




FROM FIREHOUSE TO FULFILLMENT

Health and Wellness in Retirement



FIRE FIGHTER WELLNESS

For Duty / For Life



A Commitment to Fire Fighter Physical, Psychological and Social Well-Being

Retirement **doesn't change the rules...it removes the structure**

The same behaviors that support operational readiness are the ones that determine how you transition out of the job and navigate retirement



WELLNESS OUTCOMES

Health- and fitness- related metrics that provide insight into the STATE of a fire fighter's well-being



WELLNESS HABITS

Health- and fitness- related behaviors that provide insight into the PROCESSES that support a fire fighter's well-being

WFI 'Igniting Change' Framework

A. **Defining** Wellness (Outcomes)

Establish the outcomes that matters most

B. **Pursuing** Wellness (Habits)

Reinforce behaviors that lead to better outcomes

C. **Supporting** Wellness

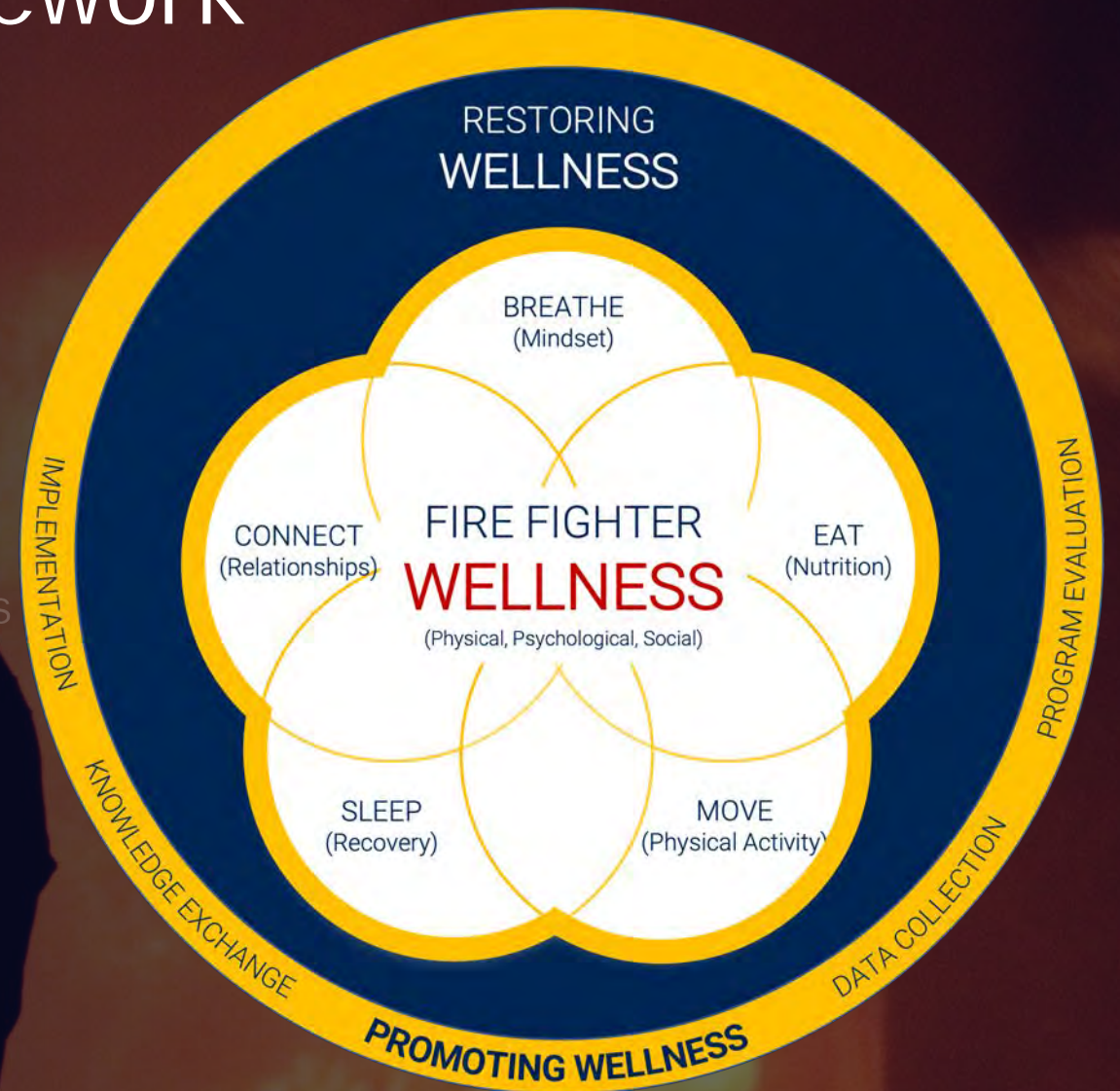
Build operational systems that make healthy choices

