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Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the emergency management department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts.

Bushra Mollick ([00:23](#)):

Hello everyone, and thank you for listening. I'm Bushra Mollick.

Allison Pennisi ([00:27](#)):

And I'm Allison Pennisi and you are our listeners. And as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can. So feel free to listen to 'Prep Talk' on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on social media, on our Twitter [@nycemergencymgt](#), Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and much more.

Bushra Mollick ([00:46](#)):

In this episode, we will be talking with two individuals who are helping build the next generation of emergency managers through education. Please welcome, Sal Puglisi of the Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management, and Anita Sher, assistant commissioner at New York City Emergency Management. Thank you both for being here.

Anita Sher ([01:05](#)):

Thank you. It's Wonderful to be here. Thank you for having us.

Sal Puglisi ([01:09](#)):

Thank you.

Allison Pennisi ([01:10](#)):

Sal and Anita, thank you so much for joining us. Sal, let's start with you. Can you share your role with our listeners? And how do you feel the emergency management field has changed over time?

Sal Puglisi ([01:23](#)):

I joined the founding staff at UASEM in 2013. I kind of feel like my entire career prepared me for this job at the High School for Emergency Management. I'm a 23-year EMT serving the City in different capacities, also as a volunteer firefighter. 9/11 kind of drove me to go back to school and finish up my bachelor's degree. Post-9/11 the City was in that phase of how do we help and how do we rebuild, and moving forward with citizenship? And I decided to go back and finish school and I ended up becoming a teaching fellow.

Sal Puglisi ([01:58](#)):

I ended up becoming a special education teacher in the Bronx, Fordham section, and did that for a few years. And I came across this interesting concept of the High School for Emergency Management in New York City. And when I read the posting for the job, it just screamed my name, and I said, maybe I can become a special education teacher teaching a subject there. Called. Literally the principal answered the

phone on like the second ring, asked for my resume, called me back within five minutes and said, "We'd like to hire you as the career and technical education teacher, not a special education position," and I kind of jumped on that, thought that'd be probably the coolest job ever.

Sal Puglisi ([02:33](#)):

The caveat was, it had never been done before. We fortunately had amazing founding partners that were able to sit with us and kind of build curriculum that didn't exist at a high school level ever before. So for example, like our ninth grade curriculum is kind of all about personal preparedness and teaching them the basics of emergencies and disasters and how to get their family ready. And then as the children progress, students rather, progress into the 10th grade, it more about how their impact and family now leads to the bigger community and how different communities then build up into a city of people that are ready for disasters and emergencies.

Sal Puglisi ([03:09](#)):

About the 11th grade students then have to pick a kind of direction. We have two pathways. We have a emergency medicine pathway, which leads to an EMT certification, or a cybersecurity pathway with technology that's just kind of blooming now and taking its root. I would definitely say that the change in emergency management has been for us, especially with the students we teach, social media and technology, the data tools that are available, the live data kind of drives the instruction, kids are able to see things live. I was a CDC fellow for the summer of 2019. Little eerie there, right? So I learned all about epidemiology. And when I came back in 2020 in September, when we started that school year, we started teaching how epidemiology works in emergency management with flues and that kind of thing, not knowing those basic lessons blew out with the pandemic. And we were kind of monitoring that. And the technology that was available was outstanding. Kids really got to make predictions and analyze data in real time.

Sal Puglisi ([04:08](#)):

The other thing I think that's changed in emergency management for the better is definitely the engagement process. I think there's a lot more outreach, especially since pandemic, to underserved and overlooked communities in New York City. I think the outreach has been amazing and I think that's going to continue to grow. My lessons learned? I think it's going to be not just in emergency management, but teaching in general and life lessons thus far is definitely listening more than speaking, expect the unexpected and always have empathy. I think those three things are my most important lessons and you can't go wrong with those.

Allison Pennisi ([04:40](#)):

Thank you for those insights. Anita, what about you?

Anita Sher ([04:44](#)):

Right after 9/11, I joined the agency and worked in a variety of different roles and ultimately became the assistant commissioner for training and exercises in the OC operations. And in this capacity, it allowed me to come in contact with the emergency management high school. Originally what happened is we were approached by the urban assembly, which is a non-profit organization that partners with the Department of Education to stand up schools, the academia with the technical school approach and the urban assembly has stood up about, I think, 12 different types of schools with different sort of focuses or themes. And so they approached us when they were thinking about standing up the Emergency

Management High School, and we thought it was a wonderful idea and a great way to move toward the professionalization of this field. We already saw that on the university level, you could start to earn a diploma in this area, but what a unique opportunity to have a high school where students can begin at a very early stage to think about these concepts and ideas.

