Moderator: One of the first things that we saw was that there was a lot of great communication and collaboration between the team so, those are one of the key successes to the work.   
  
It seems, from our perspective from reading through the transcripts, that the company does a really good job distributing information to the team. So, if there are changes, there are channels to get that information to everyone and people have the chance to know what’s happening with the company, know why these changes are happening; particularly, looking at COVID when there’s certain things like masking or precautions that are taken, everyone knows what’s happening there.  
  
Additionally, it seems as though everyone learns lessons and everyone is involved in making improvements. One of the things that we heard was that if something happens on a call and it’s a learning opportunity, maybe something didn’t go just as expected or could’ve been improved, that there’s room for everyone to talk about what happened, talk about how that can be addressed differently to be able to improve systems for the future.  
  
Also, an organized management structure and feedback being incorporated. So, a lot of people are in leadership roles, and maybe this is something that you guys can expand on, as well. There are systems for giving feedback both formally and informally if you have concerns that you want addressed or there are things that have happened that you want to talk about.  
  
We also see a lot of interdepartmental and external collaboration so, there’s a good support structure there for people to work together.   
  
In regards to these, how accurate do you feel that these are? Or do you feel that there are any areas where maybe this is not a proper representation of how you guys feel things run at the company?

Participant: I’ll turn it over to you, captains and chief, on that.

Participant: Yes, I mean, just from what we did with those other focus groups, I feel like it’s pretty accurate.

Moderator: Great.

Participant: Agreed. I think those are accurate statements in terms of the communication within the department.

Moderator: Wonderful. And in terms of if there was a concern that you had that can be any sort of concern, is there a system where you guys feel like you can talk about that or address it? Do you know who you would turn to with that sort of feedback?

Participant: Yes, I think that structure has been in place for quite some time as far as our resources.

Moderator: Great. When looking at communication – this can also be just with your coworkers when you’re addressing a call – have there been any difficulties with communication? And if there have been, how do you guys generally resolve those if maybe you look at something differently from a coworker?

Participant: I think one of the harder things for our department is just in particular, when we’re dealing with our direct reports or otherwise, it’s communicating that throughout the department, right? Especially if someone’s struggling at one particular thing, you may be dealing with it at the station level and other people in the organization aren’t going to get a sense of that or have any understanding of that; to give some context, if that person moves to another station or into another bureau. I guess tracking would be the way to put that.

Moderator: Do you feel like generally, things tend to be the same when you’re looking at different station houses and things? Or does it vary depending on where you work?

Participant: I guess I don’t know to answer that because all I know is my station and my crew, right? Captain [REDACTED], he doesn’t know kind of what I’m dealing with in terms of my personnel and I don’t know the challenges he faces unless we get together and talk about it. But we’ve got such a huge department that I think everyone’s got their own kind of little circle that we rely on of friends and coworkers. But certainly, that can’t go across the whole department.

Participant: Yes, I agree. I think there’s quite a bit of autonomy station to station and we just don’t bridge those gaps very well.

Participant: And that’s a good thing, right? It’s a good thing, at least how I feel. It’s a good thing that we have a lot of autonomy to run our stations and run our crews but that’s kind of one of the challenges with that.

Participant: Yes, yes. I think it’s an unintended consequence of the size of our organization and the fact that we’re spread out.

Participant: I think [REDACTED] could probably speak to that, being a newer battalion chief and having not too long ago been at the station level.

Participant: Yes, I agree with what you guys are saying. Just with how large we are, every station’s different, every captain’s different, every crew’s different. We generally have the same methods of [sound out] situations. Usually, it’s at the lowest level and then, it sometimes will get elevated. But for the most part, they’re all a little varied but similar.

Moderator: When you’re looking at communicating things between different station houses, what does that usually look like for you guys?

Participant: I think it’s pretty complex. Because you have – even a neighboring station, you have three platoons so, you work with your neighboring captain on the same platoon and there’s a fair amount of communication that way.  
  
