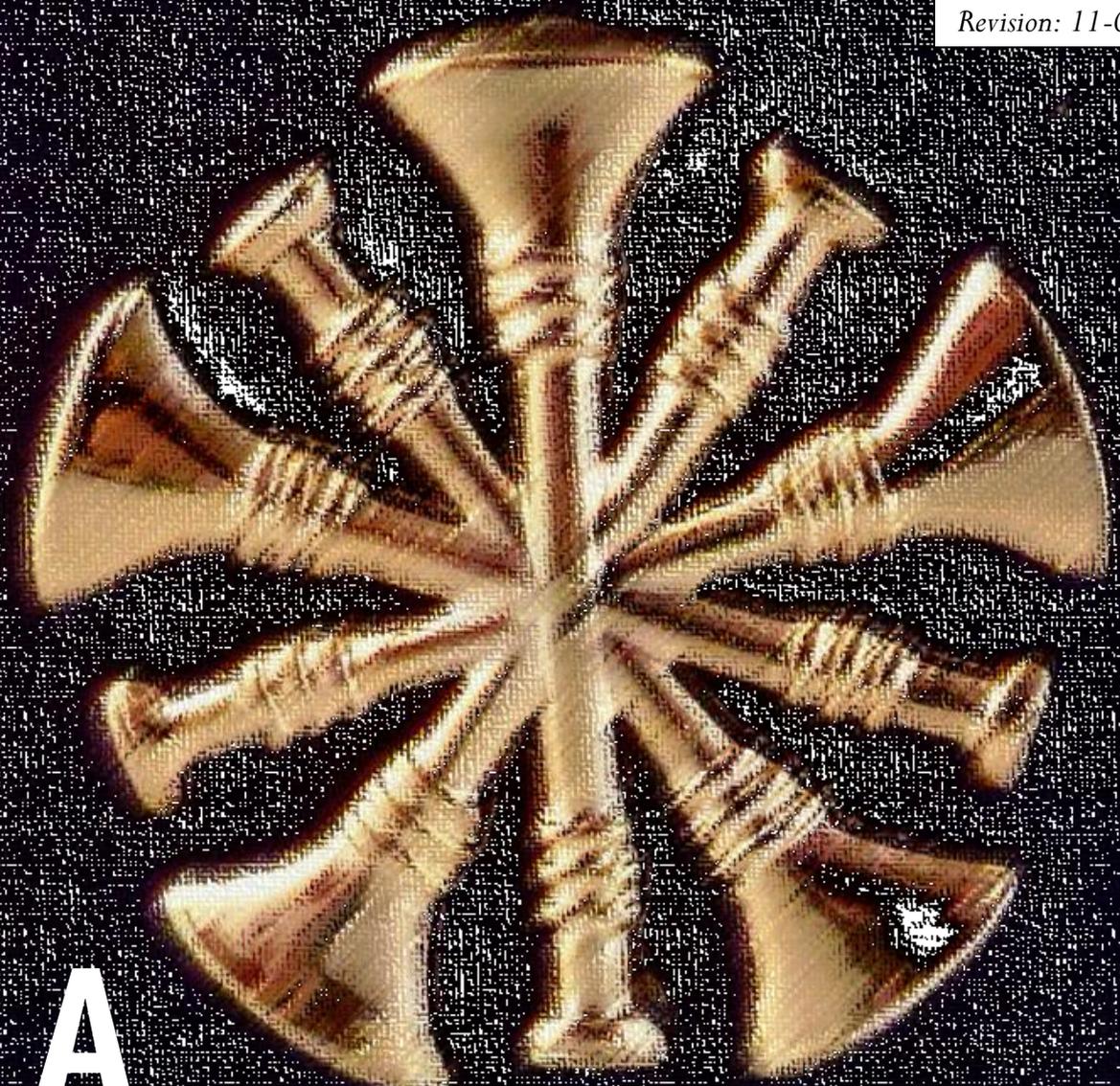


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A FIST FULL OF BUGLES

THE FIRE CHIEF'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Fire Chief Scott A. Weninger (Retired) EFO, CFO, ExMPA

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First, I must thank my wife, Deena, and our daughter, Karlee, for carrying the household through my chief officer absenteeism during my career. Deena is a very tolerant woman, often asking “What is the meeting tonight?” I thank my brother, Ryan, for being there for our parents during my relocation. I need to thank Clackamas Fire for investing in my education and for the opportunities to experiment and fix broken divisions. A big thank you for the elected fire commissioners at CKFR for their support and confidence in my abilities to navigate the hazards of an organizational makeover. I appreciate the wisdom, guidance and encouragement of my fellow Kitsap County fire chiefs for listening and offering advice when I needed to vent during the tougher days. Next, I am grateful to Deputy Chief John Oliver’s role and timely arrival at CKFR, who served critically as a team builder. I would like to thank Serena for editing this collection of thoughts. Finally, I need to thank the men and women of CKFR and IAFF Local 2819 for their persistent desire and efforts to transform CKFR into the best fire and emergency response agency in the State of Washington.

Author Bio



Scott A. Weninger

Fire Chief (Retired), EFO, CFO, ExMPA

Scott Weninger became the Fire Chief of Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue (CKFR) on August 1, 2012 and inherited an organization that had a reputation of difficult labor management relations and accountability challenges. CKFR is a combination department located in Silverdale, Washington providing emergency response and transport services to approximately 70,000 citizens within a 115 square mile fire district. The district responds to approximately 8,000 incidents annually, from 10 stations with 110 career personnel and 40 volunteers. During Chief Weninger's time at with CKFR, the department transformed from being the subject of many water cooler stories to becoming one to the premier emergency response agencies in Washington State.

Scott's Oregon fire service experience began in 1980. He retired in July 2012 as a Deputy Chief with Clackamas County Fire District #1 in Milwaukie, Oregon. Scott has Associate Degrees in Fire Science and Business Administration, a Bachelor's Degree in Fire Service Administration and is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer four-year program. In 2010, Scott graduated from the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University with an Executive Masters in Public Administration. Scott received his Chief Fire Officer Designation in 2005 making him one of only 1,200 recognized chief officers in the world. Scott served several years as the President of the Kitsap County Fire Chief's Association and retired from CKFR in December 2018. Scott and his wife Deena are enjoying boating, whitewater rafting and fishing at this time somewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

Disclaimer

Legal professionals always seem to provide a disclaimer, limiting their liability around advice and opinions. I will follow their lead and provide the same disclaimer regarding the application of any of the materials provided within this document. The recommendations and methods included herein are merely thoughts and opinions of the author solely intended for educational purposes. Applying these ideas can be hazardous to your career. Consider your actions carefully if you decide that any of this material is applicable to your current or future situation. The author and publisher assume no liability whatsoever for any loss or damage resulting from application of any of the materials in this book.

You should already be acutely aware that all employment situations, bosses, and politics are uniquely different. Advice and leadership opinions from others can be interesting and insightful, but nobody knows your situation better than you do. Your application of others' leadership advice can have grave impacts on your employment. Many organizational and environmental influences are unpredictable and can be outside of your control. With that said, please read and enjoy but do realize that the application of any of these thoughts and leadership methods are used solely at your own risk.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Congratulations! You have achieved the pinnacle of your fire service career by being appointed to serve in a very high profile job: the fire chief. This job is not for the faint of heart! What the hell were you thinking? A pay raise, more power, more influence, the ability to cause change, wear a cool uniform...*really?* Be careful what you ask for.

I thought I could learn everything that I needed to know about being a fire chief in a fire station. The most powerful brain trust known to humankind is the firehouse kitchen table. Never underestimate the influence of these kitchen table conversations. Many individuals scoff at the fire chief profession and constantly critique our decisions, saying things like, “I would not act that way,” or “make those decisions,” or “do those things if I was the fire chief.” Once you become the top dog in a fire and emergency organization, your perspective may change...*and it better change.*

Your perspective is based on your vantage point. You have been entrusted by the community to make decisions that will determine quality of service, citizen safety, and the future success of your members. If you’re successful, then your agency will improve service levels and community support. If you fail, then you might kill organizational morale and/or financial stability, thus threatening future service levels and the lives within the communities served. All of your successes and failures will be openly critiqued and on display both internally and within the public eye.

As a fire chief, your job is to ensure that all members of the organization have the tools necessary to do their job. Sometimes this entails a vehicle that starts, adequate training, current policies, and occasionally discipline or counseling. Whatever it is that the organization needs to be successful—it is *your* job to identify it, secure it, and then assess whether it had the impact that you anticipated. Keep in mind that not every experiment will go as planned. Hopefully by now you have accumulated thick skin during your climb to the top as this will serve you well.

When we were assigned to engine companies, we occasionally fought difficult structure fires. Interior structure firefighting is challenging and every situation is unique. It is hot and sweaty work with many indefinite elements encountered, such as getting over your fear of the unknown, having the courage to overcome obstacles, and working as a team member to achieve success. As long as no rekindle occurred, we were considered heroes. The daily life of a firefighter seems simple looking back: prepare, respond, eat, train, eat, sleep, respond, disengage, go home, and repeat on the next shift.

The smoldering fires currently burning within your organization today can burn hotter, be more dangerous, and resist extinguishment to degrees never faced during your time on a fire engine. The legal ramifications, risk to internal and external support, and risk

to the community's public safety are real consequences that require much strategic pondering. What smoldering issues are present in your organization that are not being adequately addressed? Is it workplace harassment? Wage and hour issues? Accountability? Outdated policies? Inadequate supervisor training? Improper fleet maintenance? Inadequate documentation of training or HR issues? Cheating on promotional exams? A lack of succession planning? All of the above are potential issues that some fire chiefs will be forced to deal with at some point in their career.

Chapter 2 – New Fire Chiefs

There are many methods to find yourself appointed as the fire chief. I hope that you are the right fit with the correct talents for the organization's needs and were appointed at the right time. Your keys to success relate to your abilities and skills in communicating, collaborating, and community involvement.

