



REDLINE

LEADERSHIP L.L.C.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COACHING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS



Issue 34-January 2026

Tip o' the Hat!!

This month's "Tip o' the Hat" goes out to Justin Bariso, Founder of EQ Applied, an Emotional Intelligence company that helps teams develop Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Justin is a bestselling author (EQ Applied) and for 10 years has written a monthly column for Inc. Magazine. Additionally, he has contributed to TIME, Forbes and Business Insider, and is in the process of writing another book. Justin was recognized by LinkedIn as a "Top Voice" in the field of management and workplace culture 3 years in a row.

He hosts classes on EQ via his website and hosts a networking platform for leaders/coaches/anyone that is interested in EQ, developing their own or exploring. His most valuable tool is "The Lighthouse," a networking platform for Emotional Intelligence enthusiasts.

The reason for my Tip o' the Hat to him this month is because of the way he conducts himself and it should be a lesson to all who call themselves leaders. He makes everyone feel welcome, feel valued, feel like they belong. He freely shares his knowledge and experiences, and humbly provides others with an opportunity to explore and learn about the topic in which he is an expert.

Justin has done 2 things for me; first, he has helped me become more aware of the importance of EQ in a leadership role, and second, he has given me confidence to share my voice, trust my perspectives and has helped me overcome my own limiting beliefs. Oh yeah, a third thing; he has helped me become more emotionally intelligent!!

I am grateful for my time with Justin over the last "X" number of months. A chance meeting has developed into a great relationship and what I would consider a cherished friendship. Thank you, JB!



"Not My Circle!"

I am sitting on my couch one morning, looking through "stuff" on my iPad in search of my next amazing "Link of the Week." I come across an article on Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and within the article is a link to a "free class" on EQ. Yeah, right. Free....to get me to sign up for something. So, I register for the free class and a few minutes later, I get an email from what looks like the "host" of the class. I read it a couple times and think to myself, "This email looks like it was written by a real person."

I bite. I click reply and send an email back to the "host" as the email intrigued me for some reason. A few after I hit send, I get a response. Ok, so this one is real for sure! It's a real person! But this person writing back to me is kind of a big deal; author, contributor to Inc., TIME and others. Why would he be writing back to ME? Scratching head emoji here.

We exchange a few emails and before long, schedule a Zoom call; his idea, not mine. We E-meet at 0900, mountain time which turns out to be evening where he lives; Germany. We have a great conversation, discussing EQ, how it should be taught more in the fire service, leadership and more. It was great.

Not long after, he shares with me that he is starting what I call a "networking platform for EQ enthusiasts." I am very interested so I buy in quickly. Others on this network include people from all over the world working in what I perceive to be pretty big roles. Coaches, mentors, authors, teachers, consultants, Italy, Brazil, Portugal, Germany, India, France. And a fire guy living in Montana! Quickly I realized I was "punching above my weight class" in this group. But, I shared my thoughts via the platform and some folks responded positively. Hmmm.

Then Justin commented on some Mission, Vision, Values thoughts I put on one of his posts. He was very interested so we had another international Zoom call. I shared what I have learned, how to use it, and what it has done for me. He was very interested and thought it might be useful for others so he asked me to share with his platform subscribers.

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"Circle"

We discussed the class structure, content, etc. and got it on the calendar. I was fortunate enough to teach to a dozen people from around the world that day, sharing a tool that has been key to helping me succeed in my professional and personal life. It was a humbling experience and I genuinely felt intimidated by the experience. "Who am I, a retired firefighter from a couple small departments teaching to an international audience of leaders?" Not my circle.

Over the months since that experience, I have reflected on it a lot. Perhaps humility is the way of my confidence? Imposter syndrome? Or maybe, just maybe, everyone has something to offer if we listen carefully. Even an old fire guy from Montana.

It also changed the way I look at others. I've never really been one to be "Star Struck" or overly intimidated by celebrities/sport stars, etc. But you know what I learned, these people are all just that, people. The same feelings, emotions, struggles and successes. People.

So, when you are feeling a little unsure, insecure, I say; "Go for it!" Put it out there. Try. Recognize that not everyone succeeds on the first try. Not all connections work. But, take a chance, a chance on yourself or another. It might be one of the greatest "risks" you take all year! Just like when I hit "Reply" to the email from some guy I met on the internet!

"Help? But I don't know how!"

Only a few times in my life I have been thrust into a situation that I could not fix, that I had no idea how to respond to. Situations so heavy I was left searching for an answer, paralyzed by emotion, quickly reduced to tear filled paralysis. I won't share the details but please trust me, these were the heaviest events of my life. In 2 of those situations I responded with, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I can't fix this. But I am here for you."

After reflection, I have learned or realized that, by accident, those were probably the best things I could have done. It wasn't done with intention, it was a vulnerable admission that I didn't know how to/couldn't fix the situation. It was me being authentic.



On Track?

RISK: *noun: possibility of loss or injury; verb: to expose to hazard or danger.*

What are you willing to RISK for your growth and/or success?

