

to mug each other, we move the major challenge from solving the incident problem (like putting out the fire) to somehow surviving the negative interpersonal experience. Over time, such bad treatment results in firefighters (smart-adaptable) “hiding out” or working around the edges of the operation to avoid recurring negative interactions. We naturally attempt to avoid painful outcomes.

By nature, operating at fire/EMS/special ops events is tough. Firefighters expect (actually love) rough and tumble conditions where and when they do their jobs. We are highly durable people who must develop the ability to bounce back after the game — if we want to keep playing. We routinely yell, shout, shove, grab, and gesture to communicate, protect, direct, and manage each other — when we are chasing the fire or when the fire is chasing us (and the customer) and the falling roof is about to compress us into short midgets, we cannot do poetry and chamber music. This is the real world of our work and is not what this little “be nice” section is about. What this blab is directed toward involves team members being mean/ugly/inconsiderate to each other in a way that puts the recipient at a disadvantage while they are doing their job and makes them feel lousy after the event because of these negative experiences. It may well be that after Mrs. Smith’s kitchen fire, she never deals directly with us again. The opposite is true of the team that operates at her event. We are permanently connected to each other. If E3 beats up E4 they are going to see them again (and again). Many times, the only chance (and the starting point) we have of controlling the problem is if we can control ourselves — we should include how we treat each other as an important part of that control.



Virtually every situation we respond to requires the effective action of a team of firefighters. It is impossible for any team to move beyond how they treat each other and how they feel about each other. Interpersonal relations during high stress incident operations are an internal customer big deal. It is worth us developing the following list of some of the etiquette items that could be included in the curriculum of an incident operations charm school:

- Don't take advantage of the situation (or anything else).
- Don't hide in confusion.
- Everyone works for the IC — don't free lance.
- Respect the arrival order — use staging to stay in line.
- Decisions and actions should be driven by:
 - SOPs
 - Conscious Decision
 - Direct Order
 - Eliminate “deification occurs”
- Operate to best advantage within the plan and system.
- Assist and back up those who need help:
 - Young help the old (muscle and energy) — old accept that help.

- Old help the young (cunning and crafty experience) — young accept that help.
- Reflect a controlled hustle but don't race.
- Bring your positive attitude to the incident — leave your ego at home.
- If you must violate the plan, compensate and tell the IC.
- Everyone cannot be on the nozzle.
- Practice incident self-discipline.
 - Stay together.
 - Practice positive follower-ship.
 - Stay in your job/role.
 - Do your share of the mundane — dull stuff.
- Be a team player — make everyone look good.
- Make the person ahead of you safe and successful.
- Work hard to do your share, plus some/don't stand around when others are working.
- Manage incidents as non-political events:
 - Make assignments based on response/arrival order.
 - Don't play favorites.
 - Don't pay folks back for something they have done.
 - Equalize dirty/yucky jobs.
 - Share good/fun jobs.
 - Give credit where it belongs.
 - Coach and correct problems.
- If we are called by another agency, we deliver service to them and they are our customer — act like it.
- Operate to reduce (not create) incident stress.
- Expect and don't be surprised by:
 - Confusion.
 - Chaos.
 - Excited-emotional people.
 - Poor communications.
 - Compressed time frames.
- Operate safely — stay under control.
- Listen for orders, follow orders.
- Answer on the first radio call.
- Don't blab on the radio.
- Tell the IC the important stuff he/she can use.
- Tell the IC when you finish your task and are available — if you can't complete your task, say so.
- Talk nice to everyone — even when you're yelling (even when it hurts).

- When you ask, shut up and listen to the answer.
- Thank those who help you.
- Tell the truth — don't fib about task completion.
- Don't leave early — stay in the game until it's over.
- If you want to know what happened, ask. Don't make assumptions.
- After the event, talk nice about each other.
- Be loyal to the team, don't ever talk un-nice about each other (is un-nice a word?).

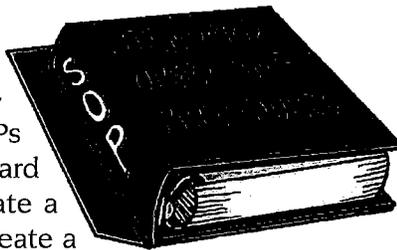
..... Always be nice.

Whenever Possible, Follow Standard Operating Procedures/Mission Statement/Organizational Values

As previously stated, quick, effective performance is the basic entry price we must come up with to get into and stay in the good service game. Such positive tactical performance will consistently emerge out of us using SOPs as the basis of our operations. The SOP process involves the entire organization deciding on the most correct and best use of department resources on the strategic, tactical, and task levels.

Procedures become a powerful performance management element because they form the centerpiece foundation of a process that mobilizes and connects deciding/training/applying/reviewing before, during, and after the incident. Procedures are constantly reviewed and refined based on their application to actual service delivery experiences.

Procedures outline the way we will operate in a standard situation and how we will react to standard conditions. The ongoing application of SOPs gives us the capability to connect standard action to standard conditions to create a standard outcome. Procedures also create a game plan that connects us as a team — together the various and separate procedures become a set of “plays” so that we can start, continue, and finish conducting operations together.



This approach provides the best opportunity (and structure) to put actual local experiences “in the bank” so that we can become individually and collectively smarter; the last event is used to improve the next event. No single person or single part of the system can duplicate this organization-wide process and the energy it attracts to continually improve effectiveness.

