32. Leadership Challenges: Be Ready to Lead

Lead Instructor: Tim Whitham

One of the most misunderstood applications of promotions is what will be required of the individual. Moving from one position to another within the fire service is a daunting task. It is not easily accomplished and will require sacrifice. Leadership is a constant hard-fought battle that will require all of the individual's abilities, a lot of time and effort, forward thinking, dedication, sleepless nights, stress, mistakes, gains, sacrifice, pride, intestinal fortitude and taking responsibility. Whether the fire officer wants to admit it or not, they are now the "BOSS", and with it comes a new mindset, abilities and the ability to avoid making critical mistakes that will affect their ability to motivate, lead and change their organization and the fire service.

Leadership to simplify many definitions; is the process of influence, in which a person enlists assistance and support of others for the accomplishment of a common task or goal. Leadership does not necessarily have to originate from the hierarchical top position, although most assume that is how change within an organization occurs. Company officers, senior firefighters and even the younger firefighters all have an opportunity to practice leadership.

There are common leadership traits practiced by those who have successfully charted change, influence and cohesion within their organizations. The fire service can learn from these common traits and establish our own traits engrained with the rich culture of the fire service. These traits can help us as leaders establish our best practices, identify what will establish credibility with our subordinates and prevent leadership failures due to bad practices. Successful leadership traits have been shared from the military to the private sector from many former military commanders and philosophy of organizational leadership.

About the Instructor:

Tim Whitham has served as the Fire Chief for the City of Edwardsville, Kansas since 2015. He has over three decades of fire service experience and has served in all capacities from firefighter, company officer to fire chief. Tim is a graduate of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program and has designations as a Chief Fire Officer and Fire Marshal from the Commission on Professional Credentialing. He holds a bachelor's degree in Fire and Emergency Response Management from the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh and a master's degree in leadership from Grand Canyon University.

Chief Whitham is a regular presenter at fire departments as well as at fire and emergency services events and conferences across the country including presenting at Fire Rescue International on multiple occasions, he has authored articles for fire service and EMS publications. Chief Whitham has addressed state legislative bodies and committees on concerns facing the fire and emergency services agencies. Tim serves in various capacities on numerous boards and committees, including having served as the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section representative to the Program Planning Committee for IAFC Fire-Rescue International.

Chief Whitham is the Fire Science Program Director for Johnson County Community College, prior to this appointment he served many years as an instructor. He is also an instructor for the National Fire Academy, and is an instructor, evaluator and site coordinator for the Kansas University Fire Service Training Program. Chief Whitham has numerous IFSAC certifications including Fire Officer III and Instructor III. Tim also holds numerous NWCG qualifications and has deployed with the Johnson County Wildland Task Force. He is an Army veteran having served in airborne infantry regiments with the US Army and then transitioned to the National Guard.