

By PETER MATTHEWS

The Journey: Motivation

Editor's Note: This is the second in a multi-part series written by FDNY Lieutenant Christopher Flatley that details the stops along the roadmap on a fire officer's journey from beginning to end. Follow Lieutenant Flatley's journey on Firehouse.com at: firehouse.com/flatley

Motivation

One of the most important tasks you have to master as a new officer or a chief officer is to get someone to do something. Its often easier just to do yourself, but that is not what you do. You are the leader and you are not asking them to do it because it is easy or not, you are asking because that is their job. That doesn't mean you make them your hand servants. As an officer you are to supervise and delegate. If a ceiling needs to be pulled, who is looking out for the safety of the members if the boss is using the hook?

The best way to get someone to do something is to make him or her want to do it! I call this the "Tom Sawyer approach." Make them want to paint the fence. Motivation is the ability to incite, urge or compel. This can be difficult. People want to know what is in it for them. If you can't make it meaningful to them, they will tell you to "go paint your own damn fence." Different people will respond to different motivating factors. We will discuss some of these in this article.

Rewards

Rewards can be used as a motivator. Don't get caught in the trap, rewards should never become a bribe. The cost of the bribe will rise faster than the national debt! The level of reward must match the level of request. Rewards can be as simple as recognition at a meeting or drill.

Intimidation

Intimidation is not motivation. Intimidation is the fear of reprisal. If your people are still working for you they're not motivated, they're scared. As a rule, intimidation doesn't work very well. You will turn friends into enemies and you will become the evil tyrant. This does not mean that you can't use a little tough love. A very successful chief once told me sometimes you need to make someone more afraid to come back and tell you they couldn't do something than for them to overcome their own fear and complete the task. Accepting the chal-

lenge and working through it is part of the growth process to effective leadership.

Direct Order

A direct order is always an effective motivator. It will get the job done. Most folks in the fire service can't refuse a direct order. In most places there is a grievance process and you can work out later if the order was improper. When the time comes to give a direct order, give it. A word of caution, as an officer if you need to give a direct order, make sure you have the authority to give it, and most of the time you will. Then don't back down from it. This would serve to undermine your authority.

"Do -- Alls"

The last group of people you will have to deal with are the people that don't need to be given orders. The overeager types, the ones that do everything you tell them, even the stuff they don't have any time for. This group works the hardest and is often the most abused. When asked to do something this guy will add it to his already full plate and not complain. As an officer you are going to want these guys. Let me give a word of advice. If you ask these people to do something, they will do what you ask for. The product may be something less desirable than you want and probably less than what they want to put their name to. The result is a stressed-out member who is willing to please but does not get gratification from his work because it is not his / her best work. You will run the risk of burning them out or losing them from the organization completely.

Find Your Own Worth

Finding out what will motivate people is as individual as they are. Some you will be able to motivate with *esprit de corps*, the spirit of the corps. You can use their feelings toward the other members; you won't let down the team. They are counting on you to get this task done. Team building is a key to fire service operations; this also makes it difficult for new members to become part of the team. New members should use their strengths to increase the value of the team. As their contribution is realized, they will become a valued member of the team.

Stroke Someone's Ego

Often, motivation requires you to stroke someone's ego. Every member needs to feel like they contribute to the team. To keep people motivated, you may need to reinforce each member's own contribution. Give assignments to a senior member that will showcase their talents and experience so that junior members will realize their value. This helps eliminate the "what has he done lately" argument.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is a tremendous motivator. Praise a junior man in public. A pat on the back and thank you will keep the member working in a productive way, but will serve as a guide to other members on "how it should be done." Saying thank you is the easiest way to acknowledge a member's effort.

"If You're Not Happy Here, I Will Find a Spot for You"

A change in assignment is always a good motivator. Depending on the situation, a change in assignment to a different company, a busier or slower place or something more challenging will re-energize an individual. The reassignment must not be seen as a punitive measure. It should be to improve the member's own personal growth. The focus should be on a fresh start. Promotions will also do that to an extent. How do you handle it when you are asking the guys to do what you have been complaining about? Now you must lead by example.

Keep the Job "New"

To motivate people you may need to reach people on several different levels. Often it is necessary to use a combination of levels to complete one task. Remember how it felt when you joined? When it was all new and exciting. Remember the zeal and enthusiasm that you had for each new opportunity and challenge? That is what you need to touch on in each and every one of your members. You need to make the job "new" again.

Comments

As I continue with this series, I would like to get some feedback from you. Comments and questions are welcome. Success as well as failure stories should be shared so we all can learn from them. E-mail me at clatley9711@msn.com.

Stay safe.