Most tactical situations are a combination of a lot of standard elements and some special factors. SOPs become the operational foundation for sorting out and responding to the profile of each particular event — our standard approach becomes the starting point of our special approach. Effectively adapting to special, unusual, or different situations and conditions emerges out of standard operations. Equipping the team with SOPs going into the event creates a strong, standard beginning. We

use SOPs for the regular part of the incident. We then develop and apply customized responses for the special parts that are "left over." This makes it a lot easier than having to invent a plan for every part of the incident. Our standard approach provides the launching pad for us to creatively invent solutions as we go.

Our procedures become transparent to the customer. Simply, they don't know (or probably care) why we do what we do the way we do it, but they see the outcome pretty quickly, and they know what they see. Most of us don't know how to read music or understand the complicated sports plays (both SOPs), but we still enjoy the concert and/or the game. When our customer observes and remarks, "You make it look so easy and simple," they have generally watched (and been impressed with) the execution of a set of connected, coordinated SOPs.

Effective service delivery innovation and creativity consistently emerge out of us approaching SOPs as being expansive and not restrictive. They are in place and meant to provide the standard foundation and starting point for firefighters to develop whatever solutions are required to get the job done for the customer. SOPs are not in place to describe anywhere close to every situation that firefighters routinely encounter — much less the screwy, unusual stuff that occurs. Sometimes a routine event has some parts that are special. Sometimes the whole event is unusual and nonroutine. Effective incident management involves quickly sorting out the routine and special stuff. SOPs are not an excuse to limit yourself and what you can and will do for the customer. It makes zero sense for workers as smart, capable, and resourceful as firefighters to stand by and observe an urgent event evolve with digits in orifices because some part of the system straightjacketed them by not allowing them to take any action without complete SOP direction. Today, anybody in our business who must have an SOP for every situation before they can operate is seriously disabled and obsolete. In the 911 world of today, anything can and does happen. Each member of the team is responsible for using his or her brain to give input to solve the problem(s). Empowered firefighters along with their team members operating under the direction of strong, effective company officers who are guided by clearly stated organizational values, naturally and automatically take over wherever SOPs leave off. SOPs create the logical, practical, and very effective foundation and framework for us to act out our basic mission statement (values).

Many fire department mission statements are long and very flowery. Some sound a lot like an academy award acceptance speech. I always wonder how much of one of these Gettysburg Address operettas Engine One can actually remember at Mrs. Smith's at 3:00 a.m.

The mission statement I like the most is short (5 words) and sweet. It's so simple you don't have to write it down to remember it. It goes like this:

- Prevent Harm
- Survive
- Be Nice

The ongoing application of prevent harm/survive/be nice becomes the action-oriented foundation for our organizational "common sense." It makes our sense of who we are, what we do, and how we do it — COMMON. Simple, huh? Over time, leaders establish the mission and then support and reinforce workers who act out these mission objectives. This process causes the action that surrounds our customer mission to become the principal organizational focus. This positive service delivery focus gives us a fighting chance to displace the traditional, dysfunctional fire service "static" (power/control/rank/politics) that always negatively distracts a lot more than positively directs. In my travels, I hear a lot of us old geezers whine that today's young firefighters don't have any "common sense" (like we did?). This nongenetic deficiency may be a reflection that we brilliant old soldiers haven't effectively packaged up, taught, modeled, and reinforced the organizational goals, style, and objectives very effectively (or in some cases at all).

Prevent Harm

This statement very quickly describes why we are in business and creates the organizational direction and authorization to help the customers (people, animals, and things) we encounter who are in some way threatened, being harmed, or out of balance. We do this (manage harm) in a way that depends on when we enter the event. The very best approach is to prevent the harm before it happens. When harm is occurring, we must then respond in a way that interrupts and reduces that harm. Once the harm has occurred, we must help the customer recover in any way we can. This help typically is directed to those who call us or those we encounter within the general context of our overall fire department mission. Staying within that mission causes us to stick to what we do best — maintain an effective, ongoing focus on the kinds of routine and special problems that visit Mrs. Smith and how we can help her with those problems. This focus also prevents us from getting up some morning, having a big breakfast, and taking on global warming or world hunger (very legitimate problems....but not on our radar screen).

Survive

This one word part of the mission statement is easy to say — hard to do. Survive means to prepare, engage, endure, and recover from all the fire service occupational and personal bad stuff that can (simply) cause us not to survive. The organization acts out regarding members (us) as valuable internal customers in an enormously profound way by providing the resources (equipment, systems, support, love) to cause us to consistently and successfully survive what is a tough job on every level. The most un-nice thing that can happen inside our system is for one of our humans to get injured/killed. The exposure and possibility of this occurring comes along with the highly hazardous job of being a firefighter. How the organization protects their members from this most un-nice (injury/death) outcome becomes the very practical, heavy-duty message that forms the foundation of the organizational caring process. This important beginning occurs at the most believable (or unbelievable) and primitive level. This process occurs on the familiar old hierarchy of needs scale (Maslow). Getting your wazoo busted will always take you abruptly down to the survival level where it is pretty tough to worry a

whole lot about self-actualization. Protecting our members requires we put our money, systems, and leadership where our mouth is. Making this investment on the bottom end provides the launching pad to get to the top end. It's pretty easy (and cheap) to say that our firefighters (human assets) are our most important resource. The way we physically protect those assets in the street will actually show if us saying this is real or baloney. No one will know the authenticity (or the opposite) of this "our firefighters are our most important asset" process any more than the firefighters themselves. They are on the up close and personal end of the occupational pain and pleasure process.

