**It's like building a three-legged barstool.**

## THE FIRST LEG

The first leg of this barstool starts with initial contributions to your 457 deferred compensation and/or the 401 account your employer may provide. The concept of making your money earn money and compound over time is powerful. The sooner you can get a large dollar amount working for you, the better financially prepared you'll be in retirement. I'm not advocating eating Ramen and Ritz crackers to make this happen, but beginning to contribute as soon as you can will allow you to grow that nest egg without ever missing the money. Work to increase that contribution every chance you get – such as when you receive step raises and promotions – to maximize that pre-tax contribution. Contribute early and often.

## THE SECOND LEG

Saving for future healthcare costs is the second, and very important, leg of the stool. Many of our agencies cover the lion's share of our healthcare costs while we're working so we experience serious sticker shock when we get closer to retirement and are forced to consider what independent health coverage is going to cost us. Encourage your organization to create a Post Employment Health Plan (PEHP) or Retirement Health Savings (RHS) to help develop another tax-exempt basket for healthcare costs. Having that in place will help you save for future healthcare costs while preserving some of your 457/401 for the traveling and fun things you've planned. The beauty of healthcare plans is they are tax-free, both going in and coming out.

## THE THIRD LEG

The last leg of your barstool is fully understanding how your pension works. I've worked in three states and have one guaranteed pension from Illinois, a significant 401A contribution from my Arizona employer, and now, living in Colorado, I plan to continue working to be eligible for a reduced pension. Not all pensions are alike, so it's important to understand the nuances of how each works, particularly as many states have gone to multiple-tier pension plans that can be quite confusing. No one wants to discover that the retirement benefits they've counted on aren't there. There are also specific state taxing implications you should investigate before deciding where you will finish your career and begin your retirement. I didn't pay close attention to that detail and I'm regretting it. Had I continued to live in Illinois or any of a few other states, my pension would not have been subject to state taxes. In Colorado, I pay a five percent state tax on my pension, which reduces my take-home pay.

The ability to develop a solid roadmap and detailed plan for retirement is not easy but what's harder is looking backward after 30 years and regretting that you didn't have a solid understanding of your retirement plan. Don't wait until you're 50 to review your options and make sound decisions. The sooner you can look at the big picture and begin to fund the many tax incentive-based investment options available, the sooner you can maximize your success in retirement.

We all want to end up having achieved the dreams we had as recruit firefighters, not finishing our careers hating to come to work, but unable to retire.

**START SAVING TODAY. TAKE THE FIRST STEP BY INCREASING YOUR 457/401 CONTRIBUTION BY \$25 AFTER YOU FINISH READING THIS ARTICLE.**

I am not a financial guru and haven't made every financial decision correctly, but I have had the opportunity to watch the ups and downs of the market over the past 30 years. I've also watched my retirement planning ebb and flow and have seen the brothers and sisters who did it right and the ones who didn't. **Get your three-legged bar stool firmly on the ground and consult a financial professional for retirement planning and investment decisions.**

# FIRE UNDER WATER

## IT WAS AN EARLY SUMMER MORNING

when firefighter and keen fisherman Derek Bonnett, his wife Tina and their 12-year-old son Colby headed out to fish for pickerel. The sun was rising beyond the trees and the winds were pushing gently from the north, making the weather ideal for fishing.

Tina and Derek had been married for 27 years and enjoyed these family trips on the water. The boat was an escape for the busy couple and their son.

Launching in the same spot as they had for the last 10 years, the little group set off in their 19 foot fishing boat for what they hoped would be a successful day of fishing. As they traveled farther from the shoreline, Derek noticed that the winds were changing, which made him wary, but since he knew the lake so well and trusted both his boat and the forecast, they pushed on, searching for the best spot to cast their lines. That ended up being five miles from shore.

They had been fishing together for Colby's entire life. He had taken an interest in fishing even as a small child and ended up being just as successful a fisherman as his dad, making every trip more exciting.

**It was more than a change in the wind speed, however, that made that day different.** Five miles out from shore, Colby had started to feel unwell, the result, Derek suspected, of increasing winds and choppy water. But it was unlike Colby to get sick. Tina, who was worried the waves were causing Colby's motion sickness, settled him on the boat's back bench in an attempt to quell the nausea. Though concerned about Colby, Derek was hoping that whatever was bothering his son would pass, as the lines were already out.

Trolling with five lines was a chore, but Derek knew that it was the perfect way to catch pickerel. With everything seemingly calm, Derek sat back and watched the serene water all around him. He loved this part of fishing, the quietness and the rocking of the boat. He glanced back to check on

Colby, who was still resting on the bench. He realized that the water was certainly rougher five miles out from the shoreline - something that he would have normally avoided due to the nature and risk of bad weather and boating. For now, he was content to keep a close watch on it.

As the hours slipped by, the waters changed, producing larger waves and even white caps. Derek was watching closely for any incoming weather, but it still appeared to be the northerly winds causing the upset.

As they trolled along at two mph, Derek thought how grateful he was that his son knew how to drive the boat. He remembered Colby's very first lesson behind the wheel, how nervous he'd been to handle the boat and take on the responsibility that came with being the captain. Tina was grateful that there was a captain-in-training as she preferred simply to enjoy the ride.

Derek looked back at Colby, saw the nausea cross his face and knew how awful he was feeling. It was time to turn around, despite the five lines out with the dippy divers dragging the

bait deep below the surface of the water - far from the cresting waves and increasing winds.

As they started heading back, there was a loud snap behind Derek and Tina, followed by the sound of something heavy splashing into the water. Derek looked down at his lines and realized that one of the five rod holders had sheared off the boat. It took a split second for Derek to make the decision to go in after the expensive rod. He could see it a few inches below the surface, sinking fast - he knew this would be his only chance. Ripping off his sunglasses and hat, he threw them into the boat behind him as he plunged into the water. As he passed beneath the surface, he could feel the water temperature change - what was once brightly lit water became darker and colder. Eyes open, he frantically searched for the sinking rod and caught a brief glimpse of it. He swam even harder and reached out, but he was fighting a losing battle. He was easily 15 feet below the surface, and could feel his body tiring and his lungs burning. If he was going to make it to the surface safely, he knew he had to give up.

Frustrated and tired, lungs burning, he swam towards the surface of the water, relishing that first gulp of air. But the waves were merciless and unforgiving, hitting Derek in the face every time he attempted to take deep breaths. He coughed spasmodically. When his breathing calmed, he quickly realized that the boat was no longer where he thought it was, and neither was he.

The wind, along with his boat's trolling engine, had carried it well over 100 feet away. He could see his wife and son frantically attempting to reel in the remaining four lines so they could turn the boat around. He knew they couldn't see him and, between their panic and his increasing fatigue, Derek quickly realized how dangerous his situation was becoming.

Colby would have to be the one to drive the boat, which he could do only once the lines were retrieved. It is often said that time turns into an eternity when you need something in a moment. For Derek, whose body was quickly fatiguing, and whose panic was increasing, time stretched endlessly. No rod was worth the worry he knew his family was experiencing, nor worth putting himself in such a dire situation.

He told himself to swim towards the boat, but every attempt made him tire faster and his mind race harder. Panic was setting in and Derek was beginning to wonder if he could last long enough in the rough waters for his family to rescue him. He pushed forward, attempting to make up the distance between himself and the boat. No matter how much he swam, the boat moved farther and farther away.

## THE WAVES WERE MERCILESS AND UNFORGIVING, HITTING DEREK IN THE FACE EVERY TIME HE ATTEMPTED TO TAKE DEEP BREATHS OF AIR.

Realizing that attempting to chase the boat down was futile, he stopped and began to tread water. Taking deep breaths to help his muscles and lungs recover, he placed his trust in Tina and Colby, knowing that the only way he'd be rescued was to stay in one spot and wait for them to find him. To this day, Derek isn't sure

how much time he spent in the water, waiting for the boat to turn back towards him. One thing he can say without hesitation is that the moment his hands touched the ladder and he pulled himself into the boat, his first sensation was huge relief. It wasn't just relief at being back on the boat, but

only thing that had needed saving was him.

Since then, there have been many family boat excursions, with some altered safety practices. Derek has promised his family he'll never jump in after a fishing rod again, no matter how expensive it is.

Despite that bad experience, good things did come that day, in the shape of two pounds of pickerel. The catch pales in comparison to the cost of the rod, and the now sunken sunglasses and hat, which bounced off the motor of the boat as Derek jumped into the water. Derek figures those two pounds of pickerel cost him approximately \$600, making it the most expensive fish his family has ever eaten. But also the most exciting.

# DAVE WURTZEL

## PAVING A PATH TO WELLNESS FOR ALL FIREFIGHTERS

By Julie Fitz-Gerald

Meet Dave Wurtzel, 53, a retired firefighter from Philadelphia with more than twenty years on the force. In 2008, when he was working full-time, he went on a hunt for a physical fitness regime to get back into shape, but couldn't find any workouts designed specifically for firefighters. Rather than give up, he decided to create the programs he was looking for – and thus The First Twenty was born.



Since then, this non-profit organization has been making a big impact across the United States, with dedicated programming for first responders that focuses on physical, mental and spiritual health. "We realized it's the software that drives the hardware," Wurtzel explains.

### Mental and spiritual health fosters physical health.

As the first person in the U.S. to form a national fitness and wellness program specifically geared to firefighters, Wurtzel has become a leading expert in the field. Given that he holds the 2017 and 2018 Firefighter Combat Challenge World Champion title in the

Over 50 Men's Relay, you know he walks the walk, too.

While serving as the health coach for two

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) clinical trials which included over 1,500 firefighters from coast to coast, Wurtzel discovered that many issues with nutrition and fitness stemmed from stress.

"Wherever we started with nutrition and fitness, it always came down to stress. Stress at home, financial problems, a mental stress load that they couldn't get through... it wasn't motivation they were lacking. It was purpose. They weren't aligned with a purpose," says Wurtzel.

This discovery led him to what has become the tent pole of his whole organization: developing spiritual resilience in first responders so they can successfully move through tough situations, both in their careers and in their personal lives. "That's the arc of The First Twenty, from the beginning to the end. Spiritual resilience is what I can arm you with – and that will allow you to go out there and live your life with less stress."

It turns out spiritual resilience is found in community and in what Wurtzel calls the "compassion/gratitude exchange." By exchanging support, you can create a community that will help you through life's ups and downs. "It's about seeing someone and saying, 'Hey I've got you and I'm going to show you I can care for you.' Now I've intentionalized community, I've created that community around me, and through faith we can step into the unknown together. Whether your faith is believing in God or putting out fires...whatever it is, we have to step out in community together to get there," Wurtzel explains.

Offering compassion to others creates a deep-seated gratitude that bolsters spiritual resilience, leading to good health in all areas of life. "It gives you meaning and purpose. I can't tell you how many times I've failed – but through community, it's easier to find purpose. Community will push me through situations in a

NAME: DAVE WURTZEL  
AGE: 53  
YEARS IN FIRE SERVICE: 20+  
ACTIVE OR RETIRED: RETIRED  
LOCATION: PHILADELPHIA, PA

### WURTZEL'S TIPS TO GET STARTED ON YOUR OWN PATH TO WELLNESS:

#### 1 TAKE DEEP BREATHS

Breathing is profoundly important to wellbeing.

#### 2 DRINK WATER

You're mostly made of water so staying hydrated helps immensely when fighting fires.

#### 3 DO ONE NICE THING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY EVERY DAY

There's nothing better than the reward of giving and it will come back to you in the best possible ways. Your community is your family, home and fire station.

#### 4 BE MINDFUL, BE AWARE & SWITCH ON

Be intentional in the way you see people. Do you really see people or just pieces of them? The more aware you are, the more you see.

#### 5 KEEP MOVING!



ABOVE: FIREFIGHTER COMBAT CHALLENGE  
PHOTO BY SHAWNA COULTER

way that makes me feel supported and connected.”

Wurtzel is nothing if not real. A tough childhood led him to years of self-discovery that ultimately allowed him to help others overcome traumatic experiences. “I suffered sexual and physical abuse as a kid, and that left all kinds of questions in my head. After my own son was born, I went to see someone to get help for anger management. He unpacked my past for me in a way that I never could and he helped me understand it. He helped me deal with things that happened 50 years ago...I still feel badly for that little kid back there. If I could go back, I’d tell him, ‘It’s going to be okay. What happened to you is going to make you understand other people.’ There’s no way I could understand the suffering of other people if I hadn’t been through it myself.”