Anita Sher ([05:52](#)):

I think it was also very appealing to me because I know that there are a lot of students who struggle academically, and if you offer them a theme or a topic or some something real to kind of anchor them in they're learning, it really helps draw them in and keep their interest and give them a way to succeed academically and otherwise, and really feel good about their academic backgrounds. Yeah, so we were really enthusiastic about creation of the Emergency Management High School and offered our services and partnership right away.

Anita Sher ([06:25](#)):

And then when Sal came on board as the lead instructor, we began to work closely with him on thinking through academically, how you introduce emergency management concepts to the students. It's challenging because we as adults think a little differently and have much more background and experience coming into the field, for students, this is all fresh and new. How do we break this information down in a way that is digestible for students, first in the ninth grade, then in the 10th grade, then 11th grade and 12th grade, sort of build layers and build the concepts and complexities? So that was really an interesting and challenging process. I think Sal, you would say we had a good time. We had a good time. We did a lot of white boarding. I remember that.

Allison Pennisi ([07:14](#)):

So, obviously you've brokered this partnership with the Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management. Obviously the field has changed over time. You've been working with New York City Emergency Management, like you said, since after 9/11. What lessons learned have you carried into your work today, especially not only as an assistant commissioner, but also as you've been working to help build the future generation of emergency managers?

Anita Sher ([07:42](#)):

I think in terms of lessons learned and also sort of the direction and changes that I've seen, just to take a step back, I guess when I first started in this business, most of emergency management was made up of a bunch of cowboys. It was interesting to see sort of how the evolution of the field has changed and evolved and become a much more professionalized field. And also how expertise has diversified. Early on, it was really about finding people who had field experience and responding to emergencies in the city. But over time, we began to evolve and grow and we needed to find planners. We needed to find people who were good writers. We needed to find people who had legal background. We needed to find people who had IT experience, communications experience because as the field evolved and grew, there was sort of a need for diversifying and expanding.

Anita Sher ([08:46](#)):

And I think that that really makes the field so exciting for young people because they can come at it from a variety of different perspectives. Someone who is interested in IT and computers can support and find a place in emergency management. Someone who is interested in communications can find a place, someone who has, who's interested in law can find a place. I think that's what's so unique is how

this has grown and expanded for young people. It offers a lot of opportunities and ways of entering into the field.

Allison Pennisi ([09:19](#)):

Thanks so much for that, Anita. Sal, this next question is for you. The Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management is a public career and technical high school focused on teaching the skills necessary for entry into the field of emergency management. So first off, congratulations, because the school was recently recognized as the Ready School of the Year, which, for our listeners, is an honor given by the Ready New York program to a school for its commitment to preparedness. Sal, why don't you tell us a little bit about the school, its mission and the work you've done to build the next generation of emergency managers?

Sal Puglisi ([09:52](#)):

Sure. And thank you. The staff and the students at the high school are super excited about this award. The school was developed to prepare students for college and career. As Anita pointed out, New York City, our school is a public school. We don't really filter or screen students. Anybody can apply and get in. It's kind of cool that we can use emergency management to kind of drive the instruction. So you have a disaster, a topic that kids can kind of buy in to and they get super excited about it and they start reading and researching, and then they're not even realizing anymore they're learning things. And they kind of get just caught up into that sense of excitement. It's just a completely different field. So our school really has focused on preparing kids for college and career. We like to throw out novel problems and have them go into the communities and try to solve them.

Sal Puglisi ([10:46](#)):

One great example is our Hands to Heart CPR team. Started out as a class assignment where we were looking at ambulance response times across different community districts in New York City. Kids start to notice a trend. We were looking at different areas in response times and we then overlapped another map and said, well, where are the most cardiac arrests or priority calls? And we start to see again a theme of response times and priority calls were kind of overlapping in the same area. Kids then, like the light went off, and kids start to realize, well, I live in that neighborhood, my friend lives in this neighborhood and they started to connect to it. So they started to identify with the problem and it was a great learning moment having kids actually do research, pull up data and, and get involved in a community issue.