Historically, we worried about fire-damaged buildings falling on us (they still do). Today a lot of other things "fall on us." Based on that awareness, we are now taking a lot more holistic, long-term approach to supporting our members from both the episodic, abrupt survival challenges and also the longer term quality of life issues. All our ugly old enemies like driving accidents, structural collapse, thermal insult, and smoke exposure are alive and well and are still out there waiting to kick our butt. They are now joined by the new guys — infectious and toxic exposure; incident and organizational stress; life-style dysfunctions; and intense, incessant, and dehumanizing change. The timeless hazards beat us up and kill us in old-fashioned blue-collar ways. The new stuff beats us up and croaks us in modern color coordinated ways — the result is exactly the same — Keep it simple....be smart, pay attention, think, always follow the safety survival rules, and stick together — have a nice day.

Be "Nice"

This innocent, two-word, six-letter phrase within our mission statement becomes the essence of this whole customer service drill.

Nice (one word by itself) is pretty easy to play games with — getting all the "nice" answers right, smiling, and nodding our heads at the right time, enthusiastically agreeing that "nice" is "nice," and singing the "nice national anthem," will probably get us an "A" in Nice-101. The class lets out and the games stop when we make it a two-word deal — be nice.

The addition of BE makes it an action plan and requires we stop talking and actually crank up nice and take it out into the street. BE NICE is where the tread hits the pavement and becomes the tough part of acting nice out in the strange, exciting, cold, mean, violent, ugly, beautiful world of being a firefighter.



What this means as a big-time value (and mission) within our organization is to be nice to the customers, to each other, and to yourself. Be nice must become the most powerful and directive value we can create. It is our magnetic North....if you forget the SOP, if you are somewhat confused about just what is going on, if you don't know at that very moment exactly what to do, if you get separated from your copy of the straight-shooters bible — simply, *be nice and do nice*. The very best, simple, nonalgebraic (golden) test of nice is what treatment you would like if you were on the receiving end.

Frank Smith (Mrs. Smith's cousin) is an active, self-employed cement finisher. On a summer morning, he is

making a nine-yard pour. The job is an unremarkable and routine (flat rectangular) driveway — he has done hundreds of them before. Just as he completes his second pass with the bull float (big trowel with a long 10'-12' handle), he has a heart attack and collapses. A motorist passing by notices his problem and calls 911 on their cellular phone. We dispatch the closest paramedic engine company and an ambulance. Upon our arrival, the troops determine that Frank is indeed having a serious coronary event and immediately begin standard initial advanced life support treatment. They establish telemetry contact with their base station hospital. Their doc gives the orders required to complete the treatment and packaging process. At that point, Frank is loaded into the ambulance and, accompanied by a paramedic, he is transported to the receiving hospital.

The engine company Captain then surveys and evaluates the scene. He determines that Frank was well along but had not completed with the finishing job. He also determines that on this warm (90 degree) morning, the concrete is quickly setting up. He (typical firefighter) is familiar enough with concrete work to understand basically what's left to be done to save the concrete and the short time frame of that opportunity. He knows that concrete costs \$60 a yard (times 9 or 10, he estimates), plus the preparation cost to excavate and form, plus the cost of finishing. He also realizes that a half-finished concrete driveway is pretty ugly, so if the job is not complete, it is essentially ruined. Then the unfinished (ugly) concrete must be jackhammered out, hauled away, and the whole installation and finishing process must start over. The Captain estimates (off the top of his head) a \$2,500-\$3,000 loss if the next (and final) finishing steps are not complete. He also realizes that his loss control window is quickly closing. A huddle among the crew indicates that two of the members of the adjacent ladder company which is first due to their location, do cement finishing on their days off duty. The Captain calls the ladder company officer on his cellular phone and tells him what's going on. The ladder officer asks his firefighters if they would be substitute finishers. They say, "Yes, and let's hurry."

At that point the ladder company responds, in service (available on the radio), to "concrete central." Upon their arrival, the two firefighter finishers go to work using Frank's tools. They make two-hand trowel passes and edge all around the driveway. This essentially completes the job that Frank started. The operation takes 30-40 minutes. Meanwhile, the engine Captain has called their Battalion Chief and asks him to respond to eliminate any surprises in case someone inquires why two fire trucks and a bunch of firefighters appear as if they have taken fire service productivity to a new and unusual level. The Battalion Chief (BC) and the two Captains observe the completion of the



job. The troops clean up Frank's tools, load them into his pickup truck, drive the truck back, and secure it at the engine company's station. Back in quarters, the engine Captain calls the hospital and has them tell Frank's family that the pickup truck (and tools) are okay and secured at the station. He also asks them to let Frank know that the firefighter elves have finished the driveway job and to not worry about it.

That evening, the BC has the ladder respond to the engine's station, and he (BC) brings two gallons of pistachio-nut, tutti-fruity, chunky-monkey, fatty-daddy ice cream. The BC thanks both crews and indicates how proud he is of them all. They hang out long enough to enjoy the ice cream and tell some department war stories before the ladder and BC go home. The BC also completes unit citations of exceptional performance (green sheets) for both companies. When Frank recovers and is released from the hospital, he visits both the driveway job site and the fire station. He thanks the troops and compliments them on both their medical treatment capability and their cement finishing (he indicates they made it look better than he could). He says how happy (and surprised) he has been to find out what a full-service fire department he has protecting him (and his concrete).

This response is a good example of our members delivering service in an unusual situation based on the prevent harm/survive/be nice organizational values. They delivered our basic emergency medical service in a standard way based on standard procedures, that part of our response did not require very much (if any) special adaptation. We do that part of our job as a regular function all the time and our regular procedures cover it nicely. Beyond the regular medical service (a basic core business), our officer identified (based on perception, intelligence, and experience) a special set of circumstances that were not covered by regular SOPs. This is where our basic organizational values and the empowerment of our members kick in.

