Meta-Leadership in the Fire Service

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Discussion Points

- What is Meta-Leadership?
- Why do we need Meta-Leadership?
- Describe the dimensions of Meta-Leadership.
- Why is this important to us as leaders in the fire service?
What is Meta-Leadership?

- Meta-Leadership refers to guidance, direction, and momentum across organizational lines that develops into a shared course of action and commonality of purpose among people and agencies that are doing what appears to be very different work (Marcus, Dorn, & Henderson, 2006)
Why Do We Need Meta-Leadership?

St. Petersburg Times
AMERICA UNDER ATTACK
PLANE CRASH INTO WORLD TRADE CENTER AND PENTAGON OFFICE TOWERS COLLAPSE; HUNDREDS ARE MISSING; ALL FLIGHTS GROUND; TWO UNITED PLANES CRASH MARKETS CLOSE; DISNEY SHUTS PARKS; U.S. ON ALERT

Sports Illustrated
BOSTON

The Times-Picayune
HOVERING HURRICANE LEAVES THOUSANDS WITHOUT POWER
Leaves overtopped in Plaquemines, forcing some to rooftops

Canadian Oil Train Derails, Burns After Brakes Activated
The Silo Effect

- Bureaucratic Culture
- Narrowly focused career ascendancy
- Allegiance to their own discipline
- Overlapping missions
- Struggles for control
- Unfamiliarity and mistrust
Dimensions of Meta-Leadership

- The Meta Leader
- The situation or the event
- Lead the silo
- Lead up
- Lead across
META-LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

1. The Person of the Meta-Leader
2. The Situation
3. Lead the Silo
4. Lead Up
5. Lead Connectivity

The Event
The Context
The Problem
The Culture

Meta Leader Characteristics

- Experienced
- Good Technical Skills
- Planner
- Communicator
- Personable
- Must have command presence
- Able to get out of the basement.....quickly!!
What is the Basement?

- Maintain Bodily Functions
- It will hunt when hungry
- It will reproduce
- It will defend itself (fight, flight, or freeze)
Going to the Basement

8 billion neurons
70 trillion connections
1 million km of wiring
Signs and Symptoms

- Tunnel vision – loss of situational awareness
- Yelling at subordinates and others (Fight)
- Disappear (Flight)
- Physical impairment (Freeze)
  - 1,000 yard stare
- Loss of composure (cerebral/rectal inversion)
How Do We Escape the Basement?

- Preparation
  - Risk/Hazard Analysis
  - Training
- Standard Operating Procedures
A Trip to The Basement
Another Basement Trip
The Situation or Event

- Not a routine event
- Are you prepared
  - “If you cannot stand up to the challenges of the incident, you will fall to your highest level of training”
- Research is helpful
- Experience is better
Lead the Silo

- Subject matter expert in your discipline
- Good people on whom you can depend
- Situational Awareness
- Command presence
Command Presence

Hair-Raising Sensations

Brain Lock

Steamy Ears

Cold Sweats

Spinning Eyes

Gnashing Teeth

Quivering Lips

Hostile Radio Traffic

Racing Heart

Butterflies

What COMMAND can FEEL like

Calm, Cool and Collected

What COMMAND should always LOOK like
Lead Up

- Chances are you have a boss
- Despite being subordinate in the organizational chart, you are the subject matter expert
- Do not let rank be a factor
- No surprises
- Speak the truth, no sugar coating, no hedging bets
- During a disaster, you will not be the only one leading up
Leading Across

- Horizontal linkages are equally as important as linkages to those above and below
- Must create a network that is sufficient for responding to a crisis
- Be aware of the difficulties:
  - Unwillingness to share proprietary knowledge
  - Unwillingness to lose a perceived competitive advantage
  - Personalities
  - Turf battles
Leading Across

- Concentrate on the shared values between the various organizations
- Develop universal objectives
- Expect resistance, but do not take it personally
- Begin building the relationships now, prior to the incident
- Ask yourself, “What if”
Unity of Effort

- This is the goal of the meta-leader
- This requires synchronized and balanced activity between all five dimensions of meta-leadership
- The meta-leader can remain proactive as opposed to reactive in a crisis
- The meta-leader leverages the five dimensions to produce results
Questions?
Thank you