Sal Puglisi ([11:33](#)):

And then the problem became, how do we solve it? What can we do as teenagers to kind of jump in there and do something for the community? And this Hands to Heart CPR team kind of evolved from that concept where they said, "Hey, why don't we offer like hands only CPR, go out into these communities, target these populations, the communities that we live in and give them the tools to least be prepared to provide first aid until that ambulance does arrive in those first crucial minutes of survival?" So, that's one of the big kind of takeaways. And the mission of our school is to kind of follow through with those concepts is identifying problems and going out and contributing.

Sal Puglisi ([12:11](#)):

With the two set pathways, we definitely try to give our kids as much exposure to the different aspects and facets of emergency management. One of the coolest things which hopefully gets to continue after

the pandemic is our partnership with the FDNY where our incoming ninth grade class in the fall gets to go out to The Rock, which is Randalls Island, you get to train like firemen for a day. Talk about welcome to high school. Literally jumping off, putting out fires, dressing up as firemen. It kind of gives them that one aspect now of firefighting, things that most kids don't get to do. We've teamed up with Region II FEMA. We've done a couple of compari-thons with them where we've actually got out and collected data with NYC EM on the Notify NYC app. I think we did that in 2019. We did some surveys and collected some data. We've been very fortunate to get the Shippy grant. It's a teacher passion grant that helped fund us. We got our first grant for 25,000, purchased all of the CPR equipment that we take out to our community events.

Sal Puglisi ([13:12](#)):

We will also apply and we're funded by Shippy again, to start a drone club where students now can go out and learn how to fly a drone manually, then learn the systems that are updated in the newer fancier drones. And then at the end of the course that they take, they actually can become FAA certified pilots for unmanned aircraft at age 16. And that actually opens up some careers already for kids while they're still in high school. And our newest venture I think, for this year is CIMS at the high school level. We're working with our folks here at NYCEM to help bring that program down to a high school level where kids can get a better understanding of what responses in New York City, especially if the heading out to careers and medicine and emergency management or technology.

Sal Puglisi ([13:59](#)):

Some of the past internships we've had, we've been doing internships, like Anita had mentioned earlier, with NYCEM, I think for the last five years. It was very early on. Once we had the capacity, we got kids in NYCEM to start learning some different facets of emergency management hands-on. We had a kid's detailed in the ready New York section public affairs office. We had students in watch command. We had one student working with the tech department here at NYCEM. Last year we had an intern, it was the first ever I think, virtual intern for NYCEM that collated mental health resources. And this year we have, I think another five to six kids joining the summer virtually in the legal department, planning and public information offices as well. And they'll be all virtual. So it's definitely an exciting place to go to school. There's so many opportunities for children to experience different types of careers, not only in management.

Allison Pennisi ([14:52](#)):

Thank you for that. And for our listeners CIMS, which is the Citywide Incident Management System, helps guide New York City first responders with their response to various emergencies. And for students to learn this really fundamental framework is especially important. So, Sal, thank you for sharing that. Anita, you mentioned this earlier that New York City Emergency Management works very closely with the Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management, but can you give a little bit of additional insight as to how this partnership came to be and how other emergency management agencies on all levels of government can and should work with community youth to help them find career paths in this field?

Anita Sher ([15:38](#)):

We've been working with the high school even before they officially opened their doors when the urban assembly organization came to us and shared with us the idea of this high school. And we thought that it was a wonderful, wonderful concept because it helps to build a foundation, starting at a very young age, getting young people to think about emergency management and government work as a career and to

build those relationships. And it's not enough just to have a high school, an emergency management high school in name, what's also important is the relationship and building that relationship and being involved in the program and in the school. And that's what we've done at the Office of Emergency Management. We have been involved with the school, supporting them in so many different ways, in terms of helping them to think through the curriculum, helping to provide them with resources, helping to mentor the young people, going into the classroom and being there and being present and talking about the work that we do and all the possibilities.

