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Leading in the Wildland Fire Service

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Leading in the Wildland Fire Service

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Prepared by

National Wildfire Coordinating Group
Training Working Team
Leadership Committee

Contract Consultant
Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc.

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Preface

Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership.

This book expresses the fundamental leadership concepts of the wildland fire service. It outlines the framework, values, and principles that guide wildland fire leaders in providing leadership across a broad range of missions. The concepts in this book are universal to every person in the wildland fire service—from first year employee to senior manager.

This book serves interagency wildland fire service interests by:

- Defining leadership in the wildland fire service.
- Articulating a universal set of values and principles to guide the actions of leaders in the wildland fire service.
- Providing a concise reference for the wildland fire leadership development curriculum for use by both instructors and students.

Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no simple, clear cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make decisions and to take or direct action—in short, to provide leadership.

This book does not state policy. It cannot provide black-and-white answers to the unlimited volume and variety of situations a leader will face. Instead this book simply outlines the broad concepts of leadership in the wildland fire service—fundamental concepts by which expectations of leaders may be established and performance of leaders may be judged. It is intended to make better leaders of us all.

For these reasons, this book is structured around our leadership values and principles as a means of communicating what right looks like and illustrating effective leadership in action.

Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles

Values	*Principles*
Duty	Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader. Make sound and timely decisions. Ensure tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished. Develop your people for the future.
Respect	Know your people and look out for their well-being. Keep your people informed. Build the team. Employ your people in accordance with their capabilities.
Integrity	Know yourself and seek improvement. Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions. Set the example.

A Framework for Leadership

Wildland fire is a phenomenon essential to nature's design. But fire, whether caused by natural force or human beings, can also pose a threat to people and communities.

The ultimate purpose of the wildland fire service is to protect life, property, and natural resources while engaging the forces of nature. Most of us made a commitment to serve our communities, our states, or our nation. We willingly accepted this unique obligation to place ourselves at risk and to put the interests of others before our own.

The Authority to Lead versus the Decision to Lead

The authority to lead is established by law. Whether this authority is based on federal, state, or local law, we are legal agents exercising authority on behalf of our organizations.

The ability to lead is a different matter; it is something that cannot be legislated. To be effective, leaders must earn the trust and respect of others. A leader's journey is a perpetual cycle of acquiring, shaping, and honing the knowledge and skills of leadership. The leadership journey is never finished.

Once we commit to becoming leaders, our focus is no longer ourselves. Fire leaders assume the serious responsibility of putting others into harm's way and for making decisions that profoundly affect citizens, communities, and natural resources.

Leadership is a tough choice. Leaders choose to sacrifice their own needs for those of their teams and organizations. They routinely face situations and make decisions that others criticize and second-guess. Leaders take risks and face challenges every day.

So why do we choose to lead? We lead because leading is where we make a difference.

Fire leaders bring order to chaos, improve our people's lives, and strengthen our organizations. Leading enables us to leave a legacy for the leaders of the future so that they can take our places well prepared for the road ahead.

These are the rewards of leadership. Their effects will be seen and felt long after our careers end.

Bringing Order to Chaos

National Incident Management Teams (IMTs) of the wildland fire service have gained a reputation for bringing order to chaos when disaster strikes. Whether organizing search teams for remnants of the Columbia shuttle or providing command and control for recovery teams at Ground Zero of the Twin Towers, these IMTs have set a powerful example of leadership in uncertain situations.

Early in the morning on September 1, 2005, the Southern Area IMT, called upon to provide assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, arrived at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, stepping into a surreal, grim, and profoundly chaotic world.

Hundreds of patients were scattered about the main terminal and ticketing area, over 300 of them confined to stretchers. Most were elderly and infirm, but many were injured during the hurricane.

At the same time, the evacuation of displaced residents had begun. Evacuees arrived by bus and helicopter, many apparently from nursing homes. In the days ahead, the airport was the portal for more than 10,000 evacuees, who were transported from the airport on approximately 60 flights in commercial jets or military medical C-130s and C-17s.

A host of emergency responders—Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, Federal Protective Service, Nevada National Guard, FEMA representatives, Jefferson Parish Police, Transportation Security Agency, Air Force Medical and Evacuation forces, Airport Authority, and a few members of New Orleans Fire Department—had converged on the scene. Each team had its own mission, and the teams were not talking with each other.

At 1900 on the day they arrived, the IMT conducted their first planning meeting with representatives from many of the teams. The goals of the meeting were to organize operations, set up a communications system, and identify needs for supplies.

During the meeting, each representative was asked to provide three pieces of information—team name, team leader, and one item they needed.

"Coffee" was the item in need listed by one team leader.

The light-hearted chuckles through the crowd indicated that everyone could use a little caffeine.

"No. You don't understand. I'm talking about pounds and pounds of coffee," he said. "Every time we open the door of the temporary morgue, the stench is so bad that we need to pour a pound of coffee inside."

Out of that first meeting came the Incident Action Plan identifying phone numbers, contact names, agency missions, feeding and showering schedules, and other pertinent information.

With communications among teams critical and telephone and cell phone coverage unreliable, the IMT distributed more than 300 radios to more than 10 agencies. Before long, teams were communicating with other teams, working together to solve problems and consolidate redundant efforts.

For the next 17 days, the IMT held planning meetings at 0700 and 1900. After spotty attendance at the first meeting, word got around that the meetings were critical, and everyone came to the meetings to provide input and share information.

IMT members indicated that their assignment at the New Orleans airport represented one of the greatest challenges of their careers. At the same time, most said that they would go back and do it all over again. "Every day we knew we were making a difference," said the IC. "We know that if we can help everyone get on the same page, we can do outstanding work—in any environment."

Art of Leadership

Leaders deeply affect people and organizations, both positively and negatively. Accidental leaders, who have little interest or enthusiasm for leadership responsibilities or self-improvement, can inhibit people's growth and reduce the effectiveness of their organizations.

Conversely, committed leaders, avid pupils of the art of leadership, can inspire others and make an enormous difference in people's lives, on the results of the team, and in the progress of the organization.

The art of leadership requires a constant interchange of theory and application. The art also includes being able to view the larger picture—discerning how to turn a weakness into a strength, gauging what is and is not within our control. Leaders constantly balance the known and unknown as well as danger and opportunity to find ways to gain the advantage.

Ultimately, the art of leadership requires successfully balancing many factors in the real world, based on the situation at hand, to achieve a successful outcome.

Occasionally, leaders may be required to provide authoritative, autocratic, tightly controlled direction that requires immediate obedience. But most of the time, leaders inspire, guide, and support their subordinates, gaining their commitment to the vision and mission and encouraging them, within established limits, to perform creatively.

The leadership challenge in the wildland fire service is to influence people to accomplish tasks and objectives under confusing, dangerous, and ambiguous conditions. Leaders balance the risks against the potential gains of any decision and action. Because of the inherent complexity of this world, many times they face morally difficult decisions—with high-stakes consequences—alone, unable to receive guidance from a chain of command.

At these moments, fire leaders rely on values and judgment and apply the art of leadership.

Wildland Fire—a High-Risk Operational Environment

We are asked to make tough decisions under a compressed time frame, given limited information, in a complex and high-risk environment. This operational environment routinely brings together people, machinery, and the destructive energy of wildfire in the close, three-dimensional space of the fireground and its airspace.

Wildland fire operations have inherent risks that cannot be eliminated, even in the best of circumstances. Incident management and response is a competition between human beings and the forces of nature; leaders struggle to manage the effects caused by wildfire and other natural and man-made events. The environment can rapidly and unexpectedly change from normal to emergency conditions to complete chaos.

Courage in the Face of Danger

In the afternoon on July 28, 1939, a crew from the Paradise Valley Civilian Conservations Corps (CCC) camp arrived at the Rock Creek Fire, a 30-acre sagebrush fire in Humboldt County, on the northern border of Nevada.

Wilbur Timmons, the crew's Foreman, anticipated few problems. Grassland-sagebrush fires were common in the area, and firefighters considered them the easiest kind of fire to contain.

Upon arriving at the fire, Timmons divided the 23 young men into two squads. He put 21-year-old Earnest Tippin in charge of the second squad. Timmons sent Tippin's group to approach from the west to the bottom of the fire—what was deemed to be the safer option for the less-experienced Tippin.