But when you’re talking about cross-platoons, it becomes complex and it’s hard to know if those communication lines work as well.

Participant: Yes, and if it’s like a department initiative or anything like that, or something like that, you know, then, there would be like a memo that came out. And then, typically, at the beginning of each shift, the three battalion chiefs will have a meeting amongst themselves and then, those battalion chiefs will have individual meetings with their captains. And then, it should trickle down from a captain having a meeting with their direct reports, as well.   
  
So, if it’s an official kind of communication from the top, there’s methods to do that but station to station on individual things might be difficult.

Moderator: Okay, great. Yes, it’s nice to know a little bit better what that structure distribution looks like. Do you feel that if you learn something at your station house that you thought would be really valuable for others, would it have to go sort of all the way back up and then be distributed back down in the same manner, since it sounds like there isn’t really a way to communicate directly with another station house?

Participant: I think there’s a lot of direct communication with our adjoining stations. I think the challenge is getting it out of the battalion. I think at least where I'm at on the east side, we work really closely with [stations]. It’s probably a little bit different for the [location] stations because they’re kind of set off on their own.   
  
But you know, I think we’re on the same page on the east side up here on [location]. But extrapolating that even to our [location] stations or the [location], and especially [location], I think that’s really challenging.

Participant: I think what makes it hard, too – and you probably know the structure of our department – but we work in two different counties with 25-plus stations spread out everywhere from [location] and everywhere in between. So, it is a very large geographical area.  
  
And then, the way our platoons work, you know, two days on, four days off, we have three different platoons. There are times where you could years without crossing paths with somebody, depending on where they’re stationed and what platoon they’re on.  
  
So, it’s just a little difficult because of the size when it comes to communication and collaboration with the full department. But that’s where the battalion chiefs try to bridge that gap, like [REDACTED] said, to try to get a consistent message and communication across the board.

Moderator: Great.

Participant: And Chief brings up a good point. You know, as far as common operating picture and organizational changes, everyone is aware of those. Those get pushed out in a consistent manner. It’s all the little other nuanced things that go on.

Moderator: Okay, that’s a little bit more complicated.

Participant: Yes, and as far as like with things like with safety things or when we’ve had issues before like near misses or something like that, there’s a safety bulletin that can go out and then, it’s distributed through the entire department.   
  
So, if there’s like a big safety concern, then, we do have methods for distributing it. But I guess from the smaller-scale stuff, no.

Moderator: Are there any specific things that you guys feel would help to improve that? I know it’s a pretty broad question.

Participant: I think that that’s a really hard question because offhand, you’d say, “Oh, more communication,” right? But I think – love to hear what everybody else thinks about this – I think we – the pendulum swing, Chief [REDACTED] says very little communication coming from our command staff to perhaps almost too much communication and feedback to the point where people were doing 360s, for example, on promotional candidates because everyone was just so burnt out on just the constant ask for communication. At least that’s how we saw it.   
  
And we’ve pulled back a little bit. The pendulum has swung a little bit more to the middle now. So, I don’t know, that’s a great question. I don’t have a good answer for that but I don’t think, offhand, more communication – I'm not necessarily sure that that’s the best thing. Because we just get so inundated that we tend to – at least I do – I tend to ignore some stuff because I just get so inundated with emails and communications and questions with the Chief. Which I think are all good things but it can get to too much of a good thing.

Moderator: Yes, yes. If you’re getting emails constantly and things and you’ve got a lot of other things to keep track of, that can definitely make it more difficult. You wouldn’t think that there could be too much communication but I suppose there can.   
  
Great. Do you guys have anything else you want to add on this? Perfect.

Participant: I don’t know if other people agree with that so, chime in.

Participant: I would agree [interruption] with that.

