



REDLINE

LEADERSHIP L.L.C.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COACHING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS



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Editor's Note:

On the following couple pages, you will find a story, shared to me by a mentee. I found the story both interesting and valuable, for our readers, as it is illustrative of the bit I just shared, "Who Raised You Up." It can be difficult to break away from the way we were raised, the way we were developed or the habits of that "bad boss." We can say we want to, might even make progress, but occasionally we will still slip back into that realm of habit formed by our environment.

The story which I titled, "The Cover Caught Me!", are the words of the mentee, outlining the events, as recalled by him. It may be difficult for some of us to understand how this could happen, how a person could fall back into a habit that isn't even their own, but that of another person. It shows the impact of those around you on your development. I share this story with the hope that you will:

- Recognize the impact others behaviors and words have had on you and the possible effects,
- Recognize the potential impact you have on others through your behaviors and words,
- Increase your personal monitoring to make sure you don't slip into the bad habits you disliked in others.

The words shared here took courage; courage to admit that the author was wrong, that he made a mistake, courage to raise their hand in front of everyone and to point at themselves. But the author felt it was a valuable lesson that others can learn from so not all is lost.

"The Cover Caught Me!"

I began my fire service career at age 20, nearly 35 years ago on the East Coast with a department numbering nearly 2000 members. 20-year-old me received my initial station assignment, in a predominantly black neighborhood, and planned to arrive at 0500 as instructed. Stressed to the max on my first morning, I had gotten lost trying to find the station. I had a DC map on my lap, trying to drive and read at the same time. Most of the street signs were missing as that is something the drug dealers do so people can't give the police accurate locations when they call 911. Frustrated, I pulled onto a wide concrete driveway of sorts, trying to make sense of my location. Across the street was the police precinct and the firehouse was supposed to be here somewhere. The clock was ticking, and I was terrified I'd be late on my first day. As I looked around again, I spotted to the right of me a run down, dilapidated building, appearing to have two garage doors. Through the small, smoked-over, blurry glass windows of the bay doors I saw what appeared to be the silhouette of a fire engine. I was sitting on the front ramp of the station and didn't even know it. As I pulled around back and parked, I began to wonder; *"What had I gotten myself into?"*



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"The Cover Caught Me!" (cont.)

Expecting a not so warm welcome, I knocked on the door. Eventually the door cracked open about five inches, and I was greeted by a black male in an FD Tee shirt wearing jet black sunglasses. *"Who are you?"* he asked. I tried to seem confident as I answered.

"Where are you from?" he continued.

"The County" is all I said.

"The County? Are you a Klansman?" was the reply.

I wanted to die. *"No,"* I answered.

"Well, do you know any Klansmen?" the voice continued. *"Me and my friends want to go hunting this weekend."*

I truly just wanted to die. I figured I was about fifty feet from my car and felt I could make it if I ran. I thought I'd go home and just find something else to do. Maybe join the military. Anything else but work here.

Let him in," I heard someone yell. Everyone was grinning and laughing when I walked in. I felt it, I was different.

For the first two years, I kept my mouth shut and did my job, trying to learn the lay of the land. I was a stranger in a strange place. I was very different from 95% of the people in the fire house, the ER's, the grocery stores, the streets. Truly the minority, I felt alone. I worked hard, was polite and professional and was eventually accepted by those I worked with. While on the street or on a call, I made eye contact, acknowledging those that chose to look at me. It was an experience that I loved. It taught me an unbelievable amount about respect, professionalism and discrimination; the best sociology class anyone could ask for.

However, I was not like them, I was different. Throughout my time in the department, I regularly found myself on the receiving end of discrimination. Sometimes I'd walk into a room, and it would just go quiet, and I would just have to shrug it off, do my job. A "detail" man came into the station one tour and made a disparaging remark towards me, only to find himself being pushed against a wall and lifted off his feet, by a very large hand around his throat. Our Truck driver, who had no time for racism directed towards me, politely told the detail man that I was one of the crew and he could leave if he had a problem with it. And there was the time while working on the medic unit, my partner and I successfully resuscitated a middle-aged woman who coded in front of us. I shocked her into a normal sinus rhythm, and she was talking to us by the time we reached the ER. As I was completing the chart, her family walked in and thanked the ER physician for saving her life. *"Don't thank me,"* he said, *"The medics did it!"* pointing to my partner and me. I watched as the family looked at me, then my partner, and chose to walk over to him and express their gratitude. My partner noticed the same thing and they were greeted by a blunt statement; *"He's the one you should be thanking!"* as my partner pointed to me. They chose not to. The funny thing is, I got it, I felt I understood. In my nearly ten years working there, I experienced discrimination a handful of times. I'm quite sure this family experienced discrimination multiple times a day. I felt it, I was different.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

THE FOUR SKILLS

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1-SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness Is your ability to accurately perceive your own emotions in the moment and understand your tendencies across situations.