This situation and the response of our troops create an excellent example of how empowering firefighters actually works in the street — the concrete is setting up; if the final finishing steps are not done pretty soon, the driveway will be ruined. By the time the Captain could get a substitute finisher from the outside world, the concrete would be history. He uses on-line, quick-response department resources to get the right people, in the right place, at the right time, doing the correct action to save the folks we work for (the customers) from having to take a \$2,000-\$3,000 loss. The organization instructed us all to use our brains and imagination along with department resources to prevent harm, to be nice, and to not get beat up doing it. In the concrete finishing case, our troops modeled that mission, and their boss (BC) thanked and commended them for their action.

This approach is absolutely critical to us, because many times the problems we are involved in (like the concrete) have a shrinking window of opportunity that is very dynamic and perishable. If we screw around with big permission (CYA) festivals, the opportunity to do good

simply goes away. For us, empowerment gives our troops permission ahead of time to episodically get us into a somewhat different activity beyond our regular, core business if our temporary entry into that somewhat different business will help a customer. After the event is over, we go back to minding our own business and looking for more opportunities to help the customer that emerge out of our regular routine. Using the concrete finishing case as an example, even though we provided some special service to Frank beyond our regular EMS, we currently have no plan to obtain a fleet of red concrete trucks with electronic sirens and polished aluminum diamond plate, and it may be (we hope) that there will never be another cement finisher that is incapacitated half way through the job. Simply, we don't have any interest in going into the construction business — if, in this case, the workman had been an electrician or a plumber, we would have extended standard medical treatment and then tried to quickly secure the scene (tools, materials, etc.) and then gone back into service. Inherently, copper pipe and aluminum conduit don't have the same loss profile as wet concrete.

The following is a simple, straightforward set of questions each of us should ask and answer to lead us through the empowerment process:

Basic Firefighter Empowerment

Ask yourself:

- Is it the right thing for the customer?
- Is it the right thing for our department?
- Is it legal, ethical, and nice?
- Is it safe?
- Is it on your organizational level?
- Is it something you are willing to be accountable for?
- Is it consistent with our department's values and policies?

....if the answer is yes to all of these questions, don't ask for permission,

JUST DO IT!

This "just do it" empowerment routine is a new trick for a lot of us old fire-officer dogs. This new routine requires us old mutts to begin to take the big scary risk of replacing our traditional control orientation (actually micromanagement) with a new level of enabling and support for those who work under(!) our command. This involves us stepping back from deciding and ordering the details of every action our personnel will take, to encouraging and assisting (actually requiring) the troops to take control of the service delivery process for themselves. This new deal takes advantage of the direct connection the fire company has with the customer and the knowledge they (fire company) have of what is actually required to solve the customer's problem. On the other side, the troops must take responsibility and control for developing the decisions and acquiring and using the resources that are necessary to get the job done. The members of the fire company become the custodians

of the service delivery event by effectively representing both the organization and the customers.

In spite of how it sounds, this new way of doing business is not a big, happy, fluffy organizational dance where everyone holds hands and skips along to Camelot. Part of this drill is what empowerment is and what it is not. Effective empowerment connects the customer and the workers in a very practical and problem-solving way. Empowerment requires the organization to clear the obstructions and confusion that can (and do) occur within the relationship between the workers and the organization. Empowerment does not give anyone (anyone!) the ability, access, right, or privilege to treat anyone (anyone!) badly, to break rules or procedures (if they are obsolete, dumb, or dysfunctional, change 'em), or to take negative advantage of any part or person in our system. Simply, empowerment is not a disguise or excuse for not doing your job — in fact, it requires just the opposite!

The empowerment approach is probably the toughest way to package and manage a fire department. It requires everyone to wake up (and join up) and to perform on their level — senior managers operate on the strategic level; middle managers connect and support with a tactical orientation; fire companies directly deliver service and operate on the task level. Many times it's a lot easier to do the job(s) just below you, than what the system is actually paying you to do (like *your* job). Effective empowerment is an enormously mature process that first involves a wake-up call and then a big dose of reality therapy. It's a lot easier on the sending end to give orders to everyone about everything to maintain absolute order and control. It's also a lot easier on the receiving end to work hard, stay low, shuffle your feet, shine your shoes, and shut up. The problem is that this old system simply doesn't cut it any more. The environment is too dynamic. We are called upon to solve a whole new set of problems, and our troops come from the factory wired differently than ever before. There is little room in today's fire service for "ion" firefighters — where the only goals are to get off probat"ion," avoid suspens"ion," and wait for their pens"ion."



The empowerment shift must be started and managed (artfully) by senior managers within the cultural and style context of each individual organization. To be effective, this empowerment shift should occur incrementally over a period of time. It is generally disorienting to the troops when we stodgy old command officers show up with frizzy doos, gold chains, and earth shoes chanting new age stuff and calling everyone under our command "associates." An old dog learning too many new tricks is always suspect so gradual personality change in a positive direction is always much less traumatic on the participants than major overnight personality shifts.