He likens life to a car ride with new versions of yourself climbing in to join the older ones. The version

of you at the wheel is often not the best choice to be in the driver’s seat, directing your life. “We’re all a façade, we all have a shield, but inside there might be awful things that people may or may not know are there. When I’m real, people can relate. I can’t get rid of my darkness, but what I can do is find the light inside and grow that space. Once you’ve got it, give it away – shine your light on someone else.”

While firefighters are used to working together as a team, both out on calls and back in the hall, Wurtzel’s approach to wellness asks teams to go a bit deeper. “I’m not here to tell anyone about God, but what I believe is God is the energy that two people share – we call that love. The compassion/gratitude exchange – that energy we create – is that social synapse between people. If firefighters have a great conversation with one another, they feel good about themselves because they’ve created this back and forth sharing.”

After some serious introspection and a lot of heavy lifting, Wurtzel has developed a strategy that’s seeing big results. The First Twenty programs are used by fire departments across the U.S. and even by the U.S. Army to help achieve mental, physical and spiritual wellness for their members: it’s all part of the same package.

“There’s a space in everybody that we need to fill, whether with cars and money, church, yoga, astrology – whatever – the choice is yours but you’ll find community helps. Being compassionate with ourselves – that’s hard. Even though spirituality is age-old, we’ve left it behind.”

Wurtzel’s on a mission to bring back that missing piece, to replace stress with spiritual wellness through community and compassion.

FOR MORE INFO, CHECK OUT  
[THEFIRSTTWENTY.ORG](http://THEFIRSTTWENTY.ORG)



I CAN’T GET RID OF MY DARKNESS, BUT WHAT I CAN DO IS FIND THE LIGHT INSIDE AND GROW THAT SPACE. **ONCE YOU’VE GOT IT, GIVE IT AWAY** – SHINE YOUR LIGHT ON SOMEONE ELSE.”

Dave Wurtzel



ABOVE: DAVE WURZEL IS WORKING TO FILL THE VOID FELT BY SO MANY IN THE FIRESERVICE.

# NEUROHACKING:

CAN MEDITATION

HELP MANAGE YOUR STRESS?

By Ryan Seeley

Stress getting to you? Your amygdala might be to blame. In case you're wondering what the heck your amygdala is, here's a quick return to Grade 12 biology class: the amygdala (pronounced "a-mig-dalla") is an important part of the brain – a part that helps us deal with threats. **Because firefighters face dangerous situations on a regular basis, the amygdala works overtime, humming away even when we're in the firehouse.** There's always the possibility that an emergency could happen, so the amygdala is ready to roll. Physiologically, firefighters are almost always prepped for a fight.

And that's a good thing - it's what makes it possible for us to do our jobs - but over time, the firing of the amygdala causes the brain chronic stress which can take the form of fear and anxiety. Eventually this stress reduces the functioning of other areas of the brain that help to inhibit that fear and anxiety, simply wearing them out. And that's not a good thing.

It's imperative, therefore, to develop practices that can help us to gain control of these emotional responses. Research suggests that activities such as joining peer support groups, speaking with a chaplain or counsellor, exercising, taking medication as prescribed, and using talk therapy can all help, but one of simplest and most easily accessible options is meditation. Defined as the habitual process of training your mind to focus and direct your thoughts, meditation is becoming more and more popular with people from all walks of life.

There are many different types of meditation. **Though some are performed in conjunction with yoga practices, many are not and require no special postures or equipment.** Some meditative practices are linked to religious observations, while others are as simple as focusing on your breathing while you take note of the physical world around you. Meditation is a calming exercise, not a struggle to be perfect. Allow it to work for you, don't work for it.

///  
MEDITATION  
IS A CALMING  
EXERCISE,  
NOT A STRUGGLE  
TO BE PERFECT.  
ALLOW IT TO  
WORK FOR YOU,  
DON'T WORK  
FOR IT.

## A MEDITATION MENU

There's a style of meditation that suits nearly every personality and every stressful challenge. **Below, we've highlighted five simple practices for beginners**, none of which requires anything more than an open mind. Your time investment could be as little as five minutes spent tracking your breath, ten minutes of taking careful note of the natural world around you while you sit quietly on a park bench, or an hour of focusing on gentle, loving thoughts of those who mean the most to you. Start small and see what feels best and what has the most calming effect on that primed-for-action amygdala of yours.

### MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

This is the simple process of being fully present with your thoughts and breathing. You become aware of but not reactive to your thoughts.

### TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

When you use a mantra such as a word, sound, or small phrase that you repeat, your breathing is slowed and your mind is calmed.

### GUIDED MEDITATION

You form visualizations and/or listen to soothing sounds that you'll find relaxing. Your goal is to ignite your senses in a calming manner.

### VIPASSANA MEDITATION

You attempt to become hyper-aware of your body and mind through self-observation. With increased self-awareness, greater emotional and mental balance is possible.

### METTA MEDITATION

You direct well-wishes toward others. Positive thinking towards others is a powerful mental tool.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
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[POPPYLIFECARE.ORG](http://POPPYLIFECARE.ORG) OR [MINDFUL.ORG](http://MINDFUL.ORG).

11

REASONS TO PRACTICE

*meditation*

.....  
If you've never considered meditation before, here are 11 reasons why you should. Practiced regularly, meditation can:

- NO.1 REDUCE STRESS:** particularly the type of chronic stress experienced by first responders
- NO.2 CONTROL AND REDUCE ANXIETY**
- NO.3 PROMOTE EMOTIONAL HEALTH:** studies of mindfulness meditation have shown it can actually decrease depression
- NO.4 ENHANCE SELF-AWARENESS**
- NO.5 LENGTHEN ATTENTION SPAN**
- NO.6 SLOW AGE-RELATED MEMORY LOSS**
- NO.7 INCREASE KINDNESS**
- NO.8 HELP FIGHT ADDICTIONS**
- NO.9 IMPROVE SLEEP**
- NO.10 HELP CONTROL PAIN**
- NO.11 DECREASE BLOOD PRESSURE**

# LEAN MACHINE

TAKING AN **UN-SEXY** APPROACH TO FAT LOSS

By Megan Lutz, MS, RD, TSAC-F

Ah, the elusive six-pack. Abs that are desired by many, achieved by few. As sexy as a six-pack might be, what it takes to get there (by healthy means) is sadly not as sexy.

Granted, not everyone who wants to lose fat is aiming for a six-pack, named for its resemblance to a multi-curved, hard six pack of beer. Some of us need to lose weight for health reasons, or we simply want to avoid another trip to logistics for a bigger uniform. Whatever your motivation – if you want to see a change by summer, the time to start is now!



## IS THE TIME RIGHT?

Before embarking on a diet change, take a moment to assess your situation. **Weight loss is like financial budgeting: reaching your goals will require willpower and sacrifice.** Even a moderate calorie reduction can result in decreased strength, fatigue, trouble concentrating, cravings, and mood swings.

This isn't meant to scare you, but simply to encourage you to weigh the pros and cons. How is your work and home life? How is your mental health? Do you have access to healthy food or a gym? If the past year has been one of the most challenging of your life, it's okay to maintain and weather the storm. If you need to make a change for health reasons, start small. Add an extra glass of water, cut back on soda, or add a veggie at dinner. **Small, consistent changes will make a difference.**

## GET REALISTIC

Successful fat loss is often over-dramatized by diet companies, social media, and even coworkers. Before you get started, know that losing a half pound per week is a realistic goal – and that means just two to eight pounds per month. How quickly you lose fat depends on a variety of factors apart from lifestyle changes. If you are already relatively lean, it's going to take more time. A simple ten pound goal can take five months or more to reach, but a slower pace will help maintain muscle mass while you lose.

## LEAVE ROOM FOR PROGRESS

It can be tempting to change everything about your lifestyle right off the bat. If what you've been eating and the way you've been living has brought you to this point, clearly everything has to change! Inspired, you dive into hours of cardio and high intensity workouts, eat only lettuce and chicken, and then wonder why you can't stick to this killer program for more than a few days.

Extremes lead to burnout. If it's been three months or more since you've had a steady workout plan or paid attention to nutrition, start slowly. See if you can maintain three, 30-minute workouts per week. Cut back on the sweets, chips, and high-fat meats. If you can be consistent with these preliminary measures, then step it up a bit every few weeks. Working with a Registered Dietitian can help you determine what each step looks like, saving you time and energy while you're trying to lose fat.

## CALORIES MATTER

At the end of the day, weight loss diets work because they create a calorie deficit. Intermittent fasting cuts calories by limiting time to eat. Mediterranean, Keto, Low Carb—all of these popular diets cut calories by changing food choices, just as Weight Watchers' programs and counting your macros cuts calories by limiting portions.

**Calories are just one important consideration in creating a nutritious diet. Choosing nutrient-rich foods that will keep you full and energized is equally important. When it comes to fat loss, however, the calorie is king.**

It sounds simple. Eat less and you'll lose fat. The reality is, it's not always easy to maintain a calorie deficit. After cutting back on your food intake or increasing activity for a while, your metabolism becomes more efficient. Like a great car, you're getting more miles for less fuel. Or are you? From a fat-loss perspective, an efficient metabolism is not as positive as you might think. The truth is, your body simply gets better at using the calories from the food you eat as you consciously cut your activity level.

This is when plateaus happen and weight loss stalls. If you gave your weight loss efforts your all at the start, it will be harder to push yourself off a plateau. Your schedule and willpower may not have that much more to give!

## THE UNSEXY APPROACH

1. **START EARLY – DON'T WAIT UNTIL TWO WEEKS BEFORE A CRUISE TO START CUTTING WEIGHT. GIVE YOURSELF TWO MONTHS MINIMUM.**
2. **EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT LIFESTYLE. IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME TO START LOSING FAT?**
3. **PROGRESS SLOWLY – DON'T OVERDO AT THE START.**
4. **CREATE YOUR CALORIE DEFICIT THROUGH FOOD OR MOVEMENT.**

Please note that you don't have to track calories to see progress. See below some ways to create a calorie deficit by changing the quality of foods in your diet.

MyFitnessPal is a good app to track calories. Start with a good calorie goal and be sure to choose "lose one pound per month." A goal higher than that will lead to a strict deficit, which is harder to maintain. Logging your progress might not be easy at a busy station, but it will give you a better idea of what and how much you are eating. Even a week of tracking can give you a clear sense of the areas to improve.

Those who struggle with yo-yo dieting might consider hiring a dietitian to provide personal guidance, help them work healthy eating into a busy shift and account for meal timing, food choices, and social circumstances. Accountability and brainstorming will save you the headache of figuring this out on your own and get you started on becoming the lean machine you want to be.



**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRACK CALORIES TO SEE PROGRESS.**

**EMPHASIZE**

- Veggies (2-5 cups/day)
- Fruit (1-2 cups/day)
- Whole grains
- Lean protein (chicken, fish, seafood, lean ground turkey or beef)
- High fiber foods (beans, veggies, oatmeal)

**CUT BACK**

- Desserts
- Alcohol
- High fat meats
- Processed meats (bacon, sausage)
- Portions overall (10-20% smaller)

# Having the talk with your kids...

not THAT talk, the other talk

By Millicent Simonics

**T**hink you might have missed the class in Fire College on how to manage your money and plan your retirement? Nah! You didn't miss it – that class never existed. Most of us never get that information at any point in our education and end up simply depositing our paychecks and trusting that our pensions will take care of us.

Why not put some thought and effort into these important issues and give our kids the straight talk about finances we never had?

That conversation could be the greatest gift we'll ever give them and an important head start as they begin understanding money.

The first step is developing financial literacy. Being wise with our money might seem intimidating but the rewards can be huge, particularly when we consider the long-term gains that careful management can create. It's important to exercise good money sense and pass those important lessons on to our kids.

With the value of a dollar comes the need for a place to save money earned. A piggy-bank is a great place to start, followed by a bank account when kids start earning more money.

Geoff Allen, Niagara Falls Fire Department

In order to educate our children about money and finances, we need to practice what we preach. Showing children how to save, spend, and budget will help them set reasonable goals and expectations for their hard-earned money. It's the key to being prepared for the nasty financial surprises that life sometimes throws our way.

The good news is there are simple rules to guide you in the right direction as you square away your own finances, ensuring that you and your family are well-looked after. The first step is to identify the benefit options you have, including the variety of insurance, pension, and savings plans available through your job. A career in fire services comes with extensive benefits packages including medical and dental coverage, life insurance, and increased pension contribution opportunities. For those looking for extra coverage, there are also options available through the government, as well as third party providers such as your union.