If elected officials want change, they will generally consider going to the outside. If elected officials want more of the current organizational momentum, they will generally stay inside, that is, if a viable candidate is present and willing to step up. If you are the local kid, done good and grew up within an agency to eventually find yourself offered the fire chief job, then you should already know all of the players. If you have been paying attention, then you will understand the budget and the politics of the community and the elected body. If not, then shame on you! You own everything from day one with no excuses on why things are broken. You knew or should have known about the organization...so get busy and correct anything that is hanging out there.

Inside fire chiefs have a distinct advantage. You already know the lay of the land, all of the personnel, and have established relationships and support systems. This can be very helpful as you know whom to trust. Nevertheless, close relationships might also become extremely uncomfortable if you find yourself having to discipline or terminate someone that you've been attending youth sporting events with for years. This brings up another question—*do you have some skeletons in your closet?* You may have left incriminating footprints on the way to the top, and thus, this baggage may circumvent your leadership success. If you received the position due to politics and not leadership skills, this will become apparent. Organizations are critical of top leadership. The higher you move up, the more of a target you become. A mentor instructed me to be nice to people on the way up as you will work for them on the way down. I consider this good advice.

If you are hired from the outside, then you have some distinct advantages and disadvantages. You are potentially landing on Mars. The local inhabitants may speak a different language, have different laws and traditions, and frankly, they may plan on getting rid of you just like the last slacker. If you came from more than 100 miles away, then you can claim to be an expert (if you'd like). You have no idea who to trust and sorting this out

becomes critical to your success. Everyone will be bringing you their ideas and their problems. Some might be good and some might be disastrous. Assume that everyone has a hidden agenda until proven otherwise. If you hear something three or more times from different people, then maybe this issue has some merit and deserves your consideration. Use your people skills to assess each member that you meet in order to contemplate their knowledge, skills and abilities. This will help you chart the correct course and get a feel for this new planet's environment.

Our hiring processes are extremely competitive. If you were hired from the outside, either into a fire chief or deputy chief position, then you probably had to compete against a field of qualified candidates. This process often pays some benefits as the organization may believe you earned your position through an open competitive exam process. You earned the privilege of serving in a leadership role.

The reality of being interposed into a top leadership position within an organization instead of working there from the ground floor up is not without its own challenges. Upon your arrival, new fire chiefs are overwhelmed with those who are willing to help you learn the organization and influence your decisions. Often, these types of people are referred to as “kiss-asses” or “brownosers”. They are looking to make friends to further their own personal agenda. All of the topics that were previously dismissed by last Chief will be recirculated to see if there is a new opportunity for implementation. Some of these ideas may be brilliant. Others look good on the surface but have harmful impacts long-term for the organization. Keep in mind that all of the easy stuff was probably completed by the last administration. Some ideas might be great, but the timing or resources are not correct for implementation action.

Ask a lot of dumb questions like a beginner. Play stupid if you must and let them explain things to you until you get the flavor of the true issues present, the common belief, and how the issues might be solved. The workforce is brilliant and they know the problems and solutions, so all you have to do is ask them for their opinions. Your risk is listening to the wrong people because you did not know better initially. You will eventually figure out whom to trust and whom is only interested in their personal agenda, which will not serve the community well long-term. A tip can be to move below your direct reports to get information. Spend time with someone that has nothing to gain by telling you the truth about who, what and how we got to the current situation. Ask who the respected leaders are in an organization. A staff assistant might be the ticket. Look for common themes like lack of accountability or lack of trust toward management, etc. Once you know the issues (and you will know these within two weeks), you'll need a plan. If another Chief tested for your fire chief position and is still in the organization, are they an advocate or adversary? If this is your reality, then it's best to develop a plan. Pull them in close or remove the threat through demotion or termination if necessary.

Continuous improvement is a slow process of experimentation. Identifying the issues first and then outlining some potential solutions is a critical step. You need to pursue options to make it better, faster, or cheaper when they arise. Your first gut instinct may not be the best solution. If you try something and it doesn't work or makes thing worse, then do less of this. If you try something and it makes the situation better, do more of this. Your goal is gradual improvement toward the ideal state. Radical moves are generally received with significant pushback whereas baby steps might just get you moving in the correct direction. Be patient. Rome was not built over night and neither will your agency drop their culture and traditions that have worked for decades. Be persistent and decisive. Know where change needs to occur and chart a new course. If you fail to move the organization, then regroup and try again with a new method. Be an agent of change within your organization. This is why they hired you!

Do not be an absent Fire Chief. Your staff needs to see you, especially early on. You may be first in and last out of the office. Remember that the big paycheck comes with big responsibilities. You cannot make progress in an organization from a distance.

The larger the agency, the harder and more expensive it will be to create change. Smaller agencies are more flexible for leaders to experiment with ideas and change. City fire departments, especially larger ones are usually more encumbered in traditional politics and are slower to adopt contemporary concepts. Fire Districts that only focus on fire and EMS may be more nimble. Available funding also plays an important role in a fire chief's ability to deploy creative solutions, but even in this case, the importance of leadership cannot be overlooked. If you were raised within a large organization and have limited exposure to other organizations, then you may have been groomed to support the status quo as you rise through the ranks. You are what you eat. Get out and look around.

Chapter 3 – Misconduct in the Organization

If you monitor *The Daily Dispatch* newsletter, you will see daily news briefs on a variety of inappropriate behaviors that occur in firehouses across the nation. Just when you think you have seen it all, some of these stories involve lawsuits and improper behavior that might just prove you wrong. The newsletter contains a variety of disturbing offenses and inappropriate conduct involving both career and volunteer firefighters. Which of the list below are occurring today within your organization? We do not live long enough to make all of the potential mistakes ourselves so below are some examples to ponder. How might you avoid these issues within your organization?

- ***Chicago Fire Department – Five female paramedics accuse their male CFD bosses of sexual harassment in lawsuit***

[\(https://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/5-female-paramedics-accuse-their-male-cfd-bosses-of-sexual-harassment-in-lawsuit/\)](https://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/5-female-paramedics-accuse-their-male-cfd-bosses-of-sexual-harassment-in-lawsuit/)

- ***Utica NY firefighter accused of lewd act against female coworker and ordered to give DNA sample*** (<http://www.uticaod.com/news/20180309/utica-firefighter-ordered-to-give-dna-sample>)
- ***Feds sue Houston over sex discrimination, retaliation claims at fire department following male firefighters allegedly urinated on walls, threatened female coworkers*** (<https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Justice-Department-sues-city-over-sex-12717728.php>)
- ***A former City of Tampa, FL firefighter was awarded \$254,000 in damages, claiming she was the victim of repeated discrimination and harassment during her seven and a half years with the fire department*** (<http://www.fox13news.com/news/local-news/woman-wins-discrimination-suit-against-tampa-fire-rescue>)
- ***Drinking at Cal Fire Academy brings down 14 more firefighters*** (<http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/the-state-worker/article201612059.html>)
- ***Key West, FL firefighters fired after narcotics sting*** (<https://www.firehouse.com/careers-education/news/21019179/key-west-fl-firefighters-fired-drugs-cocaine-narcotics-police-sting>)

When welcoming a new firefighter to the organization, do we really need to remind them that this is a “firehouse” and it is not to be confused with a “frat house?” This message must be misconstrued based upon the lawsuit examples above. Your employees and supervisors may think that they know what is considered “funny.” Even fire chiefs may think that they know “funny.” Sometimes our members forget that things that are funny in a bar over a drink are not appropriate conversations for a work environment. This is especially true today when employers are being held to higher standards of providing safe and healthy work environments for all employees. Employees today represent a diverse collection of individuals with various beliefs and can be offended by seemingly minor comments or actions by others. We are expected to provide a safe work environment that is free from civil rights discrimination and stupid acts.

Forrest Gump once said: “Stupid is as stupid does.” Jeff Johnson, the retired fire chief of TVFR in Oregon used to present “Falling off the Stupid Truck,” which was a collection of incidents that firefighters participated in to end their careers or change their promotional rank. When an employee mentions something resembling harassment or sexual harassment, it is time for the fire chief to act. These words should elicit a visceral response and a realization that you as the agency head have a significant responsibility to investigate. The duty or failure to investigate fully and/or take action based upon what is discovered can

result in both personal and organizational liability. Most organizational liability cases these days seem to evolve around harassment and retaliation claims. Be smart. Get good advice. Act.

As the fire chief, you are expected to model exceptional behavior both on and off the job. If you cannot successfully run your personal affairs or personal budget, how can you be expected to run a multimillion dollar public corporation? Not establishing expectations that prevent stupid stuff from occurring in your fire stations may effectively get you fired once the scandal breaks and the media attention permeates the community.

There are many ways for fire chiefs to get themselves fired. My recommendation is that you always keep your resume current. You never know when a fresh resume might come in handy. I know several fire chiefs that attended a routine elected official meeting only to learn that dinner was unexpectedly being served and that they were the main course. Politics can change quickly in a public agency setting, especially during times of public scandal or employee/volunteer unrest. There is always a fall guy or fall gal. Whether you were responsible for the mess or not, as the head of the agency, you will wear the brunt of the issue—that is, unless you can quickly locate another person to blame it on! You have two choices: own it or blame someone else. Either choice might be effective in a particular situation. A common move is to blame the last fire chief as they should have dealt with the issue during their time at the helm. Their failure to act at the time has caused this situation to explode. This may work for a time or two but after you have been the fire chief for a while, you will own everything within the organization. At this point, you either knew about the situation or should have known, and in either case you should have taken action to correct it, especially if you were an internal candidate.

You just took the helm. You were a little nervous about this big new responsibility. Now, let me share several proven methods to get yourself fired.

Chapter 4 – Financial Scandals

Simple math reveals a sound financial principle: you cannot spend more than you take in. Spending more than your annual revenue results in spending down reserves. This can only occur for a defined period of time before you are broke. The time when reserves are depleted will indicate a good time to retire or dust off your resume before the tough work of downsizing the organization begins. Since many public budgets are 80% personnel costs, cutting the budget often equates to reducing employees. Want to make enemies quickly? Start laying off employees due to financial mismanagement or poor planning on your part.