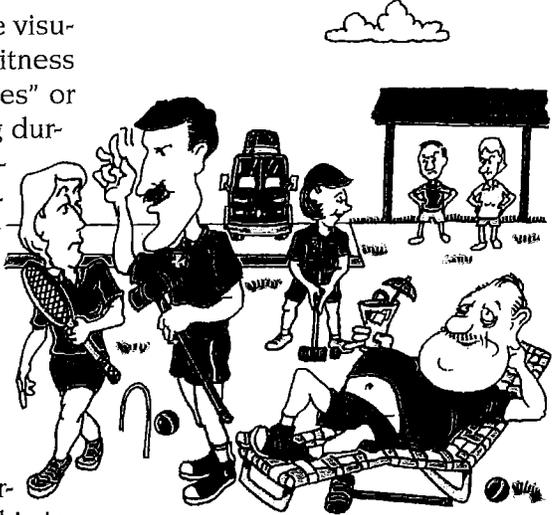
Avoid Unbusinesslike Impressions

Firefighters should attempt to avoid situations that look like the following:

- *Excessively recreational*

Our service is currently placing a higher emphasis on physical fitness and conditioning programs. Many times our companies

use public facilities for these activities. These activities are visually obvious to the customers, so we should stick to the fitness script and avoid appearing as if we are just "playing games" or socializing. Aerobic activity is what we are generally doing during these out-of-station forays and such activity should appear to be just that — aerobic. Thirty-five firefighters playing slow motion croquet at the park for two hours is pretty tough to package up in a believable explanation to a taxpayer of how our physical conditioning program is supposed to happen. Conversely, a company jogging thirty minutes at the high school track offers an excellent chance to explain how our fitness program physically prepares our players for show time.



Firefighters are typically high-energy, competitive characters who naturally congregate and do things together. This inclination emerges out of how we do regular team fire fighting. This is basically a very positive approach and feeling, but sometimes when firefighters don't have a fire to fight or an exercise bike to ride and they get together, "horse play" can happen. Company officers must always help underutilized firefighters stay in the businesslike-looking zone.

• *Wrong place — wrong time*

Emergency activity dictates and drives where and when we go and deliver service....simply, we don't have any choice — if the fire is at 5th and Main, we go to 5th and Main. In nonemergency situations, we do have a choice to be strategic, smart, and can control where and when we show up. There are some places/times where a normal customer is going to wonder, not understand, and be confused about our nonemergency presence. Company officers should consider the possible optics of a particular action and then manage that exposure.

It's probably (lots) better to make an appointment for a weekday inspection at 10:00 a.m. and file a "flight plan" with the Battalion Chief to inspect Tassels Topless Go-Go or Chip-n-Dales Bar, than to pull an unannounced visit at midnight on Saturday night.

Mrs. Smith can make sense out of a busy company stopping by a family restaurant, fast food, or take out for lunch (with a portable radio). She probably would wonder and ask about us munching burgers and hanging out with the bad boys at Bubba's Biker Bar and Grill for an hour and a half.

We routinely visit grocery stores to buy hunger prevention supplies. This can create a lot of interest and questions. If we park right next to the front door in the fire lane, block everyone's access, take an hour and a half to stroll through the store to "shop," and then congregate around a cute checkout clerk and giggle at each other for another fifteen minutes, it looks (and is) pretty stupid.

Smart ain't hard when you're hungry....make up a shopping list; delegate getting the goodies; park smart; and leave



one member at the rig as a PR agent, question answerer, and lifter of kids into and out of the cab. Get in, shop quickly, be nice, get out, go home — sing while you cook — eat 'til you're sleepy — sleep 'til you're hungry. Making the right choice and managing the impression is generally a pretty simple intelligence test.

- *Hazard Of Excessive Congregation*

The success of our operations will always depend on having the right players in the right places. Many times this requires that officers identify the number and type of workers who are required to complete a particular operation and then manage the human resources part of the execution process.

Another part of our response process involves the basic personality of firefighters — smart, aggressive, action oriented, with a high willingness (and capability) to be an active part of the incident action plan. Sometimes, our built-in tactical reserve and our basic profile cause us to overly congregate in a way that appears as an excessive overreaction — or even (more simply), it scares the customer.

Having 14 firefighters, each with a blaring portable radio in Mrs. Smith's bedroom at 3:00 a.m. on an EMS event is a pretty overwhelming sight, and even a hint that there is work to be done crowds them around her bed more closely. The first officer should evaluate the situation and select the treatment team, assign someone to deal with the family, and assign someone to babysit the pets. The rest of the responders should stage out of the way (probably outside) and be ready to provide any support the IC orders.

Having a dramatic picture on the front page of the morning paper showing 3 ladder companies, 2 engine companies, and the haz-mat team on the roof of a 950-square-foot house looks like we are having the firefighter's ball in an odd (and not very safe) place....it's pretty tough to make a game look like football if there are 57 players, 12 coaches, 3 bus drivers, and all the cheerleaders milling around on the field at the same time. We need the team that is required to get the job done working directly on that job and the resources required to support the action in standard support positions. We must create and maintain a businesslike balance between too few and too many workers working on the incident.

- *Not Joking In The Wrong Place*

Firefighters routinely attend and become part of the most difficult, terrifying, and awful events that occur. We deal with trauma, death, and destruction that abruptly disconnects (or even ends) our customer's lives. We are the agency with the resources, skills, and level of operational fitness and experience to deliver urgent physical safety services to those who are typically in the most unfit human condition (confused, hurting, burning, trapped, etc.). Assuming a somewhat detached, professional, clinical approach becomes a major way of surviving a career of attending to human misery and suffering.

Another survival mechanism involves the use of humor as a coping mechanism. Many times this humor ranges from dark to black on the color chart. The point of all this depressing stuff is that we must be careful of where we use what looks and sounds like joking to someone having a real bad day. It may be a careless comment, a joke among the troops, or two adrenaline charged firefighters high fivin' each other in the front yard after knocking down Mrs. Smith's kitchen fire and yelling "good stop" (it probably was) that creates a light-hearted impression to a customer who at that very moment has a very heavy heart.