Moderator: Perfect. So, this does sort of tie into our next aspect of policies and organizational structure and it sounds like this is something that you guys have already touched on a little bit. But there are a lot of structured systems in place that protect and promote health. What we saw was this was broad from policies that are keeping people physically safe on the job with how to respond to calls, PPE, how things are handled, and also, with things like benefits, taking sick leave and those sorts of things; that that’s all in place to make sure that people are doing what they need to. And also, that there’s a lot of training and tools in place for people to stay safe and to also keep themselves healthy.  
  
One of the things that we look at is in addition to just are people safe in the workplace is are people being cared for in the larger sense of wellbeing? And we saw that that was something that [COMPANY] did very well.  
  
A lot of this comes from national standards and expert guidance. So, it came up that the National Fire Protection Agency guidelines are what’s used for policy implementation and that things are generally done following that. And then, there are some additional things that are put in place that might vary and it might be required, but additional guidelines that help to put things in, and that’s how policy is generally implemented.  
  
A lot of things are heavily regulated so that there isn’t necessarily opportunity for you guys to make specific changes on certain things, but that the structure is in place to make sure that that’s done appropriately. Do you guys feel like this is accurate?

Participant: I think it’s accurate. I think it’s difficult because there are so many other factors that go into this in our organization. I think there are a lot of things that we look at and go, “Man, we should be doing this,” right? Like PPE, for example. “We should be doing this.” But there’s budget, there’s logistics, there’s all these other factors.   
  
So, implementing something that may make perfect sense; there’s just other things we have to do and other priorities and money that has to be considered. So, it’s hard.

Moderator: Do you feel like you have people who are advocating for those sorts of things for you and your team?

Participant: I think so, absolutely. There are just constraints.

Moderator: Do you feel like the organizational structure at the different stations or between battalions is really similar? It sounds like communication and a couple smaller things might vary but the overall structure is the same. Do you guys think that’s accurate? Or do you think there’s maybe more variation that we haven’t touched on?

Participant: I guess – what are you asking? The overall structure of what, specifically?

Moderator: With how policies are implemented, for the most part. Like if a change is going to take place, is it going to be different in how that is put in place in one versus another?

Participant: I think the policy implementation is very clear and it’s consistent across the board. The implementation at the platoon level – or pardon me, at the battalion level and maybe the station level – I think that varies, right?

Participant: I would agree with that, yes.

Participant: You know, for instance, we just got a reminder about, I think, a policy that’s been on the books about personal vehicles being in the bay space. And I worked the constant man and the message I got from one battalion sheet was very different than the message I got from another battalion sheet. And I think the policy’s very black and white. It’s pretty clear as to what’s allowed and what’s not allowed. But I think like we all do, we color it with how we interpret that policy.   
  
And I think, to the credit of the department, I think we’ve given latitude to interpret the policy and even, in some instances, go outside the policy if that’s the right thing to do.   
  
But the flipside of that, like we talked about, is that there’s variation between captain to captain, crew to crew, battalion to battalion.

Moderator: Do you guys feel that leads to any additional difficulties where if it were more consistent, that that would make things easier? Or do you feel like similar to the communication that some of this is just – that’s how it has to be with the structure and how things are?

Participant: I think that the difficulty is fairly low-level, meaning if you follow policy verbatim, you are within guidelines. But like Captain [REDACTED] said, the interpretation for how a captain chooses to enforce that policy, that may be different.   
  
So, I think maybe at the crew level, it may create some inconsistencies. But I don’t know if that answers the question correctly.

Moderator: That is helpful. So, if there were things that were going to be changed, in theory, about looking at how policies are implemented in the organizational structure, are there things that you guys would like to see or that you think would help your day-to-day or your coworkers?

Participant: I hate to say this because I think it is a little bit of a copout, a little bit. And I know this keeps getting brought up and brought up. I think consistency among the battalion chiefs – I think if you were to talk to my crew members and when they work, I bet they’d say, “There needs to be consistency among the captains, as well.”  
  
