

Resilience Leading The Change

The Bureau of Land Management National Training Center presents,
Supervisors Audio Forum. Now the host of your program, Kim Flanders.

Hello, and welcome to another great Essentials for Supervisors E4S session.
Today's topic is resilience, leading the change. We are so fortunate to have Ray Suazo, the state director of Arizona joining us today. Just to remind you, if you would like to ask Ray a question, remember to pres star 1. Ray, if you're ready, let's get started.

Okay. Thank you Kim, and welcome everyone. When Kim asked if I was willing and available to take on this topic, a couple thoughts came to my mind. It is certainly a robust topic to discuss and certainly one that in these times needs attention, and I'll caveat my discussion by saying that I don't consider myself an expert in resilience although I consider it an area that I'm always working to improve upon and hoping that our entire organization has an opportunity to freely engage in being part of resilience. What I plan to do today is cover some of my personal experiences with resiliency, walk through the resilience elements as they are defined out of the OPM Competency Dictionary, and then share some thoughts about how they may apply in particular with our current situation and needs for planning, lack of resources, things of that nature, and I would also encourage that if you've got questions as we move along to not hesitate in letting us know and I'll do everything I can to address the questions. So thinking about resiliency, there are quite a few different definitions, and I'll share a few of them,

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but resiliency is really the ability to overcome challenges of all kinds, trauma, tragedy, personal crisis, regular life problems, and to bounce back stronger, wiser, and more personally powerful. Resiliency enables individuals and organizations to remain effective during difficult times by being flexible in response to obstacles, and you know we've got plenty, recovering quickly from adversity, and seeking opportunities and challenges, and I really believe in that last portion, the seeking opportunities and challenges and really just being rather than becoming risk averse is really taking advantage of the changing times as an opportunity, focusing on contributing to the long-term organizational health of the BLM and to personal success as well. As I reviewed some of the resiliency material and definitions, it really was quite clear that resiliency, leading change, is related to all of the ECQs, the executive core qualifications, and play a role – it plays a very important role in all aspects of leadership. But more importantly, resiliency is critical for all individuals in our organization. It doesn't matter where you work or at what level or what your responsibilities are, resiliency is an important aspect.

I'll shift gears a bit now and talk about my personal experiences. I'm gonna try to hit some highlights over my lifetime, points where I recognize were important in both being resilient or learning from life experiences, and I'll start with very, very early on. I was raised on a ranch in northern New Mexico in a ranching family, son of a permittee. We ran cattle in the San Pedros, and most of what we did when it wasn't related to school was related to work on the ranch. Looking back

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upon that and realizing the amount of responsibility and the impact when each of us family members did not meet that responsibility, and there were various times throughout my childhood that there were things that I missed or did not – wasn't able to attend because of commitment to making sure the ranch kept moving smoothly, or either things that I had to take extra time to do because of being committed to that common goal, and looking back upon that, resiliency played a very important role in being able to understand that commitment to the importance of the family, at the same time trying to balance against all the other things that were important to me as a child growing up.

My next big experience with being resilient and trying to really understand balancing approach to all issues before me was in the military. I was a crew chief on Air Force jets, and it didn't really impact me until I realized that I was in charge of a 30-million-dollar aircraft and the life piloting that aircraft, and you know, that real minor adjustments and things that you did to the jet could mean the difference between success or catastrophic failure, and being able to absorb that responsibility and making sure that I took the right steps to look at precision and look at all the things that were gonna be important and that could be impactful, that was another point in life when being resilient was very important to me and to my success.