Most of this behavior is unintentional, but leaves the impression that the event is pretty routine to us — in fact, so routine that we are joking about it or at least around it.

This "be careful" message doesn't mean we can't ever use humor with a customer. It only means we should consider what we say and where we say it and not joke in the wrong place or in the wrong way. Establishing personal contact and using smart, appropriate humor is many times an excellent way to effectively connect and send a positive message to another human. Think before speaking.

- *Keep A Clean Workplace*

As a young firefighter, I always wondered how the city-wide performance evaluation category "appearance of workplace" applied to us. We typically worked in the grungiest, messiest places and at least my workplace appearance (and me) generally looked pretty bad. That old category is starting to make more sense (after 35 years) now that we are looking at customer service in a new, smarter way. Many times our customer can develop a major lasting impression simply on how we leave the place where we delivered service. To some extent, our service delivery signature is the condition of the scene at the end of operations. Simply, this is what we leave the customer in physical terms.

We routinely must manipulate and move buildings, vehicles, equipment, machinery, and landscape to find, extricate, treat, stabilize, package, extinguish, overhaul, shore, dike, dam, and generally interrupt and reverse the incident problem. Lots of times we make lots of mess and if we don't clean up the mess, it can be the gift that keeps giving to our customer.

Leaving a fire scene unsecured and unprotected, with stuff that survived and is okay exposed to and mixed with stuff that is burned and is not okay, is not acceptable. Leaving broken glass all over the sidewalk and driveway, burned furniture thrown out every window leaning up against the side of the structure, and shingles that sailed out in the middle of the street and in the neighbor's yards is also not acceptable. All of these make it appear the fire was controlled by maniacs with water cannons and battering rams, not the professional image we seek to develop.





Littering and leaving a busy intersection after an EMS orgy with 45 pounds of very used medical supplies and a half an acre of bloody rubber gloves looks like we got chased away in the middle of the event.

Rototilling Mrs. Smith's front yard and "aerating" her rose garden with a 1" tip right off the hydrant we checked on her corner will generally cause her to call and indicate how much she appreciates us flushing all that dank, stagnant water out of her personal fire plug.

What happens at the end of a service delivery event currently offers a whole new (and mostly underdeveloped) set of opportunities to send a WOW! message to the customer and to help that person in an important and memorable way. This may include establishing a loss control officer, an owner/occupant support sector, packing belongings in salvage boxes, carefully and gently using small civilized battery-operated construction tools (instead of Godzilla style heavy artillery) to check for fire extension, putting furniture up on small styrofoam blocks so that it doesn't get waterlogged, or a bazillion other positive customer-centered activities that should become a standard part of our approach.

Mom said it all — if you or the event make a mess, clean it up.

Give The Customer Your Undivided Attention

Emergency incidents generally involve some combination of people, places, and things. The combination requires that we rapidly evaluate how the people and things attending our event are connected to and sometimes captured by the event. This situation evaluation involves selecting the critical factors present and quickly going to work on the pieces and parts of the incident problem that will cause it to go away. Our problem elimination approach generally involves doing a set of somewhat separate, but highly-connected activities that take advantage of the earliest incident stage. The smallest (earliest) incident stage will typically produce the largest intervention window of opportunity. For us, fast and effective are inseparable and this means we are always going to do a lot of real quick tactical stuff to establish, retain, and never lose control.



Being preoccupied with initial intervention means we are going to be really busy during the beginning of fire/medical operations, so these front-end stages become a challenging place for us to conduct a customer service program. Obviously, they (the customer) called us to solve an urgent problem and while it's sort of rude to run right past Mrs. Smith on our way to knock down her burning kitchen, it doesn't make much sense to take time at the beginning to explain the magic of combustion while it conducts, radiates, and convects its way down the hallway into her back bedroom. It also doesn't make a whole lot of sense to explain anatomy, physiology, and modern medical electronics to Mrs. Smith before we defib Grandpa Smith. Historically, we have been preoccupied with the tactical part of our job that solved problems directly and physically (more of

the hockey team example). This focus was, still is, and probably will always be completely appropriate. Our current customer concern requires we add a new component to our regular incident action planning package. This addition should in no way interfere or interrupt tactical operations — in fact, providing a standard customer support procedure should complement tactical operations. As soon as possible, a team member should be assigned to a regular operational function to establish contact with the customer and to begin to deal with and concentrate on their needs. What is involved in supporting and assisting a customer who is going through a personal emergency becomes fairly standard and can be packaged and managed within our SOP game plan. We are dealing with a person whose life has been interrupted — from being distracted to completely disconnected by some emergency that is profoundly affecting them. They are going through the very personal challenge of not only dealing with what is going on right now, but where do I go and what do I do next? They are generally amateurs at this adjustment process because they are first timers.

On a smaller, very local event, one crew member could play this customer support role in a very simple, straightforward way. This function might be a regular assignment within a team and could be based on rank, personal profile, or rotating assignment. On a larger situation, the IC may establish an owner-occupant support sector who would do larger, longer-term functions to assist and support business owners, larger numbers of displaced and affected customers, or more complicated operational details.

We routinely summon additional resources to perform a variety of functions that are necessary to complete tactical objectives. This resource deployment function is a regular function of the IC. We must add the capability to effectively establish and maintain customer support as a regular part of our standard game plan and add this to the list of reasons we call for more help where required. The objective of this approach is really pretty simple — the organization must consider the personal situation and needs of our customers in the planning process just like every other tactical and task oriented function and then play that way at show time.