D. **Restoring** Wellness

Facilitate recovery, resilience, and reintegration

E. **Promoting** Wellness

Prioritize planning and program implementation



A dramatic scene of fire trucks at a city street intersection. The sky is filled with thick, dark smoke, suggesting a recent fire. Several fire trucks are lined up, with hoses laid out on the pavement. A white fire command truck is visible in the middle ground. In the background, a building with a sign that reads "COZY SPA" is visible. A street sign for "St Clair Ave" and a traffic light with a red light are also present. The overall atmosphere is somber and urgent.

DEFINING WELLNESS

DEFINING WELLNESS

Establish the Outcomes that Matter Most

HEALTH OUTCOMES

Cancer
Cardiovascular Disease
Type 2 Diabetes
Obesity
Metabolic Syndrome
Musculoskeletal Injuries
Anxiety
Depression
Burnout

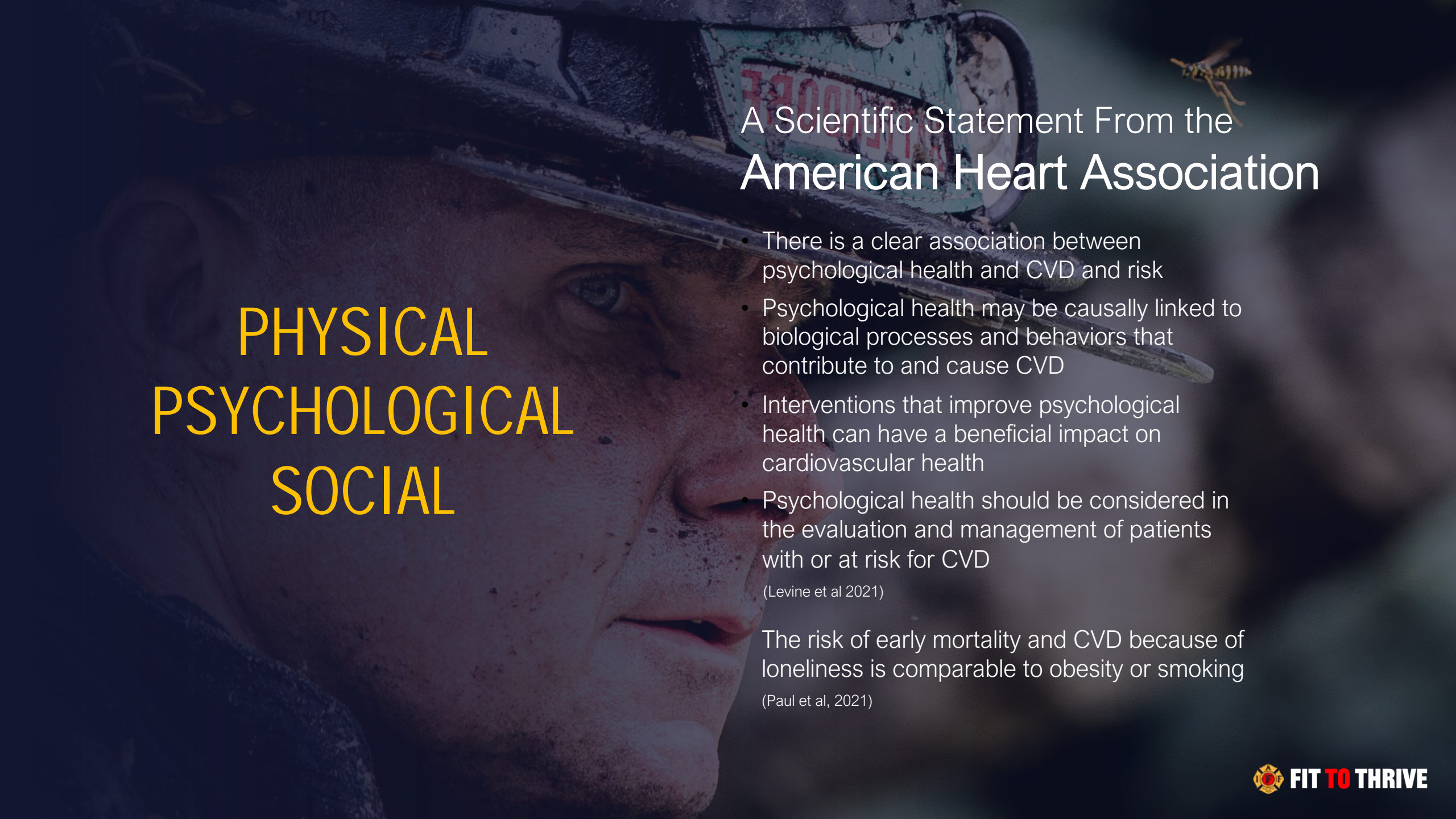
Resilience
Hearing Loss
Cognitive Function
Respiratory Function
Immune Function
Reproductive Health
Relationships
Quality of Life
Longevity

FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cardiorespiratory Health
Metabolic Health
Musculoskeletal Health
Musculoskeletal Injuries
Physical Resilience
Fatigue Resistance

Recovery
Work Capacity
Physical Readiness
Task Proficiency
Longevity
Quality of Life

While these outcomes are always important, they are revealed in retirement without the buffer of the job



PHYSICAL
PSYCHOLOGICAL
SOCIAL

A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association

- There is a clear association between psychological health and CVD and risk
- Psychological health may be causally linked to biological processes and behaviors that contribute to and cause CVD
- Interventions that improve psychological health can have a beneficial impact on cardiovascular health
- Psychological health should be considered in the evaluation and management of patients with or at risk for CVD

(Levine et al 2021)

The risk of early mortality and CVD because of loneliness is comparable to obesity or smoking

(Paul et al, 2021)

WELLNESS RESOURCES

Example Self-Reported Outcomes

1. *Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale*
(State of Mindfulness)
2. *Diet Quality Questionnaire*
(Global Dietary Recommendation Score)
3. *International Physical Activity Questionnaire*
(MET Minutes / Week **in** Work, Life and Play)
4. *Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index*
(Sleep Quality)
5. *Social Connectedness Scale*
(Belonging and Connection in Social Relationships)



PURSUIING

WELLNESS

PURSuing WELLNESS

Reinforce Behaviors that Lead to Better Outcomes



Mindfulness and Self-Regulation (**BREATHE**)



Dietary Habits and Nutrition (**EAT**)



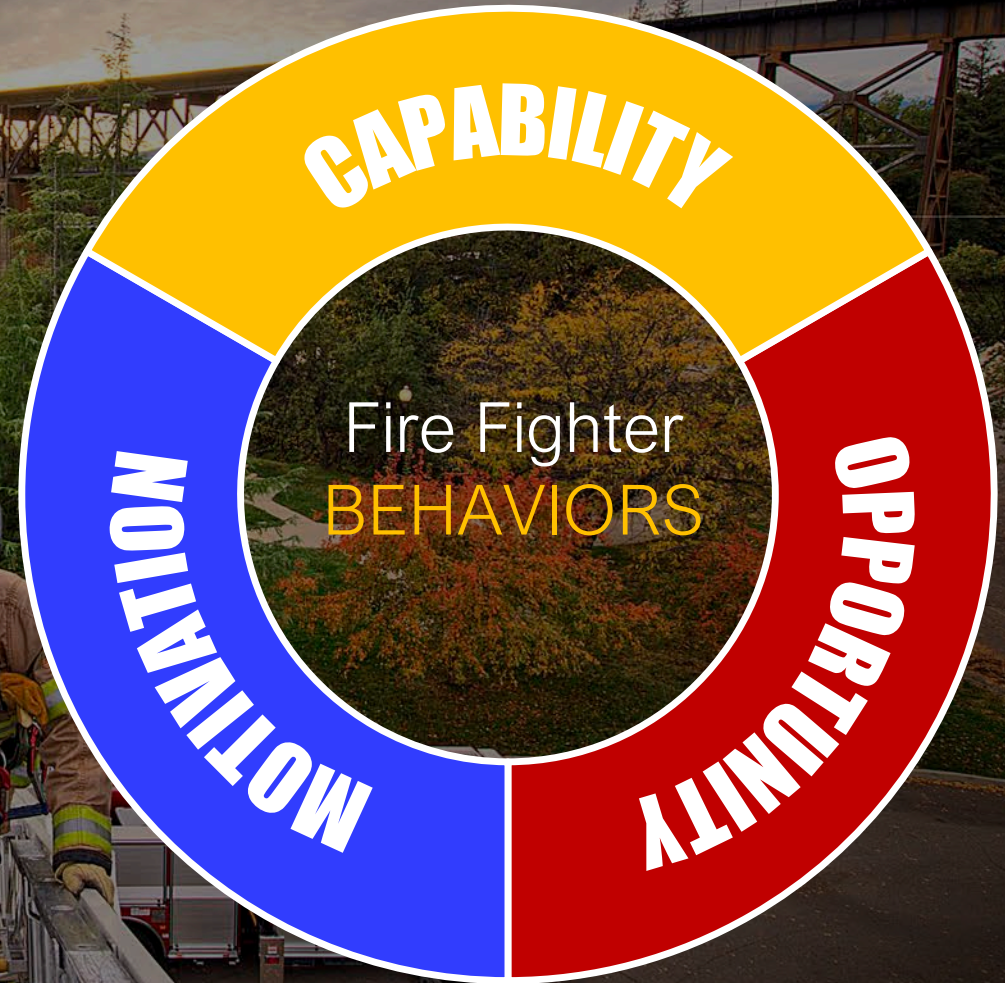
Physical Activity and Exercise (**MOVE**)



