



REDLINE

LEADERSHIP L.L.C.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COACHING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS



Issue 9 – November 2023

Tip o' the Hat...

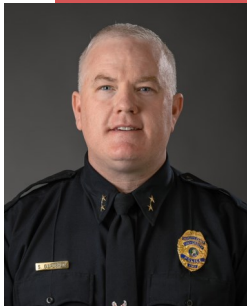
This month goes out to one of our Law Enforcement partners, Sean O'Laughlin of the Eastern Washington University Police Department, who recently completed the FBI National Academy.

Sean has been in law enforcement for 22 years, starting his career at the University of Washington (UW) Police Department (GoDawgs). Prior to working there, Sean was a punter for the UW Husky football team in the 90's. At the U.W., he grew through the ranks and eventually landed at Eastern Washington University (EWU) as a Lieutenant in charge of Operations and is currently the Deputy Chief (DC).

In addition to his full-time job at EWU Police Department, DC O'Laughlin is a Lt. Commander in the U.S. Coast Guard. He currently serves in the role of Executive Officer of Port Security in Everett, Washington, leading 105 men and woman of the security unit.

The FBI Academy, located in Quantico Virginia, is a ten-week program that includes Organizational, Servant, and Executive Leadership curriculum. While attending, Sean enjoyed fieldtrips to New York, Philadelphia, the White House, and Pentagon where they observed operations of Real Time Crisis Centers. During the academy, Sean completed the infamous "Yellow Brick Road;" a 6-mile obstacle course, that he found physically challenging but very rewarding.

Cont. next column...



Friday Deep Thoughts....

Friday Deep Thoughts: We are quick to call out people in the outgroup but refuse to criticize the same behavior from someone in the ingroup.

This behavior completely disorients our moral compass and forces us into cognitive dissonance as we preach one set of values, then defend the people on our team who act against those same principles. Doing this weakens our team, hampers our judgment, and inhibits our ability to live and work according to a shared set of principles.

We need to be conscious of our tribal instincts and start to rely more on our values than our team allegiance. We need to call out the bad actors, especially on our own side. We need to be more consistent in our application of support, outreach, judgment, and frustration.

Bad actors are bad actors irrespective of team or tribe. We need to be braver, show better leadership and realize that the dangers of going against our tribe are not the mortal ones our predecessors faced. In fact, at this point leaning into tribalism is a greater threat than abandoning it. If we treat everyone as a person and serve them, everything else falls into place.

"The opposite of courage in our society is not cowardice, it is conformity." - Rollo May

Thank you to Guest Author Chief Jeremy Young from Frederick-Firestone Fire Protection District in Colorado for his contribution. I encourage you to follow Chief Young's contributions on Facebook as "Jeremy Young."

Sean has been in the Coast Guard for 16 years, serving during 4 hurricanes and one oil spill. He is qualified for Type 1 Incident Management Teams in 4 different Incident Command System positions and been part of the EOC team for all of these events.

When asked what he enjoys most about his different leadership positions Sean said without hesitation, "The people. Nothing like the collaborated effort it takes during a crisis and how people step up to complete the mission."

When not fulfilling one of his leadership roles, Sean enjoys his family and lake time and of course, watching his beloved Washington Huskies.

"I Just Want to Leave it Better...!"

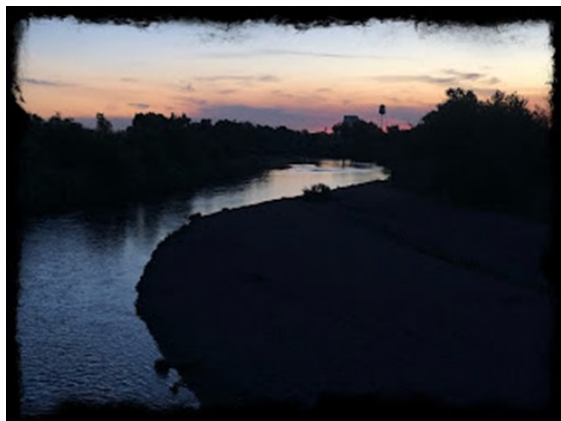
"I just want to leave it better than I found it" is the most common topic during our discussions of legacy.