About ten years ago our service woke up to the reality that our own department members required professional critical incident recovery assistance to help keep the bats out of our belfry. This (long overdue) wake-up call related to a group of experienced professionals (us) who got up in the morning and sort of expected they might have to do some pretty tough stuff that day. Imagine what is going on with Mrs. Smith as she watches essentially everything that defined her entire existence going up in the thermal column. Setting her (by herself) on the curb across the street to watch this spectacle clearly looks and is low rent (big understatement) and does not come anywhere close to matching today's stage of fire service development.

When you're confused, beat up, and hurting, nothing feels as good as some calm, capable, credible, concerned person paying attention to you, and there is no attention like undivided, exclusive attention.

Don't Act Like Delivering Service Is An Inconvenience To You

This modest essay has so far exhausted the faithful reader, making and remaking the point that customer service delivery is the most human (firefighter) directed and dependent activity we engage in. How requests for emergency service occur and how our members react to that occurrence within our schedule and routine becomes a major factor in how that customer contact turns out.

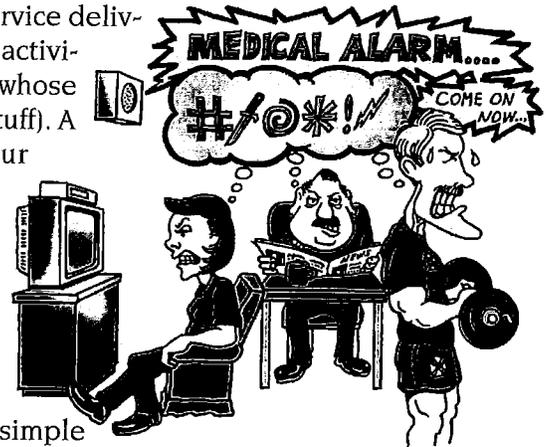
We essentially have a very retail relationship with our customers. We receive and respond to requests for service one at a time. It's impossible for us to store our service in a centrally located warehouse and then deliver that service along a prearranged route and schedule. While we know some overall activity trends, each separate request for emergency service is driven by the emergency episode itself, and we have no real capability to predict or schedule when or where the customer will need us. How our nonemergency activity is scheduled and how we feel about that schedule necessarily conditions how we deliver service.

Our nonemergency support activity is scheduled and conducted typically within regular department program packages. These programs are scheduled and conducted mostly during the day. At meal times we cook, eat, clean up, and ponder digestion. During the evening we do upright (sitting) standby (chairs pointed directly toward TV). At night we do prone position standby. Fire companies predictably develop habits around their company routine and a mentality that revolves around how that work is scheduled and performed.

The overall objective of virtually every fire department support program activity is to create and maintain an effective state of readiness to deliver some service to a customer. This reality applies to both fire companies (who extend actual service delivery along with some support activities) and support personnel (whose regular job is to do support stuff). A big-time problem can occur

when we lose sight of that reality. The objective of the support program is not the program itself, but how that activity assists what we have to do at show time to protect the customer. This program confusion involves the very simple fact that we are always doing something — scheduled/unscheduled, active/sedentary, conscious/unconscious. It's impossible for us to put ourselves into a "do nothing" state (although we had two B-shifters who came close), so every call for service interrupts something else we are doing and requires we stop that activity to respond to the customer. If we lose the focus that our real (and only) business is to respond to customer's requests for service, we can develop a negative reaction when a call for service interrupts what we are doing.

Fire department managers must make customer service the highest priority and most important activity the organization engages in. Cus-





customer service standards should be developed, measured, and positively reinforced. Good performance should be recognized, commended and, celebrated; performance problems should be coached for correction. Managers should send a clear message to department members that the organization will not accept substandard customer outcomes. Customer service must be the ultimate test of why we are doing any other departmental activity — if what we are doing does not relate directly or indirectly to the delivery of service, we should question why we are doing it.

It becomes pretty difficult to cover up the feeling that the call for service is either a distraction or an inconvenience to us when we deal with the author of the call — the customer. That inconvenienced reaction can involve subtle but clear messages like sarcasm, critical looks, impatient expressions, and negative body language. Or more explicit, and really dumb, reactions like, “You called us for this during Monday night football?” (true story).

A lot of our daily activity is very enjoyable and we are lucky to have a job that allows us to watch TV, eat meals with our buddies, work out, play games, go nighty night, etc. We are able to do these things because they do not interfere with our response availability....simply, they are interruptible.

When we become so attached to those nonemergency programs that we feel they are the reason we are in business and then act out those feelings, we need a serious jolt of reality therapy. Mrs. Smith could care less that what is an emergency to her interrupted a critical installment of our favorite soap opera series.



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6. Don't disqualify the customer with your qualifications.

Service Delivery Changes

Everything we have discussed so far has formed a description of a service delivery system that is designed, managed, and operated to maintain the highest possible level of response readiness. We realize that the protection needs of the customer and the community range on a scale from very minor to very severe. This reality creates a typical fire department system design and operational mentality based on worst case scenario planning — firefighters are just naturally pessimistic — we continually (and obsessively) plan, prepare, and practice for the “big one.” We are located, equipped, trained, organized, and staffed to respond to and perform under the most difficult, dangerous, and demanding circumstances.

Our operational versatility emerges (or sort of works backward) from the capability to deal with the most severe situation — if we can assemble the big guns required to fight a war, it's pretty easy for that same system to reload smaller caliber ammunition to handle a little street fight. To be effective, firefighters must be able to operate anywhere on the severity scale and must customize an incident action plan to match and overpower the incident profile.