When Tippin reached the ridge at the head of the dry drainage, the fire was backing down the ridge to the north. Minutes later, after Tippin gave a short briefing, the wind abruptly shifted from the west to the east and increased to more than 40 miles per hour. Suddenly, the ten men were directly in the path of the oncoming head fire. Tippin ordered an urgent retreat back to the truck.

As they dropped down into the drainage, the fire outflanked them on the ridge tops and heavy smoke hindered their orientation. The group was steadily being driven deeper into the drainage. The fire was closing in from behind and on their flanks.

While jumping into the drainage bottom, George Kennedy, one of the squad members, broke his ankle and called for help as the fire rapidly approached. Tippin and Walter James, another squad member, immediately turned back to help him. Arm in arm, the three continued downhill.

The rest of the squad was staggered ahead of them, each making their way to the truck as fast as he could.

Unfortunately, five squad members—including Tippin—never made it and were overrun by the fire.

Investigators pieced together that, after helping Kennedy, Tippin and James also helped another squad member who was injured in the retreat. The bodies of Tippin and James were found in close proximity to the second injured crewmember. The investigators contended that Tippin could easily have escaped the fire, had he left behind the injured crewmembers and instead looked out only for himself.

On that day, events unfolded in ways completely contrary to what people expected and had predicted. It marked the first time that a sagebrush fire caused the deaths of firefighters.

Earnest Tippin lost the battle with nature that day, all the while never losing sight of his responsibility to look out for his crewmembers, even though his allegiance cost him his life. The Carnegie Foundation awarded a posthumous medal of bravery to Tippin for his actions that day.

The environment requires a variety of missions across the operational spectrum, ranging from education and prevention to prescribed fire and fire use to full fire suppression. Increasingly, fire leaders find themselves responding to all-hazard incidents.

Although most danger is close to the fireground, many others besides firefighters have important mission roles. The operational environment is akin to that of an aircraft carrier: although only pilots and aircrew routinely fly into combat, everyone on the ship makes significant contributions to the successful mission—and all aboard have to be prepared to respond to any unfolding emergency.

In the wildland fire service, firefighters, dispatchers, managers, technicians, support services, medical staff, law enforcement, the military, and others are brought together in rapidly assembled temporary teams to accomplish a given mission. These teams have unique capabilities, limitations, qualifications, and experience.

Fire leaders must have the ability to integrate these varied resources into effective and responsive temporary teams.

Leadership Environment

Leadership is defined as the act of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The leadership environment is made up of those critical elements that a successful leader considers in planning for effective action.

The first element is you, the leader, who is ultimately responsible for all action and results.

The second element is your people, those that you are responsible for.

The third element, the situation, is comprised of the many unique variables that influence a leader's decisions such as objectives, conditions, resources available, organizational influences, and others affected by the action.

The last element is the consequences—the short- and long-term effects of your actions.

The one predictable factor of the leadership environment is that any or all of the elements will change. A leader's sphere of influence varies with any situation. Each person on every team is unique in behavior and personality; their motivations differ and change over time. The situation, be it the weather or the political context, changes. Missions always have different levels of risk.

Leaders constantly assess the elements of the leadership environment and adapt accordingly. Successful leaders understand the interplay of these variables and demonstrate flexibility in selecting appropriate leadership tools and techniques as a situation changes.

Command Philosophy

Our philosophy of command supports the way we manage incidents. To generate effective decision making and to cope with the unpredictable nature of incidents, fire leaders decentralize command. That is, we empower subordinate leaders to make decisions based on their understanding of their leader's vision for success.

Command Based on Intent

Translating vision into clear leader's intent is at the heart of our command philosophy. Describing the task, purpose, and end state is the prerequisite for empowering our people to exercise individual initiative and take appropriate risks and actions as the situation requires.

This philosophy is based on the understanding that competent subordinate leaders who are at the scene of action understand the current situation better than does a senior commander some distance removed.

This does not imply, however, that our actions are not coordinated. Fire leaders continually work to achieve coordination and cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective.

Unity of Effort

Our leaders subscribe to unity of effort as a second key component our command philosophy. In a high-risk environment, mixed messages or countermanding directives add to the potential for friction, danger, and uncertainty.

Many times at all levels of the wildland fire service, leaders find themselves in gray areas where jurisdictional lines blur and overlap. No matter the challenges at hand, fire leaders work together to find common ground and act in the best interests of those responding to the incident, the public, and our natural resources.

In these situations, leaders must employ multiple leadership skills to influence decisions, forge effective relationships, facilitate cooperative efforts, and ensure that objectives are achieved.

The longer it takes to develop a unified effort, the greater the vacuum of leadership. Delays increase confusion, which in turn magnify the risk to our people and increase the likelihood that people will take unproductive or independent action without understanding the larger intent.

A unified leadership team sends a powerful message: when all leaders follow the same priorities and reinforce leader's intent through consistent actions and words, our people develop a strong sense of trust for their leaders. It dispels the propensity to second-guess command decisions as subordinates recognize that the leadership team moves as one and is solidly in charge.

Unity of Effort

On October 27, 2003, Santa Ana winds, with gusts of more than 50 mph, drove the Grand Prix Fire across the Los Angeles County line towards the communities of La Verne and Claremont. With most their fire resources assisting in San Bernardino County, Los Angeles County fire officials called the national Incident Management Team (IMT) at Grand Prix Fire to ask for help.

They received a frustrating reply. "We can't help."

At the time, all engine companies in Los Angeles County were committed to ongoing fires. No reserve engines were available at any stations. When new calls came in, engines had to be redeployed from other fires. High ranking fire officials were out on fires, fighting to protect their homes and those of their neighbors. Sixty-five residences were lost that morning.

When the fire reached the Angeles National Forest, federal officials wanted to bring in another national IMT to mitigate span of control issues.

Getting snubbed in their previous request for help, Los Angeles County fire officials were not interested in seeing another federal team come on scene. They felt as though the first team had completely let them down when the fire pushed through their communities and their resources were stretched so thin.

After much discussion, federal officials ordered another national IMT even though Los Angeles County officials disagreed with this decision and felt that the responsibility for managing the incident should have remained with one of their own teams.

Upon arriving, the Incident Commander saw a critical need to coordinate efforts among his team and that of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. If he failed, the agenda of both agencies would suffer, and egos would get in the way of accomplishing the larger mission.

The first priority was to persuade the Los Angeles County Deputy Chief that, after he had spent 32 hours on the fireline, the most important contribution the Deputy Chief could make was to get some much needed rest. A member of the Command Staff convinced the Deputy Chief to go home, get some rest, and allow the new team, which included several Los Angeles County firefighters, to devise a plan.

The Incident Commander invited the Deputy Chief to breakfast the following morning and encouraged him to bring his Chief. The team would be ready to lay out their plan. The Deputy Chief also received a promise that everyone would work together to find common ground and act in the best interest of the public as well as the national forest.

The next morning, the Los Angeles County contingent arrived at camp—the Chief and both Deputy Chiefs. The Incident Commander, along with the Operations Chief, mapped out their plan. The county fire officials were relieved to find that the plans were sound and that the team had taken the right factors into consideration.

The national team entered into unified command with county officials. The Incident Commander was successful in bringing the teams together in a cooperative effort quickly, and the fire was contained in a matter of days.

What could have been a dismal failure turned out to be a great success. Attitudes in the county did an about-face—from wanting to pull their firefighters from national IMTs to wanting to enter into unified command with them the next year after a firefighter fatality on an Los Angeles County incident.

The same Deputy Fire Chief, who had been skeptical of calling in the second IMT, ordered the help of that same national team after the fatality.

Command Climate

Command climate refers to the environment within the influence of a particular leader or chain of command.

Team members develop a perception of the command climate based on their understanding of how they are expected to perform, how they are treated, and how they must conform to their leader's individual style and personality.

Fire leaders strive to create command climates based on trust in which people feel comfortable raising issues that may be problems and engaging in healthy debate over potential courses of action.

Establishing a positive command climate demonstrates respect for our teams and subordinates and generates far-reaching benefits: unity of effort, increased initiative among subordinates, and more timely error mitigation.

A positive command climate not only helps to avoid error but also enhances the team's ability to recover from error when it occurs. Direct communication with open interaction among teams and their leaders—a key attribute of an effective command climate—is the first line of defense against error chains.

Good command climate is characterized by open communication, mutual trust and respect, freedom to raise issues and engage in debate, clear and attainable goals, and teamwork.