When assembling a budget, realize that annual revenues are a best guess based upon historical data and that annual expenses are a best guess based upon changes in people and the organization's costs. These are estimates. Regular financial reporting helps to avoid year-

end surprises that elected officials do not like. Let us face it—*no one* like surprises. At the end of the year, you will learn how effective your guesses were and you will balance the books. Your reality is more guesses for the following year referred to as “future projections”. Spending time tracking your finances and assembling historical trends can avoid surprises. You need to employ competent and trusted finance professionals. Whether an employee steals from the organization or you miss something in the budget process that leads to disaster, a significant financial scandal will get you fired as you are ultimately responsible for the financial health and planning of the organization. Always guess conservative on revenues and pessimistic on expenses so you miss on the correct side of the balance sheet every year. If you miss the other way, this will most likely be an unpleasant surprise at year-end.

The biggest variable we all face is overtime expenditures. There are many factors to consider and just as many that you may not have any control over. As fire chief, every policy decision that impacts overtime needs your review. This includes staffing, event participation, mandatory meetings, committee meetings, shift relief for education, etc. Be realistic about your annual overtime expenditure exposures as you cannot plan for FMLA, military leave, on the job injuries, off the job injuries, or an employee winning the lottery.

Chapter 5 – Communicating with Your Boss

I hope that by the time you sign your contract, you have already figured out who your boss is. This seems simple but may not be at first glance. Identify where the power is within the organization. Some organizations might be run by the union through the elected officials that they placed in office. Some organizations might be heavily influenced by a small group of community volunteer firefighters. If you get sideways with your boss through intentional or naïve actions, then that fresh resume might come in handy. Determine where the power is and who is truly your boss.

Most fire chiefs believe that they work for the good of the community at the pleasure of the elected body or official. If you are a fire chief that believes you are here to serve your employees/volunteers and not the community at large, you will probably be known as a firefighter’s fire chief and will need to fall on your sword at some point in your career. Become keenly aware of who controls your success. Unions typically do not hire fire chiefs.

Most fire chiefs will work under the direction of elected or appointed public officials. Know who your boss is. Do not surprise your boss. Again, *no one* likes surprises. Seek clear expectations of your role and bookends of your decision-making authority. Once you know who your boss is and what their expectations are, do your best to move the organization forward and communicate your successes and failures regularly. Do not surprise your boss. Know what they need to hear and deliver it before they get it from another source. A fire chief should be the primary source of information for their elected officials as often as possible.

A best practice might be to meet with elected officials prior to public meetings (meeting with only small groups of them at one time may limit the establishment of a quorum so that no minutes or announcement of these meeting is required). During these meetings, topics are shared and meeting agendas are reviewed. Elected officials enjoy meeting in this relaxed setting where they can ask questions that might not be appropriate or comfortable in an open public meeting. These informal communication channels are essential in ensuring bosses are current regarding behind the scenes issues and how you are handling them. This method of open and frequent communication with bosses may increase CEO trust. It is important to note that trust is earned in slow and steady chunks. It can also be destroyed in one swift act.

All humans have distinct personalities. Learn your boss' needs, wants, and desires. They might be very predictable. If you can anticipate how your elected officials or boss will respond, then you can be better prepared when presenting issues for approval or responding to a challenging situation.

Staying focused on community needs and keeping your elected officials informed is critical. Fire chiefs that lose touch with the needs, desires, and directions of their elected officials get fired. Determine who your boss is. Keep your boss informed. Try to achieve the expectations of your boss. If you cannot do this, then inform them why and regroup. If you fail to achieve your boss' established expectations too many times, then dust off that resume because life might get a little bumpy.

Predetermine when your official performance appraisals will be completed (this may be outlined in your employment contract). Ask your boss for informal feedback regularly so that you will not be surprised.

Fire chiefs that lose confidence of their elected officials or boss may find that they are bringing in a coach or consultant to assist them in being successful. This may be the beginning of the end as they are paying *you* to provide organizational leadership. If they also need to pay someone else to provide this leadership, then you are no longer necessary. From experience, fire chiefs who encounter board-directed outside consultants are usually in trouble. Often, a performance improvement plan may result. This document may record your failures in order to begin the process of helping you be successful elsewhere. Fire chiefs under stress often hunker down, quit making decisions and stop taking risks. This causes an organization to freeze in time. Forward progress will seize and a fire chief in trouble may become a *Houdini* or *Waldo*. Being absent from the office provides sanity, limits your ability to make bad decisions, and allows time to seek other employment. This is a good time to review the terms of separation included in your employment agreement. When your elected officials disagree with your leadership direction, it may be time for a new fire chief. How you make this transition is up to you. Having open dialog with your boss or having attorneys represent your interest are both options. Often, it is best to understand that how you leave

your current job may impact your employability at your next job. If you stay in touch with your elected officials or boss, all of this can be avoided.

Keep your head up and be looking at where power changes might occur in the future. Employees or volunteers that you terminate make horrible bosses. Understand who might run for open elected positions and become your boss. It is always good to know where potential threats are coming from.

The IAFC offers support for fire chiefs who are in trouble. If you find yourself in this situation, don't be shy. Seek guidance from neutral peers from outside of your organization that are not involved. If you are in trouble, then your elected body may already be in contact with your successor (current deputy chief, last retired fire chief, consultant, friend, etc.). Contact your State Fire Chief Association representative or other trusted confidant to relay your situation and receive suggested courses of action. Some executives leave quietly and part as friends, while others decide to go kicking and screaming, leaving a trail of newspaper articles outlining the lawsuits that are pending. Always consider that the manner of how you leave affects your future employability.

In summary, always follow through on your commitments. Do not promise things that you do not control and always have regular communication with your boss.

Chapter 6 – Fire Chief Contracts

How long is a good run as a fire chief? Five to seven years may be seen as a good term. If you are a change agent, your tenure may be shorter based upon the unrest you cause by destroying the status quo in order to get progress started. Some fire chiefs may be role players like cutters or hired guns. Some like to fix stuff. Others will accomplish very little during their time at the helm.

The moment you become a finalist candidate or are being offered employment as a fire chief is the correct time to determine if an employment contract will be offered. A city fire chief may work at the pleasure of the elected mayor and merely fit under the conditions of the city's established exempt employment manual. Fire districts typically offer an employment contract to their fire chiefs. If you are coming from outside of the organization, this may be your only chance to get your needs addressed. If you have been offered a job, they want you. You are in the driver's seat. If you are an internal candidate, you have less ability to get the terms you might be looking for unless the last fire chief enjoyed these items. Elected officials may negotiate the contract themselves or hire legal counsel to complete a process to create a document that both parties can live with. Review other fire chief contracts. There are model fire chief contracts available on the internet. Copy language that meets your needs ("For Cause," "Severance Package," etc.). Although it may be uncomfortable, this is the time to begin with the end in mind.

So what if this doesn't work out? How will this end? There is usually some risk to both sides. You will be expected to perform. Your boss is expected to be fair and take care of your needs. Having a legal review of your contract is a good idea. Not having a contract at all places you in a very precarious situation should an unexpected election change who your boss is. Furthermore, realize that if you cannot get the key protection you need to justify a relocation, you might need to walk away. This is not all that uncommon where jobs are offered and contract terms cannot be reached, so as a result, elected officials are forced to move onto another candidate.

There is a noticeable leadership shortage developing within the fire service. Quality candidates with proven records of accomplishment and developed resumes are becoming harder to find. Elected officials know this and are very anxious to lock in good leadership for their organizational needs.

Chapter 7 – Runaway Egos

We all have egos. You are now the top dog. You have the ability to influence the organization and make dramatic changes. If you begin to believe you are untouchable, then you will make yourself an easy target. Resist this urge. The destructive power of a runaway fire chief ego should not be underestimated. Stay humble. Destructive egos are everywhere within the fire service and at all ranks. Keep your ego in check. This is why we have spouses to keep us humble. You are appointed fire chief to serve the community, not to have the organization serve you. Super egos may result in you becoming disconnected from your elected officials and talking down to them about technical components of our business. Do you have a personalized signed parking space in the office parking lot? If your helmet becomes too small for your head after you get promoted to fire chief, then danger is surely lurking in your future. Stay humble. Be a servant, not a dictator.

Below is a great excerpt from Rick Lasky's book, *"Pride & Ownership, A Firefighter's Love of the Job,"* called *My favorite saying: egos eat brains* that is worth a read.

"It seems like everything rolls along just fine until someone's ego runs amuck. I have seen several chiefs who started out with good intentions, and then after a few years, allowed their egos to grow out of control and to a size that prohibited good things from happening. You may have seen a situation in which someone let their ego get out of control and it ended up costing them relationships, friends, and in some cases their job. I know one individual who let his ego get so far out of whack that the city administration didn't trust him or listen to him. He could have offered them the cure for cancer and they still would not have listened to him. The best choice is to keep yourself humble, to poke fun at yourself once in a while, and to stop taking yourself so seriously. It isn't about you! Sometimes you're just not as smart as you think you are."

Cases of leadership super egos developing into ethics issues are not difficult to find. One extreme example includes the Unified Fire Authority which was investigated in a 2018 Utah State Auditors Report describing a fire department where leadership evolved into practices of questionable behavior that destroyed the public's trust.

- <http://financialreports.utah.gov/saoreports/2017/SSVF-17-SPaUFAUnifiedFireAuthority.pdf>

Another includes a New Jersey firefighter that pled guilty in federal court to a \$7 million role in a state health benefits scheme that snared 16 people including local firefighters, teachers, and public employees. The culprit was described as a “manager and supervisor” during the scheme, eventually pleading guilty to conspiring to defraud the state health benefits program.

- http://www.philly.com/philly/news/new_jersey/shore/margate-fire-fighter-pleads-guilty-to-7-million-role-in-health-benefits-scheme-20180301.html

Chapter 8 – Zipper

Another method for getting fired is losing control of your zipper. Recent sexual harassment cases involving celebrities and the “#MeToo Movement” have everyone on edge. If you are not, then you should be. Fire chiefs dating members of their organization or engaging in inappropriate workplace comments or behaviors is no longer considered tolerable for elected officials, as if it ever was. To learn more about the lure of inappropriate behavior regarding men in power, read the book, *Leadership on the Line* by Martin Linsky. The author includes an entire section on how and why these scandals are so prevalent in American society and politics.

According to *The Kitsap Sun* newspaper, a local police chief reportedly “was found in his unlit office with a female officer showing him her glow-in-the-dark fingernail polish and gave him a hug.” [Kitsap Sun Article, Rachel Seymour] The video footage is interesting as both the police chief and officer appear to be surprised by the office interruption. He quickly resigned his position of power as the scandal gained speed. Having relationships with members of your staff is a recipe for disaster. Many relationships do not end on the best terms. As fire chief, you may be accused of intimidation or having power over members within your organization, thus setting the organization up for a huge liability claim and not to mention the implications resulting from the distraction from the organizational mission. Dating or relationships of a romantic nature within the workplace are very dangerous. Be smart. Fish off of another dock, not inside the company pond.

A former fire chief commented one day after an attractive female individual walked by that caught the attention of several other chief officers, saying, “Why would I want to

humiliate myself by disappointing yet another woman besides my wife?” Think about it. It is not worth it!

Chapter 9 – Stress Relief

As the fire chief, you will need to develop healthy methods to blow off steam (stress). Emphasis here is on *healthy*. Addictions are not unheard of in the fire service. The personalities of individuals drawn to the fire service are predictable. We are Type-A, problem solvers, over achievers, and are very competitive by nature. These traits can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms that are destructive to not only your family and career, but eventually to your organizational community support. Alcohol seems to be the identified drug of choice for the fire service. A driving under the influence arrest will not look good on your resume.

A peer support group is a healthy resource, as all fire chiefs will experience instances of organizational chaos at some point in their career. These issues seem to run in cycles with different agencies taking their turn in the negative media spot light. When it is your turn, you will need to have a developed support system probably outside of your organization. Trying to maintain a steady persona may be needed on the surface during these stressful times but keeping all this bottled up inside is not healthy. Your spouse might be your sounding board but a fire service peer with similar responsibilities might be better for both career advice and your family. Each relationship and career situation is different, but consider the impacts of your choices. Beware of using your Deputy Chief or other friends you have within your organization as your sounding board as these individuals may have something to gain by your demise.

As a fire chief, you should be a role model for your employees, especially with regard to physical and emotional well-being. Healthy eating and fitness routines are important to your longevity and state of health. Job stress is common, especially if you are adverse to conflict. Develop healthy habits regarding diet and exercise. This is not a once a week commitment. A routine means every day or every week. Have your routine annual physical exams. Preventative medicine is better than crisis medicine. You need to take care of yourself so that you can take care of others. A regular exercise routine is vital and may provide time to contemplate life and develop strategies for those issues that are pending.

Chapter 10 – Spouses

Are you married to a spouse that is *fire chief spouse material*? If your wife, husband or significant other is lacking social skills, you might want to hide them from the public eye. Often times, spouses are included into a component of a testing process for this reason. Your current relationship status, the fact that you have been married and divorced four

times and are currently single might be a silent consideration during a CEO hiring and selection process. A disruptive home life can be a significant distraction that can cause your career to stumble. Elected officials often are looking for someone with a stable home life, a well-manicured yard, a clean vehicle and an organized desk when hiring a CEO. Again, correlations can be made between the way you run your personal life and the leadership you will bring to their organization. First impressions and perception will be their reality.

Your spouse may need to be agreeable to your absenteeism. As fire chief, you are also married to an organization. The higher you promote within an agency, the more ownership and responsibility is bestowed upon you. Your time, energy and attention will be tugged in many different directions. A family/work balance is also a concern for elected officials during a hiring process. Your spouse may feel neglected as a firehouse widow at times when your work priorities and after hour commitments result in broken promises on your honey do list. This tug of war and juggling of priorities can be disastrous for both careers and relationships, so choose wisely. Neither your family nor your organization can be successful without your full attention. Prioritize how you spend your time. If you cannot include your spouse in occasional work related events because they are not comfortable in a public setting or you are not comfortable with their behavior in these settings, do not become a fire chief as your relationship will suffer.

Chapter 11 – Uncalculated Risk Taking

We are all risk takers. Organizational and personal risk occurs every time you make a decision. Fire chiefs that are in trouble quit taking risks. Fire chiefs need to be decisive but must also evaluate the organizational and personal risk of a decision. Listening to feedback can be insightful. Discussing potential decisions and organizational change impact with trusted advisors is helpful before announcing a decisive direction. You can always change your mind as new information becomes available. Paralysis by indecision at the top will kill an organization's morale and drive. Consistent poor decisions will kill your career. Take some risks but do not push all of your chips into the center of the table on a long shot. Remember that the decisions you might need to make may not be popular with a few or many of your employees. Make decisions based upon your judgment on what is best for the agency and not for the sake of it being easier at the time.

The most challenging issues should be categorized before you plan your strategy to resolve them. Figure out if the issue is a *finesse* or a *force* issue. Often, this determination might require legal advice. If you have all of the cards and the decision is yours, you are in the driver's seat. You can simply announce your decision, implement it, and then wait for a response from labor. Just because you can force a solution does not mean that this is a license to do it. But, knowing that you have the ability to implement your decision against the group's desire is an important consideration as you have discussions and test the water.

This upper hand position is very important. The labor rep will know or should know that this issue is solely within your discretion. In this setting, providing input and listening to their concerns builds important trust. Use your power and influence carefully and very strategically in this setting. When you are in the driver's seat, the community comes first.

When an issue is determined to be a finesse issue, this is an important determination. You are now a salesman, not a power broker. A salesman needs to identify the hot button items and the wants and desires of the customer. Nobody will purchase a product that they do not like or do not need. Aligning wants and needs is an art form that is very detail-oriented. You are always looking for the win/win deal but in this setting, you may need to sweeten the pot above what you believe is a fair deal to make the sale. During these issues, it is important to remember that you were provided with only one mouth and two ears. You should do more listening than talking when you are trying to determine the key items of interest to those involved. Stephen Covey provided great advice when he recommended that we first seek to understand (listen) and then seek to be understood (speak).

Paralysis by analysis is very prevalent. Decision-making is risky. No solution is perfect. When you think you have one that is better, faster, and cheaper, it usually is not true once you are deep into implementation. You cannot always decide to wait until you have all the answers before you implement a solution. Nothing is perfect. Consider implementing solutions after adequate research that appears to be very beneficial. Be cautious of being the first to implement anything, especially software unless it is a beta test of improvements to come. You can always improve a product or solution along the way, because nothing made by man is perfect. If you implement a 90% solution, trust your staff to solve the other 10% along the way. This will allow you to implement sooner rather than never.

Chapter 12 – Brain Food

Fire chiefs that are successful often expose themselves to good brain food. You are what you eat. Feed your mind with ideas that have applicability within your environment. Have you completed your formal education? Are you attending outside training and conferences to stay current? Are you a role model for others or an exception to other fire chief resumes? If you achieved a fire chief position and do not have a pedigree for the position, then you are doing yourself, the fire service, and your organization a great disservice. Get started now. Fix this situation. As the fire chief, you need to be a role model for others to follow. Go finish your college degree, the NFA EFO program, etc. Get started now!

Also look outside of your agency for brain nourishment. Read the publications that your city manager or mayor might read. Build relationships with those outside of the fire service in other sectors of government or local private businesses. You will be surprised what you can learn from others and what they can learn from you. When we exclusively

feed ourselves only fire service influenced ideas, we stifle our creativity. Have you ever noticed that there are very few new ideas in the fire service? We seem to reinvent and implement old ideas with a slightly different twist. Break out of this barrier.

Have you ever wondered if you were smart enough to be the fire chief? The “Imposter Syndrome” is something many successful leaders suffer from. When asked what I do for a living, I might reply with, “I pretend to be the fire chief.” Usually a follow-up question might be, “How long have you been doing this?” and I will respond with, “Well, it has been about five years now and they haven’t caught on yet so I keep showing up.” If you are not familiar with this leadership syndrome, then I would encourage you to research it as there is ample information available online. The imposter syndrome is believed to keep some leaders very humble as they are concerned about being discovered as not quite as smart as they should be to hold their position. This competitive drive may be responsible for leadership success as they see their position as tentative based upon performance and thus, they are an underdog trying to remain on top. Leaders suffering from imposter syndrome usually work harder and longer to achieve success than others that are very ego-driven. If you do not understand this difference, then you should spend some time contemplating the reasons why you get up each morning and go to work.

Chapter 13 – Change Management

Change management is an important topic for fire chiefs. The fire service mantra of “200 years of tradition unimpeded by progress” is dead. If it is not dead in your mind, then you might be in trouble because the profession has moved on. The pace of change during this decade is staggering. During just the last couple of decades alone, the new technology and advances in equipment are astounding. The scientific data now available on fire attack water streams is quite impressive. If you are not staying current regarding advances in technology and data within the fire service, then you will find it difficult to effectively lead your agency in the right direction. What is next on the horizon for the fire service? You should know about emerging issues. Keep your eyes and ears open as more change is around the corner. Change will be the only constant in our business.

As a leader of an agency, your responsibility is to assess the current state of your organization and then based upon your knowledge, chart a desired future state. This gap between where an agency is and where they should be is your opportunity to lead. Change is hard. Many obstacles will get in the way of change. Your boss, your labor group, your direct reports, lack of communication, lack of accountability, financial resources, and time. If you direct change to occur and nothing changes but the policy, then you are not a leader. Start small. Little changes that are successful are important. Large wholesale changes may seem overwhelming at first, thus becoming very difficult to accomplish. Prioritize your actions and use baby steps to implement organizational change, *not* radical change. Leaders must

meter change into a flow that the majority of your members can absorb. Too much change all at once will fail, and as a result, you could fail. Change leadership is difficult and will take your persistent effort to follow up on your impact and implementation strategies.

True leadership is not simply supporting the status quo and serving out your time until you also can retire or get fired. I doubt that anyone ever became known as a great leader by proclaiming that “We should just keep doing what we have always done!” Supporting the status quo means not rocking the boat. We as firefighters like consistency and will often resist change. Every employee learns and adapts differently and thus, may adapt to change at different speeds or through different methods. Generational differences may be significant regarding successful change implementation, especially involving newer technologies. Plan your strategy, implement small changes, and then check back to make sure that something actually changed. If not, fix the chain of command issue, implement more accountability, and reset. Your success is dependent upon your ability to implement necessary changes in both policy and practice. Remember, baby steps are better than wild, wholesale swings in a new direction.