When shopping for extra coverage, consider both what you can afford and what you need. For example, regular pension plan contributions can be a great asset, but often require additional contributions to guarantee a comfortable retirement. This will necessitate securing secondary coverage by setting up another pension. Be sure to look carefully at how these benefits pay

out to be certain that you're putting together the package that's right for you.

Another important step is finding a mentor who can boost your financial knowledge and confidence. Geoff Allen, of the Niagara Falls Fire Department, agrees, "I feel I'm becoming better educated because I've found someone that I trust who has good, sound knowledge and is successful in what they do with their money. Find a mentor that you understand, ask questions and do your own reading."

Allen, who is married with three kids and has been with the fire department for 12 years, adds, "You have to learn on the fly - the school system does not really put it out there...doesn't show you how it is played... so I educated myself on what our pension is and branched out from that to look at life insurance and long-term disability coverage. Now, if something were to happen to me, it would be simple for my family. In our line of work, that is a reality. If you don't have those things in place, it just makes things more difficult for everybody."

When it comes to educating his kids about finances, Allen takes a smart approach, explaining and showing his kids what things cost. With one child who plays hockey and baseball, and another who does gymnastics and dance, Allen





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believes it's important for his kids to understand how much those activities cost. He teaches them the value of their programs and emphasizes that the commitments they make to those activities are important. He says his kids now understand the value of the money that makes their favorite activities possible.

Teaching your kids to be money-wise doesn't have to be tough and will make their lives significantly more comfortable in the future. Ease your kids into financial literacy by teaching them the value of money by showing just how much or how little a dollar can buy. With that knowledge in mind, you can segue into lessons on frugality and bargaining power. It's also important to teach the value of time and effort, using simple chores like helping out at home or in the neighborhood.

Once your children have the concept of earning and valuing their dollars, they'll need a place to save the money they're earning. A piggy-bank is a great start followed by a bank account when they start to earn more. The possibilities for helping kids earn money and find ways to save are endless. Geoff Allen offers his kids a chance to earn and save through personal enrichment, rewarding them for reading by giving them two dollars for every book read. His children can either put their earnings in their piggy banks, which stay locked, or split their proceeds, keeping one dollar and saving the other. Allen plans to expand on that system as his kids grow.

Delayed gratification is another important concept that can be taught by first encouraging kids to prioritize, whether they're considering purchases or chores. At the store, help them decide which is more important – candy now

or a bigger item later? When they're doing chores at home, suggest that they create a plan to prioritize the most important items on their list. Teachable moments like these will help your children begin to understand the importance of setting priorities and see that some things are worth waiting and saving for.

As your children mature, you can begin more complicated discussions about finances. Be honest about family costs so they can understand expenses and affordability – but be careful. Over-emphasizing financial burdens or poor spending

habits may create anxiety over money and security, while glossing over financial discussions or avoiding them altogether can make money matters seem unimportant.

These lessons can teach kids more than just money sense. They'll also gain confidence through understanding

more about the world around them and will learn the value of hard work through time spent working or even observing a family member working. There are many teachable moments that will enable you to share financial and life wisdom with your kids, so be creative!

While students will learn about mathematics in school, it's a parent's job to teach financial literacy. Who knows? You may even learn a thing or two along the way!

According to Geoff Allen, the learning and the benefits of financial literacy pay for themselves. He believes that we can always learn and those discoveries should remain a high priority. Financial knowledge is a precious gift made even better when parents teach their kids these valuable lessons early on, so they can enjoy financial security throughout their lives.

**Teaching your kids to be money-wise doesn't have to be tough and will make their lives significantly more comfortable in the future**





# FINDING BALANCE

By Julie Fitz-Gerald

## RANDY SCHMITZ'S STORY

///  
RANDY HAS ALWAYS BEEN DEEPLY PASSIONATE ABOUT EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE AND PUTTING SAFETY FIRST. THAT PASSION BECAME THE CATALYST FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS.

For Randy Schmitz, firefighting is a multi-faceted career. Instead of simply getting the job done and heading home, Randy has consistently gone above and beyond to serve his community.

A Fire Captain with the Calgary Fire Department in Alberta, Canada, with over 26 years of experience, Randy isn't only a leader for his team, **but also an extrication instructor for first-responders worldwide.** And if that wasn't enough, Randy is the creator and president of Schmitz Mittz, a business that makes protective extrication gloves. On top of his leadership, training, and entrepreneurial ventures, he is also a husband and father of five.

You might wonder how he's been able to balance so many different career paths, but Randy will tell you they're all related and came about naturally. He's always been deeply passionate about exchanging knowledge and putting safety first, so sharing his knowledge of extrication just came naturally. Training and safety remain his passion and priority, and his success reflects that.

Schmitz's experiences in the fire department and in extrication training convinced him that there was a need for durable, sophisticated, protective gloves. He witnessed first-hand the number of sharp objects and blood-borne threats to first-responders and was inspired to create powerfully protective gloves. **His passion for safety was the catalyst.**

NAME: RANDY SCHMITZ  
YEARS IN FIRE SERVICE: 26+ YEARS  
ACTIVE OR RETIRED: ACTIVE  
LOCATION: CALGARY, AB, CANADA



So how does he do it? Randy says managing his multifaceted career has everything to do with **time management.** He works a four-on/four-off schedule and uses his downtime efficiently. When he's not actively on a call or busy on shift, he's usually working on one of his other projects or creating a training session.

Randy finds all aspects of his career satisfying. Like many of us, he finds firefighting an extremely rewarding career – particularly when he attends a critical call that ends with a positive outcome. His passion for service is evident, but it's not always easy.

He acknowledges that there are things he struggles with – like tough calls and balancing family time. The calls that hit home the most are the ones that involve kids. Randy is the father of five children who range in age from 3 to 18, and threats to children come close to his heart. The life of a firefighter isn't easy, and like anyone else, Randy has his tough days.

The most consistent challenge for Randy is being away from his family. Training takes him all over the world, and as we all know, the on-and-off schedules can be tough, too. He makes sure to prioritize his family on days off and in the evenings.

**HE FOCUSES ON SPENDING 50% OF HIS LEISURE TIME WITH HIS FAMILY AND 50% ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT.**

Randy's family has had its share of hardships recently, as his wife is a breast cancer survivor. Fortunately, she has recovered, but there is always a lingering fear that it may return, so Randy tries to have the family with him as much as possible. If he is training for a few days, he will often ask to exchange his time for a vacation for his family wherever the training is located. **His focus is on keeping everyone together.**

Despite the hardships, Randy has been able to maintain a solid balance between work and family and has great advice for any firefighters aspiring to become

entrepreneurs. He says it's always important to think long-term. Starting a business involves huge challenges so it's important to think in terms of the long run. A lot of sacrifices will need to be made, so be prepared. Randy also points out that you may not make any money early in the game and advises that you'll have to keep pushing to see results. Research before you start, he warns, and be sure you fully understand the legalities of running a business and working with partners before you begin.

Pursuing your entrepreneurial passions and balancing your family life may seem challenging, but people like Randy show that it is completely possible. **If you have a great business idea in mind, take the leap, manage your time, and remember to prioritize your family.**

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HEALTH

## CAFFEINE: BRAIN FIX OR BRAIN FOE?

IS CAFFEINE BRAIN STIMULATION IN  
A CUP OR A BIG GULP OF JITTERS?

By Ryan Seeley



///

If you're like me, your day starts with a cup of coffee. As you open the bag, the aroma fills the air and you can hardly wait to sit down and have that first sip. Maybe your first cup of the day comes from the drive-thru or perhaps you grab a coffee on-the-go from inside a coffee shop. Whatever your routine, coffee drinking is a daily habit most people would be less likely to skip than brushing their teeth. Studies show that at least **80 percent of adults** in Western countries regularly consume caffeine in coffee and soda, in amounts large enough to affect their brain functioning.

I'd argue that a river of coffee was absolutely necessary to get me through long nights of studying in graduate school, but what does **health science** say about caffeine?



You're probably familiar with studies that support the intake of caffeine. One, released just days before last Christmas, suggests that "Drinking four cups of coffee daily could reduce weight gain from a diet high in fat and sugar. Scientists at the University of Illinois found rats that consumed caffeine gained 16 percent less weight and accumulated 22 percent less fat than those that didn't." There may be some correlation or even causation, but I'd argue that skipping your third round of turkey would be a better choice. The major question with respect to caffeine shouldn't be about limiting rat weight gain.

**REMEMBER...RATS WILL ALSO CHOOSE COCAINE OVER FOOD, TO THE POINT OF STARVATION AND EVEN DEATH!**

The impact of caffeine on the human brain depends on the individual. Most people report feeling more alert, more cheerful, more energetic, more productive, and more clear-headed after caffeine intake. I certainly experienced those reactions and, as a late-night weapon of choice, used a large mocha frappuccino. That combination of sugar and caffeine worked for me, putting the desire for sleep at bay. Other people consuming the same concoction might become jittery, anxious, or get headaches. For some, that large Mocha Frappuccino could even increase the risk of a panic attack. **It should also be noted that caffeine is mildly addictive, as it has some of the same**

**qualities of stimulant drugs, although thankfully without the profound hazards.**

The power of caffeine is often misunderstood. Unlike a typical stimulant, it doesn't cause the brain to perk up or switch into high alert mode to enhance performance. Instead, caffeine works by blocking the neurotransmitter adenosine, whose function is to encourage the brain to quiet down and go to sleep. Because caffeine is molecularly similar to adenosine, it stimulates the same receptors, thus displacing adenosine and preventing



it from stifling such "upper" neurotransmitters as dopamine. Sneaky caffeine disguises itself as adenosine and tricks the brain cells into staying alert. That late night cup of coffee doesn't jolt you awake; instead, it suppresses your desire to sleep. Experts suggest that the caffeine in two cups of coffee can knock out half the brain's adenosine receptors for as long as a couple of hours.

Even small amounts of caffeine can have the desired effect of higher alertness, improved concentration, and reduced fatigue — but there is a limit. A study done at M.I.T. showed that caffeine levels found in a ten-ounce mug of brewed coffee did boost performance scores on tests requiring alertness, concentration and fast reactions. After two cups

of coffee, one taken in the morning and one in the afternoon, there were no increased benefits to consuming more. A similar study using tea, which has less caffeine than coffee, found three cups spread out over the course of a day were enough to reach the limit of usefulness.

**Some research suggests that caffeine can help sharpen memory.** In a large study conducted at London's National Addiction Centre, 9,003 adult caffeine drinkers were tested on verbal memory and visual-spatial reasoning. The result? Caffeine helped people's scores. Another study had participants take a drug that temporarily impaired both short-term and long-term memory. Those who then consumed caffeine dramatically reversed the impact of the drug. Caffeine users retrieved information from their long-term memory, recalled words from short-term and long-term memory tests, and had increased reading speeds. Researchers theorize that caffeine, in its suppression of adenosine, increases the activity of the memory neurotransmitter acetylcholine.

Unfortunately, there's a downside. Guzzling pots of coffee won't get you any closer to developing nuclear fusion.

**STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT INCREASED LEVELS OF CAFFEINE CAN SPEED UP DECISION-MAKING BUT WON'T IMPROVE THE OUTCOME OF THOSE DECISIONS.**

In fact, with increasing levels of caffeine, complex decision-making becomes strained because users are quick to make decisions but may not take enough time to be thoughtful about their choices. It's better, apparently, to get a good night's sleep than to down a few cups of coffee prior to taking a test requiring management-level thinking.

Many weekend headaches are thought to be caused by withdrawal from the workday quota of caffeine. Symptoms can include lethargy, irritability and muscle tension. Those who go cold turkey from caffeine may experience headaches as soon as 24 hours after quitting — headaches that may last as long as a week. Thinking about quitting or significantly reducing your intake? Do so gradually, by one cup a day or combine decaf with regular coffee, increasing the

percentage of decaf until you reach 100 percent.

Are you one of those who brags about drinking coffee and going to sleep right away? I'm about to burst that caffeine-perked bubble of yours. In one Japanese study, participants who drank caffeine one hour before bed took an average of 126 minutes to fall asleep. Those who didn't consume caffeine took 29 minutes. That stat doesn't apply to you?

That might be because you're chronically exhausted and able to fall asleep quickly because you simply can't keep your eyes open. This phenomenon has been explored in studies that indicated that caffeine users sleep about three to four-and-a-half hours less than non-caffeine users. Even when a late-night caffeine user falls asleep, brain activity is interrupted, causing enormous

sleep cycle disruptions which, in turn, damage brain cells.

