

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Officers

The “7 Habits” theme is based on the book by Steven R. Covey:
The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

It is important to be recognized as a highly effective department for the morale of your members and the support of your community.



Future Challenges for Emergency Services Officers



Future Challenges for Emergency Services Officers

Are you prepared to be effective?



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

1. Be Proactive

- Ensure members build the vision.
- Discuss, listen, discuss, decide.
- Find advocates and adversaries.
- Seek blessings from the top.
- Get decisions in writing.
- Document everything.
- Share the news.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

1. Be Proactive - Continued

- Get in front of the situation.
- Time is your enemy.
- Find the real threat.
- Deploy solutions with confidence.
- Know your team.
- Observe your team's well-being.
- Be willing to discuss personal.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

2. Begin with the End in Mind

- Work backwards.
- Stay focused.
- Present logically, not emotionally.
- Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Sell the end vision to all who will listen.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

2. Begin with the End in Mind (Cont'd)

- Begin every operation with a goal.
- Have a focused end in mind.
- ICs reacting to events spells disaster .
- Even good plans can fail.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

3. First Things First

- Conduct a SWOT
- Read everything. Know your history.
- If it ain't broken...
- Recruit and prepare disciples.
- Know your enemies.
- Value differences.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

3. First Things First (Continued)

- Quick recon offers initial lay-of-land.
- Personnel: Weigh Infraction:
 - Major? Minor?
 - Precedent?
 - Existing Documents?
 - Guidelines? Policies? Statutes? Ordinances?
- Determine if individual is worth salvaging.
- What is best for the team, organization.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

4. Think Win-Win

- Keep your eyes on the prize.
- Understand win-win isn't always true.
- Know when you've won.
- There will be enough success for everyone.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

4. Think Win-Win (Continued)

- Mantra: Risk much to save much...
- Unfamiliar challenges = opportunities.
- Opportunities equal success or failure?
- Requires creative, tuned-in officer.
- Remain aware of local challenges.
- Maintain balance: work/home.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

- Establish your “True North”.
- Are your intentions honorable?
- Know your team.
- Truly know each member.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood (Continued)

- Understand those replacing you.
- Paramilitary approach not always effective.
- Understand:
 - Their point of view
 - Their solutions
 - Their motivations and fears
 - Their values.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

6. Synergize

- Establish task forces.
- Establish/re-establish alliances.
- Seek capabilities in unusual places.
- The original vision may change.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

6. Synergize (Continued)

- Everyone has a unique talent. Use it.
- Knowing your people; their strengths (and weaknesses) and nurturing diversity makes a strong, vibrant, resilient and successful team...and department.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

7. Sharpen the Saw

- Stay current.
- Adopt other industry practices.
- Take breaks when necessary.
- Seek low-drag high speed.



Building the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Officers

7. Sharpen the Saw (Continued)

- Improve by sharpening ones saw.
- Broad knowledgebase = effective (successful) officer.
- Read more than FD training manuals:
 - Case studies and military manuals
 - Historical documents
 - Business practices
 - Public administration policies.

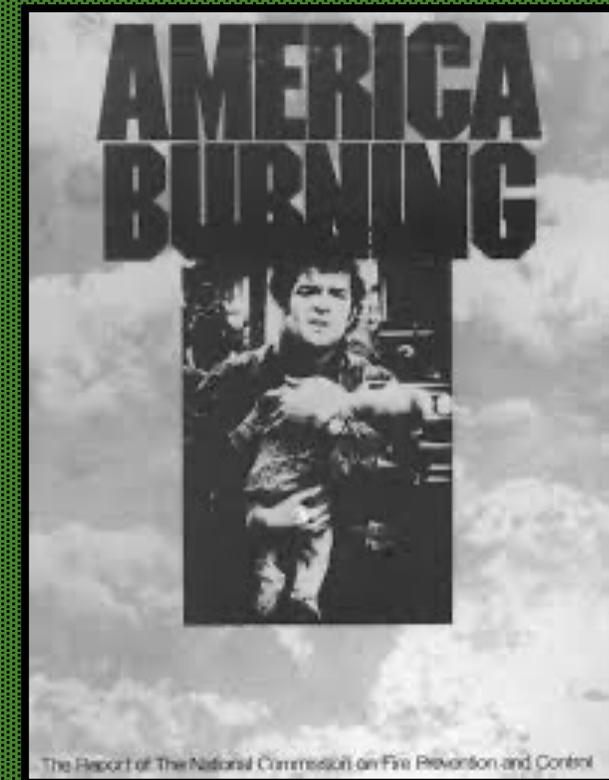
“If you haven’t read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent because your personal experiences alone aren’t broad enough to sustain you.”

