



# REDLINE

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## LEADERSHIP L.L.C.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COACHING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS



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### Tip o' the Hat!!

This month's "Tip o' the Hat" goes out to Firefighter Chris Boone, South King Fire (WA), as he departs the fire service for a new adventure. Chris started along his path in 2004 as a volunteer with Gig Harbor (WA) Fire Medic One and lasted until he was hired at Milton Fire Department in 2007. Tiny Milton held him until 2009 when he was hired at South King Fire & Rescue. Chris was medically retired September 30<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Across his career, Chris has enjoyed some special teams work and services to include time on the Hazardous Materials Team, Marine Team and qualification as a Rescue Swimmer early in the program's life. Additionally, Chris served the Department as part of the Honor Guard for 12 years, an assignment that was both honorable and challenging.

Chris and I talked about the things he enjoyed most in the Fire Service and he immediately responded with "the people." He then went on to say "the relationships developed between people that carried through to off duty time." I know I have had some good adventures with Chris over the years that I won't forget. I'm grateful for the time.

In addition to his work time, Chris really enjoys anything outdoors. A long time ago, he was an ultramarathoner, running up to 100 mile races. Now, his knees enjoy hiking, leisurely dog walks, kayaking or fly fishing. His love for the outdoors also provided him with some opportunities to contribute to Northwest Periodicals as a travel photographer/writer featuring some of the lesser known towns across Washington.

I asked Chris for his Words of Wisdom, to which he replied; "Discover your personal values, then stand firmly upon them as the foundation for your life." I think these words will help him take the next steps along his journey, which currently finds him splitting time between volunteering with the Permission To Start Dreaming Foundation.



### "Performance vs Behavior"

Back in the mid-90s, I was a young Lieutenant with a crew of my own. We worked hard, always staying on top of our assignments, training more than any other shift, and having a lot of fun. We were an energetic group of young people that enjoyed our roles and serving our community.

On my crew, I had one individual that loved to do fire inspections (fire and life safety surveys) more than anything else. He was passionate about inspections and very thorough. He would regularly go to the city building official to report persistent problems, ask questions, follow up on permits, etc.

After some time, I learned that on the days I was working, he would head out to do inspections, complete a couple and find a reason to go to City Hall to follow up on an inspection but really to visit with people. He would spend long periods of time there, effectively shutting down our progress, putting us behind. On days I was not working, he would harp on other people to get out to get the inspections completed so we could get caught up while he found other tasks to complete that required less work. In short, when I was there, he was a blocker and when I was gone, a bit of a tyrant. It took a while for me to become aware of what was going on and the crew wasn't too happy with "his doings."

Performance or behavior? If you said behavior, you are absolutely correct. His performance, or skills for the task, were great. His behavior was outside of acceptable.

Think of performance as skills, tactile, doing the job kind of stuff. Tying a knot. Performance. If you can't tie the knot, we can practice until you can. Pretty straight forward.

Think of behavioral issues as a result of attitude. You can tie the knot but won't because you think someone else should do it. Behavior. You can't tie the knot, and you don't care to invest the energy to learn it. Behavior. You can tie the knot but disagree with tying knots even though the organization says you must. Behavior.

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## "Performance vs Behavior"

Behavioral issues are the greatest challenge for any supervisor, leader or organization. Behavioral issues are always self-serving and damaging to the organization and its members. The term "normalization of deviance", wherein a member in an organization deviates from an acceptable behavior and it becomes the new norm, comes directly from behavioral issues. It occurs when someone pushes the limits without finding resistance or re-direction. When this occurs, they will push again.

A classic indicator of a behavioral issue is the statement "It's better to beg forgiveness than to ask permission". This statement indicates that an unacceptable behavior is about to occur and the person saying it is acknowledging that they KNOW it is wrong. This is premeditated. This type of attitude has never been applied to a performance issue in my career. No one has ever said, "I'm about to tie this knot wrong."

In my experience as a supervisor/leader, changing a person's behavior is very difficult. The key to changing a behavioral problem requires several key components:

1. Clear expectations established at the beginning of the relationship. Organizationally it might be Mission-Vision-Values.
2. A leader that is willing to hold themselves and others accountable.
3. The ability to have clear, honest, direct conversations quickly after an issue occurs.
4. Consistent, fair application of accountability and discipline.
5. The employee must have the desire to change.

If you have all of the above in place when you discover a behavioral issue, you need to start by putting the employee on notice, creating awareness that the behavior is unacceptable and won't be tolerated. From there it is a matter of reinforcing the expectations of behavior and consequences for failing to comply.

The key to changing a behavioral problem is awareness paired with clear expectations followed by accountability and discipline.

Continued next column



## On Track?

1. **BEHAVIOR**: *noun*: 1) manner of behaving or acting. 2b) the aggregate of responses to internal and external stimuli.

**Is your BEHAVIOR consistent, professional and aligned with organizational expectations?**

## "..... Behavior"

Progressive discipline is key unless the behaviors are so far out of line that they rise to the top immediately. A wise man once told me that he "would rather spend money on an attorney defending his actions for firing someone than to spend money on trying to rebuild the organization's reputation." The organizational reputation can't be bought for any amount of money.

Behavioral issues require swift, decisive action on the part of the supervisor/leader to put the problem person on notice. It takes courage, consistency, clarity, calm and conversation.

Failing to deal with behavioral issues will manifest itself through increase behavioral issues, drop in employee satisfaction, low morale, etc.

As far as addressing performance issues, watch for some thoughts in the near future.

This month's Tip o' the Hat recipient, Chris Boone has agreed to write a multi-part article that will be shared over the coming months. Our intent is to share his journey with mental health in an effort to make the conversation more mainstream, less awkward, to let people know it is ok, important, to talk about it. Please stay tuned for a personal glimpse into this tough conversation.



## Graduation!!

I had the pleasure of traveling to Colorado to celebrate the commitment and success of the individuals from Brighton Fire Rescue Protection District and Fort Lupton Fire Protection District with graduation ceremonies. It wasn't fancy, but it represents the efforts of all and their willingness to reflect and question themselves in an interest of greater self awareness. Our conversations often reveal vulnerabilities these leaders have as well as areas of opportunity for growth. Congratulations to all and thank you for sharing your journey with me. I am forever grateful for our time together. K-



Fort Lupton Fire, Left to Right: (back) James Mayor, Andre Gonzalez, Jakob Bolger, Stephen Holcomb, Don Ogborn, Austin Garza, (front) Marcus Bruggeman, Alex Bodnar, Shawn Montoya



Brighton Fire Rescue, Left to Right: Mike Murphy, Cole Miller, Me, Chris Swainson, Cameron Conner. Not pictured: Blake Mertz, Thad Vroman