**THE BEST ADVICE? STOP CAFFEINE CONSUMPTION BY LATE-AFTERNOON.**

**Although coffee doesn't appear to be particularly harmful for most people, it does function like a drug in your body and can be addictive.** Caffeine found in soda, tea and coffee works the same way, keeping you alert but also causing higher levels of anxiety and sleep disorders. Try cutting your regular coffee with half decaf and most importantly get a good night's sleep. While sleeping well is easier said than done, removing caffeine in the hours before going to bed could be a major factor in getting a better rest.

**Sleep well!**

STUDIES SHOW THAT AT LEAST

**80%**

OF ADULTS IN WESTERN COUNTRIES REGULARLY CONSUME CAFFEINE IN AMOUNTS LARGE ENOUGH TO AFFECT THEIR BRAIN FUNCTIONING.

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By Steve Hirsch

# WHY I AM A VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

In the volunteer fire service, our patients are most often people we know, people we are related to, people we work with or people who attend our church.



*Steve Hirsch is training officer for Sheridan County Fire District # 1, Thomas County Fire District #4, and Grinnell Fire Department, all of which are 100% volunteer fire departments. He is also the chair and Kansas director on the National Volunteer Fire Council and is currently first vice chair of the Kansas State Firefighters Association where he served as secretary from 2000-2008.*

Outside of my family and my faith, nothing has been more rewarding than my career as a volunteer firefighter. Like many who have chosen to serve our communities in this capacity, it's a generational occupation for me. In 1963, a year after I was born, my father started the fire district in my hometown in north central Kansas, so being a volunteer firefighter just came naturally. In my own fire department, Sheridan County Fire District #1 in Kansas, we have a mix of those who are second or third generation volunteers working beside those who are the first in their families to step up to this noble profession.

You might wonder why I say that being a volunteer firefighter is rewarding – in many ways, it's hard to explain.

**THERE IS SOMETHING VERY GRATIFYING ABOUT SEEING REGULAR PEOPLE DOING SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY – HELPING THEIR NEIGHBORS IN A TIME OF NEED.**

And in most parts of the United States, those who answer the call are, in fact, volunteers providing these life-saving services for free.

The people who call 9-1-1 for help are generally having the worst possible days of their lives. Something is on fire, their car has been involved in a collision, or they're experiencing a medical emergency. The person doesn't know, or perhaps even care, whether the folks who show up are firefighters collecting a paycheck or serving for free. Those callers care only that those who respond are professional, competent, and compassionate. I am proud of my crew and of the citizens from all over the nation who have decided there is nothing more noble than to help their neighbors.

I have personally been on scenes where the recovery of a deceased person from a house fire brought a family closure, where we extricated a child from a motor vehicle accident, and where a person was packaged for transport for advanced medical care and treatment. In the volunteer fire service, these patients are most often people we know, people we are related to, people we work with or people who attend our church. This is first and foremost why the job of a volunteer firefighter is so rewarding.

Next on the list is being part of a team of people committed to their community. I find that if someone is involved in the volunteer fire service, they are often also involved in other community organizations, their church in town, in youth activities, and may even hold a local elected office. The people who serve together on my volunteer firefighting team are my closest friends. They are people I trust implicitly, and they are the ones I joke, train, and even cry with from time to time. This is a team sport, and the members of our team do this work because they know how important it is to their community and to their friends, neighbors, and even complete strangers.

The beauty of the volunteer fire service is that it is composed of people who have valuable life skills. They might be farm equipment repair men, insurance agents, or public works employees, and like all of us, there are huge demands on their time. They do this job because they know how important it is to serve their community.

This past year has been painfully difficult for people around the globe and here at home, but those in the volunteer fire service don't have the option to stop responding. There are still heart attacks, fires, and car wrecks.

I have served in the volunteer fire service for more than 30 years and, for the last two, have been Chairman of the National Volunteer Fire Council. I couldn't be prouder of the people who step up every day to make a big difference in the lives of others.

For those who already serve their community in this way, I thank you for all that you do and hope you find as much pride and reward in this line of work as I do. **I encourage you to be a mentor to the people of the next generation so they can learn the value of serving as a volunteer firefighter and guide the generations of volunteers yet to come.**



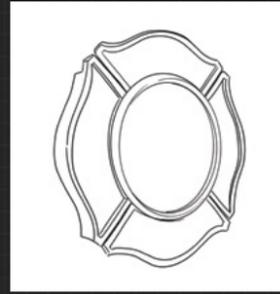
CHRIS MYRA'S  
CUSTOM  
TATTOOS

# BLENDING Meaning & Heart

TATTOO ARTIST AND RETIRED FIREFIGHTER CHRIS MYRA SHOWS HOW HE DEVELOPED A CUSTOM TATTOO FOR HIS FATHER, INCORPORATING A RICH HISTORY OF MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES INTO THIS INCREDIBLE PIECE.

My name is Christopher Myra and I have been tattooing for 15 years. I've worked off-and-on in fire services since 1999, serving numerous volunteer fire departments and overseas, where I ended my career as an Assistant Training Officer at Canadian Nuclear Laboratories as a professional firefighter.

I've decided to create a piece of artwork that will eventually become a tattoo for my father. This piece will commemorate his service as a firefighter in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I'd like to share with you my process for designing a tattoo.



STEP

1

MALTESE CROSS

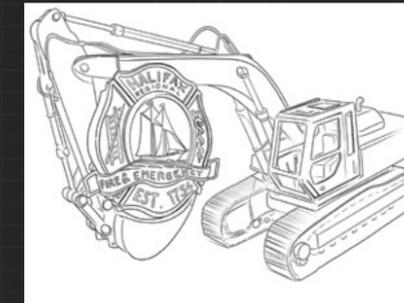
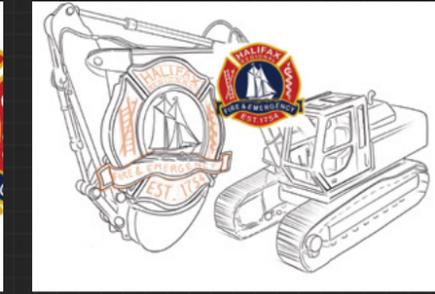
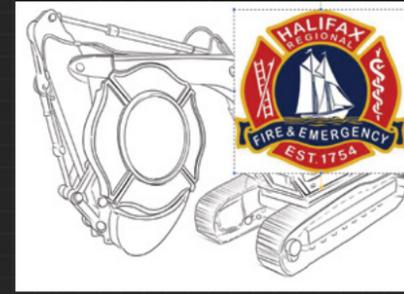
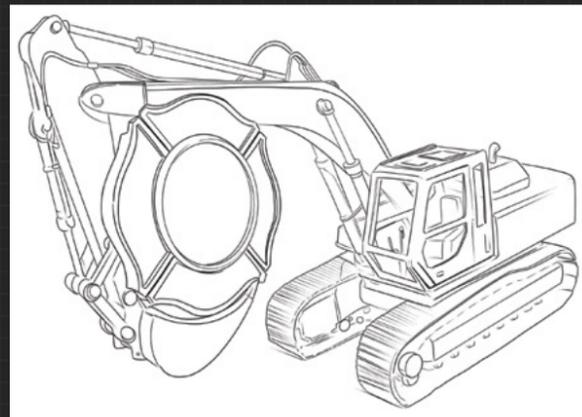
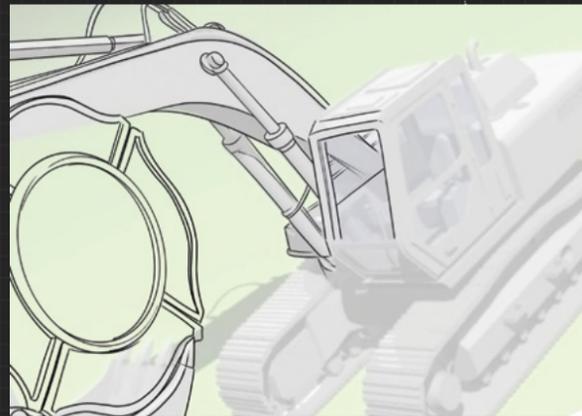
Using an art program on my iPad, I start by pulling up a stock image of a Maltese cross to use as my template and I trace it.

STEP

2

EXCAVATOR

During the latter years of my father's fire service, the City employed him as a heavy equipment operator during final overhaul. Adding his excavator, therefore, seems like a great touch so I sourced a stock 3D image to use as reference.

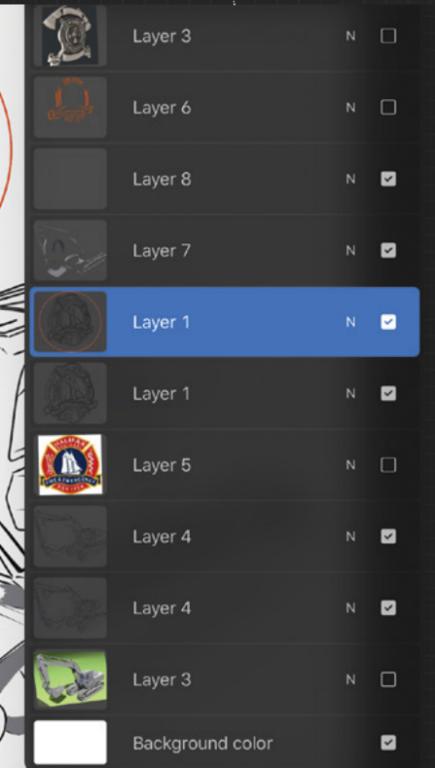
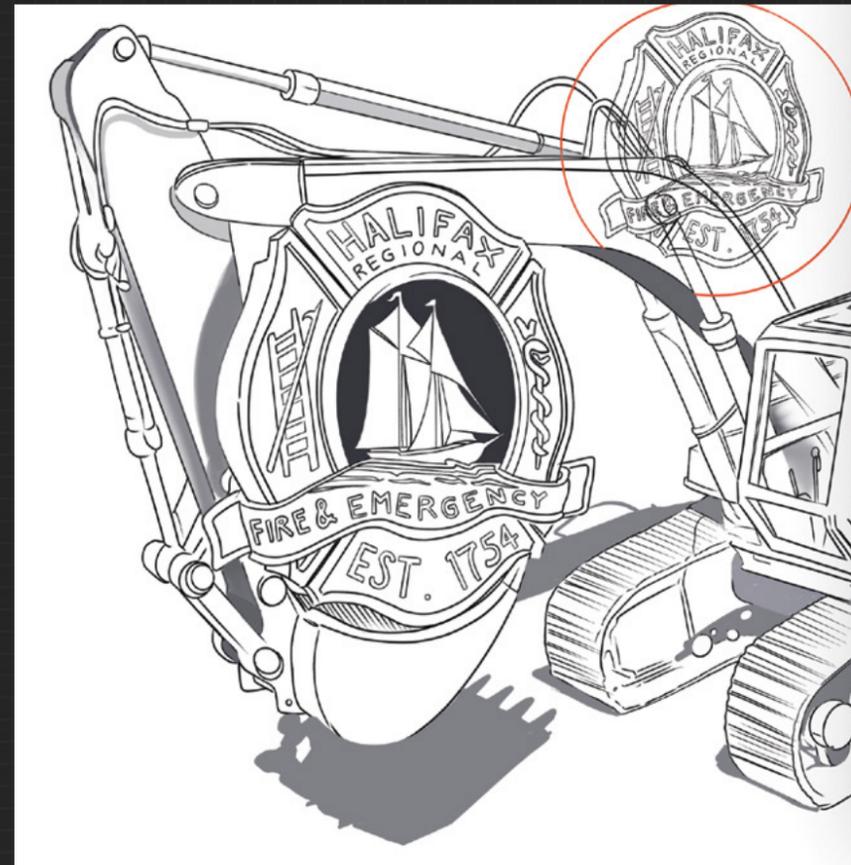


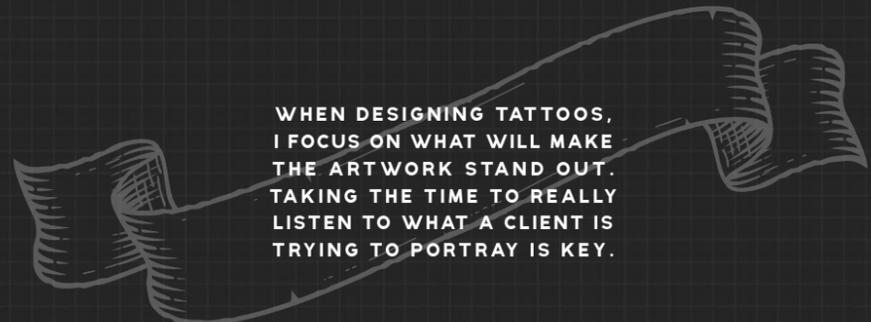
STEP

3

HALIFAX FIRE DEPARTMENT LOGO

To start customizing this piece to represent my father's service, I add the Halifax Fire Department logo and incorporate the details into the Maltese cross. I add shadows to make the stencil easier to follow during the tattooing process.





