



By KIMBERLY ALYN, Ph.D.

Creating Absolute Clarity on Values

It's Imperative to High Levels of Organizational Commitment

In my August column, I talked about the importance of organizational values. Most fire departments have gone to great lengths to define their mission, vision and core values. Some departments will frame these values and hang them on a wall. Some will display them proudly on their websites. But few departments will create absolute clarity on the organizational values through consistent communication and clarification. And the departments that do, still neglect the most important element in clarifying values: they neglect to help firefighters define and clarify their own personal values.

Personal values clarity is directly related to organizational commitment levels. Most managers and leaders focus on organizational values, assuming that if they just push those more, people will eventually align themselves with the organization. Unfortunately, that is not accurate. If employees don't have strong clarity on their personal values, they are unlikely to care about the organizational values. Additionally, low clarity on personal values results in lower commitment to the organization.

Here's what the studies show: The highest levels of organizational commitment exist when there is high clarity on both personal values and organizational values. So when your department spends the time to really clarify the de-

partment values and facilitate the process of clarifying personal values, organizational commitment will be the highest.

The second-highest levels of organizational commitment exist when there is high clarity on personal values, but low clarity on organizational values. This shows us that personal values clarity is actually more important. Yet most organizations spend more time talking about the values of the organization instead of encouraging the discussion of personal values as well.

The absolute lowest levels of organizational commitment exist when there is low clarity on personal values and you would think low clarity on organizational values, right? Wrong! The lowest levels of organizational commitment exist when there is low clarity on personal values, but high clarity on organizational values. So clarifying and ingraining organizational values in firefighters will only increase their organizational commitment if you also make sure they have clarified their own personal values. Otherwise, if firefighters are walking around unsure of their own personal values, but are getting hammered with the organizational values, their commitment to the organization will decline.

You will actually hurt organizational commitment levels by continuing to reiterate organizational values without facilitating the process of reiterating personal values. You need to walk firefighters through the process of clarifying their own personal values and how those values relate to their jobs and align with the organizational values. One of the most ef-

fective ways to do this is through the mentoring process. If you don't have a strong mentoring program in your department, look at establishing one. You don't need to

wait for a formal program to be established. Meeting with someone once a week for an hour to discuss important issues and share experiences is the basic foundation of mentoring.

It is in mentoring that you can define and articulate personal values. This is a great way to determine whether there is any inconsistency between personal values and organizational values. Mentoring

is also a great way to talk about how to live out your personal values and the organizational values on a daily basis.

Most mentoring programs in fire departments focus on technical skills, policies, procedures and culture. I have seen very few that focus on personal and organizational values. Don't get me wrong – the technical skills development is an important part of the mentoring process. But just remember this: most firefighters get hired and pass probation due to their technical skills, but most firefighters get fired for a serious violation of a core value, like lying when under investigation or stealing.

Most fire departments have mastered technical-skills training. There needs to be a strong focus on mentoring in values, starting with management and working your way down the chain of command. You will see organizational commitment increase while disciplinary issues decrease.

My next column will discuss how to use your core values to evaluate behavior. Stay tuned!

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