



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Developing a Leadership Mindset in Fire Prevention/Risk-Reduction Bureaus

No. FM-2013-3 April 18, 2013

Learning Objective: The students shall explain how a leadership mindset is developed in a fire prevention/risk reduction bureau.

Becoming the leader or manager of a fire prevention/risk-reduction bureau is a career goal for many who are promoted or appointed to the position. In some larger departments, an officer aspiring for further advancement may be required to serve in a variety of leadership positions throughout his or her career. This may include holding a leadership position in a prevention bureau. In fact, time spent in the operations bureau can help a prevention leader recognize risks from fire behavior that cannot be adequately described in codes or public education. It also lends credibility to the prevention leader when working with operations members. Whatever the career path, most who assume command of a prevention/risk-reduction bureau quickly realize that developing the right mindset is essential. The bureau leader is part of the department's leadership team. He or she must strive to attain competencies to be an integral component of the department for the at-large leadership structure. At the same time, the bureau leader must be cognizant of the department's senior leadership and responsible for balancing response capacity with prevention.

The mindset of an effective bureau leader should include following a strategic process, beginning with a comprehensive community risk assessment to identify and prioritize local risks. It continues as a risk-reduction planning team defines the highest priority problem. The planning team should be from a diverse group of department and community members who can bring various experiences and perspectives to the process. The astute prevention leader will consider ways to collaborate and integrate with suppression forces so the overall mission of comprehensive prevention services is delivered. This integration can provide enhanced credibility as the organization is viewed as a trusted and positive force within the community.

Proficient leaders are experts at environmental scanning. Environmental scanning is the process of studying the environment of the organization and the community to identify both strengths and potential threats that could impact the unit. Leaders proficient in environmental scanning are able to identify the following:

- People or groups openly supportive or opposed to risk reduction.
- Interpersonal dynamics between specific people.
- Strengths and attributes of specific people.
- Organizational and group dynamics.
- The culture of an organization or group of people.
- Political climate within an organization or community.
- Emerging issues and future trends that may affect risk.

Good leaders will carefully analyze situations and develop an action plan that capitalizes on strengths and addresses challenges.

Source: National Fire Academy's course "Managing Effective Fire Prevention Programs," December 2012.



An astute prevention leader considers ways to collaborate and integrate with suppression forces to accomplish the prevention mission and effectively deliver services.

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