Sleep and Recovery (**SLEEP**)



Social Connection and Support (**CONNECT**)





BREATHE

Be more mindful

High levels of mindfulness are associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety and fewer PTSD symptoms amongst fire fighters

(Smith et al, 2011)

6 weeks of mindfulness training significantly reduced PTSD and depression symptom severity while increasing mindfulness

(Colgan et al, 2016)

A person with extensive tattoos on their arms is shown from the waist down, wearing a dark blue shirt. They are standing at a kitchen counter, using a large black knife to chop green vegetables on a light-colored wooden cutting board. Several whole carrots and a peeler are also on the board. In the background, another person's arm is visible, also working with vegetables. The scene is dimly lit, focusing on the hands and the food preparation.

EAT

Eat real food

Fruit and vegetable intake is associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and all cause mortality

(Aune et al, 2017)

Research-driven nutrition interventions focusing on habit-change result in improvements in heart health, body composition, cancer risk, and long-term sustainability

(Lynch et al, 2017)

MOVE

Be more active

26% reduction in cardiovascular mortality and higher levels of health-related quality of life

(Anderson et al, 2016)

10-50% lower risk of specific cancers

(Moore et al, 2016)

43% fewer poor mental health days, and 22% lower mental health burden

(Chekroud et al, 2018)

Significant changes in cardiorespiratory fitness, strength, mobility and movement behaviors

(Frost et al 2015)

SLEEP

Build a sleep routine

Insufficient sleep has been linked with increased risks of weight gain, obesity, injury, cardiovascular disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and depression

(Keckland 2016)

Fire fighters who get more than 6 hours sleep following 2+ days off from work experienced lower emotional exhaustion

(Wolkow et al 2019)

More than 6 hours sleep during overnight shift mediated the effect of mental health conditions on burnout

(Wolkow et al 2019)

CONNECT

Build meaningful relationships

Poor social relationships, loneliness, and low perceived social support carry similar risks of premature death to smoking 15 cigarettes a day – higher than obesity and physical inactivity.

(Holt-Lunstad et al 2015)

29% higher risk of CHD incident,
32% higher risk of stroke

(Valtorta et al 2016)

4 weeks of group health significantly improved mental health and well-being (i.e. depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and life satisfaction)

