

Leadership in the Real World

Command Officer Boot Camp

Pensacola Florida 2016

I am not going to suggest that after attending a one day classroom training program you will be able to solve all of your leadership problems. I *am* going to tell you that if you internalize the principles that we discuss and practice the skills that are presented, you will be well on your way to becoming a more effective leader.

The Foundation of Leadership

Before we can talk about developing and practicing effective leadership skills, we have to ensure that we are building these skills on a solid footing. This footing is called the “Foundation of Leadership”.

The Foundation of Leadership contains four cornerstones that serve as the building blocks of leadership development. They are: **character, competence, credibility and consistency.**

Character - Followers want leaders with character and integrity. They want to know that their leaders will do “the right thing” and not sell them out for personal gain or when the going gets tough. People want to know how much you care, before they care how much you know. Without character, there is no foundation for trust. If people don’t trust you, they won’t follow you. If no one is following, you’re not leading!

Competence - You might be a person of good character, but if you don’t have a high level of technical competence as it relates to fire fighting and emergency operations, people will not be willing to put their welfare in your hands. Nobody will follow an incompetent, especially when lives are at risk! To be influential in the fire service you need to be a competent and confident leader. You cannot have true confidence without being technically competent. You must know your job – there is just no faking it! So does this mean that leaders need to be perfect and have all of the answers? Of course not. We are all human beings and have our imperfections. However, effective leaders compensate for their “humanity” with self-awareness and humility. Once we are aware and humble enough to recognize and admit our shortcomings, we can engage in deliberate practice, team building, and network development to increase our competence.

Credibility - Credibility is the product of honesty and integrity. It is earned by “walking the talk” – every day. When you build your credibility, you increase your *reputation capital*, and reputation capital is the currency of leadership. If you want to be trusted and have people willingly follow you - be trustworthy.

Consistency - Consistency is the final cornerstone of the foundation of leadership. But I am not just talking about consistency in your personal behavior. I am also talking about organizational consistency or unit consistency (leadership alignment). As leaders, we need to ensure that there is consistency between our stated values/goals and the structural elements that we put in place to encourage these values and goals.

Leaders must align systems and structures to reinforce the core values and highest priorities of their organization. If the structure (rules, customs, culture) don't match your rhetoric, the structure will always win out at the end of the day. Talk is cheap. The only form of communication that can really be believed is behavior!

The four cornerstones of the foundation of leadership create an atmosphere of trust and an environment of safety for both leaders and followers. This positive organizational environment will have a major impact on the daily operations within your department.

If you have not established a personal foundation made up of the four cornerstones of leadership, or are not willing to put the effort into growing in these areas, I don't believe that there is any amount of leadership training or set of superficial skills that will make you an effective leader.

A shaky foundation results in an unstable structure.

Promote Yourself

In the "leadership model", choosing to promote yourself and accept the responsibility of your rank/position is the event that starts you down the road to becoming an effective leader. Promoting yourself has nothing to do with "self promotion". Bragging about how smart you are or what rank you have attained will not help you to lead a crew or an organization.

Promoting yourself means making the mental and emotional break from your previous job and preparing yourself to fulfill the challenges of your new one. It means accepting the responsibilities of your position and **being willing to act** in ways that fulfill those responsibilities.

And promoting yourself is not limited to the specific time of your formal promotion. I would hope that as you gain experience and mature as a leader, that you would promote yourself into some of the "unofficial" roles of leadership that so desperately need to be filled in today's fire service – like coach, mentor, and role model.

Leadership is a choice. We are who we choose to be. But the sophisticated leader (what we are all striving to become) understands that real leadership is a little more complicated than just self awareness and the "power of individual choice". Whether you like it or not, no leadership decision is made in a vacuum. It is bigger than just you! Fire officers must consider "leadership solidarity" (leaders supporting each other and working together) when making individual decisions. Our willingness to work together will impact on our ability to exercise effective *individual leadership*.

The **lone warrior myth** of leadership is just that – a myth. In reality, we are a "team of teams" and need to coordinate our efforts to be most effective.

Great teams and great organizations all practice solidarity by cultivating a common vision, focusing on shared values, and fostering a deep buy-in to them. Engaging in leadership solidarity will help us overcome our individual differences that might otherwise lead to unhealthy competition, freelancing and dysfunction.

To help you promote yourself consider the following:

- All leadership begins with self leadership. Work on yourself first.
- The events of our lives may influence us but the choices that we make define us.
- If the structure of your organization does not support your rhetoric, the structure will always win out at the end of the day.
- Never forget where you came from, but always remember that you are not there anymore.
- Change your mindset - get out of the habitual “cage”.
- In non-emergency situations, slow yourself down. Grow the space between stimulus and response, process additional “size-up”, and make better decisions.
- Outsmart your biology, practice PTA (Pause, Think, and Ask legitimate questions).
- Rework your network. The type of advice and support that you need has changed.
- Engage in “Leadership Solidarity” because it’s bigger than just you!

Find Your Voice – Share Your Voice

“Who you are, what your values are, what you stand for ... they are your anchor, your north star. You won’t find them in a book (*or in a PP presentation*). You will find them in your soul” - Ann Mulchay former CEO Xerox.