Have a vision. Have a clue about the direction you want to move in. Share your vision so that others know why you are moving the organization away from the status quo. Ask yourself what the ideal state of your organization is and then pursue it.

A Sample Fire Chief's Vision

We shall strive to be the best fire and emergency medical response agency in the State.

We serve the public; they do not serve us.

Our ability to provide high quality service requires a balance of adequate personnel, facilities and apparatus.

Employee safety and wellness is a priority.

We are one fire department; one collaborative team.

We will become a training driven organization.

We cannot spend more than we receive.

Leadership, accountability and succession plans are needed to remain relevant into the future.

Supervisors will delegate responsibility to grow and mentor others.

Collaborative partnership opportunities that benefit service delivery systems will continue to be explored.

We shall remain professional and compassionate in the face of adversity.

We shall embrace conflict as an opportunity to explore different perspectives.

Chapter 14 – Succession Planning

Your job is to work yourself out of a job. A good run for a fire chief is between five and seven years. You will accomplish all that you can during this time and might become a roadblock to organizational progress if you hang around for fifteen to twenty years (I have met a few exceptions to this rule but plan accordingly). The tenure of fire chiefs can be very short if your boss loses an election unexpectedly. An important component of leadership is identifying and preparing future leaders. The rule on talent management is either you take care of your talent or someone else will. Creating an environment that is challenging and personally rewarding may allow your talent to stay for slightly less than the larger paycheck available in the marketplace. The urge to change in search of greener grass inside another agency is very powerful. It is key to understand that people do not quit jobs, they quit bosses. If your work environment is not engaging or comfortable, then your talent may be chased away.

Many fire service organizations are suffering from the lack of represented members not wanting to promote out of the labor group. Some stay in place at Battalion Chief or lower ranks because of security or schedule preferences. Others are addicted to overtime or their lucrative outside employment. If you have a system in place where Battalion Chiefs make more than the fire chief and they only work nine shifts a month, then why would you want to promote out of the bargaining unit? “The District needs you to serve at a higher level of responsibility so we do not have to resort to an outside recruitment process” can only go so far. Taking a pay cut to move to days and take on more responsibility is not a popular decision unless the individual has delusions of grandeur and sees a possibility of becoming the fire chief.

Mentoring others to fill your role should be a constant priority. Identifying future leaders within your organization and encouraging them to take on assignments outside of their comfort zone, seek formal education, and participate in promotional exams are all components of building future leaders. The true measurement of a leader is how the organization is functioning five years after they leave. Get busy. A proud moment is when a talented individual that had previously not participated in promotional exams decides to finally participate. Did something change in their personal life? Are they now threatened by others who are seen as incompetent making a move to promote? Were they avoiding promotions to distance themselves from the dysfunctional leadership above? There are all-stars in every organization. Find them.

As the fire chief, you are responsible for placing the right people in the right positions to do the right things at the right time. What have you done to identify talent and encourage them to prepare themselves to serve in a leadership capacity? How will your agency function when you leave? Are you mentoring the next generation of chief officers? Now is a great time to start!

Remember to hire and promote people within your inner circle that compliment your skills and weaknesses. Surround yourself with people that are smarter than you are. Do not be intimidated by them. Listen to them. You ultimately get to decide a direction, but by listening to those around you, you can limit your larger mistakes. Hire the best talent that the community can afford. The most important thing a fire chief will do during their service is hire and promote the right people. Hiring or promoting the wrong people results in decades of problems for future administrators. If you have these problem employees in your organization, ask yourself if they were hired that way or created because of your flawed system. Either way, you can thank the previous fire chiefs for their decisions. Some agencies use farm teams to grow future members. If they cannot retain them because they do not hire often enough, then it might be a “catch and release system” where they grow new firefighters for other agencies to hire. Resident programs and part-time positions are examples of this practice.

As fire chief, you will likely need make some tough decisions. These decisions are usually not popular. The easy decisions were made by the previous clown. He/she left the tough stuff for you by kicking the can down the road instead of doing the right thing. What will you do when faced with tough decisions? Saying yes is often easy, and saying no is often hard. You will be tested every day during your honeymoon period. In today’s world of past-practice labor precedence, the decisions that you make will last decades and become more troublesome and expensive to unwind. Saying yes is easy, but what does your ‘yes’ decision today look like in five years?

What will your legacy be? Did you leave the place better than you found it? Did you spend all of the reserves that the previous fire chief saved, leaving the agency on the doorsteps of insolvency? This is not an uncommon occurrence. When the going gets tough, the weak will pack their boxes and move on.

Perception is others’ reality. Your job is to make this position look like fun. If you are not enjoying the work and others are observing the toll of stress that the position is having on you, then why would anyone want to be the next fire chief? Be optimistic every day. Be a positive influence. Have fun at work!

Chapter 15 – Attorneys

Love them or hate them, attorneys are a necessary part of the job. It is not a question of *if* you will be sued—it should always be anticipated. Calling the attorneys late after you have acted can be an expensive and embarrassing mistake. Competent legal advice can be priceless. Some attorneys are always looking for a fight, whereas others are always looking to avoid a fight. A fire chief’s ability to select the correct attorney for the issue at hand is crucial. Would you go to a general practitioner physician for brain surgery or a knee replacement? Probably not. Just like the medical profession, the legal profession has become

very specialized. If you are using a one-size-fits-all approach to your legal advice, then you may be not be getting the correct advice.

Here are some examples to ponder:

- *General council might be good for general policy, public records requests, etc.*
- *Labor attorneys specialize in negotiations and public collective bargaining language.*
- *Harassment investigators are often attorneys specializing in this huge liability arena.*
- *Insurance carriers have attorneys to protect their pocket book.*
- *You may have a personal attorney to review your contract and your personal interests.*
- *A land attorney specializes in real estate transactions.*
- *A HIPAA attorney is helpful if you have a reportable federal HIPAA violation.*
- *FSLA is very complex for fire departments. Some attorneys specialize on this issue.*
- *A Workers Comp Attorney may be necessary.*

If you do not hire the correct attorney for the job, then you might be sorry—both personally and professionally. You might be paying an hourly rate so an attorney can learn this new discipline of law or worst yet; you received bad legal advice and created a large-scale organizational liability. Some insurance carriers have a \$50,000 copay on all HR liability claims. They will forgive this copay if the agency seeks their legal advice *prior* to acting and terminating an employee. This practice may have resulted from a smaller agency’s elected officials getting upset at their fire chief and firing them without proper legal advice. In the heat of the moment, an elected official might act without even reviewing the terms of the chief’s contract. Many attorneys charge \$300 per hour to inform you that the answer to your seemingly simple question is that “It depends.” You might also find that two attorneys in the same firm will have two different opinions on the same situation. The good news is that attorneys on both sides are hired to clean up these messes and 50% of all attorneys end up being wrong. You might consider that if you pay for legal advice and do not follow it, then you are stupid. Ultimately, you should decide how to use legal advice to your advantage. Pay attention, ask good questions, consider all of the factors, decide what is best for the community you serve, *and then* act accordingly.

Your job is to get the work done without being successfully sued. “Successfully” is an important adjective because you can expect to be involved in legal actions the moment you accept the position, especially if you are changing the status quo. Your assignment is not to lose, especially if it is a big case. Push the winners, negotiate the marginal ones, and back away from the losers. Do not take a loser issue to a third party process (arbitration). Losing only encourages more of your decisions to be challenged. Most issues will be settled before it gets expensive for labor unless they think they have a winner and feel that it’s worth their investment. If you play your cards, then you need to know what your odds of winning are

before you push all of the chips into the middle of the table. Good legal advice can be priceless during the refining process of your strategies.

Chapter 16 – Fire Chief Behavior

A fire chief should always be calm and cool on the surface. *Always*. You might be swimming hard under the surface but try not to show it. Do you own a poker face? Resist the urge to act or speak when you are angry. Your staff is looking for a consistent presence of common sense *without* mood swings. Do not push send on an email when a controversial or irritating attack is received. In the heat of the moment, you will not be at your best. Take a moment and consider your options. Delay your response overnight. Tone it down a bit before you respond the next day. If you are really upset, consider having someone else review your response to see if it's appropriate. In our public records rich environment, emails written while you are angry are permanent in nature. You may change your mind or have a different perspective after additional thought. You never know what new information might be interjected into a situation that makes your initial gut instinct response totally wrong. You must act and be decisive with the information at hand, but keep in mind that there is always the rest of the story that you should learn and consider. So think! And do this *before* you push send on a response.

Two types of fire chief behaviors will serve you well. First off, always act like a visitor while in a fire station. You do not live there. Our firefighters live in these buildings, not you. Yes, you are the fire chief, but today you are a visitor...so act like it. Secondly, always act and behave as you are being audio or video recorded at all times. This includes on and off the job. You might actually find that you were being recorded without your knowledge. Know the laws of the state as each one has different rules on this.

When attending social events that involve alcohol consumption, you should follow these rules: show up early, make a presence, and leave early to avoid potential intoxicated-induced behaviors. You are no longer one of the guys or gals. If you stay long enough to observe inappropriate behavior, then you might be forced to act as the fire chief, which I can guarantee you will not be popular. History would indicate that when the boss shows up, members become uncomfortable. Consider making a presence and then leaving early.

You may become tired of solving other people's problems. When something bad happens to one of your members, the fire chief and HR staff become the custodians. You will be asked to clean up messes (ones that you did not have a hand in creating). You have become a counselor of finance, family matters, legal issues, career planning, politics, parenting, values, and other topics you may not be able to preconceive. You are expected to take other people's problems and help resolve them to *their* satisfaction. Your performance will be freely critiqued and you will receive ample feedback. If you are not comfortable in this role, then find someone that is. Otherwise, *you are the organizational problem solver*.

While solving these issues, your legal responsibilities and the organizational image must remain your top priority.

