



"SAFETY ZONE"

"A High Performing Firefighter is by Definition a Safe Firefighter"

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Portals

Science fiction Portals are amazing. Pass through an undulating Portal or worm hole or even Dorothy's tornado, and experience altered realities, new dimensions; and see the universe from a new perspective.

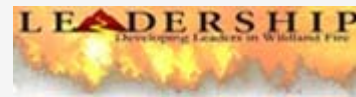
Career firefighters usually pass through a "Portal" of sorts; a "safety awareness portal" where new perspectives are achieved and their reality is meaningfully altered. Transiting the Portal is often related to traumatic events - such as South Canyon, Thirty Mile, or a personal, more intimate close call. It may have happened to you, a co-worker, or someone we read about. Some people think there is no significant emotional growth without a link to traumatic experience. Many psychologists think the opposite.

Yet once through the Portal, you finally do comprehend how veterans you previously considered bland and worrisome do understand the severe implications of risk and why they demonstrate an absolute commitment to safe practices. Transiting the Portal is likened to a wake-up call. Suddenly, we see the forest as trees that will grow back and we see buildings as things that can be rebuilt, but we see each human life as precious and irreplaceable.

Can we transit the Portal without personal trauma? Here lies the objective for every safety course ever written, the intention of every strategy and tactics ever authored and the reason we promote staff rides, distribute investigative findings, and ask for the "lessons learned" via after action reports.

The 10 and 18, Downhill and Indirect Fireline Guidelines, Complexity Analyses, Fire Behavior Pocket Cards, LCES and others, all have deep personal foundations, invented by compassionate individuals who have been through the Portal and articulately share their voyage.

Involvement in a traumatic event is no guarantee you will "get it", or even pass through the Portal. Transiting a Portal is a deep and absolute process; it is career changing. When we cross this plane, compliance is no longer a struggle and we emerge as motivated leaders with the courage to do the right thing. Driving regulations, IHOG, and the 10 and 18 become obvious and automatic - like fastening seatbelts.



After transiting the Portal, complacency is buffered by deeper insight, often called a core value, "core" meaning all the way to the bone. Our human tendency to rationalize, succumb to peer-pressure, or miss incremental changes is restrained. Oddly enough, production improves. Decisions improve. And these **core values** become license for confident aggressive firefighting.

Firefighters who have learned these lessons, through either personal experience or by studying momentous events, understand the fear firefighters can be subjected to. They can visualize a wall of flames bearing down, and run many "what if" scenarios in their head. They will never identify safety zones without considering these implications. They intrinsically understand the timing and trigger point elements that are critical to escape routes, they know what a lookout must see, and with intuitive wisdom - recognize when communications are compromised.

Science fiction writers rarely leave their characters out in new dimensions. At the last possible moment they heroically make it home. There are no climactic escapes back from the "safety awareness portal." Once you "get it" you will never trade tactical objectives for life and personnel safety. You are unwilling to subject firefighters to situations where last minute heroics are necessary.

Such is the altered reality of transiting a Portal.



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