

Inspirational and motivational leadership

True leadership – that is, trusted, respected, valued and mentored leadership – can only be derived when tacit abilities are balanced with inspiration and motivation. One need only look to the past to see the validity in this statement. Consider Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan and General George S. Patton. True leaders do not find a need to impress, imply or otherwise expect this moniker. Moreover, they have no need to flex their position by exemplifying their power with malevolence because of entitlement. In fact, to the contrary, inspiration and motivation in many cases are derived from empowerment, communication, collaboration and the results thereof driven by one's subordinates. It was Patton who said, "If you tell people where to go, but not how to get there, you'll be amazed at the results."

"The best leader is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

— President Theodore Roosevelt

A fire officer's ability to inspire and motivate people is complicated, and is developed and dependent on what personal style or amalgamated styles a person adopts or otherwise creates. Those traits less desired are physical, fearsome, terroristic, hyperbolic, fanaticism and perhaps even competing. The fire officer needs to be able to relate to individuals as well as large groups. Maintain a decent sense of humor while finding common ground and above all else be you. As a fire officer you will know and feel your limitations in this respect. Interpretation and the ability to adjust in a hostile environment in order to maintain mutual understanding are key. Development of your style is critical. Even

so, there are some bread-and-butter commonalities that will help in developing the ability to motivate and inspire.

First and foremost, respect for each individual is essential. Holding contempt or treating subordinates with contempt is going to subjugate any future professional

development or relationship. This does go both ways. Respect is not gained by being buddies, pals or otherwise and will often be defeating when trying to motivate and inspire a group. This can only be gained for the fire officer by knowing your job; demonstrating you have the courage to do

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what's right, identifying a situation when the betterment of your subordinates is in the lurch and by standing up for their welfare often taking the bullets and keeping them unscathed.

Your subordinates want to work for a winner who is willing to sacrifice for their well-being. Developing high, but attainable standards and personally maintaining those standards as the example is also contagious without the constant necessity to reinforce and shows you care for the organization and your people.

Leadership is getting people to accomplish a mission regardless of the circumstances because they see what you see. They can identify with the means. More importantly, they do so because they want to not just because they have to...that is inspiration and motivation. Yet still this is a constant maintenance requirement.

Developing the ability to be inspirational and motivating requires continuous questioning, occasional redirection and constant assessment. Are your people performing safely and acting in a safe environment? Are their basic needs being met (tailored to the individual and group)? Are they mentally well balanced? Are your senior people looking out for the younger members? Now it is the time to ensure good training programs, station routines and tasks are in place to develop self-discipline eliciting reward and accolades. A "Good Job!", a pat on the back or a handshake demonstrating your recognition will fire them up or keep the fires burning and go a long way toward maintaining self-respect, discipline and esteem; all very crucial to a great organization and critical to inspirational and motivational leadership.

For your subordinates, inspiration and motivation are found in their teachers, parents and confidants. You must become all of these. It's not just enough to stand there and show them; you have to be them. Show a personal interest, maintain personal integrity, work at planning and getting the job done and be the example. This will define, inspire and motivate your subordinates to the degree they will want to serve the organization.

Inspirational and motivational leadership is contagious. Maintaining a "team-

work"- and family-oriented foundation to the organization is going to help spread the influence of these critical leadership traits to the group and to the individual. Once you give them a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves, you develop self worth.

President Abraham Lincoln posited in a letter to Dr. Theodore Canisius that "Understanding the spirit of our institutions to aim the elevation of men, I am opposed to whatever degrades them." This emphasized his belief that true inspirational and motivational leadership came from a willingness to be open, a

"The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things."

—President Ronald Reagan

commitment to empowerment and a dedication to coaching.

Just as leaders can inspire and motivate, so too can they discourage, dissuade and depress. Obviously, one would hope that's not any fire officer's goal. A fire officer will never truly excel in a leadership role without realizing that inspiration and motivation are derived from, in many cases, empowerment, communication, collaboration and the results thereof driven by one's subordinates.

It will always be your people who make or break your leadership ability. Maintain a sense of self while being selfless. While you're listening, take time to hear. Let your people reap the rewards and receive the gratification of a job well done. Without them, there is no you.

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The writer is a 17-year veteran of the fire service. He is a former career lieutenant with the Brunswick, ME, Fire Department and a U.S. Navy officer. He holds a bachelor of science degree in business studies with a concentration in organizational leadership.

Just because we do it doesn't make it right

In Harvey Eisner's "Highs & Lows" commentary from the June 2014 issue's "As Firehouse® Sees It," he comments on a food shopping trip by an engine company in Arizona where a citizen complained about a newspaper photo showing a fire engine that fell into a sink hole while firefighters were shopping. Chief Eisner states, "Obviously, the reader is unaware that fire companies do this so that they can respond instantly to emergency calls that may come while they are preparing or eating their meals."

I accept that paid departments across this country probably do just as the Arizona engine company did. We've been doing it for years, but is it right?

We're in the business of preparing for emergencies. We train people, we do pre-incident planning, in-service inspections, site visits and the like...all done to be ready. So why can't we plan ahead a shift and ensure that lunch and dinner are resolved, food shopped, etc.?

The Arizona reader is correct – it's an impact on the budget and it does, contrary to Chief Eisner's thoughts, place a company at a disadvantage in responding to calls. After all, they are remote from their station, they may be deep into the store pushing a grocery cart or stuck in the check-out line.

Not a sermon, but just some thoughts.

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What Do You Think?

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