If you are a leader in your organization, and you want to leave a lasting impression, have a significant impact, start by investing in our young.

Take some time to teach them a skill, have the courage to hold them accountable, share a value. Help them succeed in their current role and show them how to work towards their next.

Take time to get to know what inspires them, what motivates them and where they want to go. Then identify ways you can use your past experiences to help them succeed.

Investing in our young is a "High Yield Investment." Get to it!!



Change-Dramatic or Subtle?

I've thought about this photo and it's meaning (to me) often since I snapped it. As I rode that day, and reflected, it became more and more clear. Here's my take:

Much like life, this river simply follows it's course, everyday. In the absence of something dramatic, perhaps even catastrophic, it's path doesn't change. However, if something dramatic does occur and the path does change, the river seeks a new direction, resumes it's flow and adjusts to it's new path. Soon enough, this new path becomes the norm until the next change.

What does your path look like? How do you feel about change? Can you adjust to gradual change or are you waiting for something catastrophic?

Dramatic is ok. But I say control and embrace change before something catastrophic occurs.

Link of the Month!!

Follow the link below to an article, video or website I found worthy as it challenges our conventional mindset. Let us know what you think!!

"Try to Keep Up!"

Want to Guest Author?

Do you have a perspective to share? A lesson that you learned that you feel would benefit others? Perhaps you had an experience that may inspire others to act. Maybe you just need a creative outlet.

Send us a note and let's get your words on paper. I would love to give others an opportunity to share.

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On Track?

STEWARDSHIP: *noun: the responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring about and preserving.*

What are **you** doing to be good Steward for your fire department?

Leader Spotlight-Battalion Chief Cory O'Brian

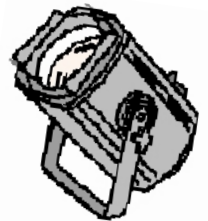
I sat down to visit with Cory O'Brian and within a few minutes felt like we were kindred spirits. And after our conversation, even now, I am looking forward to our next conversation. Sometimes you just know, "this is a good one!"

Cory O'Brian retired as a Battalion Chief from the City of Helena Fire Department within the last month-ish. I spotted the announcement of his retirement on social media and just had a hunch this was a person I needed to talk to because others could learn from him. And my hunch was right.

Much like myself, Cory didn't grow up "always wanting to be a fireman." While he had family in the fire service in Chicago, it wasn't clearly his path. He grew up in Montana, mostly in small towns and began his journey as a volunteer in Townsend, circa 1994. While he was doing the right thing, community service wasn't really his focus. He just enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer, spending time with other like-minded individuals. While living and volunteering in Townsend, Cory worked at Rocky Mountain Supply, a local ranch store. After 5 years at Rocky Mountain, they asked him to move to Belgrade to run the store there. Hmm.

Moving to Belgrade provided Cory with the opportunity to volunteer with their department, a well respected, professional volunteer organization. During his time with Belgrade FD, Cory continued to respond but began to show signs of leadership as he engaged in developing teams, leading programs, and implementing change for not only Belgrade, but the entire region.

Cory hired on with Helena fire in 2002, and his first impression was that Helena, while a career department, was a little behind his previous department. He was a little frustrated by some of the organizational practices and even asked himself, "Did I make a mistake taking this job?"



That being said, something Helena was doing right was how they treated their new people. The organization welcomed the new people with open arms, investing in their development, often treating them better than the incumbent members. Because he was treated so well, he felt comfortable bringing up new ideas. As it turns out, he did not make a mistake taking that job!

As a new career firefighter with the City of Helena, Cory pushed boundaries. Cory challenged the status quo, respectfully, pushing the organizational thoughts and practices and began to effect change, impacting the organization in a positive manner.

