THE REVIEW

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Have a Great Weekend!

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." – Viktor Frankl

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The Assistant Chief's Desk

The last time I had the opportunity to write to you, I wrote about my take on leadership. I covered the high-level aspects of how I approach leadership and I described the benefits that I had witnessed in my own efforts as well as in watching others apply this philosophy. The area that I didn't touch on was how to get there. Today I will dive deeper into the "how" and the small group dynamics that make it all work.

But first, some acknowledgements and review are in order. I'd like to thank Chief Durre with Prescott Fire. I had the opportunity to listen to him speak on this topic a few months ago. Like many of us in the fire service I am familiar with various concepts of leadership and small group dynamics, however his perspective and presentation cast them in a new light for me. If you ever get the opportunity to listen to him speak about leadership, I'd highly encourage you to do so.

I wrote to you before about my philosophy which is referred to as "Intent based leadership". In this model of leadership, we focus on technical competence, and organizational clarity. These are the fundamentals. Before we can have a good discussion about leadership with our folks, we have to have at least, a working level of competence in the tasks and responsibilities that are assigned to them. This applies across all positions and / or ranks. The other critical piece, and by far the hardest to quantify is what we refer to as organizational clarity. Large portions of this clarity can be found in the Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization. These can answer the questions of, "who are we" and "why do we behave the way we do". Organizational clarity is more than this, however. It's about understanding needs and expectations and having situational awareness not only of yourself but also the roles above and below you. Organizational Clarity can also include knowing when to do something, or even more importantly, when not to. Organizational Clarity is made up of many things and guides our decision making as we apply our technical competence in our day-to-day duties.

Once we have achieved technical competence and we have a good level of organizational clarity, we can address control. We now begin replacing orders with intent. You give intent to your employees, and they give intent back to you. Rather than asking for permission an employee describes their intent to their supervisor. At that point the supervision can simply affirm the employee's intention, or they can create a teaching opportunity by asking questions or offering guidance. More often than not, because of the hard work we have invested in developing competence and clarity, the employee's intention and direction are the correct ones. Like I mentioned before the replacing of orders with intent is a simple nuance of communication. It is, however, an enormously powerful one. This simple change creates huge psychological ownership and empowerment.

A question I get often when I talk or teach about this topic is something along the lines of, "That's all well and good and it sounds really cool, but how do we get there?" That's the real topic for today's Review. The "How".

As we get started there are some concepts we need to understand.

Organizational Citizenship:

This can be defined as a person's voluntary commitment within an organization to its success. (Organizational Citizenship Behavior, 2014) This commitment to the overall well-being of the organization occurs outside of the person's assigned duties and is manifested in respect and accountability. Organizational Citizenship is crucial to the success of any organization.

I lead off with this because none of what I am about to talk about will work if we aren't all invested in the success of the organization as a whole.

Leadership:

I like to describe this as "Embedding the capacity for greatness in the people and practices of the organization and decoupling it from the personality of the leader." (Marquet, 2016) This places leadership capacity at all levels and moves people to the accomplishment of shared goals (There's that Clarity piece)

Followership:

You will recall I prefer to describe my philosophy as the "Leader-Leader" philosophy. As such I don't really like the term followership, but it is inevitable that some following will be done by leaders as they work collectively to support the shared goals of the organization. Someday I will come up with a better term to describe this.

As Chief Durre put it, "Followers contribute through their dedication, commitment and willingness to collaborate towards a common purpose." (Durre, 2024)

Communication:

Quite simply communication is how we exchange information. While I'm not going to dive deeply into communication here, suffice it to say that good communication is crucial to effective leadership. In contrast, poor communication has led to the demise of many relationships both personal and professional.

Boundary:

Boundaries define the "container". They set the scene for how small groups engage with each other, time limits and tasks. They can also define who is included or excluded. Healthy boundaries can eliminate confusion and foster identity and purpose within a group.

Authority:

This refers to formal capacity of individuals within a group to exercise influence or give specific guidance. If authority is mismanaged it can lead to confusion, power struggles, and absolutely destroy the effectiveness of the group.

Role:

Roles can be defined as the responsibilities, expectations and behaviors that are typically expected of a given position within the organization. Clearly defined roles can improve coordination and foster cooperation between group members. (Clarity again………)

Task:

Tasks are very simply the work that the group exists to accomplish.

Collectively boundary, authority, role, and task are referred to by organizational psychologists as the BART system. In order to keep this to a manageable length I'll just use the term BART moving forward.

Now that we've covered the concepts, let's get to the "how to". We are good at creating Technical Competence. This is done through formal and informal training and mentorship. The formal training starts with day one of the academy or our employment and should continue until the day we leave the organization. An effective training program emphasizes the fundamentals of the job while simultaneously preparing us for the "High Risk / Low Frequency" events that we may also have to face. The effective and decisive actions of our personnel on the Legado Fire are evidence that we have this type of training program in place. Informal training happens every day in the stations and in other areas of the organization. It happens when formal and informal leaders share hard won knowledge gained through experience with our newer members. We can see that this is taking place because our personnel make solid operational and administrative decisions day in and day out.

Organizational Clarity is much more theoretical because there are so many moving pieces. While the Compass and the Mission, Vison and Values are a great start, there is so much more to Organizational Clarity. This is where BART can help. The beauty of BART is that it can be the "go to" for the rest of Organizational Clarity. The system emphasizes mutual understanding, and the conscious navigation of small group dynamics to engender effective collaboration so that the group can accomplish organizational objectives. (BART Analysis, n.d.)

Using effective communication to clearly articulate the boundaries, authority, roles, and tasks we create organizational clarity. Expectations and desired outcomes can be clearly articulated and more importantly, understood. When members of an organization understand what is expected of them and they know how to fulfill those expectations it becomes very easy for them to accomplish their assigned tasks. When they understand the expectations placed upon them and they are successfully completing their tasks, they require less direction. This process builds until orders aren't required because our personnel are moving to accomplish the necessary tasks before any direction needs to be given. This is how we achieve leadership at every level. Our communications consist of personnel communicating

their intent to do specific tasks up the chain of command. That intent is then ratified, or guidance given on the rare occasion when a change in course is necessary.

An ongoing forthright dialogue about citizenship, leadership-followership, and BART must also be had as we begin to raise up new leaders to assume responsibility from those we are losing to retirement or other positions. This will help us set ourselves up for success as we begin to lose the corporate expertise and historical knowledge of our more experienced folks. There are plenty of negative examples to look at in organizations who haven't done this, and many of them are in complete disarray. The idea isn't to pigeonhole our people but rather, to teach them how to use their authority and how their roles, responsibilities, leadership, and followership all intersect to help them become good citizens of the organization. These roles aren't cast in stone, rather they are dynamic and dependent upon one another. The ongoing communication will create a culture of openness, accountability, and empowerment. This in turn will help foster the organizational resiliency required to weather the storms we will face in today's society.

We will know we have reached the pinnacle when the membership of the organization is actively, passionately, and creatively contributing to the overall mission and well-being of the organization. At this point we are truly citizens of the organization. This is far more effective than a large group of people blindly following orders without understanding why.

Works Cited

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If you're interested in learning more about intent based leadership, check out the book, *Turn the Ship Around!: A True story of turning Followers into Leaders* by US Navy Captain(ret) L. David Marquet. This was one of the most useful books I have ever read in my career. (And, no I don't get a commission for this)