

I Am In Charge, Now What? Rules Of Engagement For Fire Officers

This presentation will identify how the practice of leadership is not easy, nor can it be frowned upon as it has its place in each organization. When leadership is not exuded, the climate, productivity and charisma of an organization remains consistent to what has become the norm. Just as the practice of leadership is not easy, finding the most appropriate way to influence personnel is just as complicated, as there are the set leadership characteristics of those in power, and the characteristics and traits of those within the organization. Some situations require a mixture of uses, blending of traits, or an all-out full approach of one dominate style. No one style is the cookie cutter approach that fixes all. The default state of those in charge, those who are assigned below and how to motivate, communicate, influence and change deeply held beliefs all are factors when exercising leadership within the fire service, which does not include the own self deployed minefield the leader has to face. There are common leadership traits practiced by those who have successfully charted change, influence and cohesion within their organizations. These traits can help us as leaders establish our best practices, identify what will establish credibility with our subordinates and prevent leadership failures due to bad practices. Successful leadership traits have been shared from the military to the private sector from many former military commanders and upon the philosophy of organizational leadership. These traits that are discussed deal with ethics and moral issues of the leader, caring for and developing subordinates, approach and tact during communications. This is important for the leader to engage and maintain the workforce to facilitate the necessary steps required for the agency. Leadership to simplify many definitions is the process of influence, in which a person enlists assistance and support of others for the accomplishment of a common task or goal. Leadership does not necessarily have to originate from the hierarchical top position, although most assume that is how change within an organization occurs. Company officers, senior firefighters and even the younger firefighters all have an opportunity to practice leadership.

Instructor – Tim Whitham

Tim Whitham has over 28 years of firefighting experience encompassing volunteer and career firefighting. During this time, he has spent over 15 years in supervisory roles and eight years as Chief / Emergency Manager in combination departments and smaller communities that are representative of the vast majority of the American Fire Service. This experience has afforded him the opportunity to utilize and practice numerous different strategies and tactics in various parts of the country, while utilizing the NIMS Incident Command System since its implementation on many local emergencies ranging from structure fires, hazardous materials releases and large public gathering venues such as parades and community events. He has taught strategies and tactics utilized on the emergency incident site to company officers and firefighters since 1994. Lead and managed departments in small and medium sized communities and have variety of experience in career, combination, federal and career fire departments. Over his career, during many exercises and actual events, he has utilized Unified Command operations when dealing with large scale community flooding, responses to severe weather events, and planning for community parades and events.