As a firefighter, Cory took on special assignments. He was empowered to develop more programs and teams, bringing hazmat and rope rescue to the Valley. These assignments were opportunities to lead. And that he did.

Around 2011, Cory became known as Lt. O'Brian, promoted into a formal leadership role. As a Lieutenant, he continued his efforts to effect change. Cory was constantly helping to advance the organization, supporting professional development of not only himself but his peers. One of his efforts was to inspire his team-mates to not talk negatively about other organizations. Cory pushed the belief that "Nobody is big enough to do it alone" and we need to rely on our neighbors in times of need. Those relationships were key to success for the organizations on both sides of the coin and success started with positive speak.

Lt. O'Brian promoted to Captain soon thereafter and to BC in 2017. The step to Battalion Chief increased his sphere of influence along with his responsibility and opportunity. Chief O'Brian continued to develop and engage those around him, growing them into the professionals HFD needed. For many, attaining the position of BC would be enough but that was never in Cory's plan. From the start of his career, Cory recognized that he didn't want to grow old and stale in any position in the organization. Cory always had a plan to move on to something else after about 20 years.

Leader Spotlight-Battalion Chief Cory O'Brian...cont.

In 2023, Cory was hired as the Regional Training Manager for Montana State Fire School, an extension of Montana State University. As the Regional Training Manager, Cory is responsible for providing and overseeing training for 5 counties in Northwestern Montana. This role puts him on the road a bit, covering a lot of ground in the most beautiful part of the state. In his current position, Cory works with many small, rural, and volunteer departments. One of his philosophies is "No PowerPoint. If we have time to click, we have time to practice manipulative skills."

Cory and I talked about what he did to prepare himself for success in achieving advanced positions or roles. Cory focused on training and experiences that were going to help him succeed in the roles that he wanted to fill rather than a "philosophical" or "theoretical" approach that might be found in higher education. While Cory's formal education is limited to a high school diploma, his engagement getting different experiences and specific training has been laser focused. As Chief O'Brian sought improvement and growth, the organization had virtually no money to cover class costs. This detail did not deter Cory at all, and as he described he "invested in himself." He took full responsibility for his success, paying tuition, covering travel, time off and more. Cory was willing to take the first step, showing intent and good will and eventually the organization recognized his efforts and assisted when and where they could.

In addition to his training, Cory accepted assignments and tasks that took him outside the normal "ride the rig" mentality and provided him with opportunities to network, manage a budget, oversee programs and lead people and teams. At both Belgrade and Helena, Chief O'Brian worked on special assignments and developed special teams such as hazmat and rope rescue. Cory was instrumental in helping to implement an effective Incident Management program while at Belgrade, leading an entire region in their growth.



Along with all of Chief O'Brian's various roles, he worked as an adjunct instructor with the State Fire School for the last 15 years. In this work, he had the opportunity to work with what he describes as "really sharp people" expanding his network and preparing himself for future opportunities.

All along this path, others bear witness to Cory's commitment; commitment to himself, the organization, and the community. Commitment to growth, development, and investment. And when others recognized this commitment, they grabbed on. Others began to see the value in his efforts and began to work on themselves.

As you can see, Chief O'Brian has been on a path of leadership since his job with Rocky Mountain Supply. I asked him what he thought about some of the factors contributing to his success, besides personal investment in growth and development. The first thing he said was "My stepdad.: He did a great job in his role." He went on to describe him as "old fashioned, with clear expectations and taught me about respect and responsibility." Job well done, dad!

I think Cory embodies the same practices that he got from his stepdad; teaching respect and responsibility while holding people accountable to meeting his expectations and that is why he is a respected leader not only in his organization but in the region.

Expectations Cory? I think we might be having another conversation soon.

Have a leader you believe is worth Spotighting?

Send us a note at k.body@redlineleadershipllc.com