Data collection and analysis is an important part of being a successful fire chief. That which gets measured is improved. If you want to know how you are doing, then collect data. Making decisions based upon gut instinct and intuition may not serve you well as elected officials want data to support your decisions, and in turn, theirs. Response times and turnout times are important, as citizens want your personnel on scene in a moment's notice. Develop reliable data collection methods. Doing this will serve you well.

On another note, a fire chief should be part of the solution and not part of the problem. If your middle name is "CHAOS," then you might not be well served for this line of work. The fire station kitchen table defines "CHAOS" as *Chief Has Arrived On Scene*. In reality, every complex incident begins with 10 minutes of CHAOS. By the time the Battalion Chief arrives to orchestrate our efforts, the "CHAOS" should be in the rear view mirror. Do not add "CHAOS" to our emergency scenes. A fire chief's role in a mid-size or larger organization might be to handle politics and liaison support functions at major incident—not serve as the incident commander. Be a part of the solution, not the problem.

It might be worth mentioning that a fire chief is also among other things, a professional "bullshit filter". Use your previous professional experience, knowledge and people skills to sort out ideas. Bullshit should be easily identified from a great distance as it is often smelly. Nevertheless, this is not always the case. Save some of the fertilizer from bad ideas that you come across to help grow the good ones. Once you have an idea that deserves further research, look for a champion to move that good idea forward (this may not be the person that initially brought the idea to you, even though that may be tempting). Simply put, *do not step into the bad ideas and remember to fertilize the good ones*. You do not need to come up with all of the ideas, but you should listen for them and sort them.

During times of organizational conflict or unrest, try these strategies: over-communicate with your boss, do not reward employees that demonstrate bad behavior, reward employees that display good behavior, increase your level of personal accountability at all levels, and keep your crews busy with training, performance appraisals, goal setting, inspections, station detailing, and apparatus detailing. Busy crews are happy crews. Bad morale is often related to employees with much idle time on their hands. During these trying times, identify which items you control. Display control and be strategic over the budget expenditures. If you need more help on your team, consider adding additional exempt positions. Do not be underprepared (for bargaining, ULP's, grievances, discipline, etc.) because you do not have adequate staff. Surround yourself with talent.

Chapter 17 – Human Resources Staff (HR)

Fire departments were once a community's heroic organization that nobody would sue. Today, our potential litigation risk is real. Losing a legal battle encourages others to follow, which creates dangerous trends. When navigating these risks, competent legal advice requires you to seek out experts on very complex issues like FSLA, contract negotiations, labor law, workplace harassment, etc. Let us face it, all of the largest claims against employers are wage and hour or harassment-based HR issues. Keep this in mind when you are staffing. If you are understaffed with HR personnel, then you are setting yourself up for disaster.

A great HR and legal principal is "If it's not documented, then it didn't happen." Having supervisors and HR staff document their conversations of threshold incidents is critical in today's litigious society. A threshold incident is one that you sense is fraught with risk and thus may result in attorneys getting involved and/or public records requests.

Personnel issues are the toughest responsibilities that you will deal with. First off, do not violate anyone's rights including federal, state, and collective bargaining agreement rights. Do not rush to judgment. Complete a thorough investigation. If it involves harassment, consider a neutral external investigator that does these investigations for a living. The organizational and personal liability for the fire chief is too great to be sloppy with these accusations. Once the investigation is done, the employee gets the opportunity to have the charges presented and to respond with additional information. Before this meeting, you need to work with legal counsel and HR staff to establish the book ends of potential discipline. If it does not involve property rights, someone lower in the food chain should have already handled this issue for you.

If the potential discipline involves property rights (suspension, termination, etc.), then you should seek legal review before issuing discipline. Before termination, you should check with the insurance company, your boss if needed, seek legal advice, etc. Your role is to be fair and find the middle. You may choose to bounce your decision off your union representative (depending upon your relationship with them) in order to gauge their feedback. Regardless of their response, listen to the feedback, consider the facts, and be fair but firm. You are establishing future expectations for all other members. If you want a flock the geese off your lawn, you only have to shoot one. The others will get the message. When a case is in front of you, be fair but firm! Have zero tolerance for lying, cheating and stealing. These are important decisions for you and your organization. In really smelly situations, a fire chief might be forced to terminate an employee and let a future arbitration decision potentially provide their job back. Get good legal advice, act firmly, and do the right thing for the community when called upon.

If you are a male fire chief, then you might consider having a female HR representative present for difficult performance conversations with female employees and vice versa. Protect yourself from accusations. Think very hard about firing your HR manager. They know where all the cemeteries are, where the bodies are buried, and which ones to dig up during their termination. HR professionals know how to fight. Beware! Consider options available to part as friends whenever possible during any termination process. Separating as friends always reduces potential lawsuits.

Policies are designed to provide direction for desired behavior. Policies that are old and outdated might be a significant liability. Workplace harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment are big issues. Do not ignore them if they surface. Be proactive on these issues and investigate fully.

Chapter 18 – Hiring and Promotions

Nothing that a fire chief does is more important than hiring and promotions. If your hiring practices let people in the door with poor values or work ethic, then they will be trouble throughout their entire career. Screen new employees very carefully. Do not let an entry level or promotional testing process replace your gut instincts. Hire and promote individuals based upon values. We can teach someone to do the job. You cannot reprogram poor work ethic or values. Consider using a 3-step process during promotions: review personnel files, conduct the fire chief's interview, and then solicit informal feedback from peers. Once all three components are complete, weigh this entire package before making your decision. Following the established list or passing over candidates by using a rule of three to make a point sends a powerful organizational message. A lot of soul searching and questions occur when individuals are passed over, providing a great opportunity for their own personal growth.

The best you will ever see out of an employee is during their initial probationary year. If they struggle, you might be better served to cut bait and move on. When employees are nearing completion of probation and they have experienced trouble, you should ask their supervisors two questions: Would you allow this person to treat your family members? Would you work with this individual for the rest of your career? After you have these answers, your decision becomes clearer.

Chapter 19 – Labor/Management Relations (LM)

In Ronny Coleman's book, *Going for Gold*, he says "In the best of all possible worlds, labor-management relationships result in a type of homeostasis that allows an organization to move forward evenly over an extended period of time. In the worst possible scenario, labor-

management relationships become a battleground of winning and losing in which terrain is constantly lost by one side or the other.” (Coleman).

Fire chief strategies regarding organized labor vary widely and can be crucially important to your success. Too weak and your elected officials may replace you as you will be seen as a union-sympathizer. Too strong and you will be at war constantly, and your elected officials may be getting tired of the expensive battles. Every organization will have ebb and flow of the LM relationship. The agency will experience cyclical trends of evolution and change. If the relationship between the shop steward and the fire chief is perceived as too collaborative, then the membership may replace their representative with a new radical that wants to fight. If the radical cannot get a win, the membership may vote in a more experienced collaborator. As in all relationships, you only control 50%. You can only control your actions but you can reward LM behaviors that you appreciate and resist those LM behaviors that you believe are destructive. Your focus must remain on decisions that are good for the community. If you were placed in power by labor, you might be expected to repay this debt. The relationship between your elected official or elected body and your labor group can also change overnight. You might find yourself caught in the middle.

Assess your situation carefully. Know where the power is. Know your bookends of decision-making with both your boss, the union, and other stakeholders. If you receive a grievance, complaint, or unfair labor practice charge, look into it. Assess your risk. Most importantly—are you right or wrong? If you have made a mistake, then fix it and move on. Before you rush to deploy a fix, look downstream five years regarding how this decision will impact the future. Get legal advice if necessary. Do not quickly fold just because a threat is launched your way. Your actions will set the stage for future issues. Your behavior will become predictable to your labor group. If you are right, take a stand and prepare to defend the ship.

Always remember that trust with both your boss and your labor group is earned slowly and can be lost quickly. Follow through on your commitments and be strategic.

Chapter 20 – Accountability

People will tell you that they want accountability from top to bottom until this concept is parked in front of their driveway. Most want others to be held accountable for their jobs, assigned work and appropriate behaviors. The truth is, the concept of accountability starts at the top with you. Hold yourself accountable. Get your work done. Follow through on your commitments. Assign work and follow through to ensure that it's being completed. If there are no consequences for bad behavior or broken commitments, then you have established the baseline. Accountability is something that your organization may be thirsty for. Baby steps are often better than wild swings of change. Remember that you don't have to shoot

all of the geese—the one you shoot will provide the message that the accountability game has changed.

Accountability begins with establishing clear expectations. These can be verbal or written but must be clearly understood by both parties. Prepare your comments prior to expectation meetings. Clearly present your expectations to your direct reports. It is difficult to hold others accountable for an expectation that has not been shared. Often times, you will move on to other things after a meeting where someone was assigned work. Consider logging a note in your Outlook calendar to check back after a due date has come and gone without a direct report accomplishing an assigned task. We all get busy. Important projects require timely follow up. Accountability starts at the top with you.

The fire service delivers our service through our members staffing and responding out of fire stations. Our members are our customer service contact experts. How well do we treat our citizens? In Alan Brunacini's 1996 *“Essentials of Fire Department Customer Service”* book, he describes a plan in which members can create a positive public image, saying that the general objective “is to create the consistent customer observation and opinion that we are professional, under control, functionally focused, serious, effective, and friendly. When we show up, we should look like we are there to do business, like we know our business, and that we mean business.” Build a culture where your members embody this principle.

When members believe they are more important or higher class than the citizens we serve, their behaviors will demonstrate disrespect. The number of complaints will increase in this setting. Investigate each complaint to confirm that your members understand your expectations.

Firefighters and fire stations are very competitive. Once one fire station receives a new (fill in the blank), then all of your fire stations will use this as the benchmark to justify them also getting a (fill in the blank) too. This can be very expensive in larger agencies. As the person who controls when new things enter into the organization, you need to anticipate this powerful force and the associated financial impacts of a seemingly simple decision to say just once. Freelancing is common where one fire station tests the water to see if there are consequences for an action. Your response sets the stage for expectations. Control and consequences will impact accountability and behavior.

