



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

**COMPANY OFFICERS:
THE KEY TO
ORGANIZATIONAL
RESILIENCE**

March 30, 2026





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COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY





**What do you as a
Company Officer have
to do with the mental
health of your crew?**

**That's the Peer Team's
job, right?**





Company Officers: The Key to Organizational Resiliency

NOTES:

Mission success in high-risk professions depends on the organization's ability to adapt, and sustain its people

If I try real hard
I can make it to
C shift! ☆



COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

“Resilience-building programs are effective, but only within a culture that promotes resilience.”



(Sweeney et al., 117)



**MORE THAN JUST THE
DESIGNATED ADULT**

“

Supervisors may play a particularly important role in creating a supportive work environment that leads to better outcomes for fire fighters exposed to traumatic events.”

(Stanley et. al., 2019)



“

Company officers (e.g., captains, lieutenants) were regularly recognized as key in identifying when individuals needed additional help in managing their reactions to experiences”

(Jahnke, et. al., 2014)



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INJURY DUE TO TRAUMA

TRAUMA - An event or circumstance that results in **physical**, **emotional**, or life-threatening **harm**, leaving lasting negative effects on an individual's well-being

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)



FIRE FIGHTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INJURIES

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Post-Traumatic Stress
- Emotional Trauma
- Depression
- Incident-related Stress/Anxiety
- Burnout
- Substance Use Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Suicide



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STIGMA IN THE FIRE SERVICE

Company Officers Can Reduce Fire Fighter Behavioral Health Stigma

- Normalize
- Understand internal and external
- Officers' attitude towards behavioral health
- Organizational attitudes towards behavioral health



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This study shows that in a sample of male fire fighters, confidence and non-stigmatizing attitudes towards mental illness appear to be significantly associated with manager behavior”

(Bryan et. al., 2018)





EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

“

Being intentional about channeling the highs and lows of emotions is critical for every individual who seeks to perform at the highest levels.”

(Sweeney et. al., 335)





What is Emotional Intelligence, and why do you think it is important for our fire fighters and us as officers?



