

The right leader

By Wayne Bailey



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ask you to look back in your life, especially on the job and come up with an incident that frustrated you to no end. It bugged you for several days or weeks after it happen. Why? Was it because you couldn't do anything about it? I know of a situation where someone became the escape goat. In order for administration to look good

for an upcoming audit, someone had to be given a written warning, so the auditors could be satisfied corrected actions had been made. The frustration for this individual was a written warning was not necessary. The employee had never been written up or never had a derogatory review. A meeting with the employee telling them what they did wrong and an agreement that it wouldn't happen again, never happened. It was a first offence. The frustration felt by the employee was this was a written warning and it would go in their personnel record and jeopardise future pay raises or promotions. How do you continue to motivate the employee to go above and beyond in the dailies? It's tough to motive without a strong organisation.

Ever heard of the KISS method? Keep it simple stupid? Keeping it simple doesn't mean you're stupid. CW Ceran said, "Genius is the ability to reduce the complicated to the simple." Too often people try to talk over someone's head and mask the fact they really don't know what they are talking about. If someone asks me what I do for a living,

I tell them, 'we put the wet stuff on the red stuff and enjoy doing it'. How simple is that on explaining your job as a fire fighter? The next time a rookie ask you a complicated question, find a way to simplify the response and encourage them to research the question and explain it to you later. Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself."

As a leader, you want to get alone with everyone. When it's time to move forward, you're going to follow other leaders going in the direction based on your moral, ethical and sometime religious views. When you're following such leaders, make sure they are solid inside and out. You may walk through a forest and all you see is strong trees. Once a wind storm moves through, you come back to see trees broken in half because they were rotten inside. If you had looked carefully at the tree before the storm, you may have noticed some dead branches (a leader keeping to themselves) or bark falling off the tree (a leader making bad decisions all of a sudden). Follow those that are strong and with the same values.

Rachael Fisher-Layne, vice president of media relations, JCPR, a public relations agency said look for:

1. Honesty. Always do the honest thing. It makes employees feel like they know where they stand with you at all times.
2. Focus. Know where you're going and have a strong stated mission to lead people on. If you're not sure, how can your people be sure? You have to have strong focus and stay the course.
3. Passion. Whatever it is, you must have passion for what you're doing. Live, breathe, eat and sleep your mission.
4. Respect. Not playing favourites with people and treating all people, no matter what station in life, what class or what rank in the organisational chart, the same.
5. Excellent persuasion abilities. People have to believe in you and your credibility. Image is everything and the belief people have in you, your product, your mission, your facts or your reputation are key to being a great leader. You have to persuade people of this; it doesn't just happen.

In emergency services, we do our best to establish clear lines of authority. It should be clear what the chief can spend, what the training officer puts on the training schedule, what the officer teaches at the fire station to the men and women that serve under them. If we had training officers requesting training on how to start interveinal fluids (IVs) in the field and your department was only a basic first aid responder, the officer definitely exceeded his or her authority. Having the right person or the job and knowing their authority is key.

As a leader, your people will make sure they do what you will come back later and inspect. "Trust but verify" is a translation of a Russian proverb, which became well known when used by President Ronald Reagan in the context of nuclear disarmament. People will not do what you expect. They will sometimes let you down. If the bays in the firehouse were not swept and cleaned in an orderly way, you, as a leader, would see it when you



arrived or departed the station; so you know this will be done because you will see it. Have you ever had someone test you to see if you're reading a report they submitted? They put something in the narrative checking to see if you saw it? As a leader, if you read a report, make sure you make a comment in writing or orally something about the report good or bad to let your officer know you appreciate their efforts.

If a department's moral stinks or is in high spirits, most of the time it's coming from the top down. Try preparing breakfast or serving dinner one evening for the troops. Meet one on one with new staff and get them to know them. Here's a story from 'The Chief's Happiness Officer Blog' about a company that could have been really bad for a leader with a low self-esteem:

Celebrate mistakes

In one company, the CEO was told by a trembling employee that the company website was down. This was a big deal; this company made most of its sales online and downtime cost them thousands of dollars an hour.

The CEO asked what had happened and was told that John in IT had bungled a system backup and caused the problem. "Well, then," says the CEO "Let's go see John!"

When the CEO walked into the IT department everyone went quiet.

They had a pretty good idea what was coming and were sure it wouldn't be pretty.

The CEO walks up to John's desk and asks "You John?"

"Yes" he says meekly.

"John," says the CEO, "I want to thank you for finding this weakness in our system. Thanks to your actions, we can now learn from this and fix the system, so something like this can't happen in the future. Good work!"

Then he left a visibly baffled John and an astounded IT department.

That particular mistake never happened again.

Any time you speak with your employees, always praise in public and criticise in private. Successful leaders and organisations recognise and reward effort when it happens, not when moral is the lowest. When you get a save doing CPR, a rescue from a fire or doing something that was over and beyond what was needed, celebrate. This could easily be done by mentioning it in a staff meeting, sending it by email or just a pat on the back and say job well done.

In closing, finding the right person for the right job takes time. By getting to know someone ahead of time and finding out what motivates them, will help you be ready to place them when the preparation and opportunity meet. 