Command Presence

More than anything else, the leader's command presence sets the tone for the command climate. Command presence is how we present ourselves to others, the myriad of personal attributes and behaviors that communicates to others that we are worthy of their trust and respect.

Character is the foundation of command presence. All people reveal their character in every interaction, and character shapes and permeates a leader's command presence.

Another component of command presence—demeanor—speaks volumes to others. Poise and self-assurance play a large part in shaping the image projected. Effective leaders project an image that is calm, organized, and focused on success.

Fire leaders take charge when in charge; we lead from the front and act decisively. In times of crisis, a leader's command presence can be the critical factor in determining whether a team succumbs to pressures and dangers or stays focused to seize an opportunity to overcome and succeed. We inspire confidence among team members by demonstrating a strong and effective command presence.

Command Presence

After hearing that fires had broken out in the Placer Creek area in northern Idaho on August 21, 1910, Edward Pulaski, a local forest ranger, came to the firefighters' aid, bringing food and medical supplies to nearly 50 crew members there. The men did not realize it, but they were situated on the edge of an impending firestorm, and Pulaski was about to lead them from certain death.

Soon after Pulaski arrived, strong winds fanned flames toward the group. Nearby trees exploded into flame. Some of the men panicked and started to make a run for it, but Pulaski stopped them and maintained order, promising the men that he could get them out safely if they would stick with him.

Pulaski had been working this land for the past two years, blazing trails and cutting fire lines; he had an intimate familiarity with every contour of the area. His comprehensive knowledge enabled him to devise an ingenious plan of escape.

With thick smoke choking the area, Pulaski directed each man to grasp the shoulder of the man in front of him so the group could stay together. Pulaski led the group through the forest, restraining anyone who tried to bolt, eventually bringing the group to an old mine tunnel. Although some balked at going in, Pulaski adamantly insisted that the tunnel was their only hope of survival.

Pulaski coerced all the men into the tunnel and ordered them to lie face down just as the raging fire approached. Pulaski stood guard at the entrance with his pistol, beating back any terrorized man who attempted to leave, saying, "I'll shoot any man who tries to get by me!"

During their five hours in the tunnel, four men died and the rest, including Pulaski, lost consciousness. After the fire passed, the men began to come around, one by one, and began to rouse the other survivors.

Discovering the body of Pulaski, still at the entrance of the tunnel, a man said softly, "Come outside, boys. The boss is dead."

"Like hell he is!" Pulaski bellowed.

Though seriously injured—temporarily blinded, with seared lungs and badly burned hands—Pulaski survived the ordeal. He saved the lives of 42 crew members, and his leadership that day provides us a legendary example of the effect of a strong command presence.

Communication

Communication is the primary tool for establishing an effective command climate. The ability to communicate effectively is universally rated as one of the most important leadership behaviors.

Communication is the foundation upon which we build trust and enable our teams to develop cohesion. Effective communication is a two-way process. Good leaders actively listen to build trust with others. Communication enables us to convey objectives and intent, break error chains, and improve situation awareness. Leaders are cognizant of the central role that communication plays in the ability to lead and always strive to become better communicators.

Levels of Leadership

Leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation to those they lead. Although these leadership requirements are similar for the leaders at different levels of an organization, the challenges faced and the perspective required to meet the challenges are considerably different at each level.

Those in the role of a *follower* have a number of responsibilities: to become competent in basic job skills; to take initiative and learn from others; to ask questions and develop their communication skills.

Leaders of people have increasing challenges. They accept responsibility, not only for their own actions, but for those of their team. Leaders of people act to develop credibility as leaders: placing the team ahead of themselves, demonstrating trustworthiness, mastering essential technical skills, and instilling the values of the organization in their teams.

For a *leader of leaders,* the distance between the leader and the led increases the challenges of leading. Subordinate leaders frequently work in other locations, so face-to-face communication is not always possible.

As a result, the circumstances for building trust are more complex; but even so, the trust must withstand the pressures of time and distance, enabling leaders to confidently communicate intent and delegate responsibility. These leaders act as the conduit between the organization and the people on the ground, interpreting the vision into mission, translating abstract ideas so that subordinate leaders can take definitive action.

For *leaders of organizations,* the challenges grow to looking both more broadly and further ahead. These leaders manage the most complex and high-profile emergency incidents.

Our organizational leaders plan for future operations as well as mentor promising people for key roles in our organizations. They represent the face of the wildland fire service to cooperators, stakeholders, and the general public. Decisions made by these leaders have significant and far-reaching effects.

Summary

The ultimate purpose of leading in the wildland fire service is to protect life, property, and natural resources.

Leading here requires that we manage uncertainty and events that are not within our control. A framework to understand this leadership environment is critical to enable fire leaders to make effective decisions and communicate those decisions in dynamic situations.

The decision to lead and be successful within this framework requires an avid commitment to self-development.

- Art of leadership
- Leadership environment
- Command philosophy
- Command climate
- Levels of leadership

Duty: Accomplishing the Mission

Leaders in the wildland fire service seek and accept the duty to lead. We serve our people, our communities, and our nation. We fulfill our obligation by mastering our jobs, making sound and timely decisions, ensuring tasks can be done and are accomplished, and fostering this spirit of duty in subordinates.

The unpredictable nature of our work environment means that any team member could be at a decisive point. That decisive point may take many forms: a choice of divergent options in a tactical plan or a chance encounter with a member of the public who happens to be in a position of great influence. The results of that choice or interaction—good or bad—could have a profound effect on the wildland fire service. We take it upon ourselves to make sure our effect is a positive one, no matter what the mission may be.

Being Proficient in Our Job: Both Technically and as a Leader

Much of the work in the wildland fire service is technical. In demonstrating technical proficiency, fire leaders adhere to professional standard operating procedures, following established best practices.

Competent leaders develop plans to accomplish given objectives and communicate plans throughout the chain of command. Leaders exercise good judgment to ensure that the plan matches the objectives, employing people, equipment, and time wisely.

A Bias for Action

Leaders in the wildland fire service are not only empowered but also duty-bound to act on a situation that is within our power to affect, even without direction from above.

This empowerment is not intended to encourage freelancing. In a high-risk environment, freelancing is a dangerous and unpredictable element, causing more harm than good. Ultimately, leaders are always accountable for their actions.

A bias for action acknowledges wildfire as an environment where events do not always go according to plan. At times during an incident, one person may be the only one in a position to see what needs to be done and to make it happen. Time may not permit informing the chain of command before an opportunity is lost.

In these time-critical situations, fire leaders use judgment, act within the intent of their leaders, work in unison with others, develop and communicate a plan, and then inform leaders of actions as soon as safely possible.

On a chaotic and rapidly developing wildfire, one person taking the initiative can make all the difference in seizing and taking advantage of an opportunity. Being hesitant, risk-averse, or indecisive can expose firefighters to greater long-term risks and translate into a waste of time, opportunity, energy, and money.

Bias for Action

During the summer of 1985, drought conditions prevailed across the West, setting the stage for a difficult fire season. By the end of July, firefighters had their hands full with many large fires in several geographic areas.

Initially contained at the beginning of August, one of these large fires in the Salmon River breaks country of central Idaho came back to life after strong winds fanned smoldering fuels. On an afternoon in late August, many factors were coming together to create strong potential for extreme fire behavior: rugged terrain, low fuel moisture, gusty winds, low relative humidity, and high temperatures.

After working with their crews on the fire for two days, three hotshot crew leaders watched warily as these adverse conditions unfolded. They developed a series of trigger points and plans to make sure they were several steps ahead of any impending disaster.

They first relayed their concerns to the Branch Director and the Division Supervisor, making sure the Incident Management Team (IMT) was aware of conditions on the ground.

All three leaders made a pact to communicate frequently, keeping one another apprised of changes in the fire and making sure everyone on their crews had a high degree of situation awareness.

Two of the three leaders agreed that they would keep their crews together. They determined that the safety zones that dozers had cut along the line were likely inadequate and that the "real" safety zone was a clear-cut area above them.

They tied a trigger point to the relative humidity: if it dropped below 20 percent, they would get completely out of the timber and into the clear-cut area. On the two previous days, they had observed the fire activity increase rapidly when the relative humidity dropped below 20 percent.

The leaders kept a close watch on smoke columns from two separate drainages. They observed a spot fire that quickly created a third column. Before long, the original two columns drew in the third to become a wall of fire—200-foot flames, resembling a gaseous rolling ball. Along with the intense fire behavior, the wind shifted and increased in speed to 45 miles per hour. The relative humidity dropped to 16 percent.