WHEN DESIGNING TATTOOS, I FOCUS ON WHAT WILL MAKE THE ARTWORK STAND OUT. TAKING THE TIME TO REALLY LISTEN TO WHAT A CLIENT IS TRYING TO PORTRAY IS KEY.



STEP 4

BRINGING IN DAD

Next, I incorporate a photo of my dad, at age 31, working in his excavator.

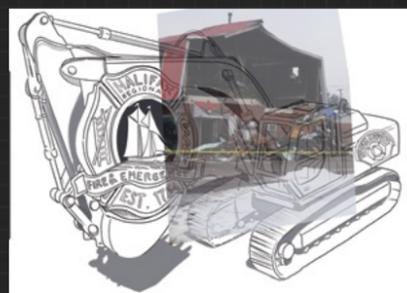
This photo is special and will be a cool addition because my father doesn't know this picture exists.



STEP 5

ADDING DETAILS

To bring the tattoo design full circle, I add small details to his excavator, and incorporate the fire department logo on the side panel.



STEP 6

ADDING HIDDEN CAMEO

Because I was also a firefighter (retired in 2018), I decide that a picture from my own years of fire fighting will be a great surprise, hidden inside my father's drawing.

The photo I incorporate is a fire scene I worked during an overhaul. I sketch this in the background and know he will really find this cameo appearance touching.

STEP 7

BACKGROUND

With the focal point of the drawing finished, I begin to add some background. I then finish off the sketch by adding his years of service below the bucket.

I hope you've enjoyed seeing how my mind works when creating custom tattoo designs and that it opens your eyes to possibilities in your own collection.

Your best chance of getting a unique and truly customized piece of artwork is to sit down with your artist so you can work together. The more you open up about your experience and wishes, the more you will see the creativity and expertise flow.



STAY SAFE,  
CHRIS MYRA



POWER FUELING A HEALTHY BODY

# FIREFIIGHTERS' PERFORMANCE PLATE

By Maureen Stoecklein RD

Shifting from highly processed, high sugar, and high fat foods at the station to fruits, veggies, unsaturated fats, grains, legumes and lean meats improves performance and overall brain and body health, while increasing career longevity.

Much of what firefighters encounter during a shift is out of their control. From call volume to the nature of calls and their timing, to mealtimes and hours of sleep, to outdoor climate and shift dynamics – these are out of the firefighters' hands, but each can have a serious impact on short and long-term health.

Statistically, firefighters have a life expectancy that is far shorter than the rest of the population. Cancer, heart disease, and strokes are just a few of the leading causes of death, both on the job and in retirement. These health challenges take a serious toll, leaving firefighters physically and mentally exhausted, injured, sick, and sometimes unable to perform on the job.

WITH SO MUCH OUT OF OUR CONTROL, IT'S IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON WHAT CAN BE CONTROLLED, SUCH AS THE FOODS WE CHOOSE.

Premium fuel optimizes mind and body functioning to make us better prepared for the physical and mental stressors we encounter on shift. This means firefighters need to stay ahead of their hydration needs, eat more fruits and vegetables, and avoid processed foods.

These strategies are always important, and not just on work days. Firefighters, unlike professional athletes, don't have the luxury of knowing when "game time" will be, so we need to arrive at the station well-rested, hydrated, and properly fueled. We're athletes who need to consider recovery strategies to prepare for the next shift.

The body functions best when our brains, muscles, tissues and organs are hydrated and well-fueled. Eating more whole foods like fruits and vegetables, and adopting a Mediterranean diet – one that is rich in vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, legumes, whole grains, lean meats, fish and unsaturated fats

– can improve a firefighter's energy systems and performance, boost overall well-being, brain and body health and increase career longevity.

Small changes each day will have a tremendous impact on the quality of time we spend celebrating and enjoying our years of service to the communities we serve. By choosing high quality food, firefighters not only increase their ability to work effectively and efficiently on a daily basis, but also set themselves up for a healthier and more enjoyable retirement.

THE FIREFIIGHTERS' PERFORMANCE PLATE IS DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE THE BEST ELEMENTS FOR FUELING TRAINING, SHIFT WORK DAYS, AND RECOVERY DAYS WHILE SUPPORTING NUTRITIONAL NEEDS FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH AND DAILY PERFORMANCE.



## PICK YOUR PLATE

A successful, energy-packed, and nutritious meal includes:

**NO1 LEAN PROTEIN** – Recovery and muscle-building foods like grilled, baked, broiled, or roasted chicken, fish, pork loin, turkey, sirloin, eggs, low-fat dairy and tofu.  
 ■ mental clarity ■ muscle strength

**NO2 COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES** – Energy-enhancing brain and muscle fuel like whole grains, brown rice, whole wheat or bean-based pasta, potatoes, oats and whole grain cereals and legumes.  
 ■ muscle and brain fuel

**NO3 BRIGHTLY COLORED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES** – Antioxidant-rich and immune-supporting foods like apples, oranges, bananas, melons, grapes, berries, broccoli, green beans, leafy greens, carrots, cauliflower, mushrooms, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers and purple cabbage.  
 ■ immune support ■ anti-inflammation ■ energy

**NO4 PLANT-BASED FATS** – Sustained energy and flavor-boosting foods like avocados, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, avocado or olive oil and avocado and olive oil-based salad dressings.  
 ■ optimal circulation ■ sustained energy

**EAT ENOUGH, BUT NOT TOO MUCH**  
 Smaller, more frequent meals are best to keep you fueled and energized. We all know fires always happen on an over-stuffed stomach!

### THE LIGHT TRAINING DAY OR ACTIVE RECOVERY DAY PLATE:

- ½ of the plate should be brightly colored fruits and vegetables
- ¼ of the plate should be complex carbohydrates
- ¼ of the plate should be lean proteins
- Fewer carbohydrates are needed on these days thanks to lower training volume and energy expenditure
- This is the ideal plate for a firefighter trying to lose weight

### THE HARD OR MULTIPLE TRAINING SESSION DAY OR BUSY SHIFT DAY PLATE:

- ½ of the plate should be complex carbohydrates
- ¼ of the plate should be brightly colored fruits and vegetables
- ¼ of the plate should be lean proteins
- More carbohydrates are recommended on these days to meet increased energy demands and increased recovery needs.

## COMMUNITY BUILDERS

# ELIZABETH MCCORMICK

By Leah Sobon

**BECOMING A VOICE AND A LEADER FOR OTHER FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS WASN'T WHAT ST. LOUIS-BASED FIREFIGHTER ELIZABETH MCCORMICK PLANNED WHEN SHE STARTED CONNECTING WITH OTHER WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**

Growing up with an appreciation for helping others and being a natural problem-solver led McCormick into healthcare, balancing her time between nursing homes, Shalom House (a women's shelter), private care, and work as a PSW. McCormick knew without a doubt how much value she gained from helping others in need; however, along with so many facets of care came varying degrees of compassion fatigue as she was constantly serving the needs of others.

"You cannot pour from an empty cup. If you are a giver with no boundaries, you're setting yourself up for compassion fatigue," she says. "It's important to do an honest self-assessment every so often to ensure you are creating and upholding the boundaries and commitments that protect your physical and mental health."

She knew that a career in helping people was something that she wanted to continue, but it wasn't until a close friend needed the help of a team of local firefighters that McCormick got a taste of what emergency care is truly about: empathy, compassion, high quality care and professionalism.

///

**WE'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE THIS HARD SHELL, BUT WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT THE THINGS THAT ARE KEEPING US UP AT NIGHT AND MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO DO OUR JOBS.**



She started her training in 2015, with the invaluable help and guidance of F.I.R.E. (Firefighter's Institute for Racial Equality). That backing, combined with her intense dedication and drive to complete her training, helped her secure a job with the St. Louis Fire Department, a role she's still loving four years later.

As McCormick's career advanced, she continued to run her Instagram account, @gritandgrace\_\_, a platform she started to enable her audience to take part in her day-to-day life. Gritandgrace\_\_ morphed as McCormick realized the opportunity she had to make an impact on her local community. She began to use Instagram to talk about mental health and share authentic experiences so her community of followers could relate and come together as one.

"My page is now focused on positive and impactful content. I started talking about anxiety and different experiences that we don't talk about enough, not just as first responders. We're supposed to have this hard shell, but we're not talking about the things that are keeping us up at night and making it difficult to do our jobs."

After a year in the fire service, McCormick found that she was struggling to feel a part of the fire family. Because she had no close relationships with or access to many of the women on the job, she was doubting her decision to join the fire service. She feared being isolated for the next 20 to 30 years. That fear inspired her to start searching for female mentors who could share her perspective on being a female in the fire service.



LEFT: PHOTOS BY KIMBERLY N OF @KIMBERLYNSTUDIOS

"I looked at lots of pages supporting firefighters, but didn't find anyone that looked like me. That search came from a place of loneliness and a need for representation as well. I found a similar group, and reached out to the woman running it who encouraged me to start my own account. I wanted other women of color to feel seen and appreciated – to have the opportunity to connect with other women. I wanted everyone to feel covered by each other."

With encouragement from others and a deep understanding of the presence she was creating online for those around her, McCormick launched @blackgirlsfightfire. There, she was able to assist women of color who wanted to become firefighters to

connect with mentors and support networks, in an effort to create inclusion and foster success.

McCormick started using the hashtag – #mysisterskeeper – and has had many Instagram users tag her in their posts and photos, helping to create a deeper sense of community and belonging.

While the original aim of the group was to reach black women fighting fire, the meaning soon morphed into something greater. "In the fire service, we get caught up in the brotherhood. But what about the in-between, talking about the cultural differences we seem to be so afraid to speak about? If those things didn't matter, we wouldn't be seeing some of the stuff that we see."



ABOVE & RIGHT: PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH MCCORMICK

/// I WANTED OTHER WOMEN OF COLOR TO FEEL SEEN AND APPRECIATED – TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH OTHER WOMEN.



ABOVE: PHOTO BY KIMBERLY JOY @KIMBERLYJOY PHOTOGRAPHY

McCormick is creating an online presence that shows other women how goals and aspirations play an important role in personal success. She emphasizes the importance of understanding and accepting that firefighting is a part of who you are, but it's not all that you are. "The training I've received and continue to receive has and will always be the most vital part of my career," says McCormick. "What you do in training will show on the fire ground, and in many cases, you are the difference between life and death."

McCormick wants others to value themselves and be proud of the hard work it takes to become a firefighter. "If you choose a career that relies on quick

thinking and fast action, you have to learn to trust yourself."

As McCormick's online presence continues to grow, she is focused on balancing her love of firefighting with her love of helping others.

"It's not the fire station itself, nor the calls we have that determine the kind of experience we get," explains McCormick. "It's the relationship dynamic with the people inside it that makes or breaks the shift. Having a hard day with people you'd give your life for, who you have a genuine camaraderie with, can make it a little easier. As for me, I'm open to whatever my career may bring and I always have been."

WHEN ASKED ABOUT LOCAL FOUNDATIONS AND GROUPS THAT MCCORMICK SUPPORTS AND IS PASSIONATE ABOUT, SHE HIGHLIGHTED A FEW FOR CRACKYL MAGAZINE, BUT EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING COMMUNITY-BASED GROUPS, FOUNDATIONS, AND ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA.

- 1 **GEARED UP FOR FIRE**  
FACEBOOK.COM/GEAREDUPFORFIRE  
An online community that connects firefighters across the world via Facebook and Instagram.
- 2 **MELANIN & MENTAL HEALTH**  
MELANINANDMENTALHEALTH.COM  
An organization connecting black/latinx people and local therapists.
- 3 **FIREFIGHTER FUNCTIONAL FITNESS**  
@FIREFIGHTERFFIT ON INSTAGRAM  
A foundation supporting fitness and nutrition for firefighters.
- 4 **THE SHIFT WORKER'S GUIDE**  
THESHIFTWORKERSGUIDE.COM  
A great online resource for anyone and everyone who does shift work and doesn't work nine to five.
- 5 **BLACK GIRLS FIGHT FIRE**  
FACEBOOK.COM/BLACKGIRLSFIGHTFIRE  
McCormick's online community highlighting, celebrating and connecting black women within emergency medical services, bringing awareness to the fires they fight.

