

# A Leader's Book Club

Once, after meetings at the U.S. Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Va., I wandered into the base bookstore and found a large section labeled "Marine Corps Reading List." As expected, there were many military-themed books, but for colonels and generals there also were books on ethics and diversity, such as *The Book of Virtue*, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and *Beyond Race and Gender*.

The Marine Corps introduced the Commandant's Reading List in 1988; each commandant would add personal recommendations to several traditional books. The list has evolved into the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program, which recommends specific books for each grade, private to lance corporal, sergeant and right on up to general. Two lists, military and societal, are included for all Marine grades.

The 29th commandant, Gen. A.M. Gray, added six objectives for all Marine leaders to his reading list. His aim was to impart a sense of Marine values and traits, increase professional knowledge, improve analytical and reasoning skills, and use printed media to learn and communicate.

This concept could work for the fire service.

I've had many interesting discussions on the future of the emergency services with chiefs and other industry leaders. We frequently would talk about books that had an affect on us. The last time we met, we each were asked to bring one or two books that we felt had value for professional development in the emergency services. The group included several fire chiefs with a total of 224 years of fire service experience and every one is an avid, if not voracious, reader.

The group recommended and discussed 12 books on leadership, organizational skills, communication and personal growth: *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive: A Leadership Fable* by Patrick M. Lencioni; *Man's Search for Meaning* and *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl; *Get in the Game: 8 Elements of Perseverance That Make the Difference* by Cal Ripken and Donald T. Phillips; *Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home*, by David Shipley; *Five Minds for the Future* by Howard Gard-

ner; *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson; *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader: How You and Your Organization Can Manage Conflict Effectively* by Craig E. Runde and Tim A. Flanagan; *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* by Jared Diamond; *The Age of Speed: Learning to Thrive in a More-Faster-Now World* by Vince Poscente; *The Perfect Mess: The Hidden Benefits of Disorder — How Crammed Closets, Cluttered Offices, and on-the-Fly Planning Make the World a Better Place* by Eric Abrahamson; and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith.

Introducing Ripken's book, one chief said, "Perseverance is a challenge we have every day — good days and bad days." Another chief is an avid fan of Bryson's books and listens to the audio books while in his car. While one chief unexpectedly admitted that *The Perfect Mess* was a good start for the new year and an attempt at better organization.

I recommended Goldsmith's book. Goldsmith is described as the leading executive coach to more than 80 of the world's top corporations. He goes toe to toe with top CEOs to improve the interpersonal challenges that keep them from the next level of achievement.

According to Goldsmith, "The higher you go, the more your problems are behavioral." His list of "20 Workplace Habits You Need to Break" is worth the price of the book.

The Marine Corps reading list was created to encourage continuing professional education and "serious practitioners of the profession of arms." We are in an era of professional development that begins with cadets and continues through retirement. Certifications, Chief Fire Officer Designations, and Executive Fire Officer and Harvard Fellowship programs mold new generations of emergency service leaders.

I see more advertisements in fire magazines and on Web sites from universities and colleges for fire and emergency management courses than I did four years ago. I predict even more opportunities are on the horizon for leaders of emergency services.

Abraham Lincoln said, "The things I want to know are in books. My best friend is the man who'll get me a book I [haven't] read." Read as if the quality of your life depended on it, because it does.



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