Anita Sher ([16:48](#)):

And I have to say that the Office of Emergency Management is not the only partner at the Board of Ed. Keith Grossman, who runs emergency management for the Board of Ed is also very involved in the school and in the program and also mentors the young people there and provides internship opportunities. And so people... the young people start to see pathways. These young people might be first-generation Americans. So they don't have necessarily all the breadth of experience that other families might have in terms of growing up in this city and what the opportunities are, so being able to bring that to them and show them all the possibilities of career, and it doesn't just have to be in government, it can be in private sector as well. I know that the emergency management high school has also had partnerships with Deloitte and with Presbyterian Hospital and other organizations. So it really brings a lot of opportunities to these young people.

Bushra Mollick ([17:51](#)):

That was great. Thank you, Anita, for all of your feedback. Sal, this next question is for you. So as an educator, where do you see the field of emergency management going in the next five years?

Sal Puglisi ([18:01](#)):

As everybody else, we've seen so much play out over the last year and a half. Kids are monitoring, our high school students are watching what's going on in the world. They're picking up on things. Recently, the cyber threats in the cybersecurity realm of the world have definitely, I think, inspired some kids and opened up some conversations to that pathway of that side of security. They spent so much time online with their devices that they're starting to understand now the business that's attached to it, the money and all those different parts of society that are kind of at threat when there's a cybersecurity breach like we recently had.

Sal Puglisi ([18:39](#)):

Like I said, it was a CDC fellow. So we spent a lot of time talking about public health for the pandemic. So it was kind of interesting to watch them kind of work through things when the pandemic actually happened. They knew we were going to lock down. They knew a lot of the terminology. They understood, which was more impressive to me, based on the lessons we had pre-pandemic about epidemiology and what they needed to do for their own families and how to move forward.

Sal Puglisi ([19:03](#)):

We talk a lot about climate change and flooding, and those risks with climate change. So a lot of these kinds of things are kind of like meshing out into that way. I think there's like an activism component where kids are kind of making observations and taking those pieces. I definitely see a passion to reach out for underserved communities. I think we're heading towards that kind of group of students that

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really want to get involved in their communities and it helping them in that emergency management component.

Allison Pennisi ([19:34](#)):

Final thoughts before we go to rapid response. Sal, we'll start with you.

Sal Puglisi ([19:39](#)):

Opening up and taking on this venture of the first emergency management school in the country, I look at all the people that came to the table before I was even hired. We had an OEM, excuse me, NYCCEM as we say now. We had a FEMA Region II sat at the table. We had New York Presbyterian Hospital. We had the new school. We had so many people that came in and tried to help mold us, including educational partners. We talk about the education component, we had MCNY that I think was helping us so much trying to put the curriculum and making it rigorous enough for students where we had the practitioners and the academic component in one room, helping us figure out how to build a pipeline of that next generation of emergency manager.

Allison Pennisi ([20:29](#)):

Anita, any final thoughts before we go to rapid response?

Anita Sher ([20:34](#)):

I mean, I think, Sal, many of these young people will probably go into some related field of emergency management. But I think even if they don't, I think the foundation that you've given them will help them appreciate and understand the importance of emergency management, even just in their own personal lives. I think the more that people understand the importance of emergency management, the better prepared they are. And then, and I'm just talking about the general public. And I know we do a lot of outreach to the general public because it makes our job that much more successful. That's what I would say. Emergency management becomes a much more successful thing if folks on all levels, whether professionally or doing emergency management or personally are thinking about preparedness.

Allison Pennisi ([21:30](#)):

Speaking with Sal Puglisi and Anita Sher. Thank you both. For our listeners, if you want to learn more about Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management, you can visit [uasem.org](http://uasem.org), or you can follow the school on social media. It is rapid response time. And if you are a first time listener, it's simple. 'Prep Talk' will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind. But before Rapid Response, here is a message from New York City Emergency Management.

Wes ([22:03](#)):

My name is Wes. I live in Staten Island and I live in zone six. I first found out that I lived in a zone prior to Hurricane Sandy.

Speaker 7 ([22:18](#)):

A good place to start would be by visiting [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](http://NYC.gov/knowyourzone). You can find information on evacuation centers.

Speaker 8 ([22:26](#)):

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There are information about how to keep your pet safe and what to pack during a hurricane and how long typically help could arrive.

Speaker 7 ([22:37](#)):

Another tool that you can use would be signing up for the Notify NYC app. You'll get up-to-date information on any emergencies throughout the city.

Speaker 8 ([22:47](#)):

Notify NYC provides free alerts and updates daily.

Wes ([22:51](#)):

New Yorkers can receive emergency alerts where it matters most to them, in their workplace or anywhere they are in the city.