Moving along, that life passed, and later in life I had – I became a father. I had a set of twins, a boy and a girl, and it turns out my daughter was deaf. She was

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born deaf, and of course you go through all the, you know, the saddening approach of, you know, what are we gonna do and how are we gonna overcome this obstacle, and this feeling of – I guess the best way to say it is the woe is us or the woe is me, and that was another point in life where I really had to think about and take a step back and really evaluate, you know, what is it that I want to see as an outcome, and together with my wife I was able to support my daughter, our daughter. We all sign fluently. My wife became certified to teach deaf education. We sent our daughter to the Santa Fe School for the Deaf and later on to public school, and she graduated from a regular-hearing public school where she excelled in a number of arenas including cheering and gym and tumbling, which is pretty amazing when you think about what's needed to, you know, listen to music and timing and things of that nature. It was really the choices that we made in thinking about personal experience. We could have shipped her off to an institution and had somebody else teach her and be part of her world, but we chose to roll up our sleeves and engage and become fluent in sign and being able to communicate directly with her, and that was another one of those points in life where, you know, we had to overcome the tragedy and become resilient and make choices that led toward the common good or a positive outcome.

Moving along that same – the timeline of life, later in life my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and he was very influential in my upbringing and my life, and seeing him go through the changes that that brought, and being a man

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that was able to do everything to a man who could barely tie his shoes, that was – I guess the best word at that time was devastating. Thinking about the choices that we had to make, you know, for the good of my mother, for the good of our family, that was another point where we had to overcome the – maybe it's the guilt and the feeling of what next to being able to take action and make decisions about how to move forward. Over the last few years, you know, balancing work and family, my spouse has had a few medical issues and those have been impacting as well, and thankfully things are going well right now, but you work through those things as part of life as well and you make the time to be there with them, and you balance that against the work and the challenges that we have through BLM as well.

I would say that from a career perspective, the many choices that I've made with the support of my family to move across the country, take new and challenging positions, those also bring an impact, and you always have to think about what am I giving up to take on this new assignment or this challenge, and it's always a balancing act and it takes resiliency to work your way to evaluating those situations and coming to a conclusion that is best suited for not just you but your family as well.

And most recently, I think if I had to share anything if you think about our recent crisis here with the loss of the Granit Mountain Hotshots and the Yarnell fire, you know, I started my career as a seasonal range technician in the Forest Service,

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and I spent many a summers with what we call a regulars crew out fighting fire and can look back upon times where there were close calls and we were gung-ho about the work we were doing, and as we walked through this whole recent event, it definitely dug deep into that whole being resilient and being there for your organization, and I can tell you that for Arizona and for many others, you know the fire community, it was quite impactful, and it hit home when you think about the relationships with people and what we do as an organization and why that's important to the American public, but also just how fragile life is and the work that we do. So certainly being able to take a step back and think about what's important for our workforce, what's important for our organization, what are the things we need to pay attention to moving forward? Those have certainly been on our minds and resiliency will definitely play an important role as we think about how we deal with these tragedies and bounce back and be wiser and smarter about the work that we do. All the things that I mentioned to you that are personal experiences for me are really – I've been able to bounce back from those types of events because of the foundation of moving forward and always looking for a balanced approach to issues. Those folks that have heard me speak before that have been around me, you know, I really believe in having a balanced approach and thinking about what makes sense and where is that balance. But more importantly, the self awareness piece, understanding the roles that I play and understanding the role that our organization plays, and ultimately having the desire to move forward and the willingness to move forward and believing first and foremost in yourself and in your organization, and you

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know, I've always thought to myself if you can't believe in yourself and your organization then who will, and so that's part of the challenge that I bring myself each and every day and to the organization is to start by thinking about the role that we play and what we can do to lift up and foster those around us. So Kim, before we move into talking about elements of resilience and some facts or some highlights that might be helpful, it would be a good time to take questions if there are any.

We don't have any right now, Ray, but I do have a question for you, and again, I'll just remind everybody that if you would like to ask a question just go ahead and press star 1. Here's a question that I have, Ray, for you. How can one person affect resiliency? How do you think that can be effective, just one person alone? That'd probably be more like self talk or maybe talking about believing in yourself.

Yes. I think there's quite a few ways, and it is the whole – part of it is the idea of believing in yourself and knowing that the role that you play is an important role. The other way, and I'll talk about this a little later in the presentation, is that it takes the entire organization to really bring the very best in who we are and what we can accomplish, and I know that for me personally, I look to the expertise around me and what they bring to the table. I'm always interested in hearing what folks have to say, and I think when you get more heads around an issue, working towards a solution is when you can really come to the best informed

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solution. So currently every single person in our organization can be part of building a resilient organization and part of the solutions that are important to us.