The two leaders hurried their crews into the clear-cut area. They radioed a warning to the third leader, "Whatever you've got over there, it's not going to be enough." The third leader made a quick decision to go downhill and successfully moved his crew below the fire.

As the fire blew by the crews in the clear-cut area, it picked up sizeable debris and embers, scattering them high in the air. The Air Attack Supervisor, flying in a helicopter overhead, commented that he could not believe that the wind could move that kind of material that fast.

Because of the leader's keen attention to the changing elements and contingency planning, no one in any of the three crews sustained any injuries during the blow-up. Further, no crew members had to deploy a fire shelter because all were either below the fire or well within a clear-cut area.

The leaders' bias for action ensured the safety of their people and serves as an example of how taking the initiative can avert potential tragedy, even in the most dangerous situations.

Operational Tempo

Operational tempo is the speed and intensity of our actions relative to the speed and intensity of unfolding events in the operational environment. Within this context, fire leaders plan, prepare, and execute operations proactively, rather than continuously being forced to react to the environment.

Successfully maintaining operational tempo is not solely about speeding up to match or exceed the pace of the environment. It is also about knowing when operations should slow down and why.

Fire leaders balance activities such as planning, preparation, and action. Too much time spent planning increases the potential for missing opportunities. Too little time spent planning increases the potential for error. A judicious assessment encompasses the capabilities and endurance of resources. When employing people, leaders weigh expected gain against potential risks.

Using too few resources keeps teams from building the momentum needed to gain the advantage. Using too many resources can lead to confusion. Tasking resources beyond their capabilities leaves the team exhausted and unable to respond to an unexpected change in the environment.

We are most vulnerable to accidents and errors when the operational tempo is changing, especially when it changes quickly. Maintaining good situation awareness in spite of change in operational tempo represents a considerable challenge.

The key to managing operational tempo successfully is monitoring the changing environment and capabilities of the team, and then applying good judgment to determine whether to push forward or pull back while making necessary planning and resource adjustments.

Making Sound and Timely Decisions

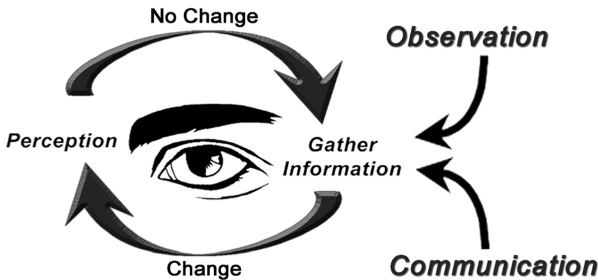
To make sound and timely decisions, fire leaders assess the situation, seek out relevant information, weigh options, make judgments, and initiate action as required to create a positive outcome within inevitable time constraints.

The cornerstone of good decision making is good situation awareness. Leaders can increase their decision space by attaining and maintaining good situation awareness. Decision space is simply the amount of time that a decision maker has for considering options before reaching a required decision point.

Leaders can optimize their decision space by using time efficiently. Seeking advance information in new situations or utilizing standard operating procedures for routine tasks are examples of techniques that make good use of available time.

In the wildland fire environment, decisions have serious consequences and often can have life-or-death implications for others. With so much on the line, we have a responsibility to understand the decision-making process—the components, the flow, the effect of time—and to develop the skills and confidence that enables us to make the best decision possible with the information and time available.

Situation Awareness Cycle

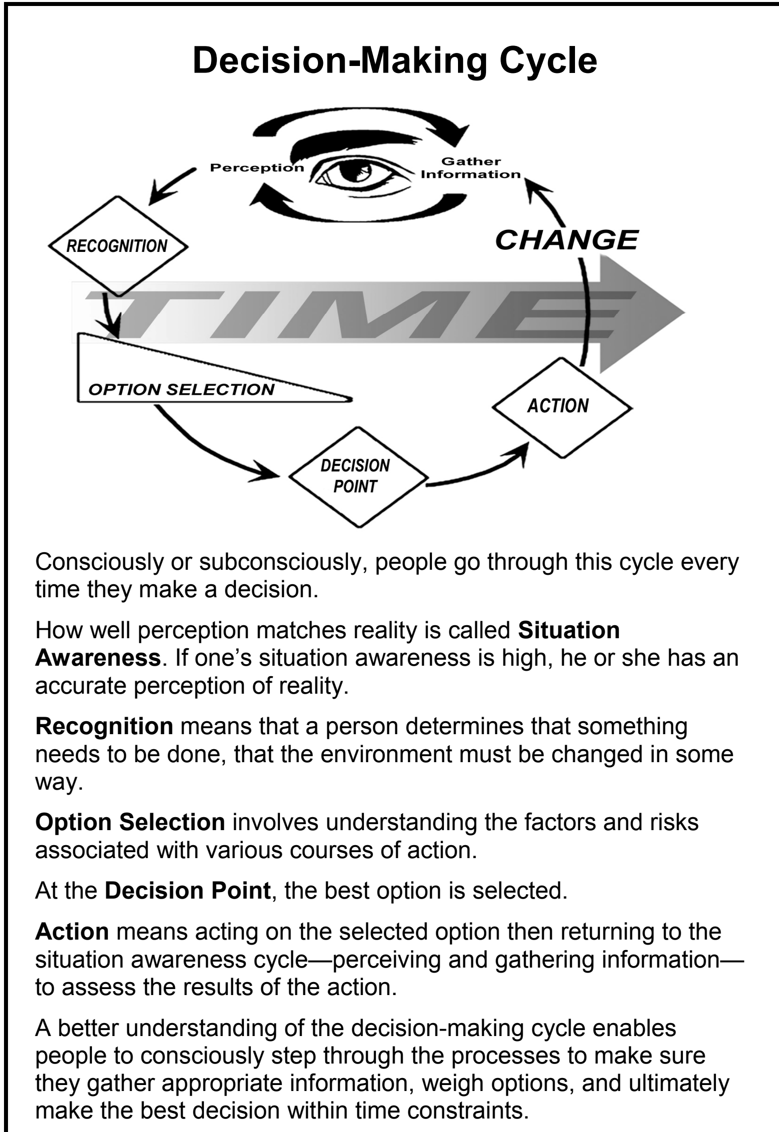


Situation Awareness is depicted as a cycle because the situation and people's perceptions are constantly changing. This internal cycle continues as long as people are awake.

Everyone starts with an initial perception of any given situation and then continuously updates it with new information. People gather information through both **observation**, which includes input from the senses, and **communication**, which includes face-to-face conversation, written communication, and radio or telephone exchanges.

Simply paying attention is an important part of maintaining good situation awareness, but even more important is determining what to pay attention to. All perceptions are subject to filtering and focusing: people constantly filter information and shift focus. People also produce a lot of internal inputs such as thoughts about what to do next, stress, memories of similar experiences, fear. Those with more experience in an environment often can more easily filter out distractions and unimportant details and focus on the most salient information.

Decision-Making Cycle



Consciously or subconsciously, people go through this cycle every time they make a decision.

How well perception matches reality is called **Situation Awareness**. If one's situation awareness is high, he or she has an accurate perception of reality.

Recognition means that a person determines that something needs to be done, that the environment must be changed in some way.

Option Selection involves understanding the factors and risks associated with various courses of action.

At the **Decision Point**, the best option is selected.

Action means acting on the selected option then returning to the situation awareness cycle—perceiving and gathering information—to assess the results of the action.

A better understanding of the decision-making cycle enables people to consciously step through the processes to make sure they gather appropriate information, weigh options, and ultimately make the best decision within time constraints.

Ensuring Tasks are Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished

Issuing clear instructions includes a requirement for providing leader's intent. Leader's intent provides the foundation for ensuring that tasks are fully understood. To ensure that tasks are supervised and accomplished, leaders apply the concepts of situational leadership.

Leader's Intent

Incidents inevitably create conditions in which it is impossible to project centralized command and control over all actions and events. In fast-moving, dynamic situations, top-level decision makers cannot always incorporate new information into a formal planning process and redirect people to action within a reasonable timeframe.

We provide leader's intent so people closest to the scene of action can adapt plans and exercise initiative to accomplish the objective when unanticipated opportunities arise or when the original plan no longer suffices.

Leader's intent is a crucial element of effective operations because it reduces internal friction and empowers subordinates—even when chaotic conditions prevent the chain of command from communicating effectively.

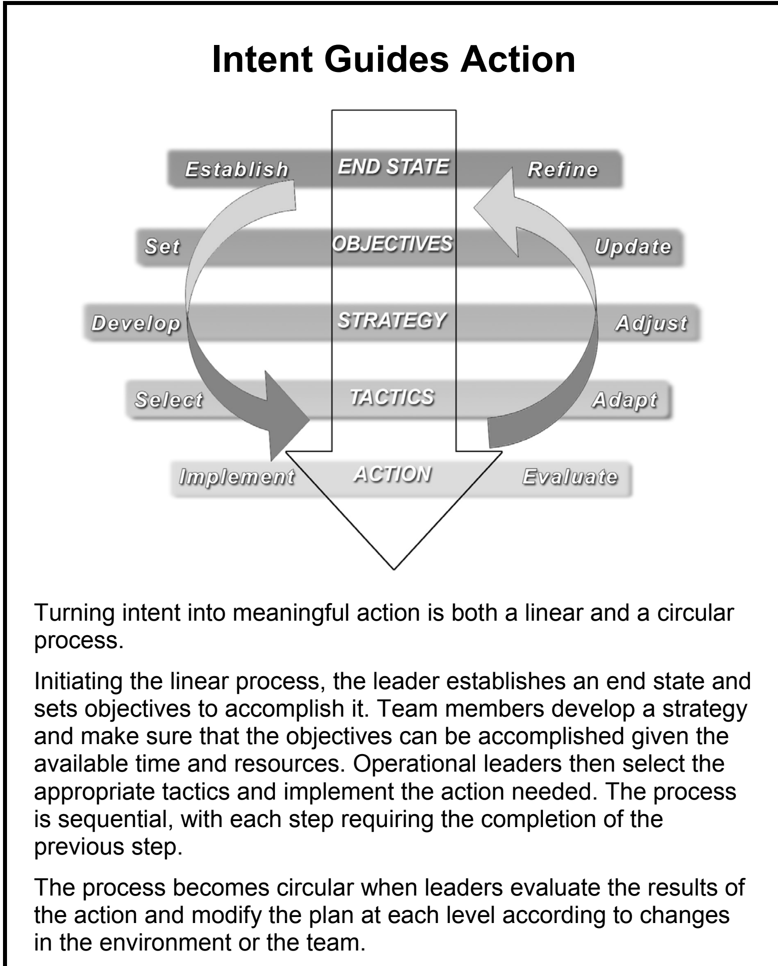
Leader's intent is a clear, concise statement about what our people must do to succeed in their assignments. It delineates three essential components:

- Task—what is the objective or goal of the assignment.
- Purpose—why the assignment needs to be done.
- End state—how the situation should look when the assignment is successfully completed.

At the incident level, the end state places the values at risk within the context of the standing incident priorities: (1) life, (2) property, (3) natural resources, and (4) management goals and concerns for the area affected.

Within the framework of the defined end state, leaders can develop plans that include incident objectives, priorities, strategies, trigger points, and contingency plans.

Intent Guides Action



Turning intent into meaningful action is both a linear and a circular process.

Initiating the linear process, the leader establishes an end state and sets objectives to accomplish it. Team members develop a strategy and make sure that the objectives can be accomplished given the available time and resources. Operational leaders then select the appropriate tactics and implement the action needed. The process is sequential, with each step requiring the completion of the previous step.

The process becomes circular when leaders evaluate the results of the action and modify the plan at each level according to changes in the environment or the team.

Refining Leader’s Intent throughout the Chain of Command

Each leader goes through the process of understanding and refining the intent from above and expressing their intent to their people.

At the division or unit level, the leader focuses on the incident objectives affecting their assignment, rather than overall management goals; but they use the same process to define task, purpose, and end state. At the crew level, the leader zeros in on the tactical objectives to develop intent.

Leaders narrow their focus at each level, identifying the objectives that apply to each level. We make sure that each person understands the end state and the purpose behind the task.

Leader's Intent

In October 2003, in the midst of the widespread wildland-urban interface fires that came to be known as the California Firestorm, a firing group had been assigned a straightforward task: light a backfire on the west side of a frontage road to head off the main fire and keep it from crossing a major interstate highway. The Santa Ana winds from the east created the right conditions for a successful burn.

The firing group and the holding crews—roughly 80 firefighters—were in position. Helicopters were in orbit to support the operation. Television crews and reporters were on hand, poised to shoot action footage for the evening news. The stage was set for a grand show. Everyone was leaning forward waiting for the first drop from the drip torch.

As part of his final check, the crew leader in charge of the operation looked down, around, and up—and saw something that stopped him cold.

High above the approaching fire, the upper transport winds had shifted direction back to the prevailing west-southwest. The surface winds still blew from the east, but conditions were changing in the sky. Smoke from the fire was sheering off at 200 feet and blowing east.

The experienced crew leader quickly calculated that a backfire would likely feed into the main fire, generating increased embers and burning debris that would ride on a transport wind and spot on the other side of the interstate.

As dozens of people waited, the leader consciously took a tactical pause.

He first tried to contact the Firing Group Supervisor, but communications were down. He then collaborated with the Division Supervisor. Together they agreed to disregard the original order because the plan was increasingly unlikely to achieve the Incident Commander's intent—preventing the fire from crossing the interstate highway. They instead created a plan to have the firefighters defend the frontage road from the approaching fire.

They also decided on a contingency plan: Setting a trigger point, they concurred that if the transport winds again switched direction from the east, they would go ahead with the original plan to start the backfire.

Their alternate plan to defend the frontage road worked, meeting the leader's intent behind their task. The fire did not cross the interstate highway at that location on that day.

Command and Control

We apply the principles of command and control to effectively reach the leader's end state while making sure actions remain proactive and reducing risk.

Fire leaders employ command by putting plans in place, communicating leader's intent, making decisions, and directing people to action. Fire leaders maintain control by soliciting feedback regarding the status of the unfolding situation and the results of action.

Control flows upward: from crew members via crew leaders, division supervisors, and unit leaders ultimately to the Incident Commander through his or her staff. Control enables leaders to modify command decisions and direction as the evolving situation requires.

In exercising command and control, fire leaders provide intent and direction and then gather feedback from subordinates. Leaders give subordinates flexibility to take appropriate action but also expect them to communicate status as quickly as the situation allows.

Situational Leadership

Leaders use a variety of power sources and leadership styles to influence others. Being able to select the most effective leadership tools in a given situation is an application of situational leadership.

Power can be defined as a person's ability to influence the actions of others. How leaders use power shapes others' perception of their ability to lead. A leader's ability to read a situation and apply the appropriate source of power enhances their ability to lead.

The more visible power is, the less it works. The less explicitly leaders rely on power to accomplish tasks, the greater their power actually is.

Those who rely on position, reward, or discipline power have less real influence on others. On the other hand, those who are able to rely on expert power and respect power—less overt forms of power—often influence in ways that have more far-reaching and deep effects.

To gain power, the most effective leaders give it away. By giving away some power to team members, leaders actually increase their influence and strengthen their ability to lead.

Leaders also use different leadership styles as appropriate for the level of experience of the people involved and the situation.

With inexperienced people or time-critical situations, leaders use a directing style, explicitly telling people what needs to be done. As team members gain experience, leaders increasingly seek team members' participation in discussions and decision making, working together to devise plans and actions.

Leaders keep sight of the long-term goal of being able to delegate most tasks and responsibilities to experienced and capable team members, setting the conditions that enable them to grow as leaders.

At every step of the way, leaders judiciously employ the amount of supervision required. They provide adequate feedback to make sure people can successfully accomplish the mission yet avoid micro-managing competent team members.

Developing Our People for the Future

Fire leaders are committed to building a high level of competence in team members. Their satisfaction depends on it as does the future of the organization. Some of today's team members are the leaders of tomorrow; it is the leader's responsibility to mentor and help them cultivate the right tools and skills that they will need to face the challenges of the future.

Setting and Achieving Standards

Leaders set standards as a means of clearly stating the leader's expectations as well as those of the organization. Standards define acceptable performance, and holding people accountable is contingent on clearly defined standards.

Fire leaders step up to the responsibility of establishing reasonable standards, training to those standards, and providing the resources necessary to achieve the standard. With standards in place, leaders help people develop technical and personal competency, enabling them to grow as individuals.

Mentoring

Leaders also help their people grow by mentoring and sharing experiences. Mentoring them begins their journey from followership to leadership.

Fire leaders coach and then step back to allow people to take on new responsibilities. Providing the opportunity to test new waters and try new behaviors is important in developing people for the future.

We consider the individual skill levels and developmental needs when delegating tasks, making sure people have appropriate challenges that press them to grow and expand their skills.

Mentoring

During the five decades of his career as a firefighter, Paul Gleason worked tirelessly in many roles, ranging from hotshot crew member to specialist in the science of fire behavior. He influenced and inspired countless firefighters, many of whom name him as the one person who had the biggest impact on their lives and careers.

In a February 2003 interview, the day before he succumbed to a battle with cancer, Gleason talked about leadership.

Gleason believed that effective leaders must have the ability to instill confidence; their followers must know with certainty that the leader regards their safety as a first priority. A good leader inspires their people to have a sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities. His depiction of effective leaders describes the essence of mentoring.

Gleason went on to say, "If you choose to lead others, you will have a legacy. But that legacy will be determined by those that follow you. I suppose I would want my legacy to be that firefighters begin to realize the importance of being a student of fire and that I was able to help make that happen."

Gleason walked the talk. His life epitomizes a leader who made a difference in developing people for the future.

His accomplishments have had enormous effect on the wildland fire service. He developed the LCES system, distilling the operational components of the Standard Firefighting Orders into the now familiar Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones.

He helped translate complex research on the characteristics of extreme fire behavior into usable training for field practitioners.

He reached out to academia to help the wildland fire service better understand how people make decisions in complex high-risk environments.

And most telling, many young firefighters who came to work for Gleason during his 15 years as a Hotshot Crew Superintendent chose to stay in the wildland fire service, going on to become leaders in various fire organizations, a ripple effect with profound influence on the future of the wildland fire service.

Developing a Learning Organization

Leaders evaluate performance at all levels to understand the causal factors of successes and failures. All those involved learn incrementally, applying today's lessons to the next assignment. This focus on continuous improvement brings with it a responsibility to share lessons learned throughout the organization

In a learning organization, leaders treat honest mistakes as opportunities to do better next time. Understanding that failure is a part of learning, they establish command climates in which young leaders are motivated by desire to succeed rather than fear of failure.

After Action Reviews (AARs)

Fire leaders walk the talk of the learning organization by scheduling routine debriefings to evaluate performance and apply the lessons learned. AARs maximize learning from every operation, training event, or task; they represent a powerful tool for team and organizational learning.

AARs allow people to share honest opinions and learn from each other. Fire leaders make sure that debriefings focus on *what* instead of *who;* we use them to improve weaknesses and to sustain strengths.

After Action Review (AAR)

A division consisting of five handcrews had been assigned to a fire in a wilderness area. The firefighters on the division had to hike for two hours, through rough terrain, to get to the fire. There they began working on their assignment: construct indirect handline, fire it out, and hold it.

Midway through the first shift, the Division Supervisor called some of the crew leaders together for an AAR to get a handle on operations so far: What is going well? What is not? What do we need to do better?

Several leaders pointed out that no area had been cleared for a helispot even though they were authorized to use power tools and ATVs in this wilderness area. Without a helispot it would take at least two hours to transport anyone who was injured to the nearest road. From there it would take another 45 minutes to get someone to a trauma center.

Based on their discussion, the Division Supervisor persuaded the Incident Management Team (IMT) to authorize a helispot and directed some of the firefighters at the fire to clear an area for a helispot.

The following day, the adjacent division had a major slop-over while going direct on the fire. Three firefighters were overcome by the heat and smoke. One of them went into cardiac arrest. EMTs worked on him while he was brought to the helispot where a medevac helicopter was waiting. The chopper transported him to the hospital, and he survived.

Summary

Duty is how we value our job.

Duty begins with everything required of us by law and policy, but it is much more than that. As leaders, we commit to excellence in all aspects of our professional responsibility so that when a job is done we can look back and say *I couldn't have given any more.*

- Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Ensure tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished.
- Develop your people for the future.

Respect: Taking Care of People

To gain respect from our people, we first respect them. Leaders demonstrate respect for our people in many ways: by getting to know them, by looking out for their well-being, by keeping them informed, by putting forth the effort to build strong teams, and by employing them in accordance with their capabilities.

Mission success or failure often hinges on our ability to understand each other and work together. Whether merging a diverse group of people as a team or dealing with the aftermath of a tragic event, understanding human behavior is inherent to being a good leader.

Knowing Our People and Looking Out for Their Well-Being

The wildland fire service approach to taking care of people encompasses mind, body, and spirit. Because duty can take our people into dangerous situations, fire leaders reciprocate their loyalty by looking out for their safety and well-being in all circumstances.

Leaders learn about people as individuals, developing an understanding of what motivates them and how they derive satisfaction from their work. We consider how stress and fear can affect our people's well-being and take steps to understand and mitigate the effects of these human factors.

Our First Priority: Life and Safety

The first of our standing incident priorities is life. No objective is worth the lives of our people; and we put the safety of our people first, above all other mission objectives. However, in the complex and high-risk environment of wildland fire, we realize we cannot completely guard our people from all the inherent risks involved in our work.

When the mission takes our people into harm's way, fire leaders redeem their people's trust by looking out for their well being: doing our best to make decisions that appropriately balance risk and potential gain, being watchful for unfolding conditions that may jeopardize their safety, and being present to share the risks and hardships. The leader being first in and the last out is a classic way of demonstrating the ideal of taking care of our people.

Motivation and Expectations

Leaders understand that people derive motivation from individual values and needs; others cannot force a person to be motivated any more than one person can force another to change. However, we recognize that leaders are responsible for putting in place the conditions in which people are motivated to act.

To create these conditions, fire leaders start by taking the time to learn about our people—understanding their internal motivations and accepting them as unique individuals.

In addition, leaders keep in mind that each team member has expectations regarding the benefits—overt as well as intrinsic—they will receive from their work.

Many barriers can prevent people's expectations from being met: poor relationships with their peers, intrusive supervision, inadequate resources, or work without meaning.

Fire leaders work to reduce barriers and increase benefits such as giving people a sense of achievement, recognizing accomplishments, resolving unhealthy conflict, providing meaningful work, increasing the responsibilities, and offering opportunities for advancement.

Stress

Representing a significant risk to safety and operational effectiveness, stress can bring about reactions such as tunnel vision or confusion that substantially degrade situation awareness—in ourselves and in our people.

To mitigate this risk, leaders act to alleviate the effects of stress by:

- Understanding our own stress reactions—the triggers that set them off, the symptoms, the mitigations to put into place to reduce them.
- Monitoring and preventing stress buildup in their teams—openly discussing the causes of stress and the potential mitigations.
- Encouraging team members to watch out for each other by monitoring one another's stress reactions.

Fear

Fire leaders work to keep fear from being a barrier by understanding those fears that affect their team. Fear can destroy communication and, with it, trust and cohesion. In looking out for our people, we are mindful of their fears and vigilant in eliminating unnecessary fears.

Leading Up

Looking out for our people includes not only those who work for us but also our leaders and peers. Leadership is about influencing others to accomplish tasks that are in the best interest of our organization; this often means influencing those above us and leading up. Similarly, we are open to upward leadership—and, in fact, encourage and reward it.

Fire leaders are expected to lead in many directions, an expectation that increases complexity and risk. Summoning the courage needed to intervene and influence peers or leaders above can be difficult, especially if providing unwelcome feedback about behavior or pointing out an alternative to a potentially bad decision.

However, in high-risk environments, no one can afford to assume that anyone has all the answers. Everyone, at every level, can make mistakes or feel pressure to make decisions without adequate information or make decisions based on outdated information. The potential for error is inherently high.

To build the kind of healthy and resilient culture required in the wildland fire service, we lead up—holding our leaders accountable, providing unvarnished situation awareness in challenging situations, and offering unbiased and viable alternatives.

Leading Up

During the difficult and long 2002 fire season, two handcrews were assigned to a firing operation on a large fire complex in the Pacific Northwest near the location where several firefighters had lost their lives in a burnover several years earlier.

The overhead was on edge about this incident, unnerved by its proximity to the fatality site. The accident investigation report had found fault with the leaders at the burnover for oversights and omissions that contributed to the deaths of the firefighters. Shadowed by criticism of his peers in the report, the Operations Branch Director was having trouble focusing on the firing operation at hand.

"Do you feel it?" the Branch Director asked one of the crew leaders.

Puzzled, the crew leader asked, "What? Did the wind change? The temperature? Humidity?"

"No," the Branch Director said. "Can't you feel 'it'?"

Abruptly, stating that things didn't feel right, the Branch Director ordered the firing operation shut down.

Up to that point, the burnout had been progressing normally with few problems. The crews were working at night under generally favorable conditions; a few spot fires along the road were discovered and quickly extinguished.

From the perspective of the two crew leaders overseeing the burnout, shutting it down was a decision made for the wrong reasons. The two reasoned with the Branch Director, citing the good progress already made, pointing out that the identified escape routes and safety zones were rock solid. Moreover, if not completed that night, the operation would be left for the day shift under vastly different conditions.

By focusing on the present and keeping the discussion about "what" was happening and not "who" had been criticized in the past, the two crew leaders successfully led upward that day. The Branch Director eventually saw the logic of their argument and allowed the firing operation to continue, and the crews successfully completed their mission.

Keeping Our People Informed

Fire leaders show respect by keeping people informed—describing leader's intent for assignments, providing timely briefings and debriefing, identifying hazards, and answering questions at appropriate times. By keeping our people informed, we consciously create a command climate that fosters appropriate initiative by subordinates.

Five Communications Responsibilities

Fire leaders work to instill the Five Communications Responsibilities in the culture of all crews, teams, and units. These responsibilities are not just tactical tools but apply to the staff and management environment.

In high risk environments, the best level of protection against errors and accidents is effective team communication. Therefore, everyone—regardless of position—has an obligation to communicate critical information.

Fire leaders redeem the Five Communications Responsibilities to enable everyone at all levels to develop good communications practices.

Five Communications Responsibilities

Brief*—use briefings to ensure accurate situation awareness.*

Debrief*—use After Action Reviews to build accountability and learn from experience.*

Acknowledge and understand messages*—acknowledge and ensure clarity of received communications on conditions, assigned tasks, intent, and other important information.*

Communicate hazards to others*—use hazard identification, a key component of risk management, to identify personal, tactical, situational, political, or organizational hazards. Good leaders ensure that team members are vigilant for hazards and communicate identified hazards effectively.*

Ask if you don't know*—guard against making false assumptions when the picture is not clear.*

Situational Communication

Closely related to the concept of situational leadership, situational communication involves selecting the appropriate communications tools given the people and the situation involved.

Leaders use a variety of communication tools—*I* messages, restatement, inquiry, decoding, summarizing, encouragement, or direct statements—to exchange information at many different levels with team members, peers, and leaders.

Leaders modify communication to engage the listener according to their style, using a variety of means to convey the message: visual, auditory, and written text. Context is important, and leaders continually make judgments about what communication tools to use and when.

Keeping Our Leaders Informed

Just as communicating with the team builds trust, so does communicating with supervisors. When our leaders are out of the loop—whether intentionally or unintentionally—we bring about a host of negative effects: what is unknown increases; we are seen as unpredictable; our leader's trust decreases. We keep our leaders informed to gain their trust and to prove ourselves capable of increased responsibilities.

Building the Team

Fire leaders build cohesive teams—not simply groups of individuals putting forth individual efforts—to accomplish missions in high-risk environments.

Cohesive teams are more creative and adaptable when dealing with complex situations. This enables them to detect and mitigate errors before irreparable damage occurs. Cohesion allows team members to anticipate the needs and actions of other team members. This increases efficiency and saves time.

Fire leaders set the stage by creating an environment in which cohesive teams thrive: establishing a foundation of trust, enabling healthy conflict, requiring commitment, setting an expectation of accountability, and bringing focus to the team result.

Trust

Leaders start by building a foundation of trust in teams. Trust is the underpinning of all cohesive teams; without it, teams are merely collections of individuals that can never hope to achieve synergy.

Recognizing that communication is the key to building trust, we communicate openly with teams and make sure we convey the essence of our values, mission, and vision. In doing so, we also communicate information about ourselves because our teams must, first and foremost, trust us.

Healthy Conflict

Leaders create teams that engage in healthy conflict: enabling a dynamic exchange of ideas, the voicing of diverse viewpoints, and, ultimately, innovative solutions.

To enable healthy conflict to flourish, we focus on the *what* not the *who*. By concentrating on *what* should be done or considered instead of *who* is right, we help team members resolve issues more quickly and keep everyone’s focus where it needs to be—on the team and its mission.

Commitment

Leaders create teams committed to the mission. To increase the level of commitment, leaders seek input and delegate appropriately.

We involve team members from the start and actively solicit contributions—not just strong backs but also ideas and observations about the work environment. We make people responsible, give them enough authority to accomplish their assignment, and hold them accountable. Although we take a risk when we delegate, the resulting ownership far outweighs the risk.

Involvement is the foundation for commitment.

Peer Accountability

Leaders create teams in which team members hold each other accountable. More than any system of reward and discipline, more than any policy, the fear of letting down respected teammates and peers represents the most effective means of accountability.

Peer accountability is an outgrowth of trust and commitment. We set the example by demonstrating that team members can hold us accountable, encouraging them to give us feedback on our own performance in meeting stated goals.

Team Results

Leaders create teams that focus on the team result. This requires us to articulate a clear end state, specifying success criteria so that team members can turn intent into focused and decisive action.

The important human element of morale is related to this focus on team results. High morale is a visible expression of team cohesion, and channeling the team's energy to a common focal point builds strong cohesion.

Resilience

The ultimate team result is resilience: teams that can bounce back when problems or errors threaten cohesion and synergy. Resilient teams practice behaviors that reinforce situation awareness, communication, and learning.

We create an atmosphere that fosters resilient teams:

- Establishing an expectation that people at all levels communicate effectively by practicing the Five Communications Responsibilities.
- Communicating clear leader's intent, making sure all team members understand the end state and the objectives needed to reach the end state.
- Defining roles and responsibilities so all team members have a clear picture of what they are supposed to do and how they fit into the bigger picture.
- Tracking situation status so team members understand what progress has been made and can alert others when deviations occur.
- Developing contingency plans to extend decisional space. Maintaining the advantage over the environment by planning for error or unexpected events and calculating responses in advance.

Employing Our People in Accordance with Their Capabilities

Teams are comprised of individuals, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. Some are stronger; others are faster. Some are better with numbers; others are better with words. Some are good with machinery, and others are better with people.

In the same way fire leaders optimize tactical resources such as engines and aviation assets, leaders maximize the potential of teams by optimizing the match up of the tasks that need to be done with the people who are available to do them. When assigning tasks, leaders take into consideration a variety of factors: team experience, fatigue, and physical limitations.

Aligning Values

Each team member has personal beliefs and interests. Individual points of view can work for or against the team result.

If diverse points of view focus predominately on individual needs, the team's efforts are diffused and conflict becomes factional. By aligning individual points of view toward team results, however, leaders can leverage individual attitudes to building positive results.

Instead of diffusing the focus of the team, the variety of beliefs and experiences can lead to dynamic discussions that temper, refine, and strengthen the values of a team.

Performance Feedback

Leaders provide feedback by creating open lines of communication and providing an opportunity to exchange ideas, perspectives, and concerns. Failing to provide feedback represents failure in a basic responsibility of leadership: to guide team members in learning accountability, accepting responsibility, and being effective communicators. Fire leaders use performance feedback to develop team members and help them meet their full potential.

Providing feedback represents a potentially powerful form of influence. When given in a timely and appropriate manner, feedback builds the leader's credibility among team members, demonstrates respect for them, and increases their respect for their leader.

Fire leaders give objective feedback, acknowledging strong performance as well as pointing out where efforts fall short. We try to praise in public and discipline in private, always considering the people involved and the situation.

Recognizing Accomplishments

Leaders recognize efforts that move their teams toward stated goals. Teams value recognition as evidence that their leaders understand and appreciate their dedication and hard work.

Insincere or uninformed praise, however, can quickly backfire. When a leader singles out someone with extraordinary praise for what is perceived to be an ordinary effort, the leader loses credibility with the team member as well as the team.

At the same time, failing to recognize someone making a beyond-the-call-of-duty effort paints the leader as disinterested and uninvolved. Leaders praise and reward appropriately, as required by the effort and situation.

Discipline

Leaders utilize discipline with those who lack motivation or are unwilling to perform to standard. Leaders discipline team members only after providing timely feedback and clear standards, and that effort has failed.

Failing to discipline team members who refuse to meet standards undermines team cohesion. Shirking this responsibility represents a failure in the leader's duty to other team members.

Summary

Respect is how we value our co-workers. Respect for the individual forms the basis for the rule of law in America. This value reminds us that those who follow us are our greatest resource. Not all of our followers will succeed equally, but we owe them our respect.

- Know your people and look out for their well-being.
- Keep your people informed.
- Build the team.
- Employ your people in accordance with their capabilities.

Integrity: Developing Yourself

Integrity is a measure of where a person stands in times of challenge and controversy.

Leaders cannot hide what they do; they are always setting an example. Followers assess their leader's integrity every day. If people believe a leader has integrity, they can accept other weaknesses and help compensate for them.

We are ultimately accountable to our followers and owe it to them to redeem this responsibility in a professional manner. Therefore, we seek to learn more about ourselves in order to leverage our strengths and improve on our weaknesses.

Knowing Ourselves and Seeking Improvement

The starting point for leadership development is self-awareness. In many ways, our greatest challenge is to know ourselves. Self-awareness is an inward application of situation awareness. Fire leaders have an inner drive to analyze and know ourselves. We probe our blind spots and come away resolved to improve ourselves. We honestly appraise our own strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding our abilities and limitations, seeking feedback, learning from our mistakes, knowing where to improve, recognizing when to seek others with complementary strengths—these are all behaviors that enable us to become better leaders.

Born Versus Made

Our perspective is that leaders are made, not born.

The distribution of innate leadership traits in the wildland fire workforce is similar to the normal Bell Curve distribution for any set of traits in any population. A small percentage of people are natural leaders, possessing the character and traits that compel others to follow them. Another small percentage have character flaws or issues that would prevent them from ever becoming effective leaders.

Most people—the vast majority—do not come to the job as natural leaders, yet they have the ability to become very effective leaders by working to develop their leadership skills.

The wildland fire service cannot be successful depending on that small percentage of natural leaders. As a result, we accept the responsibility of making ourselves the best leaders that we can be, continuously embracing opportunities to learn the art of leadership through formal training, field experience, and self-development. The best leaders are life-long students of leadership.

Increasing What is Known

Fire leaders seek and accept feedback to maintain accurate situation awareness about ourselves. We are willing to examine and probe blind spots, seeking feedback from others. Because blind spots can lead to problems, leaders accept and act on feedback as part of the responsibility to mitigate error.

Effective leaders also share information about themselves with others. Greater situation awareness about the leader builds trust among team members and enables them to help the leader compensate for weaknesses.

Seeking and accepting feedback and sharing information enables leaders to increase what is known among team members and contributes to the development of a strong team.

Seeking and Accepting Responsibility for Our Actions

Fire leaders seek responsibility and accept responsibility for their actions. We also accept full responsibility for poor team performance, credit subordinates for good performance, and keep superiors informed.

Fitness for Command

Our position as leaders requires us to take people into unpredictable situations where mediocre leaders can be quickly overwhelmed in a crisis and make dangerous errors in judgment.

We accept the responsibility to demonstrate fitness for command as leaders in the wildland fire service. Fire leaders prepare for command by learning the applicable technical and leadership skills, by gaining the requisite experience, and by developing the physical, mental, and emotional capabilities through training, certification, and evaluation of behavior.

Accountability

Leaders are responsible for the decisions they make and for the actions they take. This responsibility also means that fire leaders are accountable for their teams—for the decisions they make and the actions they take based on the leader's intent provided to them.

Fire leaders strive to meet and exceed standards for performance in accomplishing the mission. When we fall short, we take action to make it right, getting ourselves and our teams back on track.

Setting the Example

Fire leaders set the example by exhibiting strong character, by showing optimism and encouraging others, even when facing setbacks.

Character

Character is based on values. It is the combination of actions and words that others appraise to determine if we can be trusted to do the right thing. Character is the most valuable asset we have as leaders because it, more than anything else, promotes or hinders the development of trust.

Because other's perception of character results from the observation of many actions, it is impossible for anyone to hide their character. We cannot fool others: they assess our character every day; they know if we are open and honest; they see if we are indecisive, lazy, or selfish.

Fire leaders are mindful of our values and the way that we communicate and reinforce them to others and to ourselves. We set the example by taking steps to build our character continually:

- Knowing our values, reviewing them frequently, and contemplating areas for improvement.
- Admitting when we are wrong.
- Taking time to reflect on our actions.
- Finding role models and asking them to be our mentors.
- Studying leaders and leadership, learning from their successes and mistakes.

Moral Courage

Wildland fire leaders demonstrate moral courage by adhering to high ethical standards and choosing the difficult right over the easy wrong. We avoid ethical dilemmas by directing team members to operate in ways that are consistent with our professional standards and by directing them only to actions they can achieve ethically.

When we make mistakes, we handle them in honorable and effective ways, fixing the immediate problem then searching for root causes. Leaders with moral courage look for causes, not scapegoats, learning and improving, looking for ways to turn weaknesses into strengths.

An outgrowth of strong character, moral courage enables us to build trust with our teams and gain respect from peers. Although some may judge that leading ethically compromises short-term gains, leading ethically allows us to accomplish more than our mission.

Because the consequences of ethical decisions can be great and those who make such decisions may be asked later to justify their conclusion, following a careful and thorough process is a wise approach in situations with ambiguous courses of action. The values of duty, respect, and integrity should weigh heavily in any ethical decision.

Moral Courage

The horrifying tangle of bodies and fire shelters on the side of Storm King Mountain after the afternoon blowup spoke of chaos and desperation—an attempted escape gone terribly wrong.

At sunset on July 6, 1994, just hours after the blowup, a smokejumper in the rescue party surveyed the grim tragedy, stunned by the enormity of what had just occurred. As he dejectedly contemplated the position of the bodies and the tattered fire shelters, he began to have a growing conviction: the hillside, with evidence of the last struggles of 14 firefighters, had a critical story to tell.

His initial impulse was to do whatever it took to remove the bodies as a sign of respect, but as the smokejumper weighed the competing values, he realized that the site must be preserved, to learn lessons from those who had died there that day.

Late that night the smokejumper had made his way down to the incident command post, where fire supervisors were buzzing with plans to immediately remove the bodies. Realizing what was about to happen, the smokejumper interrupted:

"Listen, here's the deal. You move those bodies and you are going to ruin every bit of information those investigators can get. What happened up there was unusual, and it would be foolhardy to destroy that scene."

One of the fire supervisors shrugged him off saying, "Well, the governor wants those bodies off the hill tonight."

"Well, [expletive] the governor!" the smokejumper said.

At that moment, the governor turned and cut into their conversation, "Is there a problem here?"

Without skipping a beat, the smokejumper continued, "Governor, be sure not to let them disturb that scene until there has been a very thorough mapping of what occurred. Because, in spite of the tragedy, we must learn from this event. And there is much to be learned."

The governor heeded the smokejumper's impassioned plea and instructed the fire supervisors to leave undisturbed the bodies of those who had fallen.

The resulting accident investigation report would have told an entirely different story if the smokejumper had not thought through that difficult decision and spoken out at that decisive moment. Instead, the report is one of the most detailed accounts of a firefighting tragedy and has had a lasting effect on the wildland fire service.

Summary

Integrity is how we value ourselves.

We cannot be in charge of others unless we are in charge of ourselves. People of integrity separate what is right from what is wrong and act according to what they know is right, even at personal cost.

- Know yourself and seek improvement.
- Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Set the example.

Eyes Forward

Leaders in the wildland fire service chose to reach beyond the challenges of learning the craft of firefighting by stepping forward to lead people in complex and dangerous environments. Fire leaders trade the indulgences of complacency, second-guessing, and fault-finding for the responsibilities of bringing order out of chaos, improving our people, and building our organizations.

As our careers progress, some move from being a leader of people to being a leader of leaders to being a leader of an organization. At each level, we rise to meet the challenges of adhering to our values of duty, respect, and integrity and assume the responsibility of instilling those values in others.

A leader's accomplishments are measured in lifetimes. Our character, decisions, and actions create powerful ripple effects that continue to influence people and organizations long after we are gone.

This is the legacy that each generation passes on and entrusts to our successors.