Speaker 7 ([22:57](#)):

You can also follow Notify NYC via Twitter.

Speaker 8 ([23:00](#)):

Just be aware that you do have the resources to always be informed.

Speaker 7 ([23:06](#)):

New Yorkers have the power to be prepared for hurricanes. Know your zone. Stay informed.

Speaker 9 ([23:17](#)):

It's time for 'Prep Talk' Rapid Response.

Allison Pennisi ([23:25](#)):

I'll start with the first question. What is the one emergency item that you cannot live without? Sal, let's start with you.

Sal Puglisi ([23:33](#)):

I'm going to be biased on this. Sorry. It's going to be a CPR mask. My students have been trained backwards and forwards. We do so much stuff for the American Heart Association, making sure they always have their pocket mask or their keychain pocket masks. So we're ready to go, God forbid there's an emergency.

Anita Sher ([23:51](#)):

Probably a flashlight because I'm afraid of the dark.

Allison Pennisi ([23:57](#)):

We'll take it.

Anita Sher ([23:59](#)):



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Okay.

Allison Pennisi ([23:59](#)):

It's a good one. No, flashlight works.

Bushra Mollick ([24:04](#)):

All right, team. Next question. So what are your hobbies? Anita, let's start with you.

Anita Sher ([24:10](#)):

Oh, come on, Bushra. What's my hobby? You know.

Bushra Mollick ([24:14](#)):

I know, but our listeners don't know.

Anita Sher ([24:17](#)):

Oh, okay. Powerlifting. I love to... I do competitive powerlifting. That's my thing. It all starts and ends in the gym. That's what I say.

Bushra Mollick ([24:30](#)):

Anita, do you mind sharing how much you can deadlift for our listeners?

Anita Sher ([24:37](#)):

Sure. Thank you for asking. I deadlift 330 pounds in competition. That was my best lift. Yeah.

Bushra Mollick ([24:48](#)):

Sal, what about you? What are your hobbies? Are you also a powerlifter?

Sal Puglisi ([24:52](#)):

I'm not deadlifting anything but the remote to watch TV. By the way, that is my favorite thing to do at a meeting when Anita's there, it's, you'll never guess what she can do, and I get into the powerlifting conversation. Because when you look at her, you wouldn't think so, but she is a strong lady. Hobbies. Does Zoom count at this point? Because I feel like I'm doing a lot of Zoom. When I'm not teaching or on Zoom, I try to do some gardening with the kids up at the house. And I'm also still a volunteer firefighter and EMT in my local volunteer agency.

Allison Pennisi ([25:29](#)):

Very cool. Fun question for you both. What is currently on your playlist? Sal, we'll start with you.

Sal Puglisi ([25:37](#)):

My playlist is all over the place, but I can tell you as a teacher, one of the cool little knacks I've learned with Zoom teaching, for those awkward silence moments when nobody wants to speak, I've downloaded elevator music to my playlist. And I've learned that the simple, basic elevator '80s music can get a room full of teenagers to start speaking faster than I ever could.

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Allison Pennisi ([26:01](#)):

That is a great tip. Anita, what about you?

Anita Sher ([26:05](#)):

Pretty much all the music that was played at Woodstock. I love it. It's got a good... It's all got message. Good strong messages in there.

Bushra Mollick ([26:15](#)):

All right. And our last question or rapid response. Sum up the work that you do in one word. Anita, can you start for us?

Anita Sher ([26:23](#)):

I like to think that I help people. "Help" is the word I'll pick.

Bushra Mollick ([26:28](#)):

Sal, what about you? Do you have any one word answers for the work that you do?

Sal Puglisi ([26:34](#)):

I think I'm going to go with "passion." I think if you have passion in what you do, you're going to help, you're going to make an impact. You can do so many things as long as you're passionate about what you do.

Allison Pennisi ([26:42](#)):

Speaking with Sal Puglisi and Anita Sher, discussing building the future generation of emergency managers. Thank you both again for joining us for 'Prep Talk.' For those interested in learning more about emergency management, visit [NYC.gov/emergencymanagement](http://NYC.gov/emergencymanagement), or visit [uasem.org](http://uasem.org) to learn more about the Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management.

Speaker 1 ([27:10](#)):

That's this episode of 'Prep Talk.' If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.