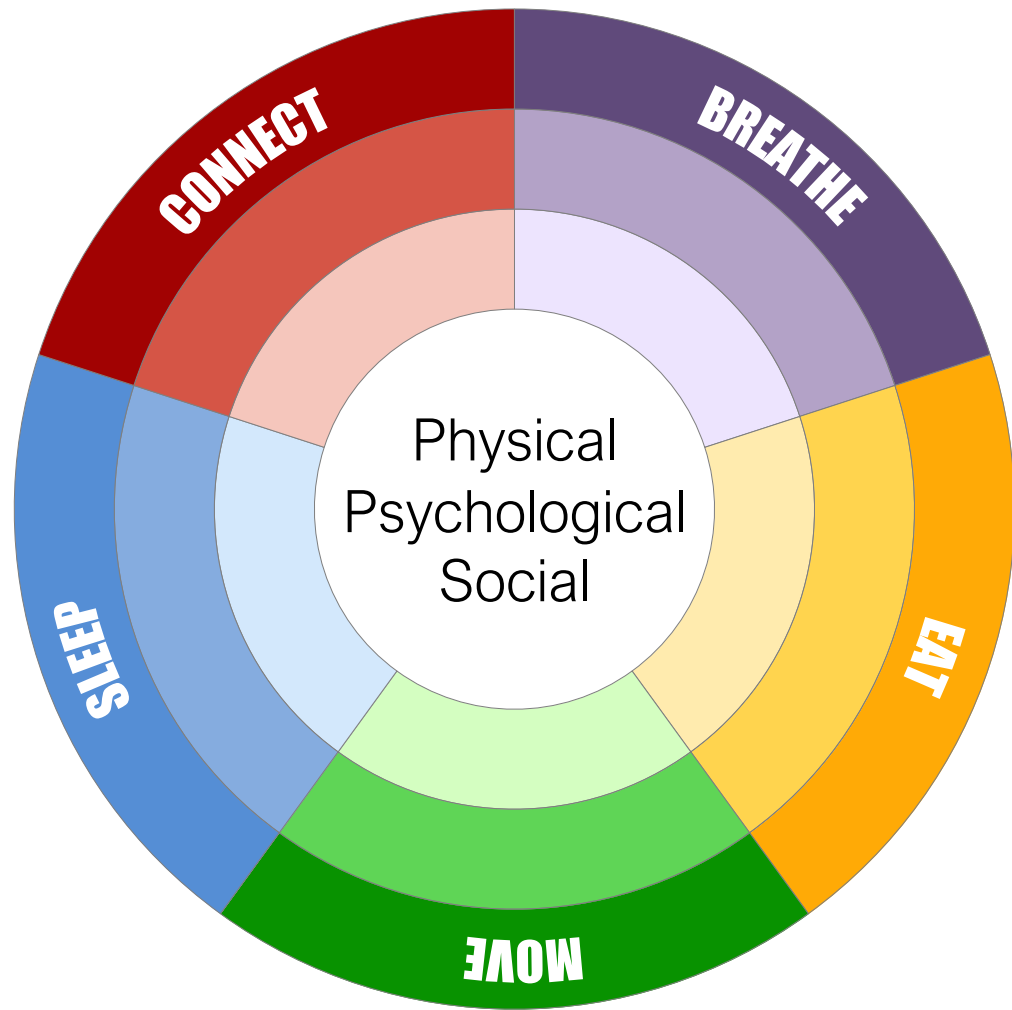
(Haslem et al 2016)

View as **COMPLEMENTARY** Habits

Breathe, Eat, Move, Sleep, Connect

As a fire fighter, each of these habits are influenced largely by the job.

In retirement, they are influenced by factors beyond the job. This means that fire fighters will need to create new strategies to sustain them.



Fire Fighter Well-Being

Wellness is a continuously evolving pursuit that will be influenced by several factors that shape a collection of behaviors.

It is the collective contribution of these behaviors that will influence our health status and overall well-being.