So, I fully understand that. But I think on the other hand, [sound distortion] even though I can’t be 100%, but I think it would be more helpful if the battalion chiefs were a little bit more consistent in their messaging and more on the same page about things. And that’s an impossible talk. You couldn’t get two people to agree on everything 100% let alone twelve people – the twelve battalion chiefs. But I think more consistency would be my answer.

Moderator: If your goal was to try and figure out how to get that to be more consistent, would you – what would your go-to – for example, do you think that having regular meetings or having a specific training session? How do you think it would be possible to get that consistency improved a little bit?

Participant: I think Chief [REDACTED] and Chief [REDACTED] would be the best to give input on that.

Participant: I think it’s hard to kind of – guesswork on that one. Because we do our best to get on the same page, right? But again, you’ve got the whole spectrum of battalion chiefs. So, when we’ve got the [redacted] BCs that sit and an ops chief, I feel like we’re doing better than we ever have as far as consistent messaging and being on the same page. But you have battalion chiefs that don’t agree with certain things that are brought up in our ops meeting and we leave that meeting and feel like we’re all on the same page and then, you know, the delivery of that messaging is different.  
  
I think at all levels of any organization, you run into this issue and I don’t think that it matters whether you’re a small department, whether you’re a large department, whether you have three stations versus, you know, 45 stations. You’re going to run into the same problems with consistency across the board because of the number and amount of personnel.  
  
I think the difference is you’ve got a fire chief whose absolute head direction, when you’ve got two or three fire stations, their absolute direction is known to the 25 to 35 personnel that they have, right? Because they touch them on a regular basis. Whereas the BCs and that filtering down leads to that interpretation, like Captain [REDACTED] just said.  
  
So, I am not sure how to overcome it. I mean, we’re doing our best to try to have the consistent messaging and to continue being on the same page. But at the same time, if there’s any latitude in policy – and policy should be fairly black and white, right? But once we throw leaders’ intent into policy, it leads for discretion and gray and that leads to personal interpretation and getting that out.   
  
It's a mixed bag. And that was a complete non-answer and probably a nice five-minute conversation on how it’s not fixable.  
  
I think it’s fixable. I think we’re doing better than we have before. But I think the impediments that we run into are going to be there regardless of what we implement and how we implement it, right? Unless we go straight down the line of, “Thou shalt, thou shalt not.” Any time there’s discretion and latitude, we’re going to run into differing of opinion. Well, it doesn’t matter. I mean, we’re always going to have differing of opinion but we’ll have different variations of how we implement that.

Participant: 100% agreed, right? You take away that latitude and then, I’d hear complaining about that we have no latitude to do what’s right for the organization and for our guys.   
  
So, if I'm going to fall on one side or the other, I’d much rather have a little bit of inconsistency.   
  
And I will also say, from my vantage point, I’ve never had a supervisor – a battalion chief or a captain, for that matter – come down on me or get after me for doing something if – if – what I was trying to accomplish was for the good of my guys and for the good of the organization and the good of the public. Like I may have gotten crossways when I haven’t been doing that. But any time I’ve been trying to do what I think is best has not been a problem. I may be off base, I need to recalibrate and change a little bit, but it’s never been a big problem.

Participant: Yes. I do think that that is the one consistent message from the time that I have started in the fire service. And when I was with [location], which is a smaller department, to the time that I’ve been over at [location] and been here for a chunk of time, is you do right by the personnel and you do right by the patients and people that we serve, and you pretty much can justify walking outside of policy on any certain topic to do what’s right, right? As long as it’s ethical and lawful, you can do pretty much what you need to do to do what’s right.  
  
Now, you may have to justify it and you may have to have a conversation with some supervisors and some higher-ups as to why certain things happen, and you may get crossways with it. You may not be able to justify it sufficiently to satisfy that next-level supervisor.  
  
But at the end of the day, when we’re trying to do – and you know, we don’t have a rigamarole regular job. Like you have to have critical thinking and the ability to have the flexibility on calls and on day-to-day items that come up. Which is why we try to deliver our leaders’ intent and get the best information out there possible to allow people to make the right decision at the right time.   
  