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

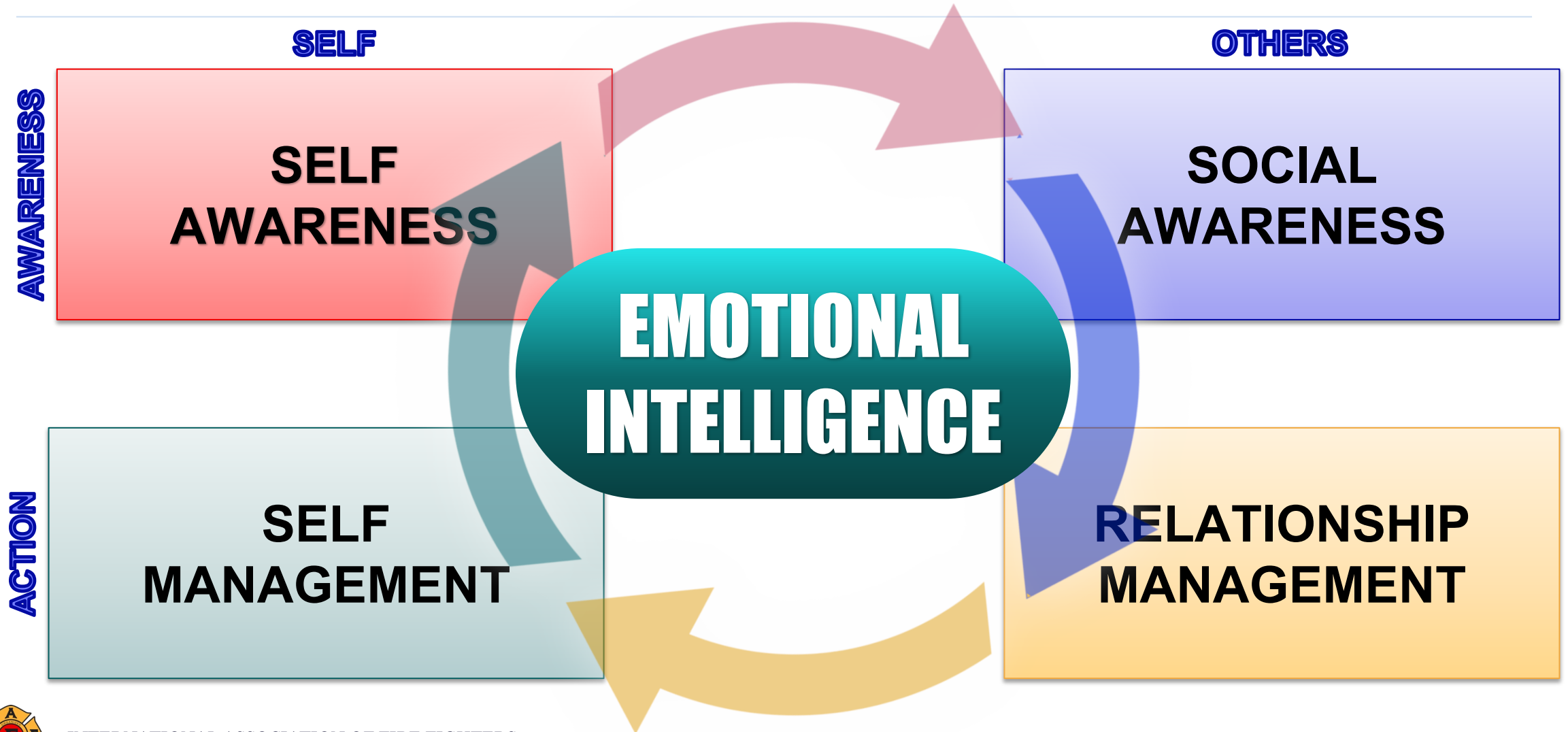


“The set of abilities (verbal and nonverbal) that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own and others’ emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures.”

(Boyar, et. al., 2023)



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: KEY COMPONENTS



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE = SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

- Self awareness
- Stress management
- Empathy
- Communication
- Increase self confidence and self acceptance
- Increase capacity to forgive mistakes
- Increase ability to accept change
- Accept accountability

Help maintain emotional control during challenging situations

Increase ability to manage your emotions: **Respond Vs. React**

Increase ability to correctly read the emotions of others

Better understand your abilities and limits

Better understand crews' abilities and limits

(Boyar, et. al., 2023; McGuire, C., 2023; Kavitha & Rajan, 2023)



“

Previous generations of first responders sought to control unwanted emotions by shutting them off or denying their presence, but those practices were ineffective because they ignored enormously important sources or information about how to respond to critical incidents.”

(Sweeney et. al., 335)



“

It is important to be able to leverage appropriate emotional motivators such as determination, courage, and honor.”

(Sweeney et. al., 335)





“WE WERE SOLDIERS” (2002)



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



Emotional Intelligence involves recognizing, understanding, and managing your own and others' emotions.

- **Perceived distress** without the soldier having to articulate it
- **Regulated his own authority and ego**, choosing compassion over correction
- **Responded with empathy**, addressing the underlying issue instead of publicly shaming the soldier
- **Built relational trust** through action rather than words

He didn't bark orders. He didn't call attention to weakness. He demonstrated that leadership is service.





**What can you do as a
Company Officer to
build the Emotional
Intelligence of your
crew?**



COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1. Anchor it to the mission
2. Teach it through realistic scenarios
3. Build simple, repeatable skills
4. Make officers the model
5. Integrate it into existing training
6. Emphasize that EQ protects firefighters
7. Keep it led by firefighters







NORMALIZING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

COMBS
©2016
DRAWN BY FIRE
FIRE RESCUE
MAGAZINE

THIS RATHER HURTFUL
TONGUE-LASHING
WILL BE FOLLOWED
WITH A HUG, RIGHT?



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“

The main lesson is that leaders must know their people, know the crucible in which they operate, establish a culture of catharsis, and know that they are a principle source of resilience.”

(Sweeney et. al., 65)



TALK ABOUT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Build confidence with having discussions about behavioral health
- Discuss without stigma
- Be open about your own experiences
- Your emotions effect everyone around you
- Read the room
- Active listening
- Don't try to fix anything



“

You Don't Have to be a Mental Health Professional to Talk About Mental Health with Your Crew.”

(Bryan et. al., 2018)



SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Training
- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Manage Expectations
- Communication
- Outings
- The Kitchen Table
- Meals
- Down Time
- Humor
- Fitness
- Sports



BUILDING/MAINTAINING CREW BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- **TRUST** – Build an Environment of Trust
- Behavioral Health Training
- Build/Maintain Good Relationships
- Pre-Plan
 - FD culture
 - Manage expectations
 - Plan for reality
 - What do members need





**What can you do, on a
daily basis, to
normalize behavioral
health in your ~~station?~~**

FIREHOUSE

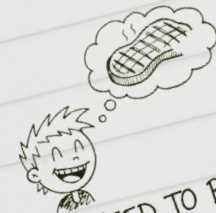


COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

NORMALIZING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

1. Treat it like any other readiness factor
2. Speak about it openly and routinely
3. Share appropriately from your own experience
4. Conduct regular check-ins
5. Use plain language
6. Reinforce that reactions are normal
7. Highlight performance benefits
8. Publicly support people who seek help
9. Include it in after action conversations
10. Protect confidentiality

BE CONSISTENT



"MAN I NEED TO BUY THESE GUYS A STEAK"





PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



**What does
“Psychological Safety”
mean to you?**

Why is it important?



