



Share it, learn it!

By Christopher Huston

One aspect of the fire service that is so different than most professions is the diversity of situations encountered. Each member brings unique perspectives and experiences. For the Instructor to fully engage the student, using real events to bring the message home is a must. These are called Lessons Learned or **Operating Experience (OE)**.

OE is a great way to insert both internal and external events that shaped the manner in which we operate. Most commonly, Line of Duty Death reports are used in the fire service. Not only are we honoring the hard taught lessons by our fallen brethren, but we also discover plenty of teaching points to further enhance both our operational effectiveness, and safety within the organization. The remainder of this lesson will discuss plenty of methods for utilizing OE to help further our craft.

Several groups produce reports that discuss Fire Service OE. NIOSH focuses on Firefighter LODD reports that occurred during operations. The United States Fire Administration releases information when a LODD occurs, but details are typically minimal. Both of these organizations contribute a great deal to the Fire Service but lack a database of the everyday events that happen to us, the ones we have the most control over. To really find out what is going on use **Firefighter Near Miss**, firefighternearmiss.com. This reporting system is a database fully of injuries, close calls, and near-misses from Fire Service professionals just like you. Please submit, retrieve, and support this invaluable resource!

OE does not have to come from some unknown place that happened to someone else. This type of OE is called **EXTERNAL OE**. To really drive

home the lesson, use **INTERNAL OE**, meaning it happened to me, it happened to us! Keep it simple however. OE is not story time; it is not for recalling that "one big fire." Explain what happened, what the effect was, and how you/we learned from it, and of course the measure that we put in place to prevent it from happening again. The current lesson could be the prevention/educational measure, so make sure to point that out.

Another avenue to take is placing these lessons into a statement called **WIIFM**, or *What's In It For Me*. Use this to sell home why each one of the students are in this class today. As with everything we do, and I have certainly learned this lesson over the years, we must teach the Who, Where, What, How and Why! If you cannot find a WIIFM statement for the course, then ask why are you conducting it? OE for the topic is always a great WIIFM statement.

Using OE in training is a great way to sell home the topic and provide the students with an answer to the burning question of why they have to be there. Yet, you must constantly gather OE and lessons learned from within the organization. First reason is simple, what went wrong, how can we improve and what went well, all help shape your training curriculum. The second reason is using this information to sell the point during training. Conducting **After Actions Reports** and formal/informal post operation critiques are a tremendous way to gain insight for later use. As an Instructor or Training Officer, support AARs and these debriefs for ALL operations and insist a log is kept to draft from later.

Use OE and lessons learned to help shape better Firefighters, this will happen when you teach them not just the what and how, but why!