The absolute best decision that we can make is the right decision and the next best decision is the wrong decision, right? But we allow our people to make wrong decisions, and I think that is there. I think sometimes we get scared in that respect and I think we’ve come down hard on people for making a decision at times. But by and large, if you’re making a decision and you can explain the why behind it, I think you’re in a safe spot. And I don’t think organizationally, we’re far off from where we probably need to be.   
  
Now, we can always improve. We can always do better. But that’s my take on it.

Participant: Yes, I agree with that. And I think the health and wellbeing, a big part of that is empowering your people to solve problems, make decisions, you know, make those choices that you may be on the fringe. But it’s with the organization and with our patients in mind.

Moderator: Right. Great, this is wonderful information. We appreciate it. It can definitely be hard to try and find the balance of where you go in which direction. But it does sound like, from what you guys were saying, that overall, things are good and that there has been improvement. And even if there could be improvement, there’s been enough that, generally, things are doing well in this area.  
  
Is there anything else that you guys would like to add here before I move on to the next slide? Perfect.  
  
So, Employee Safety and Job Requirements. This is similar to the previous one in some sense; some of the things overlap. So, the company cares about employee health and encourages employees to take an active role so, safe and healthy in all aspects, kind of like what was just touched on; that there is some leeway in making sure that things are done to keep people safe. There is flexibility for that.  
  
And then, another example there would be encouraging people to take sick leave and other measures for personal safety, if someone isn’t feeling well, not coming into work and potentially getting other people sick.   
  
One thing that we heard a lot about is in relation to COVID, because the profession is inherently dangerous already, COVID didn’t really change a lot of things significantly in day-to-day but they were adjusted. So, there’s only so much you can do if you’re already dealing with infectious disease. You have people’s safety and wellbeing to think about first. But oftentimes, that is the priority over trying to make sure that all of these precautions are done. And if there’s already some level of understanding that there are risks inherently involved, then, COVID doesn’t feel as though it’s as dramatic of a change as it might be for a lot of other professions that aren’t used to being in these sorts of situations.   
  
So, taking precautions as much as possible; some formally, some informally, to try and minimize the risk as much as possible. But also, being realistic about what’s going to hinder people from being able to do the job efficiently and to keep people safe. And just that the nature of the work makes things difficult; for example, social distancing, that can be really difficult if you have someone who’s in an emergency and needs help now. You don’t have time to deal with masking and trying to stay away. As well, being in the station, those sorts of things are difficult.  
  
And so, what we want to know from you guys is, first, do you guys feel that this is accurate? And also, if something like this like a pandemic were to happen again, are there things that you guys would have liked to see [COMPANY] done differently?

Participant: Well, the utilization of sick leave and all that; I think that’s been a culture shift in our organization since COVID, particularly. Before that, like there were people at work that were sick constantly. Like people almost didn’t really use sick leave when they were sick; it was more for personal days or whatever.   
  
But there has been a pretty good culture shift. If people are sick, it’s not even a question; just don’t come to work, you know. If someone’s not feeling well, they can call in. We’re not even really – as people call in, we’re not even really questioning them really anymore. During COVID, we were. We were like, “Do you have COVID symptoms? Do you have this or that?” But now, if they’re calling in sick, we just say, “Copy that,” and we’ll put you out sick.

Participant: And with that, it’s hard to know if that culture shift, if we’re seeing more – and I don’t want to call it abuse but because we don’t ask the questions, we just say, “Okay, hey, you know, do you think – feel better,” it just seems like we have, now that we’re outside of what I call the “COVID window,” we’re still seeing a ton of utilization of sick time. Which that is a benefit, people earn it, but I think the mindset is a little bit different now.

Participant: I would agree with that and I would maybe \_\_\_\_\_ [00:30:32], for sure.

