

## Learning from those around you

It has been quite some time since I have put mind to matter here at the blog, and honestly I haven't been able to zero in on what has been on my mind. Recently I found myself surrounded by micro beers, hipsters and the microbrew of the fire service. The Portland fire expo was a huge success by raising tens of thousands for the Sons of the Flag organization as well as the spirits of those that attended. If you had to miss this year's effort, please follow Cody Trestrail and watch for next year's offering.

Now the brass tacks... I am currently what I would call a "tweener" in the fire education circuit. I have the great opportunity to work with and, learn from those that have been in this job longer than I have been breathing.... 1973 btw. I am between having a level of confidence that is needed to accomplish my job yet, still see the distance I need to make up to be at that higher level of understanding of the fire service. I also see the valuable lessons of keeping your sense of humor as we break our backs (sometimes literally) working towards the unattainable goal of being the best we can be at this vocation. Without the humor, we can quickly circle the drain of animosity and apathy.

Being quiet enough to learn from others is key. I have seen veteran mentors be humble enough to learn from those different and/or younger than themselves. Even when faced with a technique totally foreign or a statement believed to be complete bull shit, a measured reaction is always best. After understanding it from the other person's perspective, then you can call it as you see it. I have seen how an overlooked conversation can set off a chain reaction of events which have literally revolutionized the fire service. There is no unimportant conversation, there is no time wasted when spent with people who want to learn from each other. The intensity and the intelligence of today's fire service is growing like it never has due to the networking over the web. Sure there has been some casualties as this fire service hive mind comes to life but, the fire culture IS better for it.

The most important lesson for me has been to stay focused on the mission. Do you know what your mission is? I have heard many of my friends say that it is "about them". OK, if that is what works for you than I'm ok with that. However, I see the mission very differently. The reality is that this job will eat you up

emotionally, physically, and financially if you always lead with your heart and not your head. For me, the work is the reward and if that includes a save then congratulations to all involved. Practice to execute the tactics that meet the strategic goals. It is about caring to do your job right. It is about trusting the guy next to you, as well as yourself.

My mission is to know what needs to be done at a moment when some people go into vapor lock. To be able to make decisions when others are too close to the ball to see the whole field. I want to train hard enough so that I know what doesn't work and most importantly why. Regardless of my previous ideas or prejudices or even past capabilities, I want to know how to perform the skills within the principles of a disciplined firefighter. I see this as an unsolvable puzzle that I just can't stop trying to solve.

My mentor has explained his position on professional and personal topics to me over the last few years. My summary is an oversimplification but here it is: The genuine teachers are those that want to know, not those that want to be known. Being ruthlessly honest with yourself and your peers will ultimately make us all better. Maybe that is why the profiteers (those with a professional marketing campaign) amongst us make my skin crawl so much. Making an honest buck does mean something! It is never too late to repent and stop being a sellout. Donate some classes every year, and give yourself time to take other classes, and for God's sake take the ones that make you sweat! Humor, Humility and Honesty. Not always easy things to do or be but, if you're going to stay on mission you will need all three.