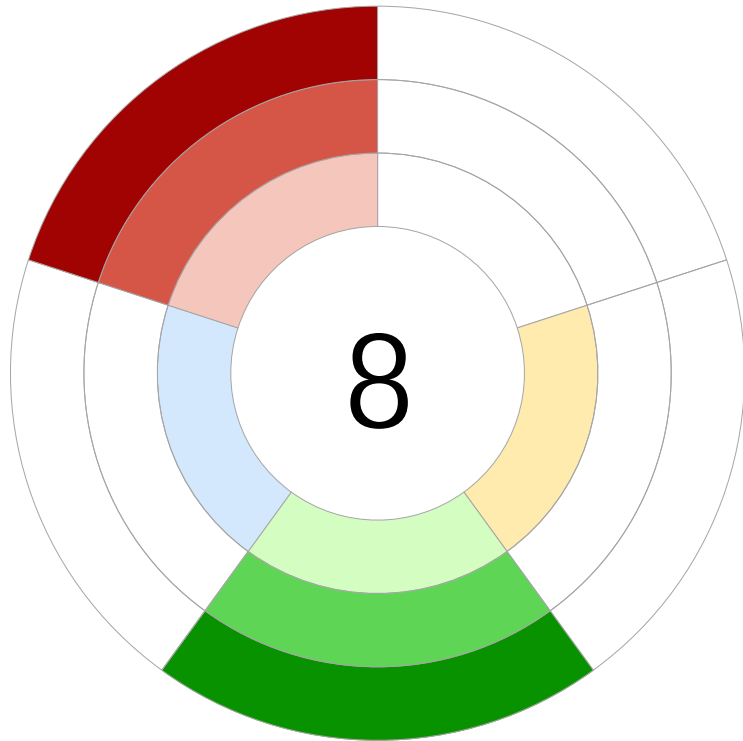
LEVEL 0: Poor / Erratic

LEVEL 1: Superficial / Occasional

LEVEL 2: Intentional / Consistent

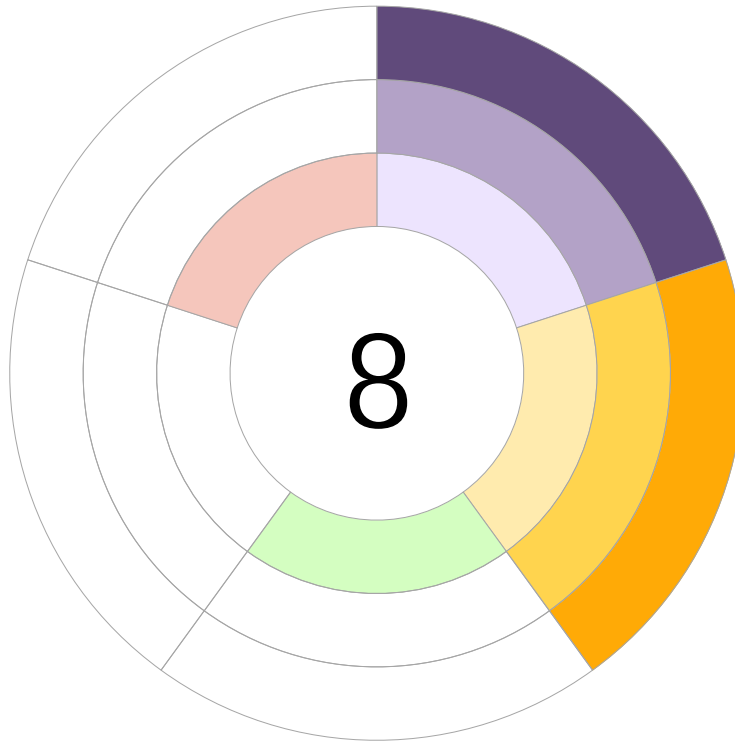
LEVEL 3: Intuitive / Integrated

Which individual is most at risk after retirement?
Who has the structure to sustain their behaviors when the job is gone?



Fire Fighter A

Single, no kids, unlimited overtime, health conscious, supportive peer group



Fire Fighter B

Divorced, 3 kids, union executive, periodic low back pain, small peer group



Fire Fighter C

Retired, 7 grand kids, multiple CVD risk factors, frequent travel, weekly pickle ball

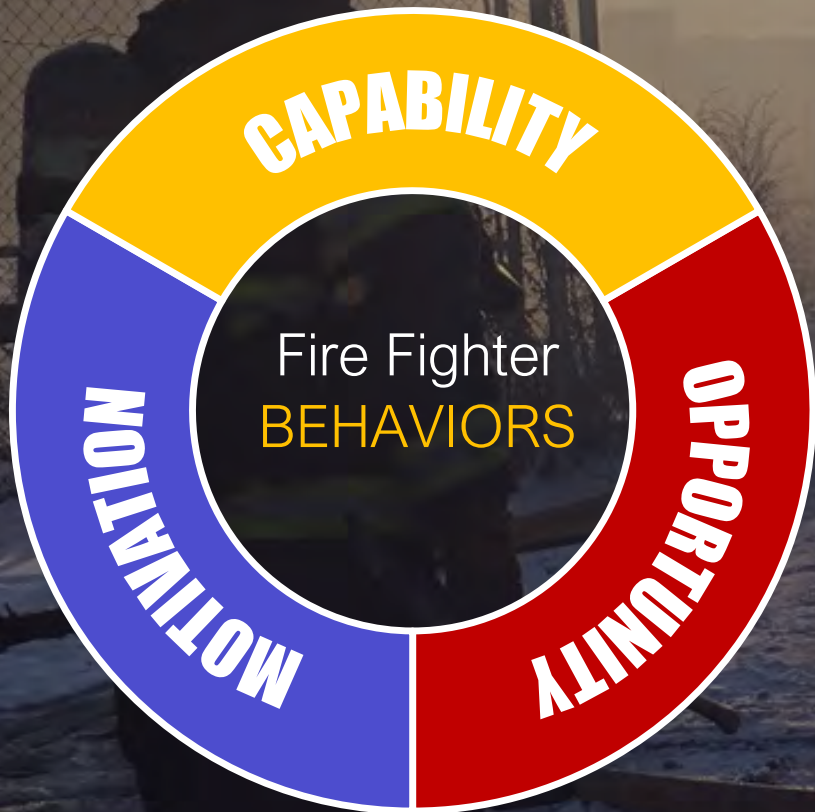
GROUP ACTIVITY

Identify the state of your current behaviors

(Which of these behaviors would change the most if you retired tomorrow?)