Chapter 21 – Community Support

Don't wait until you have an issue on the ballot to begin getting involved in your community. Make your agency an integral part of the communities served. Employees should understand that the important work they do each day is building community support for your next bond measure or levy request. Our patients need to feel that they received compassionate and professional care at each contact.

Community events provide an excellent method to have your members mingle with your voters. Members need to understand that each and every contact (emergency or non-emergency) is an opportunity to sell or destroy your organization's image. All members should know that they are salespersons of the organization and an organizational image and your agency's reputation is what voters consider when they cast their ballots. Get embedded into your community. If you believe you are engaged adequately, then get more engaged as this will serve your organization well.

Develop methods to stay in touch with the community that you serve. Get out of the office. Attend community events, join the Rotary Club or your local Chamber of Commerce. Attend ground-breaking events. Get involved and stay involved whenever possible. This community networking will pay big dividends. Do not underestimate this impact.

You might consider surveying your community or establishing a community advisory committee. Make sure to include raving fans and skeptics so that you hear what people really think (and not just the good stuff). When asked, community members might establish several priorities for your organization, such as fast response times, compassionate professional service, and being a good steward of public resources. Your community might have different needs, but how will you know if you do not ask them?

Stay connected by keeping your pulse on the local media. Editorials, news articles, blogs, etc. If your Public Information Officer (PIO) is not monitoring your local news for positive or negative stories or trends, then you need to start doing this. Read the local newspapers so you know what is happening, not just within your organization but within the community. Watch the news. You will be surprised how often community members will ask about your opinion on something that happened across the nation regarding fire and EMS. Be knowledgeable on current affairs in your profession.

If your organization becomes the focus of a scandal that receives TV media attention, consider wearing a suit rather than a department uniform during these interviews. By distancing the patch and the badge from the issue, you may better protect your organizational image.

Chapter 22 – Business Cards

Invest in business cards for all members of your organization or at a minimum, for all officers and staff. Have members drop business cards at every opportunity. Consider leaving these in wrecked vehicles that are being towed from the scene or on the kitchen counter of a home you are securing as the occupant is being transported to the hospital. Business cards add a personal touch and reminder of the care provided during what is often a very hectic moment. Citizens typically will not remember which fire department showed up, but just that firefighters solved their issue and they were so nice and professional during their time of need. The card provides them with a personal contact should any questions, comments, or feedback be warranted. Also, if you left a piece of equipment at the scene, you might want it back!

When crews drop business cards, this also causes citizens to send thank you cards with touching stories of appreciation. These cards can be shared to connect elected officials with the customer service delivered on the street, which can improve the image of your workforce. Baked goods might also be delivered to fire stations, which is also a nice reminder of why we go the extra mile with customer service. Having a satisfied recipient of our services visit the crew a day or week after an emergency response is positive reinforcement of why our members joined the fire service. Nothing is more rewarding than meeting someone whose life would have been much different had responders not been there during their time of need.

Often times, citizens may not know which fire department response district they are inside and/or pay their property taxes to. The marketing and branding of your organization is an important factor in developing community support. If the community does not know who you are and what services you provide, then they may not support future funding that is necessary for providing a high level of service. If your responders are lazy, incompetent, or rude to citizens during their time of need, you will want to know this. So, with that said, remember to investigate and follow up on all service complaints as part of accountability.

Chapter 23 – Goal-Setting

There are many types of leaders. Some leaders are very focused on the product (*get 'er done!*). Others are very focused on the relationships at the expense of the product. What is your focus? Both types of leaders are needed based upon organizational needs. Too much focus on either can be a problem. One thing is true: product-focused people set goals.

Establish and write down short-term organizational goals. Some leaders preach that if you write it down, it will happen. Without a plan, any road will get you where you are going. Setting annual short-term goals helps your staff know where to focus their efforts. This is a team sport, not an individual task (if you want buy in). Review goals regularly so

everyone knows that you expect them to make progress. You may find that 80% of the goals you write down will be accomplished, 10% will become unimportant as time passes, and 10% will just plain not get done due to funding or time constraints. Remember that incremental continuous improvement should be your weekly goal. Write down your goals and share them.

An annual budget is your one-year organizational planning tool. Strategic planning or strategic business planning can be a useful tool for fire chiefs to align the wants, desires and needs of several diverse stakeholder groups into one plan. It is a team sport. A plan developed and adopted by the CEO is just that, your plan. A skilled facilitator is needed to engage community input and internal stakeholders into one cohesive multi-year organizational plan. Some strategic objectives might require decades to accomplish. Others might require two to five years. Your adopted strategic plan and your annual budget should share a common focus. Baby steps toward big ugly campaigns should be seen in each annual budget. If you established a desire to become a paperless business during the next decade, then funding for steps along the way should be present in each annual budget. An adopted strategic planning document can also be used to justify not only annual budget expenditures but also larger ballot funding measures and capital improvement projects. If you do not currently have an adopted strategic plan, gather some samples, get some advice, assemble the correct stakeholders, and get this on your to-do list.

Chapter 24 – Organizational Communication

How well does information flow from top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top within your organization? Is the fire chief part of the communication problem or part of the solution? Do you have a weekly or monthly organizational newsletter? How is it used? Do you use face-to-face staff meetings? Do you use email? Your labor group and volunteer association are communicating their message on a regular basis. Test your current communication methods. Send something down from the top. Check at the bottom, did it arrive in tact or was it filtered? By wandering around, do you hear about something that someone tried to send upward and how it never arrived? Communication can be a major issue within every organization. How can you improve internal and external communications?

In the absence of official information, firefighters will make stuff up (*hard to believe, right?*). It is always better to be very transparent with information, especially during periods of great change. It may be best for you to disseminate and control organizational information with a newsletter or by email. The official kitchen table rumor mill at the fire stations may serve as the primary source of department information. No group of fire chiefs can outsmart, out think, or out plan a firehouse kitchen table. You might consider spending time at these kitchen tables to answer questions. Many firefighters will express the perspective that the fire chief has lost touch with the firefighter's role and they want this in person

contact occasionally. Those employees closest to the problems are usually closest to the solutions, so listen to your people. They have the insight, perspective, and the possible solutions. If you believe this principal is true, then you will need to establish open communications throughout the organization so that challenges and good ideas can get to you. Remember to get out and see what is really going on and being discussed at your kitchen tables.

Prepare for tough personnel conversations when you can. Do not avoid them. They do not get any easier if you procrastinate. Research the issue, identify the behaviors that are not appropriate, get advice from HR, and dig in. It may not be as bad as you anticipated. You will feel better once these frank discussions have occurred. Often, the behavior is known to be a problem throughout the organization and others are watching to see if you will address it or let it ride. Address it or own it by doing nothing. Getting issues out in the open is often required in order to move forward. Remember to obtain advice from HR on the big, tough conversations that are needed in order to keep you out of trouble.

In the movie, *A Few Good Men*, a memorable line was delivered by actor Jack Nicholson, saying, "You can't handle the truth!" Sometimes being honest with people that ask for your opinion comes with a personal cost. Consider this carefully before you provide unfiltered feedback. I was once asked for feedback following a mediocre performance on a promotional exam by an officer candidate. Because I sat through the process as an evaluator, I knew what the problem was. I hesitated for a moment. Then I clarified the expectation, asking, "Do you want the easy answer or the hard truth?" The candidate replied, "I am here hat in hand looking for how I can improve my performance." I hesitated, knowing better but provided an honest and harsh response that was right on target for this individual. As a chief officer, I was honest and delivered the truth. I told him that he was arrogant and the entire assessment panel quit listening to his rhetoric within 5 minutes of the interview starting. He was totally over confident in his leadership abilities because he served as the Union President. This honesty changed our relationship and probably cost me the Fire Chief position in a large urban fire agency. Some people cannot handle the truth and maybe I should have been smarter than to deliver it in this instance.

It is often lonely at the top. Be curious and courageous. Ask good questions. Learn the art of being political without providing the appearance of being political. Assess your risk before you speak up.

Chapter 25 – Mistakes

We all make mistakes. Do not hide your mistakes. When you admit you have made a mistake, it humanizes your image as the fire chief. Learn from your mistakes as you fix them. If you hide your mistakes, so will your employees. When you admit mistakes to your elected officials and have a plan to ensure that this same mistake is not made again, it builds trust. If they identify a mistake that you were aware of but failed to tell them, this can develop into a lack of trust in your relationship. Learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others. After all, we do not live long enough to make all of the potential mistakes ourselves.

Chapter 26 – Unions/Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA)

If you have a unionized workforce, much of your time may be related to labor/management communication. Labor is a stakeholder (as are citizens, volunteers, staff members, managers, elected officials, etc.), but they seem to require and sometimes demand much more fire chief time and attention.

Union firefighters are very good at moving an agenda forward. What they did not get from the last fire chief or mayor, they may try to get out of you. If they cannot get what they want, then they may move to get control of the elected body in an effort to get the control over the fire chief. As the fire chief, you might be well served to stay out of any election processes. A safe answer could be that as the fire chief, I work for whomever gets elected—so I stay neutral. Under the surface, you may realize that if a key elected or appointed player is changed out, then you may be looking for work. Stay in touch with politics and power within your community so that these risks will not be a surprise. It is not unheard of to survive an elected leadership change, however, this will be based on your reputation and performance as a leader.

National fire service agendas led by the IAFF have been very effective at engaging in local, state, and national legislative efforts. The image of firefighters are used for many television marketing ads. The public hero mentality and the frequent news stories of significant wildland and structure fires feeds into personal safety concerns. People within our communities sleep better knowing that our personnel are ready, willing, and able to help them during an emergency. This public fear of personal safety has been used for centuries and has resulted in current wages, pensions, and benefits. The fear of labor strikes has led public safety toward binding arbitration. The use of Total Cost of Compensation (TCC) comparable data consistently moves the wage and benefit bar upward. At what point will the public let us know that enough is enough? No end is in sight but there are indications of change on the horizon. In general, terms, the American labor movement has diminished over time while the IAFF strategies have remained very effective to benefit their

members. The recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling (Janus v. AFSCME Council 31) may impact future union effectiveness. Jury is still out.