# IN SEARCH OF *sleep*

WHY YOU CAN'T  
CHASE IT DOWN

By Dr. Beverley David



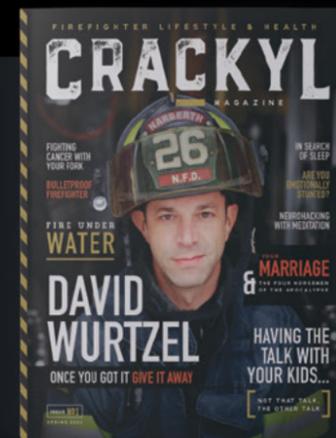
Research shows that a significant percentage of North American adults aged between 18 and 64 report being dissatisfied with their sleep. For shift workers, the situation is even worse, with poor sleep remaining the most common health complaint.

EVER WONDER WHY IT'S SO HARD  
TO BE A FIREFIGHTER FOR AN  
EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME?

# YOUR LIFE IS ON FIRE

- Looking for a better work-life balance?
- Worried about saving for retirement?
- Struggling to get back in shape?
- Concerned about your health?
- Can't seem to get motivated?

LET'S TIP THE SCALES IN YOUR FAVOR



## JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF FIREFIGHTERS

CRACKYL Magazine is a ground-breaking new publication dedicated to the mental and physical wellbeing of firefighters - the first of its kind. We have partnered with the top associations, fire service industry leaders and experts to bring cutting edge research and thought-provoking content to firefighters active on the job today.

DOWNLOAD FREE CRACKYL MAGAZINE  
OR SIGN UP TO RECEIVE A PRINT COPY  
[CRACKYLMAG.COM](http://CRACKYLMAG.COM)



FOR MOST ADULTS AGED 18 TO 64

## 7-9 HOURS

OF SLEEP DAILY IS WHAT'S ADVISED.



Sleep is a slippery creature. Given that it's vital to our survival and ability to function—particularly when our profession involves life and death decisions—it seems unfair that it's so hard for us to grasp. The more you chase it, the more elusive it becomes.

Why is sleep so tricky, and what can we do about it?

## HOW DOES SLEEP WORK?

In an ideal scenario, we'd go to sleep at the same time each night when it grows dark, and wake up at the same time the following morning. That's known as the "circadian rhythm," and it's our body's built-in schedule. In addition to that rhythm, we also have a "sleep appetite." The longer we're awake and the more activities we participate in, the bigger our sleep appetite becomes. In that original ideal scenario, we'd spend plenty of time outdoors during the day, exercising body and mind, so that both would be pleasantly ready for sleep again by nightfall. Easy! Unfortunately, for most of us, that ideal scenario bears very little resemblance to real life.

All kinds of things can interfere. Shift work and travel are key offenders, but so too are days spent indoors at a desk, kids who insist on jumping into bed with us, and even the tiny change that occurs when the clocks go forward or back. When that

happens, things can feel out of kilter. We might have missed an entire sleep cycle and feel desperate for some shut-eye, but when the opportunity to sleep arrives, our body clock just isn't ready. Sleep may not come as quickly as we'd like—or it may not come at all.

The good news is that sleep, though slippery and elusive, can be coaxed into your life on a regular and restful basis. Once we accept that our personal sleep situation doesn't fall into the ideal scenario, we can focus on how best to operate with what we do have. Figuring out the sleep/wake schedule that's right for you may take some trial and error, but there are key elements that help most people.

## SET THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

In the lead-up to sleep, it helps to gently encourage your body and brain to move in that direction. Bedtime rituals such as taking a hot shower or bath, brushing your teeth and putting on pyjamas can start the process. Lower lighting, relaxing music and reading a few pages of a book can continue that journey. **Avoid caffeine and alcohol, as both can cause sleep disturbances.**

Light, noise and room temperature can interfere with sleep, particularly during the day. Black-out blinds, an eye mask, ear plugs or white noise can help, so ensure you're kitted out,

and aim for a room temperature of around 18.5 C or 65 F to help induce sleep. A sign on your front door will help fend off an untimely visitor or delivery, and another on your bedroom door will remind others in the household that you're not to be disturbed. Unless you're on call, turn off your phone - and if you can bear to be apart from your device, use a stand-alone alarm clock, so you can leave your phone elsewhere in the house.

## MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR BED

IDEALLY, YOUR BED SHOULD ONLY BE USED ONLY FOR SLEEP AND SEX. THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT TO ASSOCIATE THAT BED WITH RELAXING.

The more time you spend awake in bed, furious that you aren't asleep, the more your body and brain will associate the pillow with that frustration. Frustration is stress, and stress causes increased cortisol and adrenaline to be released, which in turn, keeps us alert. It's the same system that, long ago, allowed us to act quickly in the face of a saber tooth tiger attack—but is now less helpful when it's time to snooze. If you find yourself lying in bed, tossing and turning, get up, go somewhere calm and comfortable and do something relaxing. Return to bed

only when your eyes are fighting sleep, to preserve that all-important connection between your pillow and sleep. You don't want to associate that pillow with worry or effort.

The secret is this: sleep can't be chased down so never try to sleep. Instead, give yourself permission to not sleep and see what happens.

## SHIFT WORK &amp; SLEEP

Some people aim for a short block of sleep soon after their shift ends and plan another sleep block later, while others prefer a few hours of wakefulness followed by a longer block of sleep, more like those who work a traditional 9-to-5 schedule, but with day and night reversed. Those with a rotating schedule often choose to prepare by adjusting their sleep times, gradually delaying bedtime by an hour or two a few days prior to starting the new shift. This can help you get enough rest and avoid the disruption of sudden changes. Whatever you prefer, aim to stick to the routine so your body and brain know what's what.

## HOW MUCH SLEEP IS ENOUGH?

For most adults aged 18 to 64, seven to nine hours of sleep daily is what's advised. Some of us can get by on less while some may need slightly more, but we don't recommend fewer than

five hours or more than 11 hours of sleep per day.

IF YOU FIND THAT YOU ARE FEELING VERY SLEEPY, CONSIDER TAKING A 10 TO 20 MINUTE NAP ON ONE OF YOUR BREAKS.

For many, the "coffee nap" can be effective: drink a cup of coffee before your nap so that your wake-up time coincides with the caffeine taking effect. The "coffee nap" can also help if you find you're sleepy before driving home. Remember that driving when you are sleepy can be more fatal than driving under the influence, and studies show midnight to 6 a.m. is one of the most dangerous periods for drowsy driving. **If you begin to feel sleepy behind the wheel at any time, pull over at the next available opportunity where you can park safely and nap.**

AND IF  
*sleep*  
STILL WON'T COME?



If, try as you might, your sleep hasn't improved, consider speaking to a professional who can look at the bigger picture. When I meet someone reporting poor sleep, I'm keen to learn three key things:

## 1 PREDISPOSING FACTORS

The history of your sleep, from when you were tiny. What was it like in the beginning?

## 2 PRECIPITATING FACTORS

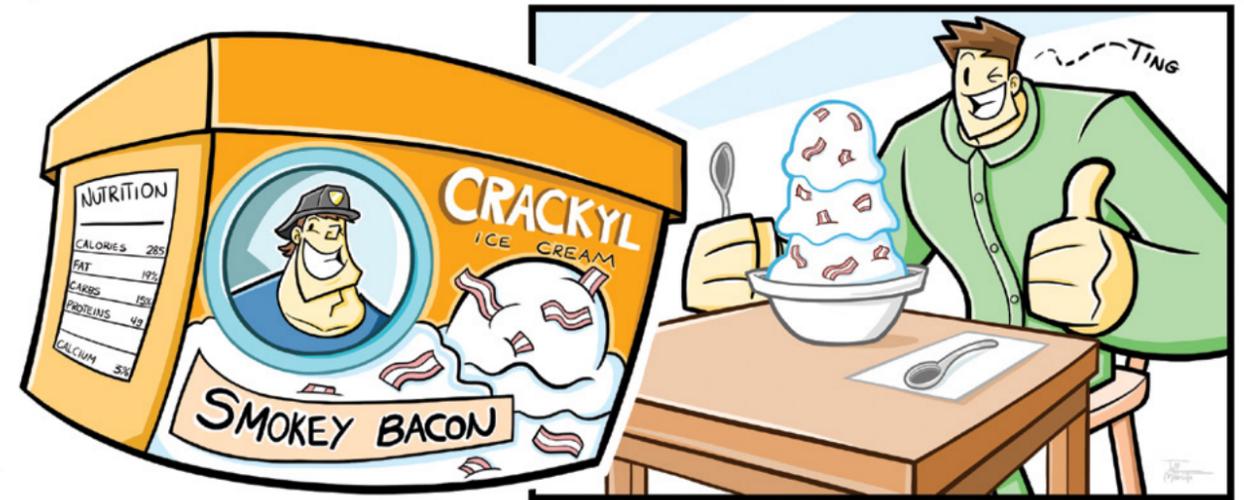
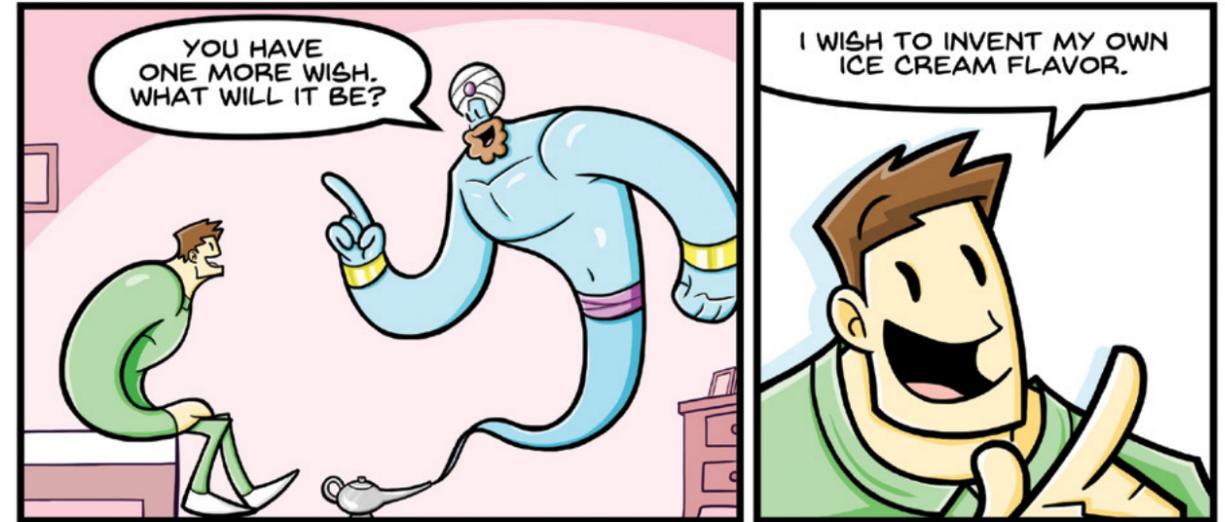
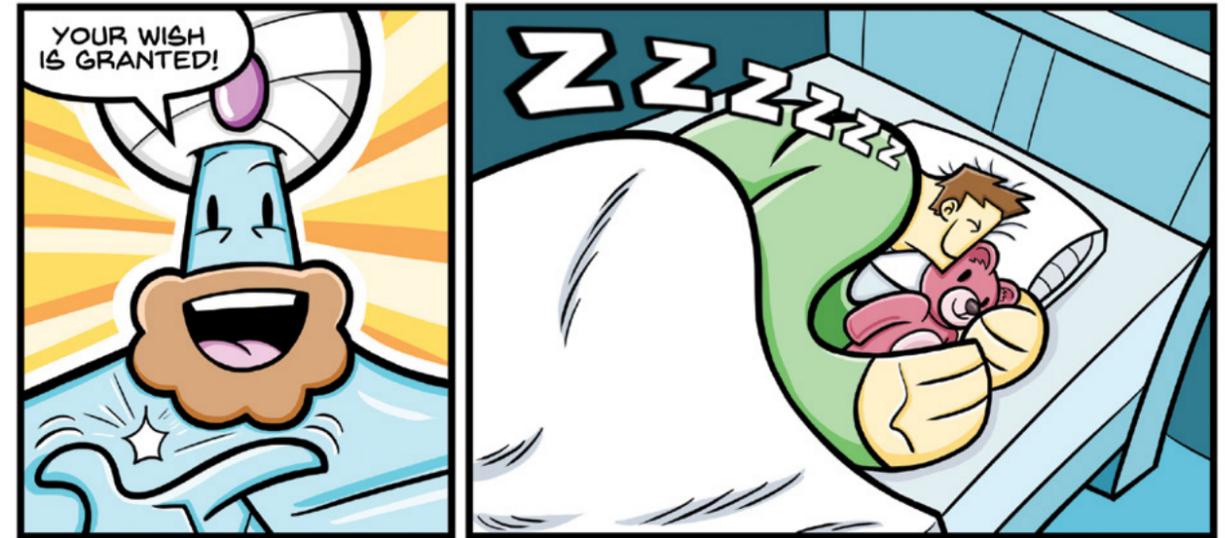
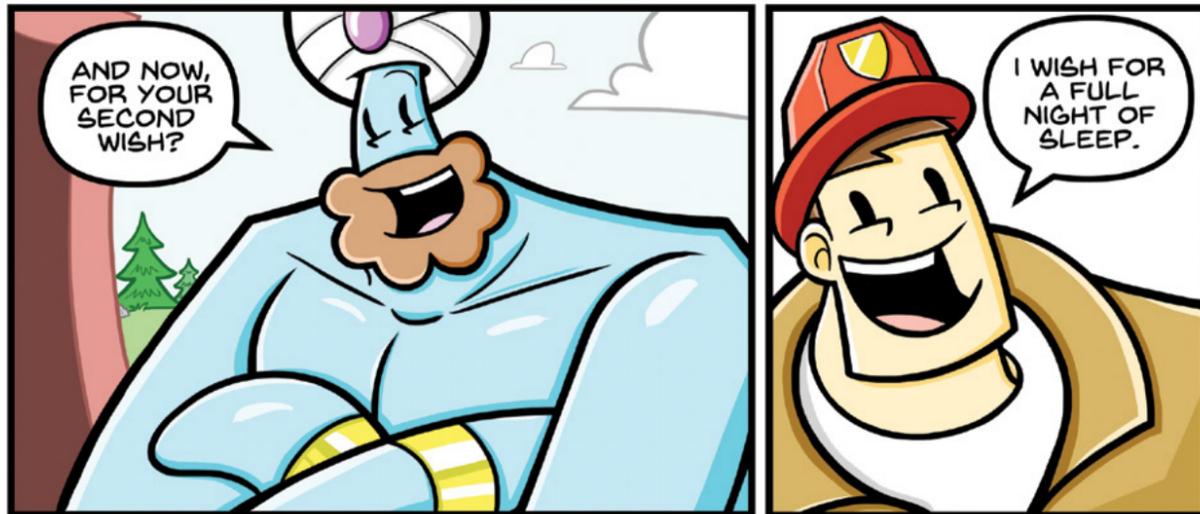
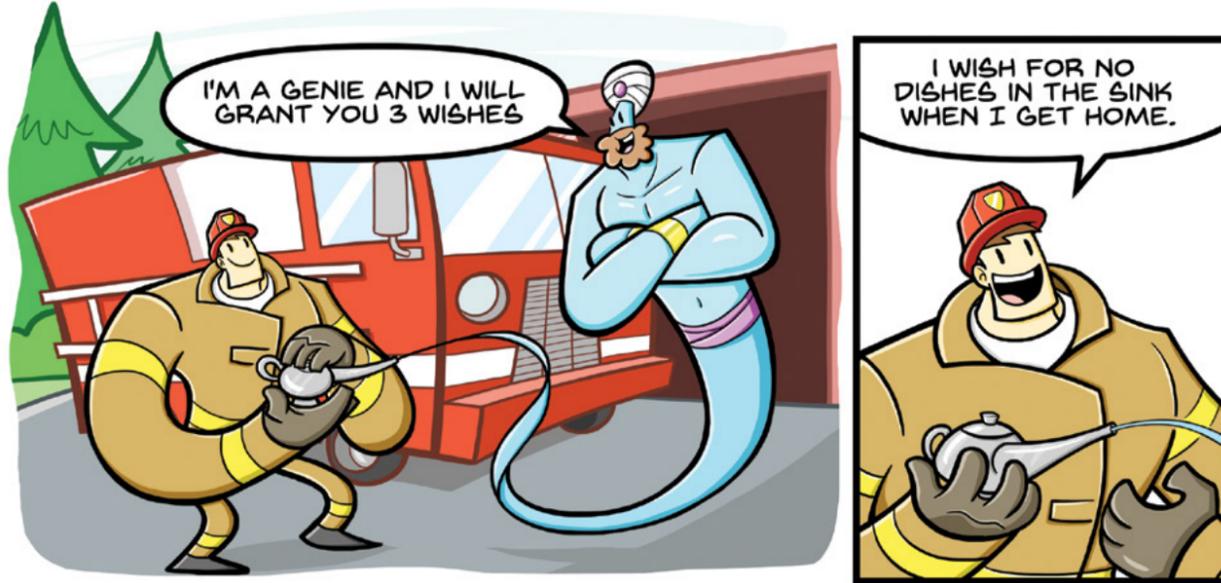
Has anything happened to knock your sleep off track? It could be anything from marriage to divorce, children, pets, moves, work, shift work, the weather, health, hormonal changes, getting older, stress etc.