Ideally, we should make decisions that reflect our character, values and moral codes. But in reality, most of us go through life without associating what we are doing with a sense of purpose and a process of reflection. We simply respond on auto pilot or give in to social pressures and customs.

When difficult choices come up in our careers as officers, we may not have done the introspective work that serves as the source of inner strength for these difficult decisions. This introspective process is called “Finding Your Voice”.

Finding Your Voice is one of the **most important leadership development activity** that we engage in. Why? Because every other decision that we make (large and small) will be influenced by our “voice”; our values.

Leadership behaviors develop naturally once our internal foundation is in place. If you don’t develop this internal foundation, mere techniques and skills can never compensate.

Although finding your voice is a personal and on-going process, there are several “exercises” that we can all use to get us started on the right path.

Exercise #1 Carve out your commandments – your “non-negotiables”.

Exercise #2 Square yourself away on the “hot button” issues in your organization.

Exercise #3 Consider and preplan your “critical predictable”

Exercise #4 Develop and consult your “action” mission statement.

To help you find and share your voice, consider the following:

- We only grow by taking risks. The greatest risk is being honest with ourselves.
- Tell me what you want.....what you really, really want.
- Answer the follow-up question. What are you going to do to get what you really, really want?
- Train your people – competence increases safety.
- Have the courage to speak up, that’s your job!
- Never grow a wishbone where your backbone should be.
- Never walk past a mistake – make on the spot corrections without interfering with the chain of command when possible.
- Corrections done in a firm and fair manner *with an explanation* are generally appreciated, not resented.
- The truth won’t set you free until you develop the skills and muster the moral courage to deal with it.
- A positive “No” requires a greater “Yes” (the positive reasons for your “no”).
- Finish the Story, or someone else will. SHARE YOUR VOICE!

Know the Tools of Your Trade

At this point in our personal leadership development process we have established ourselves as legitimate leaders by having our “foundation of leadership” firmly in place. We have promoted ourselves and accepted the responsibilities of our rank/position. We have found our voice and connected with our values – we know where we want to go. Our challenge now, is to influence those around us to join us on our journey.

If we are going to be leading people, we should have a basic knowledge of human nature and the dynamics that influence human behavior. We know that “everyone is different” and that there are many unique personality types. However, there are several powerful influence factors that are always in play and are common to all human beings. I like to call these influencers “The Big 3”.

These 3 foundational influence factors are our paradigms, our consciousness level, and our view of the potential consequences of our actions.

A paradigm is an assumption, a theory, or a frame of reference that we use to “see” and process the things around us. Our paradigms are the glasses through which we see the world. Paradigms shape how we define ourselves, and how we define ourselves impacts on everything we do. If I “see” my job as a noble calling and an opportunity to help others, my behaviors will be guided by that paradigm. On the other hand, if I “see” my job only as a means to a paycheck, I will probably behave quite differently. Paradigms influence behavior!

“Consciousness level” is just a fancy term for how much we know and understand the information that we have - aka “our cognitive sophistication”.

Humans make decisions and engage in behaviors based on what they think they know. For example (finish the sentence):

“If I only knew then what I know now, I would have behaved differently”.

Consciousness level influences behavior!

However, it doesn't matter how accurate our paradigms are or how high our consciousness level is, because we are human beings, sometimes we forget who we really are and what is really important. Those are the times when we need to be reminded that there are consequences to our actions.

People choose their behaviors in part, based on what they think will happen to them as a result (a mini map of cause and effect) – aka a **consequence bundle**. If I know that a cop is hiding behind the trees with his radar gun, I tend to drive within the speed limit. Consequences influence behavior!

When it comes to leadership and influence, paradigms/consciousness level/consequences are the “tools of the leadership trade”. All leaders should be actively engaged in these 3 influencers. They are simply too powerful to ignore!

In your role as a leader and influencer consider the following:

- Be aware of the power of the paradigm.
- Our paradigms affect our perceptions (how we see things), which affect our emotions (how we feel about what we “see”), which ultimately affect our behaviors (what we do).
- Carefully evaluate your paradigms – stop blowing up lighthouses!
- Engage in the “shaping of paradigms” in your units and commands.
- Effective leaders shape paradigms by setting standards, modeling behavior, and telling the stories of their organization.
- Raise the consciousness level of the members of your team.
- Communicate the “leader’s intent” – the “why” behind the tactic or task.
- Policies, systems, and programs (any method for encouraging behavior) will never function fully until leaders are willing to address deviations and violations.
- What often differentiates the worst, the good, and the best organizations is how they handle consequences and accountability.
- It is easier to keep them out of trouble than get them out of trouble.
- A lie unchallenged becomes the truth.
- Tolerated behavior becomes the “standard”.

Suggested Reading List

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey

From Buddy to Boss - Chase Sargent (Virginia Beach FD Ret.)

Crucial Accountability - Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler

The Power of Habit – Charles Duhigg

It Worked For Me In Life and Leadership – Colin Powell

I am always available to answer questions or discuss leadership issues via e-mail. You can reach me at BCBBFLSTP@aim.com If you put COBC 2016 on the subject line, I will make sure that I open it promptly and respond as soon as possible.