Participant: You know, though, from everything – well, I guess I shouldn’t say “everything” but I think we keep analyzing our sick leave use, and our sick leave us is underutilized for an organization of our size. Coming from the union point of view.

Participant: Yes, yes.

Participant: And I would agree 100% that the – I think before COVID, it was definitely frowned upon. If you had a sniffle or you had a cough or a sore throat, it was kind of expected, unwritten, that you should come in, right? Just power through it, work your shift, and now, it’s really shifted, which is a good thing.   
  
But I don’t know that I agree that we overutilize. I mean, \_\_\_\_\_ [00:31:17] people in the organization that abuse sick leave, right? But that’s a finer minority for the general firefighter population.

Participant: And I think that there are other factors that affect this, right? You look at like the staffing piece and COVID had an effect on every organization in the healthcare space. So, now, maybe it feels like it’s more utilized because we’re having staffing issues, you know.   
  
So, I think there’s a lot of other factors that go into that, as well.

Participant: Yes, absolutely.

Participant: There are, and I have a different take on it. As a chief officer, I don’t care if people take sick days. Like it really doesn’t matter to me. If they need a day, they need a day.   
  
The staffing piece, I think what gets lost in translation is the same time that COVID was around, we made the commitment for four-handed staffing. The four-handed staffing is really what is driving; a, the staffing levels; and b, the mandatory sort of commitment and callback, right? So, I think that it got coupled with COVID but we would be in this position with or without COVID.   
  
What it does, though, is when people call off and take that extra day or whatever day they feel they need to utilize sick, it forces somebody else on the callback. So, because we don’t have the staffing levels that we’d like or want, we do force the employee pool to pick up that burden. And that’s, I think, where the issue comes.   
  
But it feels like the pushback is towards the organization on the mandatory and the callback rather than the people that are taking the sick. And I don’t think that we’ve seen an increase in abuse; I think the people that are going to abuse are going to abuse, and people that aren’t – like generally, by and large, the vast majority of the work pool is willing and able and they pick up a lot of slack and they do a lot of things for the organization.   
  
So, I don’t think that we’ve – I think the utilization is different. I don’t think we’re seeing an abuse, necessarily, and I wouldn’t capture it in that regard.   
  
But I do think the conjunction of four-handed staffing with COVID is kind of what has driven staffing and some different things and like the inability to pick up the number of people that we need to properly staff. And that’s a national problem; that is not unique to us, that’s not unique to the [location], that’s not unique to the [State]. It is a national-level problem. [interruption]

Participant: And the new hires turn over, right? People leaving with two, three years’ experience, the amount who have left. I’ve never seen that in my limited career.

Participant: Well, and the second that we go to retirement availability, that’s had a huge effect on the work pool. When we allow – and we knew that Tier 2 was going to be a huge problem and aspect of this. But the second we go into a Tier 2 status, people – and I think we’ve had multiple conversations about this, you know, what, twelve years ago when Tier 2 came into being that people are going to utilize this as a stepping stool to get their education and get tuition reimbursement and then, move along to a better, more lucrative, and more promising profession and career.   
  
Our pension isn’t what it was, you know, the things that we used to be able to rely on to keep people kind of employed. People that are in Tier 1 are, by and large, like stuck to – for the most part, they’re stuck to the organization in which they started. Like there’s some small movement here and there but they’re at least tied to the state. Now, it’s portable and they can move from state to state to state. [Redacted] would probably have a better grasp on what that looks like on the retirement side of things or the portable 401 and 457 component.   
  
But I think there’s a lot of stuff that leads into this. I think COVID got tagged with a lot of the issues. I think it highlighted a lot of the issues that we were already seeing and the trends that were coming. I think the timing just so happened that eight to ten years after Tier 2 gets established, we’re running into these issues, which we were already running into them. We’re just having it – it’s exponential now because we are dropping off a lot of the Tier 1 personnel that we used to have that were keeping the organization kind of in a solid place.

Participant: And I would add to that, too, I think Chief [REDACTED]’s right on point when it comes to retirement system changes.   
  