Years ago, my cousins came over to play hide and seek. One of them hid in the dryer. Somehow, the dryer got turned on. I remember my dad lecturing me following this event, saying “After everyone goes home, you have to live here!” This statement is applicable to fire chiefs and their egos regarding doing their own negotiations for collective bargaining agreements. Retired Bremerton Fire Chief Al Duke once said, “I leave negotiations to the attorneys, I administer the contract.” Should a fire chief negotiate a CBA within their agency? You may have previous experience serving on both sides of the table during negotiations by the time you reach the position of fire chief. Your ego will tell you that you can do this work and save the agency a lot of money. Your labor group would probably prefer that you take the lead as they know they will get more out of a fire chief that has to live here than a hired gun. Attorneys that negotiate public contracts for a living are more likely to successfully navigate our ever-changing labor laws.

Fire chiefs giving away wages, hours, and working condition improvements over the years has led to the current state of our collective bargaining agreements. Is this wrong? Firefighters are national heroes and members of the most trusted profession in the country. They should be paid fair wages and taken care of. But, if you study the level of increases of firefighter wages, hours, and benefits over the past couple of decades and compare it to the increases over time for other private and/or public positions, firefighters have done quite well. You may be tempted to lead your negotiations team. If you do, do your homework. Set absolute limits that you will not cross even in mediation and get sound legal advice. The items you give away to keep the peace will impact the agency for decades.

Al Duke’s advice is sound. Hire out your negotiations. When professionals lead these efforts, you have someone to blame when the outcome does not please your elected officials. Elected officials that believe their fire chief negotiated the deal and gave away the farm will not be big fans. If you need to tell your elected officials something unpleasant, consider having the consultant or attorney do it. Consultants trade their time and expertise for money. When you hire a consultant to tell you something that you already know, you might be engaging in the world’s oldest profession.

Bargaining strategies differ based upon your analysis of the situation. If your firefighter wages are dramatically behind, you might hire an attorney, go to arbitration, make the arbiter provide the huge wage increase and then you are not the fall person since you did not create the situation.

You might find that bargaining with our newer generation employees is always like their birthday. They just want to receive gifts from you. Productive negotiations and LM discussions should be more like Christmas where gifts are *exchanged*. Do not just keep giving

stuff away thinking that this will keep your employees happy. The truth is, they will be back for more. Always look for the win/win in the deal. Deals that benefit the community should be your priority. Remember that saying “No” is always an option.

Chapter 27 – Safety & Health

Getting the work done within the community without getting employees hurt must remain our top priority. Firefighters seem to use the availability of improved technology to take more risks rather than to reduce their risks. For example, new turnout design and fabric, thermal imagers, and advanced SCBA technology have all allowed firefighters to venture farther into high risk situations. Training and certification standards are ever changing adding more restrictions and requirements on employers. Each time a firefighter is killed in the line of duty, we study it. Most are the result of preventable situations that we already identified as a cause of another firefighter’s death. We do not live long enough to make all of the potential mistakes ourselves. We need to learn from other deaths and injuries and correct these situations. Eventually, human firefighters may not enter burning buildings. A review of Underwriters Laboratories (UL) scientific research regarding fire stream application provides insight into external fire attack with smooth bore nozzles making a resurgence.

Cancer within the fire service will be our future issue. Scientific research and advances in medicine along with our preventative measures are critical. Start prevention methods now and change trends for your newer employees. They deserve it. Best practices for reducing firefighter risk of exposure to carcinogens are included in “*Healthy In, Healthy Out*,” a publication of the Washington State Council of Fire Fighters.

National trends indicate that people are getting more obese. Since we lift patients all day long, back injuries are a real concern over a long career. Training on the ergonomics of lifting people might be a worthwhile investment. Equipment and training to save spines, shoulders and knees will pay dividends in the future.

Many studies are available regarding the impact of sleep deprivation on shift workers and combat soldiers. Enough research has been completed that you should no longer be ignoring this issue. As a shift worker, some may willingly sacrifice family and recuperation time for a higher paycheck. These individuals might be known as “Overtime Sluts”. I was one and once worked five 24-hour days in a row as a Shift Battalion Chief. It was summer and others were deployed on conflagrations or on vacation so I stepped up! The wife and I liked the overtime money but it truly took a toll on both my mind and body. Some organizations allow members to work these type of extended work shifts on a regular basis, but I caution you about this practice and the organizational liability involved. Before we explore the research, you should ask yourself how productive are employees working their third 24-hour shift in a row? Might they be at a higher risk of being disrespectful to the public during a late night incident response that seems unnecessary? Could they be at higher

risk of injury or accident because they are tired? Could the risk of inappropriate personal behavior or conflict with coworkers increase because they haven't rested? Organizational risk and productivity should have your attention by now, and if not, then go back to sleep.

Diet, exercise and sleep are all components of a healthy lifestyle. Sleep is the time when the body restores itself and is key to an individual's recovery, especially those who are under stress. Many firefighters are thought of to have untreated sleep disorders and thus may be reporting for work sleep-deprived even for their initial shift. Research on this topic reveals a comparison between the effects of fatigue vs. alcohol regarding alertness, cognition, hand-eye coordination, task speed, and task accuracy. The results should get your attention. After 17 hours awake, reaction times are thought to be equivalent to a 0.05 Blood Alcohol Content (BAC). After 24 hours of being awake, reaction times are thought to be equivalent to a 0.10 BAC. Legally intoxicated is established at .08 BAC in many states. I am not an attorney, but I will bet that this issue will be explored in our court system if one of our big red vehicles plows through an intersection and someone dies after our apparatus driver has been on shift for four continuous 24-hour shifts without relief. Now some of you are thinking, our call volume allows for sleep time so this does not apply to me. This topic made me contemplate the rationale of FDNY and other large agencies scheduling 10/14 hour shifts. Are you allowing your personnel to trade shifts into extended periods? What is the impact on the divorce rate, customer service, injuries, accidents and productivity within your agency? Are you considering moving to a 48/96 schedule and allowing OT and trades on both sides of these scheduled shifts. If I were a betting man, I would bet that 24-hour shifts within the fire service will sunset as more data and scientific research confirms the negative risk and health impacts of shift sleep deprivation. I saw one study that linked cancer to sleep deprivation. Do your own research. Have your eye on this topic and the impact it may have within your agency.

Along with workforce physical fitness, fire chiefs must monitor the mental resilience and well-being of their workforce. Employee assistance programs are good options for family counseling. It seems all too common that EAP counselors who meet with a distraught firefighter might inquire if they have contemplated a different, less stressful line of work. Firefighters are not going to give up their career, financial, and lifestyle benefits without a fight. Thus, counselors who ask this question will quickly be regarded as useless. An internal peer team might serve as a better resource for emotional counseling for firefighters. Firefighters seem to respond better to a member of their firefighting family providing advice rather than someone who does not understand our business. Peers can say and do things that an administrator may not be able to legally participate in. Actions of fellow employees might save a career, or potentially, a suicide. Face it, the public pays us well to see and do things that they do not want to see or hear about. This long-term exposure to traumatic and sometimes horrific events takes a toll on our personnel. One emerging fire service injury now receiving legislative attention is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

A best practice might be to have an established EAP, an internal peer team (where training is required), and an external mental health professional available that understands the fire service. These resources will ensure that your members have access to resources when needed.

- PTSD is a listed topic in the Firefighter Life Safety Initiative:
<https://www.everyonegoeshome.com/16-initiatives/>
- The Center for Firefighter Behavioral Health was formed in 2017 and can be accessed at: <http://cffbh.com/>

Chapter 28 – Random Pearls of Wisdom

Below are some additional random pearls of wisdom I have encountered. Please consider them:

- *Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and little concept of the odds against them. Be a leader.*
- *The best indication of future individual performance is past performance.*
- *Don't be a liar. Do not promise things you cannot deliver on. Under-promise and over-deliver.*
- *Wander around, asking questions to really see what is going on in your organization vs. what policy dictates.*
- *Be curious. Ask dumb questions (you can make a living out of this concept!).*
- *If it is broken, fix it. If it is working, should you break it anyhow to change course?*
- *Be strategic—what will your decisions look like downstream in 5 or 10 years?*
- *If something doesn't look right, smell right, or seem right, then it is your job to investigate.*
- *Proper prior planning prevents piss poor performance.*
- *Be fearless. Leadership is not for wimps.*
- *Act like you are the owner of the organization, not a renter.*
- *Pride in ownership starts at the top.*
- *A fish rots from the head first. Everything starts with you. Be a role model.*
- *You do not need to know everything. You just need to know who in your organization knows.*
- *Those closest to the problem are often closest to the solution.*
- *Surround yourself with people smarter than you.*
- *Don't try to solve everything by yourself. Listen to input and then decide on a course of action!*
- *Those that show up decide. Miss a meeting and you suffer the consequence.*
- *Be observant for disruptive cultures and behaviors that are imbedded into the organization.*

- *Employees do not quit jobs, they quit bad bosses. Don't allow your talent to be chased out of your organization.*
- *Leadership is part science and a lot of art.*
- *Do not be an absent Fire Chief.*
- *Preach that we have firehouses, not frat houses.*
- *Everything that seems simple will not be.*
- *Anything that seems too good to be true will be.*
- *As you move forward with a plan, it always seems to get more complex and expensive.*
- *Follow the rules or change the rules—do not ignore existing rules.*
- *Nothing is more destructive than a runaway ego in a fire chief.*

Chapter 29 — Final Thoughts

All I ask is that you care! I ask that employees care about their organization throughout their entire career. Care about themselves enough to learn their job, stay fit, and stay safe. Care about their team members and keep them safe, and most of all, care about the community members that we serve. All I ask is that you care!

Be smart, be strategic, and have fun! Enjoy the ride.

Sincerely,

Scott Weninger
Recovering Fire Chief

If this any of this information was valuable to you, then I ask two things of you:

1. Please pass this along to someone else who might find it useful; and
2. Please consider making a donation to Central Kitsap's Medic One Foundation, which can be done by going online to <https://www.ckfr.org/medic-one/> or making a cash or check donation at 5300 NW Newberry Hill Road, Silverdale, WA 98383.