## 3 PERPETUATING FACTORS

What could be perpetuating your poor sleep? As mentioned, the anxiety about sleeplessness alone can perpetuate the problem.

Ultimately, sleep is important and should be treated as a priority. Be kind and patient with yourself and remember, you're not alone in this struggle.

# JAKE BREAK COMICS



BY JEFF MAKSUTA

# JOSH FULK'S JOURNEY TO HEALTH

A conversation between Aaron Zamzow and Josh Fulk

**THERE WILL BE DAYS WHEN YOU WON'T WANT TO WORK OUT OR EAT HEALTHY. FOCUS ONLY ON THE POSITIVES AND DAY ONE WILL LEAD TO DAY 1,000.**

Helping fellow first responders improve their health and fitness is a no-brainer for firefighter Aaron Zamzow. As a strength and conditioning specialist with Fire Rescue Fitness, Aaron's mission and top priority is to help other first responders improve their health and fitness. Aaron loves to share other first responders' success stories on his social media pages, in an effort to demonstrate the power of healthy transformations.

One transformation that Aaron is especially proud of is that of Josh Fulk, who lost over 140 pounds and is now a regular participant in triathlons. Aaron spoke with Josh about his journey, in the hope that his continued success story could inspire other first responders to make healthy changes in their lives.

**AARON: Josh, tell us a little about yourself. Where are you from and what do you do?**

**JOSH:** I am a father to a two-year-old daughter and I have been married to my wife for nine years. We reside where I was raised, in the small farm town of St. Elmo, Illinois where I have served as a firefighter on the St. Elmo Volunteer Fire Department for five years. I am also the Civil Engineering Technology Instructor at Lake Land College in Mattoon, Illinois.

**AARON: When you were at your highest weight, what did your typical diet look like? What was your daily routine at that point?**

**JOSH:** At one point I weighed 425 pounds. It is really no surprise considering I would drink more than a gallon of soda a day. I used it as a crutch for energy and would drink 20+ ounces between classes. I also filled up on fast food while driving home, and then ate another whole meal when I arrived. I remember going to the local wing food chain on "endless" wing nights and having 30 to 40 wings on my own.

**AARON: When did you start making your transformation? What was the moment when you knew you needed to make some healthy changes? How did you feel back then?**

**JOSH:** I started my transformation in 2017 with the majority of the weight loss happening in 2018. As for the moment



PHOTO BY RODGER FALK

///  
**AT ONE POINT I WEIGHED 425 POUNDS**

that I knew I needed to make a change, there were three big ones. The first real smack-in-the-face moment happened in 2016 while I was pushing (literally) through the local Fire Academy. I was the biggest guy in the class and would get winded very easily. The first time going through the maze at the academy was a big eye-opener. As soon as we hit the first obstacle, I already had my pack off, pushing through each hole while everyone else was going through, shifting packs. There were quite a few times when I questioned my health and fitness. The second eye-opener occurred at the doctor's office. I went to the doctor in January 2017 – the first time in over 10 years – and was told I needed to lose weight. My blood work indicated that I was pre-diabetic, with borderline hypertension and heart disease. That really hit me. Heart disease runs in my family and the doctor explained that if I didn't change, I would be on diabetic and cholesterol meds before the age of 31. The third eye-opener occurred on Super Bowl Sunday in 2018 when my wife told me I was going to be a dad. I knew I had to really focus on my future and my own health – I just didn't want to be the fat dad. That was the final tipping point for me. I realized I needed to change.

**AARON: What was the biggest motivation for wanting to make the transformation?**

**JOSH:** It sounds selfish when I think about it, but I wanted to get healthy for myself first. I knew I was not living my best life nor being my best self - and I didn't want to be that guy in my department. Add the fact that I was going to be a father, and I had all the motivation I needed. My daughter continues to be one of my biggest motivators and has helped me get through some rough times during this journey.

**AARON: What was the first thing you did to start your change? What were the main reasons for your success?**

**JOSH:** In 2016 and early 2017, I started doing research on fitness programs and what the best steps for me would be. I looked at quite a few programs but none of them seemed to address what we do as firefighters. Eventually, I found Fire Rescue Fitness and entered one of their "Fit for Duty" challenges. I got the program, set my goals, and started working on getting healthy. My first goal was to improve my nutrition – especially my soda habit. I didn't even think about working out for a couple of weeks and just focused on drinking more water, eating more veggies, and watching my calories and sugars. After I had established some control of my nutrition, I started to work out. I think the biggest reason for my success is that I had a plan I could easily navigate and had a great deal of determination to make these healthy changes.

**AARON: Was there a time when you stopped making progress? What did you do to get back on track?**

**JOSH:** In 2017, around the beginning of fall semester, after losing 50 pounds, I went back to my old bad habits. I started eating poorly and had a soda (or four!) and I gained almost 25 pounds back. Then, in early 2018, we did a firehouse weight loss challenge and, as I've said, I learned I would be a father. These two events gave me the motivation to get back on track. I started eating healthy foods, drinking water, and watching my portions. I think we all go through these ups and downs. I learned that the key was not to let the downs out-weigh the ups – no pun intended!

**AARON: If you could offer any advice to other members of the fire service trying to make healthy changes, what would it be?**

**JOSH:** I would tell them to do some research, find a plan and a support system, and then go do the work. Getting started was exceedingly difficult. Just get started. There are days when you will not want to work out or eat healthy, so just focus on the positives and Day One will lead to Day 1,000. I am sure that the Day One guy would never think of doing a Half Ironman, but now I do, and believe it or not, it's doable. Just keep grinding. It's worth it.

**AARON: What is your current goal? What is your ultimate goal, and where would you like to be?**

**JOSH:** My main goal is to keep improving and challenging myself. I want to continue to lose weight with an ultimate goal of 225 to 250 pounds which would be almost a 200-pound change! I also want to make a trip down the Half Ironman 70.3 triathlon red carpet in Ohio in July 2021. I was able to complete some 70.3 distance triathlons this year, but I dream of completing an Ironman event. After completing the Half Ironman, my next goal is to finish the full 140.6 Ironman. It gives me chills just thinking about crossing the finish line and hearing the announcer say, "Josh Fulk, you are an Ironman."

**AARON:** Thank you, Josh for your inspiring journey and story. I know you will continue to accomplish your goals and I hope your story motivates others to take action to improve their health and fitness. Day One might be the hardest, but it is miles ahead of Day Zero and feeling hopeless.

You can get in touch with Fire Rescue Fitness by contacting Aaron Zamzow at [firerescuefitness.com](http://firerescuefitness.com)



**THEN & NOW**

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Q

MY PARTNER AND I KEEP FIGHTING ABOUT THE SAME ISSUES. HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE SO WE CAN RESOLVE THEM?

A

Firefighters are used to being in control of and repressing their feelings - but bottling up emotions when you're in a relationship can lead to a breakdown, and maybe even a breakup! Being flexible and learning to communicate clearly are key to being able to thrive in a fire-y relationship.

Remember that timing is key and try to set a specific time to sit down and discuss the issues. A change in scenery could also be helpful, so think about a drive in the country, a night at a hotel, or a weekend getaway.

Create a list of concerns and be specific. Simply saying "I'm upset" won't get to the root of the problems. Pick one issue and focus on it until you can agree on some strategies to resolve it. Compromising and seeing the other person's point of view, with empathy, is going to be important.