I'll cover some more of that as I move into the elements of resilience, and I'm pulling these directly from the competency dictionary, and I've asked Kim to make that available after the forum because I will refer to it a bit. The first element is to remain effective in judgment, decision making, and actions despite pressure, ambiguity, and stress, and this is – I mean we deal with this type of situation day in and day out, and different levels of it. Obviously it can be from the perspective of a one-on-one relationship with a coworker all the way to very high-level critical actions that are being dealt with at a bureau or department level. And the one thing that I would recommend that you do, and I mentioned this a little bit earlier, is to gather up all the facts, to utilize the expertise around you, utilize the staff or the coworkers around you, and to take the time, if you have it, to make the most informed decision. Often times we March forward in order to stay effective. I mean it really depends on gathering all the information that's relevant, and I recognize that sometimes we don't have that amount of time and that deadlines are tight, but there's always enough time to take 3 minutes or 5 minutes and take a step back and ask yourself the question what did I miss and who can I get it from.

Under element 2, element 2 refers to understand and manage situations and variables that contribute to stress arousal in self and others, and there's a couple

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of highlights that I have here. Understand your tendencies and the tendencies of those around you, and there are several ways to do this. If you've ever taken Myers-Briggs, there's _____, there's a whole host of ways to evaluate yourself and evaluate your team, and one of the things that I certainly am aware of for me personally is I'm an ENTJ, and because I'm an ENTJ I know I have certain tendencies. I make a point of, you know, in critical situations to take that back and say okay, what's my tendency and how am I applying this to the situation and making sure that I'm not using – that that tendency isn't overcoming good thinking or good process or good, you know, information from the expertise around me. Understanding the tendencies of those around you. I also believe that you can see those tendencies and you can help folks to take a step back and also ask questions or have them discuss your situation and you discuss their situation. It's beneficial toward really distressing and really bringing back to the forefront the issue that you're really trying to resolve.

Building ownership and inclusion. That's really critical. If you're not – if there's not consensus on what the issue is and the approach that you want to take, and we all have this tendency, and certainly your organization will be stressed and you as well may be stressed. Now that's an area that I believe we could all improve upon and it's certainly a highlight that I would recommend under element 2. And the one thing that I think under element 2 is always critical is ask questions. There's nothing like a good question to reduce stress levels and bring your

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organization or yourself back into the perspective of what is really the goal or the accomplishment that is before you.

I'll move to element 3, and element 3 refers to use analysis and problem solving skills to assess stressful and/or threatening situations and to identify root causes. What I'll highlight here is that there's a host of analytical tools that you can use. There's a host of relationship building or organizational goals that you can build. For me personally, I've got several. I take the time to evaluate what do you know about a situation, and I use tools. Some of you may have heard me talk about the paper test. I use this tool a lot. It's an indicator tool for me, and the way I use it is if I've got an issue, you know, before I make a decision or move forward with it, I write down on one side of the paper what are all the things that I know that I'm ready to make my decision on, and then I flip the page and I use that to tell me what do I not know or what's missing from the other side of the story, and often times there are other things that come into play, and when you start to use the expertise or the organization around you, you can fill in those little gaps that reduce stress or reduce threatening situations, root causes to issues that your dealing with. So just an example of one of the tests that I use that I think you can develop a host of what I call indicator tools that you can very deliberately use to defuse situations or to deal with problem solving.

Moving into element 4, value and use positive coping/thriving strategies to manage stress and recover from setbacks, and I think it's critical here to separate

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agency organizational perceptions from personal commitment and your continued efforts or approaches. In other words, do not take things personally. We're always gonna have an agency of perception of perspective. We've got approaches that lead to great results, and often times we're still scrutinized for the approaches that we take. There's a lot of roles that we play. There's quite a few that come to mind, whether it be in the wild horse and burrow arena, you know, dealing with _____ fire, a whole host of things that have high visibility, and often times it's easy for us to take these things on personally, and I think as much as you can work to separate what you do at the agency from you as a person and not let that become a stressor, that's vitally important.