CHANGING BEHAVIORS

Factors that Influence our Desired Behaviors

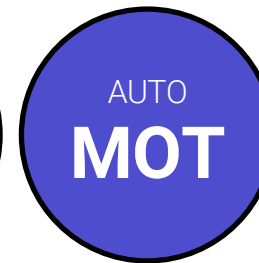
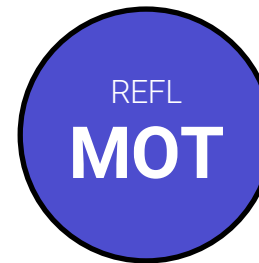
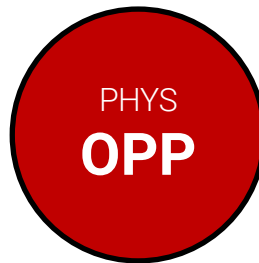
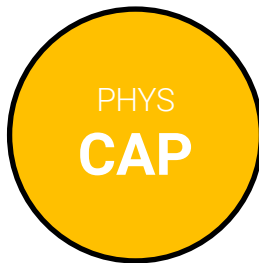


Must acknowledge the factors that are influencing or could influence our behaviors
(as obstacles or facilitators)

EAT

What best supports your DIETARY HABITS?

1. The ability to eat healthy foods without gastric distress.
2. Knowing how to make healthy meals that meet needs.
3. Having the means to purchase and make healthy food.
4. Seeing family/colleagues engage in healthy dietary habits.
5. Believing that healthy diet will have positive impact on health.
6. Feeling the need to eat well or guilty if not eating well.



MOVE

What best supports your ACTIVITY HABITS?

1. The physical ability to engage in moderate-vigorous activity.
2. Knowing how to be physically active in many environments.
3. Having the time, space and equipment to be active.
4. Receiving support from members in social networks.
5. Having the self-confidence to engage in regular exercise.
6. Wanting to exercise and fully enjoying the time spent active

GROUP ACTIVITY

Identify factors that are influencing your behaviors
(How would these factors change in retirement?)

The Habit Loop

A cue triggers a craving, which motivates a response. The responses then prompts some form of reward.

Retirement removes many existing cues (good and bad). If these cues are not replaced the behaviors will disappear.





4 TIPS TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIORS

Make it **OBVIOUS** (Cue)

Be active at specific times in dedicated spaces

Make it **ATTRACTIVE** (Craving)

Link to something you enjoy or crave

Make it **EASY** (Response)

Use short bouts, limited equipment, “go-to” activities

Make it **SATISFYING** (Reward)

Reward yourself immediately after the activity

Make it **OBVIOUS**

Change the Cue!

CAPABILITY

Highlight the benefits and the steps to adopt a particular behavior

OPPORTUNITY

Modify the environment so specific cues/triggers prompt a response

MOTIVATION

Pair the desired behavior with an existing habit

Make it **ATTRACTIVE**

Change the Craving!

CAPABILITY

Increase capability or reduce the perceived effort or difficulty

OPPORTUNITY

Make the target habit more accessible and convenient

MOTIVATION

Link the habit to intrinsic motives or personal values

Make it **EASY**

Change the Response!

CAPABILITY

Match the current skill level to the target response

OPPORTUNITY

Modify the environment to make it easier to adopt the target behavior

MOTIVATION

Prioritize consistency (frequency) over perfection (volume or intensity)

Make it **SATISFYING**

Change the Reward!

CAPABILITY

Teach small actional steps and target sense of accomplishment

OPPORTUNITY

Create a group or join others in adopting the target behavior

MOTIVATION

Reward yourself immediately after finishing with something enjoyable

GROUP ACTIVITY

Changing behaviors pre and post retirement
(What cues would replace those related to the job?)