General James Mattis



Emergency Services Reading List

1. America Burning – US Fire Administration
2. Built to Last - Collins
3. Characteristics of Leadership – Maxwell
4. 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership – Maxwell
5. On Becoming a Leader – Bennis
6. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – Covey
7. The Leadership Challenge – Kouzes and Posner
8. The Art of War – Sun Tzu
9. The One Minute Manager – Blanchard and Johnson
10. Extreme Ownership – Willink and Babin
11. Make Your Bed Every Day – McCraven
12. The Team Handbook (3d Ed.) - Scholtes



What actions have you taken recently to continue developing yourself as a highly effective officer?

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Officers

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Se7en Habits of Highly Effective Officers

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Last month, I wrote an article “7 Lessons for Leading in Crisis” based on Bill George’s book of the same title. The concept has been utilized many times throughout my career during crises of varying degrees of criticality. George’s concept is succinct and, in my experience, effective.

When facing a crisis, George advises:

1. Face reality, starting with yourself.
2. Don’t be Atlas; get the world off your shoulders.
3. Dig deep for the root cause.
4. Get ready for the long haul.
5. Never waste a good crisis.
6. You’re in the spotlight – follow true north.
7. Go on offense; focus on winning now.

If you’re keeping score, you will notice that there are seven steps in Bill George’s recipe for crisis management. And now it seems Stephen Covey of “seven habits” fame has provided the framework for yet another structure by which fire and emergency services members can use to sharpen their skills. Covey’s steps are less direct, but nonetheless very employable:

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. First things first
4. Think win-win.
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Synergize.
7. Sharpen the saw.



“There’s likely a place in paradise for people who tried hard, but what really matters is succeeding. If that requires you to change, that’s your mission.”

*General Stanley McCrystal
(USA ret.)*

Be Proactive

Get in front of the situation. Whether the concern is heat transfer or smoke conditions of a structure under fire attack or considering the survivability of entrapped victims, time is your enemy. Remain focused. Find the **real threat associated with the emergency** at hand, **determine necessary resources** and tactics needed to change the course of destruction and **deploy them with purpose, resolve and confidence**. Occasionally, effective officers must consider employing unorthodox tactics. This may require working outside the guardrails of departmental procedures. Be mindful of the legal and disciplinary risks when this route is taken.

When dealing with personnel matters, getting in front of the problem applies as well. This requires knowing your team members, which allows the effective officer to notice when a member is off their game or not themselves. This may present the observant officer the first signs of home issues, emotional distress or in a worst-case scenario – drug and/or alcohol abuse. Personnel matters are the touch-feely responsibilities many officers don’t like to deal with. Because it takes time, emotions, talking about uncomfortable issues and asking tough questions. Take the time and effort to: 1) get to know your folks, 2) let them know you are taking note of their well-being, 3) you are willing to discuss matters beyond station life, and 4) you will act upon your observations for the safety, security and well-being of them and the team.

Begin with the End in Mind

Every operation must begin with a goal. Whether it's to stop the forward progress of the fire, affect rescue, minimize life loss, or load and go, **a focused end in mind is a critical contribution to an effective outcome.** When the IC reacts to an unfolding emergency without a plan in mind (or communicated) the outcome is often not good – and sometimes catastrophic. Keep in mind, however that regardless of one's plan, efforts and availability of sufficient resources, the outcome may not go as planned. That is the cold reality of the business all emergency service members must remember.

First Things First

This often is the glue that connects these first two Covey steps. Often, a **quick lay-of-the-land reconnaissance** will offer much needed information which to begin exposing the real problem and contributing factors (with possible solutions) affecting a positive outcome. Reliance on training, previous experience and sometimes intimate knowledge of a target hazard provides time for the officer to focus, establish goals, determine, and request resources and communicate the goal to those affected.

Should the challenge be personnel related and the thoughtful officer chooses to consider beginning with the end in mind, research and documentation is crucial. Questions to be considered:

1. Is the infraction major or minor?
2. Is there precedent?
3. What document exists on the individual being considered?
4. What guidelines, policies, ordinances and/or statutes exist to assist the officer in navigating the minefield?

Is the employee or member worth salvaging? This may sound impersonal at best and maybe cruel, but there comes a time when an ongoing problem affecting the entire organization must be dealt with quickly with minimal emotion.

