

By KIMBERLY ALYN

Real Leaders Create More Leaders, Not More Followers

*Developing More Leaders Within Your Department
Starts With Developing Yourself*

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One of the biggest issues facing the fire service today is leadership development. Leadership is often defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. One leadership proverb says, "He who thinks he leads but has no followers is only taking a walk." This is a humorous and true statement. However, real leaders don't have to ask people to follow them. People naturally want to follow great leaders. The focus of great leaders is not getting more people to follow them; it's getting more people to become great leaders.

Developing more leaders within your department starts with developing yourself. Whether you are a formal or informal leader, you need to have a vision and career plan for yourself. I call it a Personal Development Plan (PDP). If you don't have one, I would highly recommend developing one. Map out your vision for the future. Where do you see yourself one year from now? How about five years from now? Ten years? Twenty years? Start writing down what you want your life and your career to look like in the years to come. Once you have done that, you can start coming up with some action points: what you plan to do to ensure this vision comes to fruition. While you're at it, try writing down some value statements as a leader. Examples of value statements would be:

- "I value integrity."
- "I value professionalism."
- "I value a strong work ethic."
- "I value priorities – my family comes before my job."
- "I value excellence."
- "I value humor."

As a leader, be sure that your actions are congruent with your values, or others will not see you as authentic. One of the fastest ways to erode trust as a leader is to say one thing and then do another. People find it difficult to follow leaders who are inconsistent, hypocritical or phony.

Once you have a well-defined vision for your future and clear action plans, and you have demonstrated a consistency between your values and your actions, you can start working on developing others. Sit down with the people you want to develop and show them your own PDP. Let them know the steps you have taken and the steps you plan to take to reach your goals and protect your values. Help them to develop their own PDPs and guide them in the process.

I have worked with many fire departments across the United States. Very few have mentoring programs that are designed to develop outstanding leaders. Many of the mentoring programs in the fire service are designed to merely train and equip firefighters for new positions. Some departments offer mentoring for rookies or probationary firefighters who need someone to show them the ropes. The mentor is responsible for explaining policies, procedures, techniques and maybe even the cultural nuances of the department.

Some departments offer mentoring during a promotional process. This puts potential candidates under the wing of an experienced firefighter who has already gone through the process. The mentor works with the promotional candidate to prepare him or her for the upcoming assessment center or promotional exam. This helps the candidate know what to expect and eliminates some of the anxiety that comes with the promotional process.

But how many departments have ongoing mentoring programs that are focused on mentoring firefighters at all levels in the fire service to be great leaders? Not many! To develop great leaders in any organization, you need great mentors to set the role model example. You don't need a formal mentoring program in your department to make this work (although it would be great to have one). What you need is a willingness to see others developed.

Try serving as a mentor by spending 30 minutes to an hour once a week with your followers. Set up an agenda of what you want to discuss and what you hope to accomplish in each meeting. Lay out a career

plan with the person you mentor. Set up action points to meet those goals. Answer important questions like:

- What training will you need to reach these goals?
- What classes do you need to take?
- What projects or committees should you get involved in?
- What level of education will you need and how can you get that education?
- What skills do you feel need to be developed to reach these goals?

Stay on track with the important issues. Talk about the mission and vision of the department and how they directly relate to the person you are mentoring. Talk about the values of the department and the values of your follower. Talk about your own values and how those relate to the department. Talk about what your purpose is in the fire service and how everyone's job fits into the "big picture." Talk about ways you can improve as individuals and ways the department can be improved.

Developing others is not about inundating someone with the policies and procedure of your department. It's not about

training someone in the technical aspects of the job. It's about mentoring them to be great leaders. When you focus on that result, everything else falls into place. Great leaders want to follow policy. Great leaders have a love and a passion for what they do. Great leaders develop a high level of competence in job performance.

Consider re-thinking how you define mentoring and what it takes to develop others. A little true mentoring goes a long way in developing great leaders in the fire service! For more free information about mentoring, log onto www.FirePresentations.com/FreeInfo.htm.



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