SUPPORTING

The Transition to Retirement

Active Fire Fighters

Normalize and reinforce supportive behaviors through training, culture, expectations

Ensure consistent opportunities to engage in the target behaviors (time, access, peer support)

Reinforce self-care and personal identity

Transitioning Fire Fighters

Prepare for the loss of structure through education, planning prompts, resources

Provide guidance on replacement cues and routines and involve family support

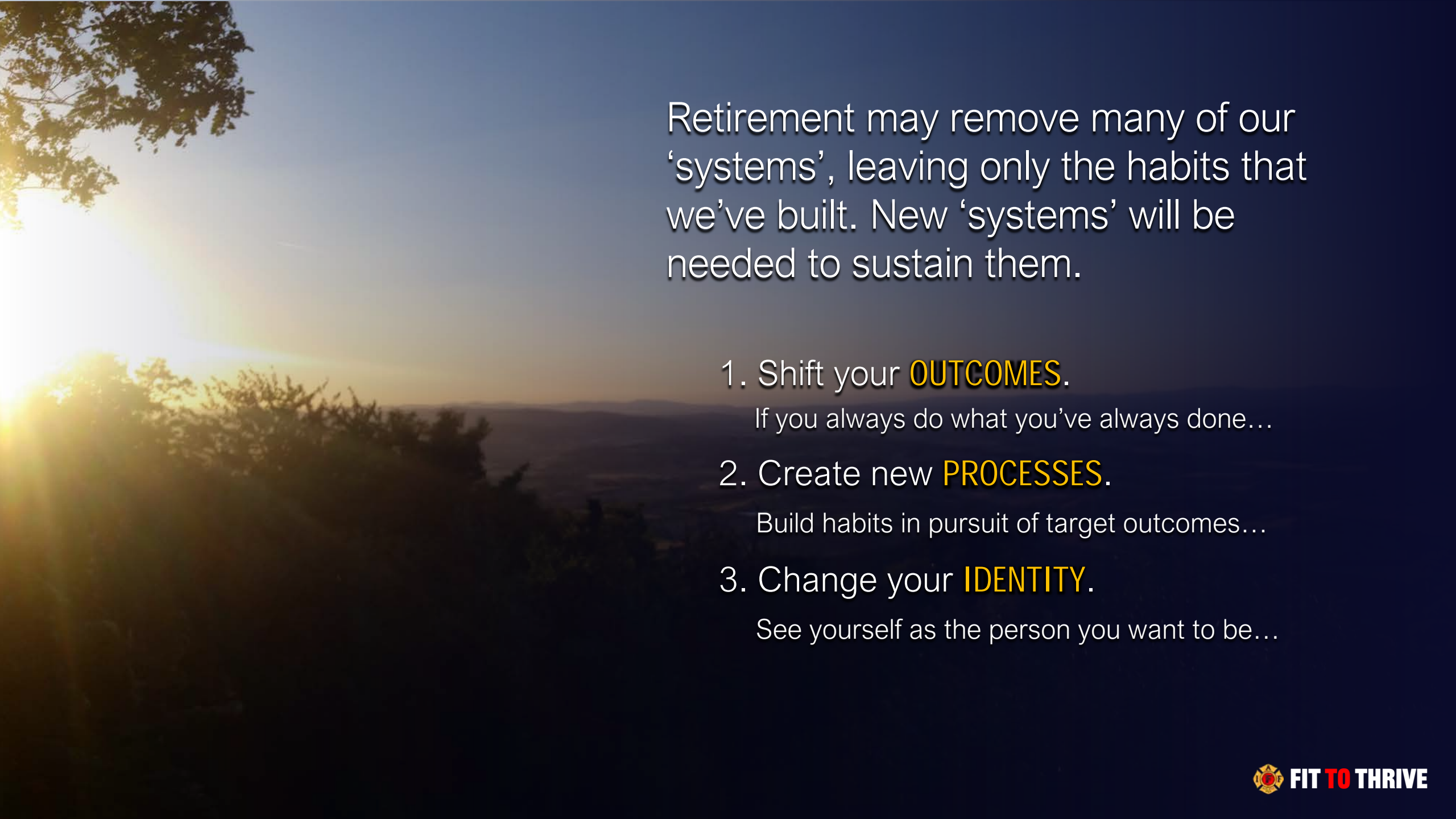
Establish peer networks and mentorship opportunities

Retired Fire Fighters

Maintain options to stay connected to people and organization

Provide pathways to maintain access to resources, opportunities, referrals, etc.

Reinforce personal identity beyond the job



Retirement may remove many of our 'systems', leaving only the habits that we've built. New 'systems' will be needed to sustain them.

1. Shift your **OUTCOMES**.

If you always do what you've always done...

2. Create new **PROCESSES**.

Build habits in pursuit of target outcomes...

3. Change your **IDENTITY**.

See yourself as the person you want to be...



FROM FIREHOUSE TO FULFILLMENT

Health and Wellness in Retirement



EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"

For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