Understand when you or your team needs a time out or a time off. That's also a very critical thing. Under pressing situations or critical times, often times we will press ourselves beyond that point of harming a relationship or harming potential positive outcomes to work or a situation, and being able to take that step back and say you know what, let's sleep on this, let's postpone this, let's regroup in an hour, let's come back and take the time to sort of put things back in perspective and take that time out or take the time off so that you can work to continue from where you're at rather than go backward.

Understand when you need to take a step back and re-evaluate the issue that's before you. This is huge. I think we move very fast in the government today, and we're expected to. The desire to have information yesterday is a constant

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thing, but there's not many things that we do that are so critical that we can't take one moment to take a step back and re-evaluate is this the right approach, what's before us, are we in sync, do we need to touch base further, and after those questions, you heard me earlier that asking questions is critical. There's nothing wrong with that.

If you are a supervisor or leader, definitely encouraging balance is huge, and that's a hard thing to do. For me personally, I'm one of those that it's also hard, but there are gonna be times when I recognize that BLM is gonna be first and that there are other things that have to be second, but there are also times when BLM is gonna be second, and family, children, spouses, and friends have to be first, and so make sure that you work to have that balance and that you recognize when you can flip-flop the first and second and make sure that you're taking adequate time to be more productive by encouraging that balance.

Highlight or emphasize successes and do not be sure on praise. I think that's certainly an opportunity that can reduce stress. In our human nature, we are far more productive if we feel like we're on the right track or if you let folks know that expectations are being met. I think often times we are far more critical on ourselves than what we need to be and less in the way of really highlighting and telling our story, you know, the great things that we do in BLM and in each of our organizations.

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Another big thing that I think is important is to really help your organization believe in itself. One of the earlier things I talked about was you've got to believe in yourself and you've got to – it can't only be a desire but if you don't believe in yourself then who will, and that's important for your organization as well. You have to foster that belief that you do great things and also set the path for doing more great things.

Moving to element 5, understand the internal and external environment and use that knowledge to plan strategically to overcome obstacles and to obtain needed resources, and what I'd like to share here as a big highlight is to definitely plot a course. In the next section that I'm gonna cover, I'm gonna talk a little bit about the importance of having a plan and understanding of where you're going. I definitely believe that plotting a course 2-3 steps ahead, what's the outcome that you want and what's the approach that you're gonna take to get there is really important, and there's a lot of room, I believe, in the BLM and probably in each of our organizations to improve upon this topic.

So Kim, now would be a nice time if there are any questions before I move to the next section.

Great. Ray, we do have a question from Jess. Jess, you want to ask your question to Ray?

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Yes. Thank you so much. Hi Ray. My quick question for you is with the current economic climate and doing less with more, which we're all doing, how do you as a state director infuse the competency of resilience into your leadership team so that they can display that behavior of resilience like throughout, you know, their districts or their field? So how do you do that?

So you're being very helpful in leading to the next portion that I want to talk about. I think it's important that we have a plan. I think that it's really important that you can focus on those things that are gonna be important. Some years back here in Arizona, we moved towards developing strategies, and we now call them strategic focus areas, and defining and making sure that you understand where your organization is going in these trying times is critical, and the article that I'm gonna refer to says if you don't take time to step back and re-evaluate when conditions change then when will you, and so that's part of what we're trying to do is evaluate where our workload is at this point, where our risk is at, where our resources are at, and then prioritize so that we can then be very clear with the organization about how we're gonna move forward. And I believe that across the board, you know, understanding what is that, not just the short-term but long-term plan is really critical.

Thanks for calling in. We do have another call. Ray, would you like to take another call right now?

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Sure.

Okay. Sandy is calling us. Sandy, you want to ask your question to Ray? Are you there?