Listen closely and ask for clarification if you don't fully understand what your partner is saying. Don't interrupt or shout, and keep your body language positive and open - the goal is to come to a positive resolution, not to start yet another fight. Stay in the present and avoid tossing past grievances at your partner. Don't see yourself as a victim or behave as if you are. Instead, take responsibility for your shared role in what's happening.

If you come up with a plan, celebrate and show your appreciation to your partner! If you still can't come to an agreement and can't see a path forward, seek out a counselor for an unbiased, third-party point of view.

You're a team battling a tough issue together - you're not battling each other.

Q

I'M A DEFINITE TYPE A PERSONALITY, WITH ALL THE COMPETITIVE, AMBITIOUS, DRIVEN ATTRIBUTES YOU'D EXPECT. THOSE QUALITIES HAVE REALLY HELPED WITH MY CAREER AS A FIREFIGHTER BUT THEY POSE CHALLENGES WITH MY RELATIONSHIPS AND HOME LIFE. WHAT STRATEGIES CAN I USE TO TURN MY TYPE A PERSONALITY TRAITS INTO ASSETS IN MY OTHER ROLES AS A SPOUSE AND A PARENT?

A

Being competitive, ambitious and driven plays a big role in helping you succeed in your role as a firefighter - but it can also make you impatient, irritable and sometimes even hostile when you come home to a household that's not as structured and goal-oriented as the firehouse!

TYPE A PERSONALITIES TAKE NOTE: HERE ARE SOME QUICK TIPS FOR MAKING LIFE AT HOME LESS STRESSFUL AND MORE POSITIVE FOR ALL.

1

Make a definite difference between work and home. Schedule time for you to reboot and rest before diving into home life, allowing time for your brain and body to reduce the adrenaline and hypervigilance your work life demands. Don't make any major plans for your first day off.

2

Try having weekly or bi-weekly family meetings to discuss what the coming days look like for everyone. What needs to be done and who'll do it? Make a game of it and have some fun!

Every family has its own system and way of doing things so rather than trying to reorganize, ask how you can help to keep things rolling along.

If everyone stays on track and most things are accomplished - celebrate! Maybe have a picnic at the park, watch a movie together or order in a family dinner from your favorite restaurant.

3

Your tendency towards perfectionism may make you want to point to everything that hasn't been done correctly - but that won't encourage the person on the receiving end to keep trying. Instead, put the focus on yourself and figure out what's really bothering you. Is there something you've been putting off? Is there something that's out of place? Take responsibility, do it yourself or talk with your family about what you need. Always be sure to thank your family for everything they've accomplished. Compliments and appreciation go a long way!

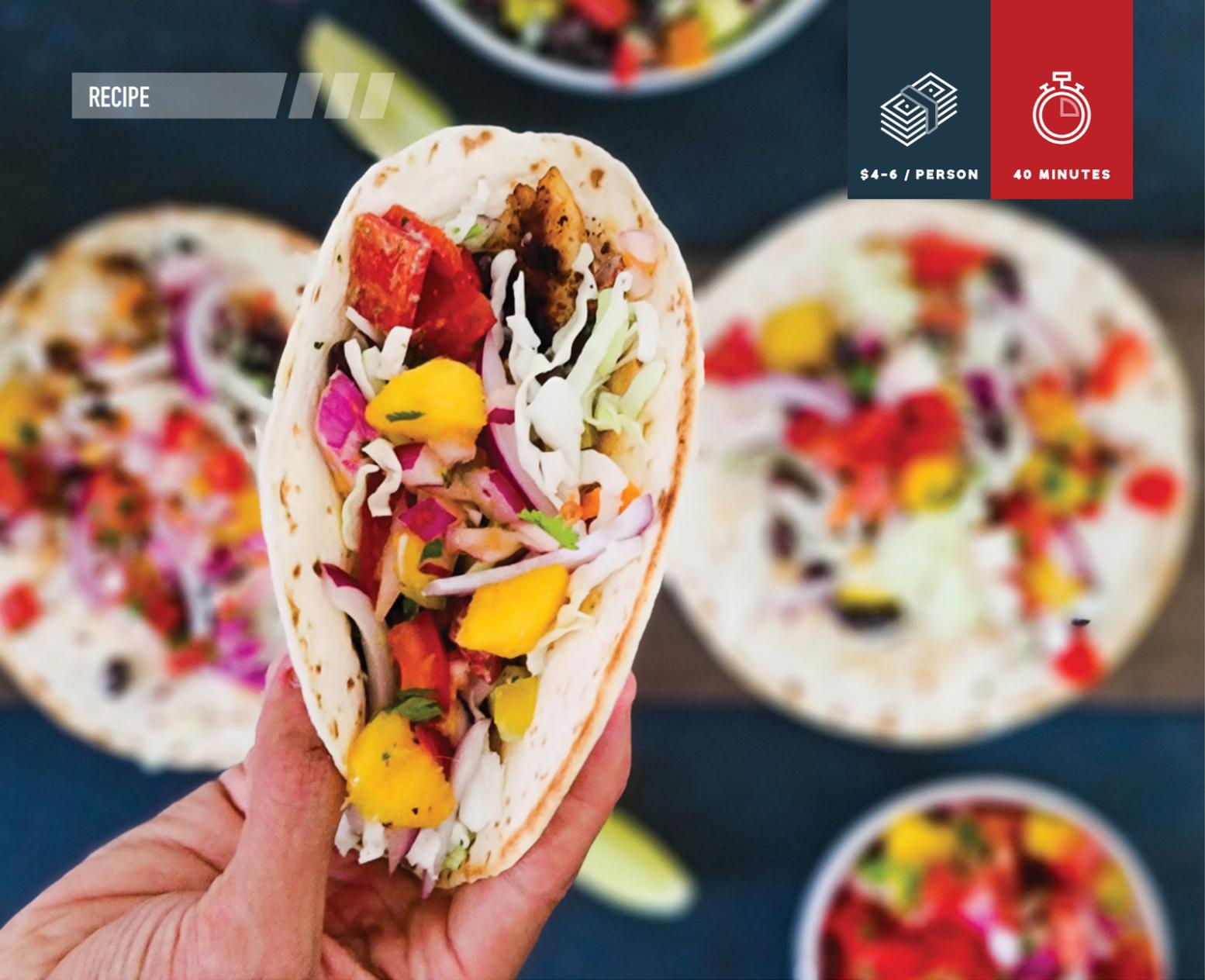
4

Set up a communication framework that works for all of you so everyone feels heard.

Type A personalities like to get straight to the point with no unnecessary preamble, so make it easy for your partner and suggest making a list of issues in bullet point form. Set boundaries with work communications and try hard not to read them at home. You don't want a frustrating work email to spoil your family time.

5

Keep your cool. Breathe and ask yourself whether it's better to be right or to be happy!



\$4-6 / PERSON



40 MINUTES

# FISH TACOS

WITH CITRUS BLACK BEAN SALSA AND A CILANTRO LIME SLAW

Fish tacos are perfect for warmer weather but are just as tasty in the cooler months. Cooking up in just a few short minutes, tilapia is a low-calorie source of protein that is not only affordable but also has a mild flavor, making it a crowd favorite. Pair it with a citrus black bean salsa for a rich, creamy side that can also be used as a vegetarian alternative. Spoon the salsa into

a tortilla for a filling, plant-based dinner or as lunch leftovers.

### IS TILAPIA HEALTHY?

Tilapia can be a great component of a healthy diet, as it is inexpensive and a good source of protein, vitamin B12, potassium and selenium. It is a staple of bodybuilders during contest preparation but is often featured in negative news stories about poor farming practices.

Wild-caught tilapia is preferred over farmed fish, but it can be hard to find. Farmed tilapia from the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Ecuador or Peru is next best. Avoid tilapia from China, as farming practices are most concerning in this country. If you are still worried, consider mahi mahi, flounder, halibut or cod as an alternative when making fish tacos.

RECIPE DEVELOPED BY MEGAN LAUTZ, MS, RDN

## GROCERY LIST

Paprika, oregano, cumin, chili powder, cayenne pepper (**Optional: Fresh Salsa** - Anticipate 30 minutes of additional chopping time, small to medium dice. Makes 6-8 cups and can last up to 5 days refrigerated. 15 Roma tomatoes, 1 mango, 1 large red onion, 1 bunch cilantro, 1/2 - 1 tsp. salt, juice of 1 lime)



6 PEOPLE

- 4 lbs. frozen tilapia fillets
- 2 bunches fresh cilantro
- 1 orange
- 4 limes
- 1 medium red onion
- 2 bell peppers (red/orange)
- 1 avocado
- 1 bag coleslaw mix
- 3 (15 oz.) cans black beans
- 1 (24 oz.) jar salsa
- 1 (16 oz.) container light sour cream



10 PEOPLE

- 8 lbs. frozen tilapia fillets
- 4 bunches fresh cilantro
- 2 oranges
- 8 limes
- 2 medium red onions
- 4 bell peppers (red/orange)
- 2 avocados
- 2 bags coleslaw mix
- 6 (15 oz.) cans black beans
- 2 (24 oz.) jars salsa
- 2 (16 oz.) containers light sour cream



14 PEOPLE

- 12 lbs. frozen tilapia fillets
- 6 bunches fresh cilantro
- 3 oranges
- 12 limes
- 3 medium red onions
- 6 bell peppers (red/orange)
- 6 avocados
- 6 bags coleslaw mix
- 9 (15 oz.) cans black beans
- 3 (24 oz.) jars salsa
- 3 (16 oz.) containers light sour cream

## INGREDIENTS LIST

Nutrition: **Tilapia:** 10 oz. (1/6th serving), 250 calories, 0g. carbohydrate, 6g. fat, 50g. protein, 0g. fiber  
**Black Bean Salad:** 1 c., 280 calories, 46g. carbohydrate, 5g. fat, 15g. protein, 14g. fiber  
**Cilantro Lime Slaw:** 0.25 c., 55 calories, 9g. carbohydrate, 2g. fat, 2g. protein, 2g. fiber

### Citrus Black Bean Salsa

- 1 bunch cilantro
- 1 orange, juiced
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1/3 c. light sour cream
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 bell peppers, diced
- 1 avocado, diced
- 3 cans black beans, rinsed

### Cilantro Lime Slaw

- 1 bunch cilantro
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 3 limes, juiced
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 bag coleslaw mix

### Spice Rubbed Tilapia

- 4 lbs. tilapia fillets
- 2 Tbsp. chili powder
- 1 Tbsp. cumin
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne powder
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. oregano

### Citrus Black Bean Salsa

- 2 bunches cilantro
- 2 oranges, juiced
- 2 limes, juiced
- 2/3 c. light sour cream
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 4 bell peppers, diced
- 2 avocados, diced
- 6 cans black beans, rinsed

### Cilantro Lime Slaw

- 2 bunches cilantro
- 1 c. sour cream
- 6 limes, juiced
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 bags coleslaw mix

### Spice Rubbed Tilapia

- 8 lbs. tilapia fillets
- 4 Tbsp. chili powder
- 2 Tbsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. cayenne powder
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 2 tsp. oregano

### Citrus Black Bean Salsa

- 3 bunches cilantro
- 3 oranges, juiced
- 3 limes, juiced
- 1 c. light sour cream
- 1 1/2 tsp. salt
- 3 medium onions, diced
- 6 bell peppers, diced
- 3 avocados, diced
- 9 cans black beans, rinsed

### Cilantro Lime Slaw

- 3 bunches cilantro
- 1 1/2 c. sour cream
- 9 limes, juiced
- 3/4 tsp. cayenne powder
- 1 1/2 tsp. salt
- 3 bags coleslaw mix

### Spice Rubbed Tilapia

- 12 lbs. tilapia fillets
- 6 Tbsp. chili powder
- 3 Tbsp. cumin
- 1 1/2 tsp. cayenne powder
- 3 tsp. paprika
- 3 tsp. oregano

## DIRECTIONS

### Citrus Black Bean Salsa

1. Using a blender or food processor, blend cilantro, orange/lime juice, sour cream and salt.
2. With a sharp knife, dice the onion, peppers and avocado.
3. Combine diced veggies, blender mix and beans in a bowl and stir.

### Cilantro Lime Slaw

1. Mix cilantro, sour cream, lime juice, cayenne and salt in a bowl.
2. Pour over coleslaw mix and fold in sauce.

### Spice Rubbed Tilapia

1. Preheat oven to 425 F.
2. Combine all spices in small bowl.
3. Sprinkle spices evenly over tilapia
4. Bake for 10-15 minutes, or pan sear at medium high heat for 2-3 minutes on each side, until white all the way through or until the fish flakes easily with a fork.

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