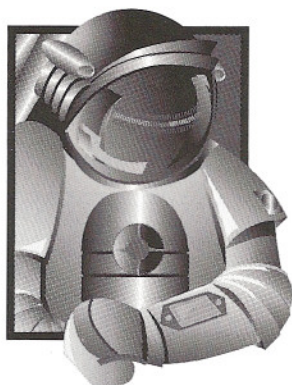


Who Will Your Replacement Be? The Ultimate Leadership Challenge

by Robert Laford



PART I

Who will your replacement be when you leave the fire service or the position you are in now? As leaders in the fire service, we each meet and respond to many issues and situations on a daily basis. Budgets, emergency response, training, fire prevention, public education – they are all of an important nature and all can aim back to our departments' individual mission and goals.

But one of the most important jobs any of us can undertake is preparing the next generation of leaders. If we leave and there are none prepared to take the lead; then we have failed. We each must make an effort to guide and direct others in the fire service to improve themselves so that they too can work to meet the challenges of tomorrow; challenges that we strive to meet today.

There are many different firefighter philosophies that we've all seen during our careers. Those with jobs at the fire station and others that look to the fire service as a career. There will always be some who come to work each day at the firehouse as a job and others who work to make a career or to promote an avocation.

Even if these two different people are accomplishing similar tasks within their department or company, their reasons for participating in those specific tasks – and their participation in the fire service in general may be different.

Why are any of us in the fire service? It may be for a wage, prestige, ego, self-fulfillment, belonging, and any number of other tangible and intangible reasons. We must each examine why we as individuals want to be in the fire service, what direction our involvement in the fire service will take in the future, and how to reach those benchmarks.

If you're reading this periodical, that probably means you're in a career and not just working at a job. Not that you necessarily get paid to be on the fire department.

But by improving your insight and working to gain new knowledge and different perspectives, as well as how that knowledge will benefit you and your fire department, you are showing your commitment towards improving your part of the fire service.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In developing a career in the fire service, a person is likely to have established goals. These goals are either developed by the individual, the department they are affiliated with, or a combination of the two entities. To move forward in any profession we need specific growth and development – a direction. The best way to develop professionally is to have individual goals that mirror or parallel the goals and direction of the organization.

There are four basic ways to pursue career development. These include; individually, mentoring, networking and systematic.

Individually: We can each personally, as individuals, look to classes, training, references and standards to work on improving our background and working towards our goals. In this area, however, the goals and objectives established by the individual may not be in sync with the goals and needs of the organization. So even though the individual may become more knowledgeable and meet specific guidelines and standards he or she still may not meet the criteria established by the organization.

Mentoring: Mentoring is when a member or members of an organization hand pick *successors to the throne*. There is a high relationship with organizational goals and objectives through the grooming of selected candidates. The mentor has already been through the process and knows what is needed to succeed, both professionally and politically or personally. This avenue of

development may sometimes be unfair to a wide range of developing personnel because of how the candidates are chosen.

The mentor has decided that a subordinate has promise and potential as a leader within that particular department. Using their specific knowledge gained through experience, the mentor grooms the candidate to meet the necessary challenges that await someone aspiring to the greater position.

The individual that is receiving the grooming has a great advantage over others that do not have a mentor. He or she can receive valuable insight into the workings of the job and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to successfully fulfill those specific duties. When the opening finally occurs, he or she will be more prepared because of the time and energy spent on preparing that specific individual to effectively assume the role.

Networking: Working together with your peers within the organization is the third approach to personal and professional development. This is called networking. Study groups have been used as an effective means of improving the knowledge, skills and abilities of a group of students in similar situations. The team approach many times will help the individuals increase their potential for achieving their collective goals. The downside of the networking approach is that like the individual approach the goals and objectives are usually based on the needs of the individuals, rather than the organizational needs of the department.

Systematic: An organizational systematic approach is the fourth way to direct personnel development and enlighten career goals and specific ways to achieve these goals. A systematic approach to knowledge dissemination takes the best from both networking and mentoring. The organization works to develop a program to help a given target group work on the steps to

increase their potential in achieving their career goals. This opens the *mentor's chosen field* to more people, helping make the development process fairer to others.

The systematic approach also keeps the team effort in mind. Now the team approach to studying and development is focused on not only the individual's needs, but also the needs and objectives of the organization. This enables the team to be directed on the best path.

As leaders in the fire service we must understand that formal programs like those mentioned, help bring up new and fresh ideas into the ranks. This is always valuable to the future of the fire service. As fire service leaders, we also know that personal commitment to the individual's professional development is necessary as well.

Reading trade journals and books, as well as business and management periodicals and text, is a good way to start. Classes and training both inside our own departments as well as outside are also important. But by taking training outside our own closed circle, we are opened to other ideas and different perspectives through networking beyond our day-to-day inner circle.

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Part II: (April 1998)

The X's and O's of Career Coaching

Part III: (May 1998)

Making the Best Job Performance Evaluations

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