Sorry. I was on mute, hahaha, which I guess I don't really need to do since I'm actually listen only most of the time. Uh, so as I was gonna say, my question involves your discussion of trying to keep balance, and I would be interested to hear your thoughts about how to do that in increasingly challenging times for the budget this year and moving into the future. A lot of times leadership has expressed the idea of trying to keep work life balance going for the employees, but I think it's going to be something that's very critical as we have less and less resources to deal with and employees are gonna be feeling more and more pushed to try to do more with less.

I love that question. Thank you. Let me see if I can tackle that in a couple of ways. One is coming back to that idea we really need to understand where we're going as an organization and having a plan to go in those directions, what is the outcome we want to see, and I think in the short term what you're gonna see is definitely our folks are stretched. I mean I see it here in Arizona, you know, other states the same, at the national level. The rubber band is pretty stretched and trying to find some give in there is gonna be important. I also think that leaning on an article that I'm gonna refer to, there's some thought that for every complex

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problem there's a simple solution, and this fellow refers to it as saying that it's always wrong. The simple solution of doing less of the same or taking other approaches, you know, doesn't work, and I think part of what you're gonna see more of is discussion in the way of process improvement, how can we change the way we're doing business, you know, what are the important things that we need to pay attention to like budget, like in the business arena, what are the things that we can improve upon, and in the resource arena as well. I definitely agree with you. We're stretched and we're asking folks to do a lot. We've gotta step up, and I believe really focus on developing plans that lead us towards an outcome that's in line with the current situation, and it's a difficult thing to do because in the BLM we don't know how to say no, and that's really the challenge is to figure out those high-risk, high-importance things that we're gonna focus the resources we do have on and be able to say no, you know, on the things that we just don't have the capacity to deal with.

That's a good point. Sandy, thank you for that question. Thank you for calling in. I will at this time do a little plug for one of our upcoming Webexs, and it is – the whole presentation is on work life balance. It's a Webex. It's gonna be on August 29, and I think that you'll be getting a lot of great tips and tools that you'll be able to use, personal and in business as well. So I just wanted to plug that real quick in case anybody would like to attend that, and you can also find all this on the webpage. And again, I just want to just reiterate, if anybody would like to

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ask any questions, you can press star 1, and Ray, I do have another question for you.

Sure.

So I guess with what you're saying, is doing more with less a good example of resiliency?

Um, no. I think doing – identifying those areas are important to your organization, you know, in structuring with your leadership group, thinking about those things that are important, that are gonna bring the most risk, those things that we need to do, and then having a plan, having a plan for the rest of the items but not necessarily moving forward with them, because as you know, we can get called upon at any point to address an issue, and you're helping to lead me into the next area that I want to talk about. We've been working on this in Arizona for a bit of time now, and we're gonna try to really focus our strategic areas, but it starts with a simple idea of having a plan, and what is that. It's not that you're gonna execute the plan, but in a specific arena, you know, if you had an issue, what are the 3 goals that would lead you towards an outcome that you've already talked about, and I think it's really the understanding the scope of the work that's before you and then reducing that scope to the most important work, the critical work, the risk work, and then aligning that with the available resources. And I think that, you know, I want to take one step back to the question on balance. I

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think each of you, each of us personally should figure out what are those things that bring us that point of where we can reduce the stress or get that sort of balance that we need, and balance sometimes, it's not always – it's not a 50/50 and it's always give and take, but I think if you can figure out those things that are important to you that give you that stress relief then, you know, make it a point to go after those. For me personally, I have young children, and when I'm not here I'm chasing them at either baseball games or dance recitals, things of that nature, and I work hard to try to make those things. It doesn't always happen, but what's great is the leadership team around me are very supportive and see that as an important thing as well, and hopefully by me taking time to be engaged with those things, they see that it's important for them as well. Finding that point in balance where the thing that's important to you and challenge yourself, make some time for it. It doesn't always happen, but it is very important.

