



Fire Training Toolbox "Free Training for Firefighters"

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Elements of a Successful Leader

Captain/FTO Todd Hurley

Many of us in the fire service have only had the opportunity to learn from our peers when it comes to leadership. The habits of our leaders are passed onto us, some positive, some negative. Many times promotions occur without any training to be successful as a leader. A common example. A good Firefighter and a good example of what an organizations is looking for in an Officer. *Here is the badge, now do your thing.* In my 20 years in the fire service I have been blessed to be able to lead at both the volunteer level, and now as a Captain in a combination department. I learned early on that I had to do some things for myself to become a leader. Trust me, there is a big difference in an Officer vs. a leader. Anyone can be an Officer, but it takes work to be a leader. Leaders are the ones who everyone **wants** to follow. Leaders are the men and women in your department that lead by example. Anyone can tell you what to do, but a leader will show you how to do it. I was lucky, I had good leaders that took me under their wings, and were not afraid to share their success stories with me along with their struggles. Even more important, the unsuccessful outcomes. When you're a leader you will find that people are happy to do the things you ask of them. Most of the time you won't have to waste time disciplining people, because they already know what is expected of them, and they have respect for you as the leader. They want to be like you. They don't want to let you down. They work hard, because they respect you as a person, and as a leader. Here are a few things I remind myself of everyday when I go to work. Sure I have

bad days just like everyone. However, at the beginning of each shift I go to work that day with the expectation that I am going to be a leader. I run these items through my mind each and every shift day to remind myself what is expected of me.

Treat everyone with respect.

Respect is something that is earned. Just because you're an Officer doesn't mean people are going to jump up and respect you. Treat everyone the way you want to be treated. This goes from the newest guy on the job to the oldest. If you want people to follow you as a leader, then you need to show them the same respect in return. I always follow a simple rule when it comes to earning respect. Praise in public, and discipline in private. A successful leader does both. Often Officers get into a bad habit of only disciplining people, and not praising them. If you want to set yourself apart from an Officer and be a leader you must do both, and know when and where to do them.

Don't ask people to do things that you yourself will not do.

This is pretty simple. If you have not done it, or will not do it, then how can you expect someone else too? If they haven't been shown how to do it by the leader, then how can you expect them to be successful at it?

Work just as hard as your crew

A leader is someone who is right beside his crew doing the job. I am not just talking about on the fire ground, but also in the station. If you show your crew that you're willing to do the dirty work right beside them, they will have much more respect for you. So when the crews out washing the trucks and checking the rigs, you better be out there with them. This is a leader.



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Just because you're the Officer doesn't mean you don't have to help out anymore. Show them you're willing to scrub toilets and mop floors. The more you are with them and show them that you are all on the same team, the more respect they will have for you.

Don't tell people what you know, show them what you know.

Officers will tell you what they want you to do. A leader will show you. When you're out training get involved. Be the first one to participate in the drill. If you show them how to do it, then your crew will be that much more successful. If you show them first, then they know what you expect out of them. Anyone can sit around and tell you how to do something, but it takes a leader to show you how to do it. I took this advice early in my career from a guy who is a Battalion Chief on my shift. This guy is a true leader. Till this day he still is putting on his gear and training right beside all of us.

Be nice, and help others

Isn't this why we got into this profession? To be nice to our customers and help others. If your answer was no, then you're not in the right profession. Not only should we be nice to the customers and help them, but we should also be nice and help each other. We treat everyone with respect, and we help each other out by making our crews successful.

Be a leader

Every chance you get, be a leader. Leaders take their crews out to train. I am not talking about just the scheduled training's. I am saying a leader will come up with their own drills as well. A leader will make sure that his or her crew stands out, that they

are the best of the best. A leader will expect that when at a drill, the crew takes it seriously and performs to the best of their ability. In fact if you're a true leader, your crew already knows this, because again, they don't want to let you the leader down.

In closing I would like to share this with you. A leader never stops learning. In fact no one should every stop learning in a job that changes daily. Take classes, and attend conferences outside of your department. Get out and see what others are doing, and build a network of friends from all over. It's always nice to be able to ask these people from the outside for advise when you need it. It also amazes me that every class I attend, I still learn something new.

As Deputy Chief Frank Viscuso says, "**Step Up and Lead!**"