“

Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.”

-Amy Edmondson



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- **When fire fighters trust that they can speak openly**
 - They share information sooner
 - Admit limits faster
 - Back each other up more effectively
 - Errors are caught before they grow
 - Learning accelerates
 - Cognitive load decreases
 - Adaptability under stress rises
- **When people feel safe to speak, the team gets smarter, faster, and more reliable.**





“WE WERE SOLDIERS” (2002)



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY UNDER EXTREME FAILURE

1. It separates responsibility from blame
2. It protects performance under trauma
3. It prevents moral injury from becoming identity
4. It models leadership culture
5. Psychological Safety is proven when:
 - Systems fail
 - Mistakes have consequences
 - Emotions run high
 - Stakes are life and death





What can you, as an officer, do to create a psychologically safe place for your crew?



COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

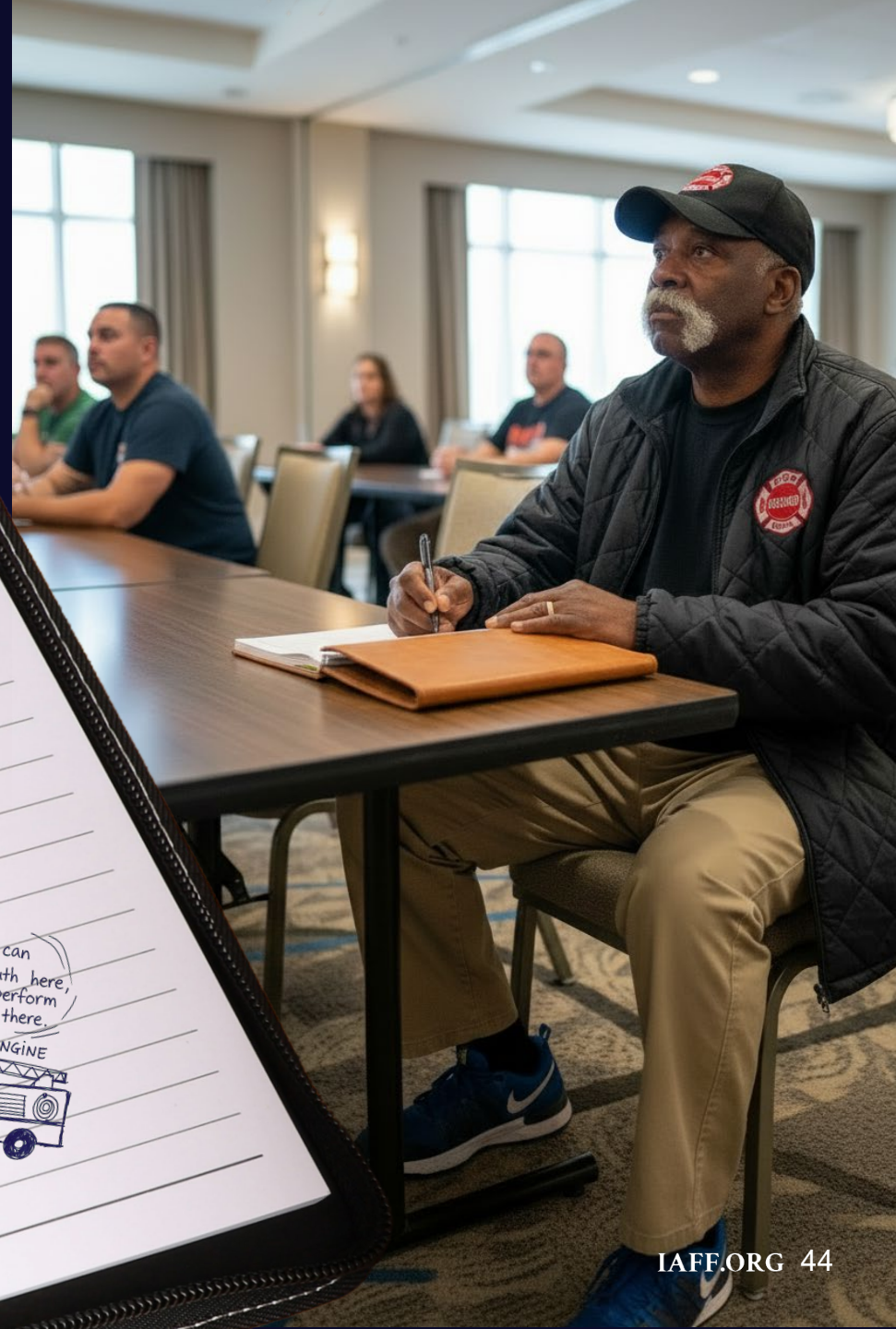
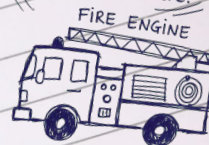
- 1) Make respect the baseline
- 2) Respond well when someone speaks up
- 3) Admit your own fallibility
- 4) Make learning the goal
- 5) Protect people who take interpersonal risk
- 6) Keep communication predictable
- 7) Follow through
- 8) Be present after calls
- 9) Reinforce belonging