Recently, after my friend Chris B. retired, a mutual friend sent a couple photos from his retirement party and said something to the effect of; "Great turn out, good words, an elephant in the room." From that statement, I could feel the tension in the room, without even being there. THAT was what I needed to work on. At that moment, I realized I needed to take action.

I talked to Chris shortly thereafter and we talked about his journey. I asked if he would share to which he eagerly replied, "Yes!" So, here we go. Over the next few months, I will share Chris's words. More than the words, the journey, the emotions, the challenges and successes. I will share these in the interest of helping others learn how to support those in need.

A couple of things I ask of you;

- Please read it! This is going to be long, but important. We can't remove words to "make it fit the page." It all needs to be shared.
- This may be emotional. It's real, direct and honest. This is a very personal story, and for me, has been the hardest piece I've done since starting RLL.
- Try to empathize with the storyteller or those that may be in the same situation.
- Think about how you can say, "***I don't know how to help but I will be here with you.***" That might be all you need.

“A MIND ON FIRE; My journey through PTSD”

When my friend Kevin asked me to share my experience from the last few years in battling PTSD, I started quoting all kinds of stats and studies. And then some more studies. I had books and videos and public speakers to quote. You get the point; I had a wealth of someone else's knowledge that I wanted to share. However, being the leader he's always been, Kevin asked me to look deeper and make it more personal, to make it more impactful for anyone who might need it. So, over the next few newsletters, it's my humble privilege to share my story of struggle so that if you, or someone you know is struggling, maybe this can help them. So, with that, let's hop right in!

I've been struggling to figure out what makes a career in the fire service successful. Since my recent medical retirement, I've been searching for meaning out of my 18 years in the fire service. Was my time successful even though it didn't end the way I had planned? If I had worked 35 years was that more successful than 18? For me, the meaning of success changed the day I had a panic attack on a call. A successful career in my eyes abruptly shifted from working 35 years in a job I love to literally trying to survive the drive into work, the next call or the lonely drive home after a bad shift. For me success started to mean getting out of the fire service alive. My goal became keeping my family intact, staying alive for them. For me success became not adding my name to a list of names on a wall in a fire station somewhere.



My battle with PTSD took me to some dark places; so low and so distant from the man I was that I couldn't see the good things in my life or the good in me. I hated myself for being "that guy," for having whatever it was that was going on with me. Why me? It made me feel alone and afraid to ask for help from the only people I knew who loved me unconditionally. I pushed away the only people I could always lean on because I didn't want to admit what I saw as defeat and surely, they would too. How wrong I was looking back. It wasn't until I summoned the courage to ask for help, to stick my neck out for the swift blade of social ridicule, that I learned I'm not the only one. I'm not broken. I can be happy again. It all begins with

that first step of speaking up.

My career was like everyone else's, wanting the "worst of the worst" calls and the busiest of the busy fire houses. I wanted to test myself against whatever the "Fire Gods" had in store, to prove to my crew and to myself that I can do this job. You want to help people and we did, a lot of people over a lot of years, and I always felt good about making a difference. As the call volumes increased over the years, finding time to absorb those positive emotions and store them in my memory became harder and harder. The hard and challenging calls happened more and more while the ability to "off gas" from those toxic calls became less and less. The trauma piled up and I was doing nothing to get rid of it. As a new firefighter no one wants to be the one to raise your hand and say "I need help!" We get hired because we're strong-minded, capable humans and finding a crack in that foundation felt unacceptable. So, I didn't raise my hand. I didn't say "hey, I can't stop thinking about that call" because I was never shown that as an option. It's not to say I wasn't safe to speak up, I just didn't know how or to whom I should talk to about it. I kept all the pain and sadness I felt from the job to myself. I was quick to tell the entertaining versions of the job for sure, but not how it made me feel, or worse yet, how it kept me from feeling anything.

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"A MIND ON FIRE" (cont.)

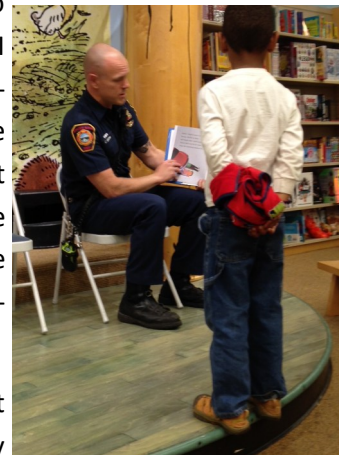
My breaking point came in 2019 when I lost four patients in the span of about 12 hours. There was nothing unusual about this day or about the calls we went on. As gruesome, gut-turning and heart breaking as that day was, it's nothing that first responders don't see every shift. While that's kind of the problem, it was more the fact the I had reached my maximum load capacity for tragedy. My brain shut off and my body shut down. My brain could no longer process the emotions I was feeling and my body shut down in the form of a panic attack in the middle of an accident scene. From that day on I was a giant walking red flag that no one knew to look for. I was withdrawn and would isolate on duty and off, not wanting to participate in shift tie-in's, shift dinners, group workouts or training. I was irritable around the station and on calls. I wanted to be elsewhere, anywhere, but where I was. I didn't realize it then, but my life was beginning to spiral down the drain. I always felt stuck and frustrated at work because I couldn't find the words to describe the way I was feeling. I disconnected from all social and department func-

tions for fear of my peers seeing my weaknesses. I would get so anxious on my way to work that I envisioned myself getting into a car wreck, so I didn't have to go into work that day. The weight of responsibility and the gravity of error when dealing with human life became more than I could bear.

