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Polishing the "Boots," Part 3

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To really make your “boots” shine their best, Authoritative leadership is the key to your success. Many of the values of authoritative leadership and management practices are already practiced among officers in the fire service. An officer, who has taken his or her management position seriously, has developed a way to garner respect and lead his or her people with confidence and fidelity.

First and foremost, it is important to review the fact that a person’s job changes when he or she is promoted. There has been the saying in the fire service that one goes from “Buddy to Boss” when he or she becomes a company officer. It is a catchy phrase because both words start with a “B,” but it is not entirely accurate. Buddies respect and can trust one another. When one is promoted there is nothing about those dynamics that need to change. One aspect of the new company officer’s position is to realize the he or she used to work with tools and equipment. Now the “instruments” he or she must become skillful with is his or her people; People are far more important and complex. The skill set has to change from “tools skills” to “people skills.”

In the fire service, people need to know how to be both, a leader and a follower. In order for leadership and followership to happen, clear communication and mutual goals must be honored in both roles. Open, clear, and honest communication is an important aspect of authoritative leadership and good followership. It is not being respectful of one’s people, to have expectations of them without clearly describing and defining what they are. Further, the precision with which the officer expects crew followership must only be in proportion to the clarity and reasonableness of any directions given. One sets his or her people up for failure when he or she expects the crew to a “play the game” well without first knowing all the rules. Often times in relationships, conflict or discord arises because of the private contracts that people hold one another to without having made clear agreements about what they are and what they mean. Such instances are when we fall into the traps of “should” this and “ought to have done” that. We operate on the illusion that the other person should know what we want without our being clear about it. Psychologist Albert Ellis said that when people “should” on themselves or “should” on others, they get “should” all over the place. It is a very messy way to relate to one another.

Having high expectations is another important aspect of authoritative leadership. Having high expectations inspires people to strive for excellence and tap into their growth potentials. Such high expectations need to be clearly expressed, described and demonstrated. Leading by example is a value in the fire service that is rarely contended, but we still find officers in departments that do not know what it really means. An old misconception about promotion is that the higher one is promoted the more leisure time ought to accompany the added rank. Certainly, one needs from dragging hose and throwing ladders to pushing more paper. But truly leading by example begins with the degree of enthusiasm, focus, and passion one has in the pursuit of excellence in his or her position. An officer must always “lead” his or her crew by getting the officer tasks done in a timely manner and then assisting with general crew tasks when his or her duties are done. Doing so demonstrates initiative, tenacity and helpfulness in work ethic.

When we have a “boot” join the crew, officers must not assume that he or she understands all of the formal and informal rules of the workplace. Those policies that are, both important and urgent (meaning, must be known right away) should be at the top of the list with a clear expectation of when they must be known. Setting clear “due dates” or “achievement goals” helps the new firefighter...
NEW TOOL KIT TO SUPPORT FIRE SERVICE-BASED EMS

A new resource for fire and emergency service leaders looking to strengthen or protect their department’s position as a fire service-based EMS provider is now available. Fire Service-Based EMS Electronic Tool Kit: Resources for Leaders is a brief, web-based selection of critical facts, documents and videos that will support fire chiefs and others as they engage in discussions with policymakers and the public on the role of fire service-based EMS in their communities.

The current economic environment coupled with opportunities being presented as part of national health-care reform, has many communities considering various model of EMS delivery. Now more than ever, fire and emergency service leaders need to understand and be able to articulate to policymakers and the public the effective and efficient nature of fire service-based EMS.

Fire Service-Based EMS Electronic Tool Kit: Resources for Leaders is provided as a cooperative effort between the IAFC, the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association.

Here is the link for the file: