

The New Year: Time for Change

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy New Year to all my brothers and sisters out there!

As 2019 arrives, everyone, including firefighters, looks to implement some kind of change. Fire chiefs will implement their new, hard-fought budgets. Unions will negotiate new contracts. Our training divisions will try to come up with something interesting and realistic for us, so we don't complain, but we will complain, anyway, because it is what we do. Firehouse cooks will threaten to stop cooking over the griping about the overcooked steaks, burnt sauce, or whatever. You see, griping is what we do; it's also what makes the firehouse life fun.

In my book, *Surviving the Firehouse*, I discuss the importance of being a good person, someone that others want to be around, to engage in conversation and to work for. If you aren't that person already, you might consider taking these steps to move in that direction. Trust me, your co-workers will appreciate your efforts.

This is what I want you to do. In this New Year, I want you to have a long, hard, honest look at yourself to determine what you can do to improve the lives of the people around you, to make life more enjoyable for others to work with you so that they want to be around you. Listen, all of us have committed fire department sins. After all, we're only human. The problem lies, not in the blunder, but the repeated, chronic blunder and transgressions, making life in the firehouse miserable for everyone.

Starting today and before your next shift, ask yourself these questions, then, based on your answers, make a change for the better.

If you're a fireman:

1. Can I come in early and maybe relieve my person at a reasonable time instead of five minutes to eight?
2. Can I help more around the station and not leave every single cleanup detail to the other person?
3. Can I quit griping about stupid things, making life miserable for others?
4. Can I quit selling out others to make myself look good?
5. Should I start eating with the crew?
6. Can I cook a meal once in a while, or, at least, help with the prep work?
7. Can I not throw the person under the bus that I just relieved because the O2 bottle was low, fuel was below 3/4, or dirt was left on the floor of your engine?
8. Most important, can I mentor a new, young kid that just got hired, instead of putting him or her down all the time?
9. Can I make peace with administration and find common ground?
10. Can I work better with my union to help move my fire department forward?

If you're an officer:

1. Ask yourself everything I wrote above.
2. Am I setting a positive tone and environment for my crew?
3. Am I putting my crew first, before myself, because I am working on that next bugle?
4. Am I helping out my crew around the station or with reports, knowing we just ran twenty-two calls, or do I justify my right to relax while others do all the work?

5. Do I speak to my crew with respect and treat them with dignity because we are one and not two separate ranks and pay scales?
6. Am I too heavy-handed with discipline because everything is either right or wrong?
7. Most important, should I mentor a new young hire, instead of putting him or her down all the time?

If you're a high-level chief:

1. Can I make peace with the Union and the troops in the field?
2. Can I find common ground with some that do not agree with all that I do?
3. Can I better communicate with my firefighters in the field to let them know how valuable they are and prove it through my actions?
4. Can I have a better understanding of the reality that we are all imperfect beings and that my people will screw up at times, sometimes a lot?

You see, this change isn't really that hard; you just have to want to do it and have the will to become a better person. I promise, even if you make just a couple of small changes, your fire department career will be so much more enjoyable for your crew and yourself, and the department you love. Heck, you may even look forward to going to work again.

May you all find peace within yourselves in the New Year!