My brain was full of nothing but negative outcomes for every situation I found myself in. I thought every patient I touched would die and those feelings of fear and doubt compounded to the point that I couldn't trust my skills or my confidence to mitigate the problem anymore. I worried about becoming a liability to brothers and sister on the line. Knowing I could never live with that on my shoulders, I purposefully tried to get myself out of roles of responsibility. I didn't want to drive because "what if I get lost in thought and don't see the minivan driver who also didn't see me?" I didn't want to pump and make a hydrant because "what if my skills let my best friends get hurt inside that burning home?" And I damn sure didn't want patient care a critical patient because "what if I mess this up?" At this point I had 15 years on the between two departments in busy cities. All I could wonder was "How was this happening?"

In my world if something goes from working to not working, we call that broken. I felt broken. When you spend all day telling yourself something negative, it becomes very hard to feel positive. If you wake up every morning and tell yourself you're broken, eventually you start to believe it. The worry in my brain became consistent and never ending, my brain telling my body to prepare for the world to end with every minor setback. I was stuck in "fight or flight" just trying to go to the grocery store. A dentist office visit would take me out of commission for days. Talking to people became a chore, trying to hide the way I was acting because of the way I was feeling. It's a vicious cycle of self-destruction, isolating to hide my symptoms but being alone with my thoughts was the worst thing for me. The problems at work soon carried over into my home life.

PTSD started to control my life. Expecting the worst out of people is a lonely way to live and it's a dangerous way to raise a family. My body responded to stress at home just like I was at work. The tasks of trailing kids around the house, picking up after them would stretch my stress tolerance to its limits. Not because I didn't love spending time with my kids, but because I had "zero" of myself to give to them, to give to my wife. I had to save every ounce of emotional energy for work so I had nothing left when I got home. They bore the brunt of my frustration simply because I had nowhere else to turn it. I started to have daydreams and nightmares of seeing my kids' faces in place of my patients. The horrible fate of others now cast upon my own children.



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“A MIND ON FIRE” (cont.)

The feeling of a lack of control over one’s life when you can’t look at your kids’ faces too closely, because they turn into another kid that wasn’t as lucky as they are in life. The screaming words of grieving parents haunted me until I thought I was certifiably losing my faculties, but somehow I still have to go put my two kids to bed, to find the words to make them feel safe and loved when all I can think about is how vulnerable they truly are in this life. Instead of seeking comfort in the safest place I know, the love of my wife, I pushed her away. I don’t know if it was to save her or to save me but I thought that it was the only way to spare her the disappointment of me being her husband, me, in the state that I’m in. When I hid my emotions, I felt some control over them and some relief from the pressure of facing them head on. I felt like a burden my family was forced to live with. This bred shame and embarrassment for the man I had become. I was unable to fix myself or my family. I lost my purpose and I lost my self worth.



Worthlessness is a dangerous place to be. It gives you the sense that “no one cares so why bother” or so I felt when I parked my truck by the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, trying to convince myself to leave everything and everyone I love. It wasn’t because I didn’t love them or they didn’t love me, it was because I felt of no value to them. I felt more like a negative than a positive, worthless and nothing good to give, so why bother. Telling myself the struggle is not worth the fight, I asked myself how I got here? How did I go from wanting to help people for a living to wanting to die because of it? As I sat there crying, talking to the ether, looking for answers I got one. The only friend that I never pushed away, my dog. She went everywhere with me and had seen every version of my hurt. As I struggled to sit still, feeling the truck cab closing in, she reached her paw out and pinned my arm down to the center console. I was in such a panic that I had almost forgotten she was there. Her firm and confident nonverbal “shout” to get my attention broke me out of my trance. When those big brown eyes hit me, I saw the love of my family. I thought that if this dog and my family can still be here for me, still loving me after all that I’ve put them through, then maybe they see something I don’t. Maybe there is something left in me that is worthy of love.

I knew after that day that I didn’t want to leave the people I love. In fact, I wanted to live and fight for them, and for me. I wanted to be happy again, but I had no idea how to do that. I had no idea what help was available, and I truly didn’t know how hard it was going to be to get that help. I was prepared to fight my demons but not to have to fight for the support my family and I needed, all the while trying to heal and move forward. Logistical roadblocks and obstacles can obscure the path to recovery, whether it’s insurance, workers comp or your own department. It can be discouraging to finally get the nerve to ask for help just to be told to “take this form and go wait in the line over there.” It deters and prevents people from asking for help, and then hinders recovery when you do, and for some it can have fatal consequences.

Next time I’d like to discuss just exactly what it looked like, from my perspective, to raise that hand and say the words out loud, “I need help.” I’d like to share the struggles my family found on my path to recovery and then we’ll finish up with what does life look like on the other side of struggle.

- Chris Boone