Wish the Chief would take this class!!



If people can tell the truth here, we will perform better out there.





POTENTIALLY TRAUMATIC EVENTS



**What do you think of
when we say,
“Potentially Traumatic
Event”?**

**Why do we say,
“potentially”?**



“

Although [first responders] are far more likely than the general population to develop PTSD, this does not mean that a PTSD trajectory is inevitable.”

(Sweeney et. al., 143)



POTENTIALLY TRAUMATIC EVENTS



Right after a Potentially Traumatic Event (PTE)

- It can take 24-72 hours for someone to process a PTE
- Maslow – Practical Needs
 - Food
 - Shower / Clean up
 - Safety
 - Family
 - Social Support
- Anything else in your Pre-Plan



“

Quality sleep is essential in any stress management program.”

(Sweeney et. al., 71)



GIVE MEMBERS TIME TO DECOMPRESS

- Stay out of service
 - Put everything back in service together
- Talk about the incident
 - Don't push
 - Not a critique
 - Positive reframing
 - Education
 - Training
 - Cohesion
 - Culture of catharsis
 - Promoting coping strategies
 - Instilling a sense of commitment, control, and challenge



“

The memory is likely to never be forgotten, so the goal is to manage and master it.”

(Ehlers et al.)





**What will you do in the
hours and days that
follow a Potentially
Traumatic Event?**





COMPANY OFFICERS: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY



POTENTIALLY
TRAMATIC
EVENTS

Thanks Gordon →

1. Re-establish physical needs first
2. Create decompression time
3. Acknowledge the difficulty of the call
4. Bring the crew together
5. Normalize common reactions
6. Watch behavior over the next few shifts
7. Offer resources without forcing them
8. Model healthy behavior
9. Protect the crew from unnecessary noise
10. Remind them they performed with purpose



“

It's not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

— Theodore Roosevelt

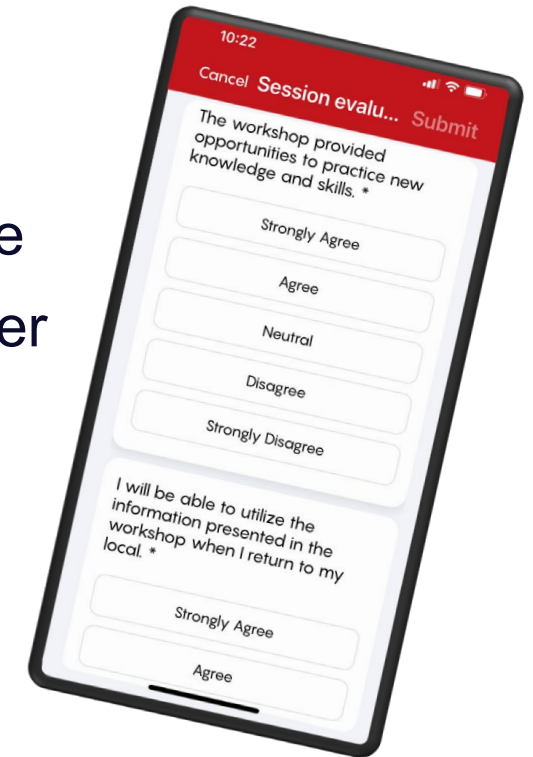




THANK YOU!
ANY QUESTIONS?

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.