2-SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-management Is your ability to use your awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and direct your behavior positively. This means managing your emotional reactions to situations and people.

3-SOCIAL-AWARENESS

Social awareness is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people and understand what is really going on with them.

4-RELATIONSHIP-MANAGEMENT

Relationship management is your ability to use your awareness of your own emotions and those of others to manage interactions successfully.

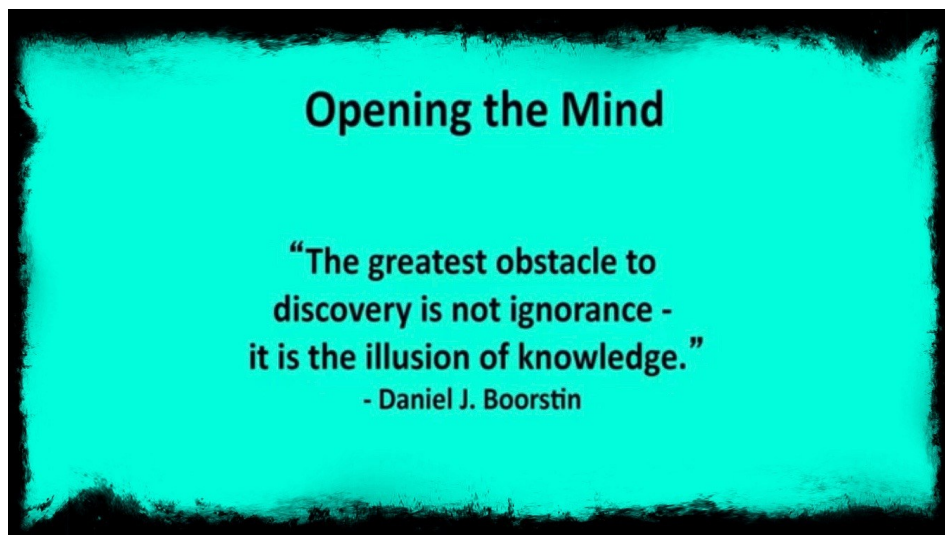
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“The Cover Caught Me!” (cont.)

After nearly ten years, I would move on to a smaller department on the West coast. I am so very grateful for my time spent working back East as it taught me unforgettable lessons about respect, professionalism, and even racism. It taught me to not judge, never assume, and be very careful of stereotyping people. Or so I thought.

Fast forward 24 years, I find myself working with Chief Body doing leadership training. Ironically, this opportunity is at the end of my career, if only I had found this fifteen years ago. I was on shift, sitting in my office, working on my final assignment, a SWOT analysis. It read; *“Ask four co-workers to do a SWOT analysis on yourself.”* I easily picked three coworkers who I would ask to offer their opinions. As I was contemplating who the fourth would be, a 20 something “Gen Z-er” came bouncing into my office to say hello. She is an EMT on the Basic Life Support Ambulance, has long blonde hair, is “bubbly” and always smiling. She never complains and always does a good job. I honestly felt this was just me hitting the easy button. I asked her if she was interested in doing a SWOT analysis of me. I gave her a bit of the backstory on the project, and she agreed to participate. I added, *“Please be honest.”*

A few days later the projects were returned to me. Reading the first two, nothing that raised an eyebrow, nothing unexpected. And then I read my “Gen Z-er’s.” I was 100% stunned. Hers was very thorough, and quite profound. She had been paying close attention to what goes on behind the scenes here, more than I ever gave her credit for. Her words



were candid, on point and honest. I was stunned. I had thought that by asking her for participation, I was simply checking a box, figuring it was low hanging fruit. *“She wouldn't have anything of value or interest to add,”* I thought to myself. She was too busy paying attention to her phone to have any true insight as to what goes on in the organization, right? I couldn't have been more wrong. She was spot on with her analysis. I sat there quite humbled after reading her analysis. It made me think of all the times I had

been judged by my appearance and how I said I would never do that to anyone else. Fast forward thirty some years and I had simply forgotten all that. **I had done what I said I'd never do.** Judging a book by its cover.

I am profoundly thankful for the opportunity to go through Redline’s development course. I only wish I had found it at the beginning of my fire department career. And I am quite thankful for the reminder that I received from the young woman whom I so incorrectly judged. Without knowing it, she taught me something I had long forgotten. **Treat everyone with respect. Forget stereotypes and never judge a book by its cover. –Garrick Terry**

The experiences presented this month are not intended to point at someone, their mistakes or their weakness. They are about discovery, about how your past can affect your current or future performance or behaviors.

If you made it this far, thank you. Thank you for listening to another’s perspective, reading about their wins, losses and discovery, for opening your mind about another’s experiences regardless of who experienced it. We need to pay attention to what others go through so we can increase our personal awareness, recognize our mistakes, faults or propensities in the interest of being better. -K