Think Win-Win

Seldom will an officer consider this step in its simplest form when dealing with emergencies. The mantra: Risk a lot to save a lot; risk little to save little has been burned into the officer's psyche. However, the growing list of unfamiliar challenges (pandemic threat, social unrest, climate change and economic instability) begins to crowd out the traditional challenges (fire, EMS, Hazmat) and presents the officer with vast opportunities for success – or failure. And, placing the challenges on a scale and weighing it like one would when buying cold-cuts at a butcher shop is too simplistic.

This requires the creative, tuned-in officer to take a long-term view of one's community and professional calling. **Become and remain aware of the challenges that are growing locally, regionally, and nationally.** Attempt to maintain a balance of work and home. Learn new skills. Become more resilient. Flexibility will serve the effective officer well.

Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood

Do as I say and not as I do", doesn't cut it anymore. If you represent the census group of officers that acquired their chops in the 90's or at the turn of the century and haven't tried to understand

those who will replace you, it will (or is) an uphill, painful battle – for many. Granted, the fire and emergency services are paramilitary organizations. Yes, the services are based on a structure that includes officers and a chain of command. And that’s a good thing as it provides a construct to operate but **leaning solely on the paramilitary aspect** is not always effective.

As Generation “Pick-a-Letter” begins to take possession the black-and-white strain of command may not be sustainable in its civilian form. This is not to suggest handing over the keys without reservations and preparation. Rather, working with those representing upcoming generations to understand: 1) their points of view; 2) their solutions to current and future challenges; 3) their motivations and fears; and 4) their values will help those currently in charge to manage with more acceptance and greater clarity. Once you understand, or at least show a genuine effort to understand, then solutions can be formatted that address the individual and organization as a contiguous unit.

Synergize*

Acetone by itself while flammable is not explosive when burned outside a pressurized vessel. However, add two other ingredients and the mixture becomes a highly reactive (and unstable) explosive. Using this analogy, most organizations are rostered with members of various skills and capabilities who by themselves may be good, albeit average members. However, when combining team members who possess different abilities often results in exponentially beneficial outcomes.

This refers to “Begin with the End in Mind” and “Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood”. Teams should be a congruency of various members possessing different skills, strengths, cultures, and experiences to ensure competitiveness and success. If every member was great at hose operations, but not so in ladder operations, the department’s capabilities at multi-story incidents would be limited. Just as if every member was excellent at fire operations, but not able to provide sound, patient care, the service to the community is limited as well.

Knowing your people; their strengths (and weaknesses) and nurturing diversity makes a strong, vibrant, and resilient team...and department.

Sharpen the Saw

Stephen Covey ended his list with a direct affirmation that those who wish to improve and more importantly succeed should continually improve by sharpening their saw or knowledgebase.

“If you haven’t read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent because your personal experiences alone aren’t broad enough to sustain you.”



(Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC ret.)

Effective officers shouldn’t focus solely on the training aimed at firefighting or emergency services, but add variety to their library. Below is a reading list I prepared for a recent presentation that provides a rounded view of topics and ideas the effective officer may want to delve into after they’ve reviewed their latest issue of *The Pennsylvania Fireman* or training manual.

Emergency Services Reading List

1. America Burning – US Fire Administration
2. Built to Last - Collins
3. Characteristics of Leadership – Maxwell
4. 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership – Maxwell
5. On Becoming a Leader – Bennis
6. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – Covey
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10. Extreme Ownership – Willink and Babin
11. Make Your Bed Every Day – McCraven
12. The Team Handbook (3d Ed.) – Scholtes

Read. Learn. Explore. Succeed and survive.

**noun*

The interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.

*F. R. Montes de Oca served as a firefighter/paramedic for 25 years in Orlando, Florida before appointment as Chief of Department for Springfield, Ohio; and Fire and Emergency Services Director for Osceola County, Florida. His last appointment was as Emergency Services Director and Fire Marshal for Orange County, North Carolina. Throughout his career he has been involved in training, developing, and managing firefighter safety and leadership programs and organizational change. He is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer program, a certified Manager of Environmental Safety and Health and a Certified Public Manager®. Chief Montes de Oca is an adjunct instructor for the National Fire Academy and qualified to present training programs for OSHA and the EPA. **To receive a complimentary mini-lesson "Se7en Habits of Highly Effective Officers" contact the author at frm1@me.com or download it at www.responder1.org.***