I'm gonna continue on this idea of having a plan as part of resilience. If you don't have a plan, if we're just continuing to react and let's go back into what the idea of resilience was really leading through difficult times, then all we're really doing all the time is reacting, and I think that one important thing is to, for yourself, understand what are those goals that you have and discuss those with your supervisor, your leadership, but then as an organization also take the time to develop a very simple plan, you know, in each arena that is of high risk to you and to move forward with that, and then to ask questions that help to place your organization and your employees in a position of success. Things like are your

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skill sets covering the right workload or can they be better utilized elsewhere and not be afraid to make those needed changes, or don't be afraid to ask for a needed change, and I think that's where you start to build resilient organizations.

Those that can be adaptive to the situations that you have. With building resiliency, I also think it includes challenging your organization. It's during difficult times that the best thoughts and the best ideas are brought forward.

Often times when there are no challenges we get complacent, so there's an opportunity in challenging times to take advantage of organizational thought, organizational input, and great ideas that lead towards improvements and new processes that are more effective. You know, the whole idea of challenging complacency, we've all heard well that's the way we've always done things.

Challenge that. Challenge and say how can we improve it. And I think that's part of building a resilient organization is to keep your organization with the times and doing things that are gonna benefit the long term. Another real key I think to building resiliency is to accept failure as an opportunity to learn and teach. Each of us has failed at multiple things throughout our careers, and the real question is what did we do after that, and so don't focus really on the failure itself. Focus on the opportunity and what does it teach us and what can we learn as we move forward.

A thought from me is that resiliency is not really about reacting. It's about finding effective practices that make sense along the way and being proactive with them.

The common sense approach. And if does not feel right then maybe it's not. List

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what you do know about a challenge and what you don't know and then start to work with that and work with your coworkers and your leadership and raise ideas that might add value to what you're trying to accomplish.

So here would be another opportunity, Kim, if we have questions.

We don't have any questions from the outside audience, but I'd just like to add that it sounds like, Ray, what you've done in your organization and what you've given people opportunities to do, basically for self discovery, and that's kind of what we're all needing to do is learn how to kind of look. I think your attitude has a lot to do with resiliency and how you manage and take on different issues has a lot to do with how you're gonna be able to be seen and to be able to go past what you've gone through to be able to open it up for a positive attitude. So I think that's really, really important, and I want to thank you, and if anybody has any questions we do have a few more moments. You can press star 1 and we'd be more than happy to take them. Ray, do you have any maybe last lasting words to share with the group?

Sure. I'll make these materials available to you, Kim. You know, some of the highlights of the one article that I'd like to share is challenging times provide an opportunity to a good strategic plan, you know, to improve our organization and the overall perception or mission of the organization. Something like drawing the entire stakeholder community to help shape the response to challenge offers

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tremendous benefits, and I think in challenging times bringing all the thoughts to the table is what leads towards a positive result, and I'll go back to the one that I shared earlier is if you don't take the time to step back and re-evaluate when conditions are changing or during challenging times then when will you do that, and I think that's something that you can take at a personal level, at an organizational level, at many levels and think about, you know, where is it that we're trying to go and is the path we're on right now the right one and how do I bring about positive change to support that. And then I guess as a closing comment I think that for me personally it starts with believing in myself and those around me and encouraging a positive approach to bringing about resolution, and as I mentioned earlier, if you don't believe in your organization and yourself then who will. I think we need to really focus on those things that we do that are really great, and BLM does some amazing, amazing work. That's one of the things that just really intrigues me and I love about working here is that we touch everything, and it's just extreme and just a great highlight, and so we need to take advantage of that and continue to foster that during these difficult times, but then also take advantage of all the great ideas and the great thinking that we also have in this organization.

Those are great closing remarks, Ray. Thank you so much, and thank you for your time and I really, really appreciate it.

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This is gonna conclude our audio forum. Please don't forget to join us on our next Essentials for Supervisors. It's titled A Model Workplace, and we're gonna have Michael martin on from Washington, and that's gonna be on August 6. And as always, please check out the BLM employee internet site at web.blm.gov for all our upcoming E4S offerings. Thanks for joining us today at Team NTC that facilitates excellence through training. Thank you. Have a great day.

This has been a presentation of the National Training Center.