I think the other thing is the economy, as well, right? It’s difficult for an individual starting out in this career making, you know, between $50,000 and $60,000 to have a young family and a house and rent and mortgage. And I think things have changed to drastically in the [state] that that’s forcing individuals to make different career choices.   
  
A lot of people that leave are not unhappy. I think they leave because they have just different and better opportunities, either financially or for the lifestyle they’re looking for.   
  
So, I think you add in all those factors; the retirement system, the cost of living here in [location], just what we can offer people as starting wages, and I think it all contributes to everything that the chiefs and captains have been talking about.

Participant: Yes, and I think back to the questions that were posed originally. I won’t answer about the employee health and that side of it; I’ll let the other individuals on this talk about that.  
  
But as far as COVID and seeing things adjusted, I'm sure of things that we could do different, and I’ll bet we get some conversation on mandatory vaccines versus non-mandatory vaccines and stuff like that. But at the end of the day – and I was a big part of the COVID response and the [county] response to COVID – you know, we were looking at all the information and relying on medical expertise and the doctors and CDC to identify what best practice was in a very dynamic and changing atmosphere.  
  
So, I don’t know what to do different and what we would do different. I think the vaccination piece is still argumentative but I still think that we probably would go down that road were we to have this again, right? And we’re going to run into the same issues on establishing a mandatory vaccine for any level of that.   
  
So, the two questions that were posed; I’ll let other people talk about the employee health side of it and then, their kind of take on the COVID response.

Participant: Yes, I was involved in a little bit of that response, as well. But I think overall, our organization did a pretty good job of taking what the current information was and putting it into practice, for the most part. We also, as things changed, we adapted and we communicated changes. We were doing a morning briefing at the beginning of it when there was just a lot of uncertainty with stuff.  
  
So, I think overall, we did pretty good. And I think kind of with Chief [REDACTED], I'm not sure if we really would do anything different. It would just depend on what the situation was. But overall, I felt like we did a decent job.

Participant: I would agree with that. And I think Chief [REDACTED] brings up a great point is all of these issues were just magnified by COVID and, therefore, COVID gets this stigma of creating all of this stuff. This stuff was already in the works and there are challenges that every organization is facing, or would be facing, without COVID. It’s just, like you said, accelerated, magnified.

Moderator: It sounds like, like you said, a lot of things were sort of blamed on COVID but were maybe things that were just magnified or brought to light because of COVID that were issues already.   
  
With looking at staffing, it sounds like that is a pretty complex problem that has a lot of things that are playing into it. And then, if a lot of people are taking sick leave, that can then impact other staff and people have to do additional work that they hadn’t planned for as a result.   
  
Are there things that you guys think would help with having more staff or retaining staff for longer, as that was something that was mentioned? I know it’s a very complex thing and obviously can’t be fixed. So, it’s just one thing but you know, what sorts of factors do you guys think might play the biggest role?

Participant: I think while we’ve already talked about wages, starting wages, or retirement incentives, things like that. There are bigger state issues probably than just organizationally other than pay.

Participant: And I think over the last 20 years, there’s been a shift in how people look at work. You know, it’s just not very common anymore for someone to work in the same job for 20, 30 years. It’s more common [interruption] for people to have multiple careers over a 20-, 30-year period.

Participant: “Career tourism,” that’s how I’ve heard it phrase.

Participant: Sorry, what’d you say?

Participant: I just said I’ve heard of the phrase, “it’s career tourism,” and that’s generally – and honestly, we’re going to need to change because I don’t think the workforce is changing short of a big downturn in the economy. And typically, that economy, not only for the jobs, that’s usually good for the fire service and I think government work, in general, but particularly, the fire service because this is a pretty attractive job at that point. It’s stable, relatively good benefits.   
  
But we’re going to have to adapt and probably change the way we’re doing things and get used to not having people around in 20 years. There’s going to be a lot more turnover. I think we’re just seeing the beginning of that.

Participant: Right. And to go back to Chief [REDACTED]’s point is, you know, not to put Tier 1 versus Tier 2 but you have those of us that we’re in, right? We know where our finish line is. So, we keep seeing people, these younger Tier 2 folks that move onto different things and the onus falls on us to keep the machine running. It’s challenging, it’s exhausting.

Moderator: Do you guys feels like there’s a good system in place to understand when people leave, the reasons that they’re leaving? For example, are there exit surveys done? Or is it more just perceptions of the reasons that people are leaving?

Participant: I know Chief [REDACTED] he talks to every single person that retires or leaves and I think he gets a good sense of why they’re leaving. I don’t know if that’s communicated back onto the battalion chief. I mean, I don’t think it’s a secret but I think we do a good job of capturing that.

Participant: Yes, I would agree. Chief does a wonderful job meeting with everyone. We meet with them, as well, when we do all their exit paperwork. What’s very difficult is a lot of people are not leaving because they’re upset. They’re not leaving – you know, that’s what makes it hard. It’d almost be easier if people were like, “You know, this is why we’re upset and this is why we’re leaving.” A lot of times, they’re leaving because they’re like, “You know, this was a great gig. I loved it. I love the men and women I work with and work for. But now I just want to go do something else.”   
  
And I think it’s a lot to what Captain [REDACTED] and Captain [REDACTED] were talking about is people don’t look at this as a long-term career like we did when we hired on. It’s a stepping stone, it’s a cool thing that they’ve done in their life. Their retirement is portable, being 401K contribution so they can move on and go make more money or finish up their degree or do whatever it is they’re doing.   
  
And I think culturally, the mindset has changed, too. A lot of people that leave are just like, “You know, I’m moving in with four or five buddies and we’re going to go travel Europe and this is what we’re going to do. I loved my time here. Maybe I might reapply in two or three years.” And that’s what makes it very difficult when people are leaving because we really don’t have reasons.   
  
Our turnover, although we are losing a lot of people and to us, it is shell shocking, our turnover is still very, very low compared to industry standards. We’re talking in the low-digit percents. We’re not in double-digit percentile of losing people overall. Not counting retirements, you know, just people that are leaving for whatever reason.   
  
So, although it is shocking for us because that is not what we’re culturally ready for, I think if you talk to almost any other organization and you say, you know, “We have a 10% turnover,” they would take that in a heartbeat.   
  
But the cost of us training people and getting to where they are efficient and effective as a team, it doesn’t happen overnight. And around that four- to six-year range is when they’re really, really getting into it and that’s when we’re starting to lose them and that’s the problem that, like Captain [REDACTED] said, we’re going to have to adjust. I don’t think the workforce is going to adjust; I think it’s going to be us as an organization. And when I say, “us,” I think it’s fire service, in general, it’s not just us. It’s nationwide.

Moderator: Great, great. This has been wonderful feedback. We really appreciate it. One of the things that we wanted to talk about – and we’re getting close to the end here so, we won’t spend a whole lot of time on this – but the way that we analyze things is through Total Worker Health competencies. And this is a way of organizing things to understand both ways that things function well and then, ways that things don’t so that we can improve them by looking at specific areas.   
  
So, those six areas are up on the screen. Those are subject matter expertise, advocacy engagement, program planning, implementation and evaluation, communication and dissemination, leadership and management, and partnership building and coordination. And overall, [COMPANY] does these things really well. Most people from the previous focus groups had positive things to share in all of these categories. And it sounds like from previous focus groups and today, that a lot of the things that can be improved are complicated to improve and are certainly better than they used to be and could only potentially be improved so much.  
  
So, before we end, I wanted to give everyone an opportunity; if you have something to say about an area that you think [COMPANY] does well or maybe doesn’t do well on any of these, if you have any thoughts that you’d like to share. Or if you have other thoughts, in general, something we haven’t touched on already that you’d like to share, as well.