This traditional “think big” mentality and the resources that come with that approach formed the backdrop and basis for a set of productivity driven changes that have occurred, particularly within the urban fire service, over the past two decades. These changes have challenged our ability to balance our concentration between the smaller end of the service delivery scale and maintaining the simultaneous capability of delivering larger, more complex operations....the present is a lot more complicated (and bewildering) than the past — stand by for the future.

The local government productivity improvement emphasis (craze) that occurred in the early 1970s (big time in Phoenix) directed us to consider other uses and services for our in-place existing resources. This productivity movement has produced a twenty-year period of active change, increased service delivery versatility, and dynamic improvement in the response, versatility, capability, and effectiveness of our business.

In addition to improving the delivery of traditional fire control services (ICS, firefighter safety, positive pressure ventilation, Class A foam,



etc.), we are currently very actively involved in ALS-BLS level emergency medical and transport services, haz-mat mitigation, special technical rescue operations, and a variety of other educational, prevention, and community involvement programs. While these service delivery improvements have involved major changes in our tools, equipment, and procedures, the most dramatic change in our business has related to the organizational investment we have made in increasing the skill level and sophistication of our firefighters.

Firefighter Profile

The basic ingredient in any substantive fire service change necessarily involves the behavior and performance capability of our human resources. Our service delivery process is effective to the extent our firefighters are effective (that sort of says it all). The productivity changes that started in the '70s created a new combination of both how we did our jobs and a need to change how we felt about doing those new functions. Our service had a lot of experience in changing behaviors, but changing feelings and emotions is a whole new deal — providing service to real live customers is a lot different than protecting buildings (buildings don't have feelings)...simply being grumpy with a customer generally gets a different reaction, effect (and phone call), than being grumpy with an immovable inanimate object (like a building). We have been (and will continue to be) successful in meeting the change challenge because we started with extraordinary human resources.

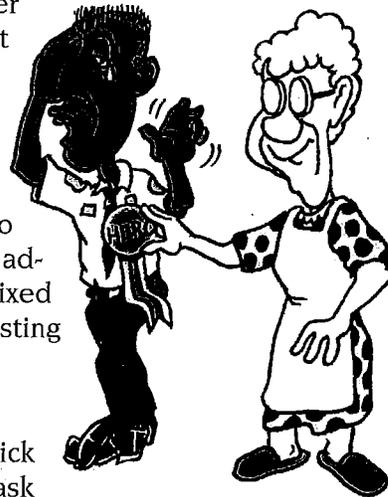
Firefighters today are an interesting combination of the new and the old. Recent improvements in entry qualifications, lots better training, standard fire fighting, medical, and special rescue qualifications and certifications, continuing education, and program management progress have greatly increased the personal capability of firefighters to deliver new, different, and better service.

A lot of old stuff is also still going on. Firefighters are still highly inclined to directly engage the problem, articulate their feelings with action, and attempt to meet whatever challenge is present. They love commitment and hate compromise. They regard tactical problems as the competitive opponent of their professional capability and are highly inclined to aggressively outexecute or outplay any challenge. They are willing to approach and get close to hazards that are causing problems. The command system must generally pull them out, not push them in. Firefighters are typically loaded for bear, have an attitude, and will willingly pick a fight with a problem. They are attracted to strong, straightforward leadership and are not much inclined to follow a committee into battle.

Our members voluntarily enter the service and commit themselves to a career with a cultural/spiritual tradition that directs us to take enor-

mous risks, if necessary, to protect a person we have never met and do not know. The willingness of firefighters to put their own welfare on the line for an unknown, threatened customer is a unique characteristic in a service delivery relationship.

They come on duty prepared and programmed to do whatever it takes to get the job done, including jumping into the conditions that exist on the worst end of the scale. This admirable set of firefighter characteristics and qualities gets mixed up with some other current events that produce an interesting paradox.



System Access

An important element in this paradox relates to the quick and easy access the customers still have to our services. We ask only two basic questions that quickly trigger our response:

- #1. "Where are you?" and,
- #2. "What's the matter?"

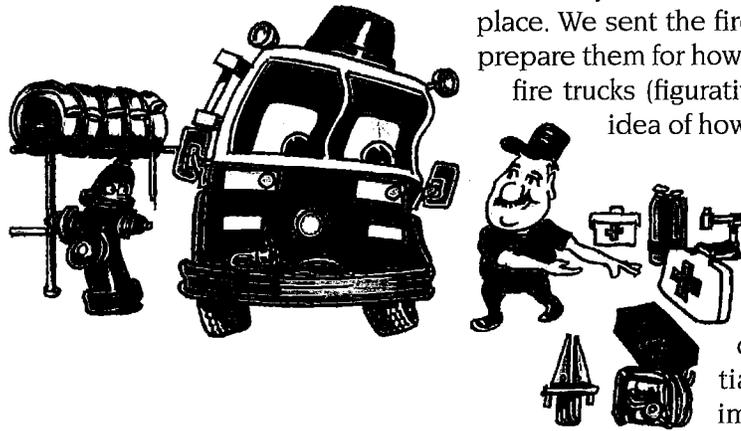
No forms, applications, paperwork, or interviews with mindless bureaucrats. Simply, answer #1 and #2 — we're out the door (hopefully it's all the way up). The newest enhanced addition to most 911 systems (E911) even eliminates the need to answer question #1. The basic, original system was built during the old days, when we delivered mostly fire control services. When a customer smelled smoke and called us, there was (and still is) a pretty simple and straightforward physical problem going on....even today, fire control jobs have more clarity and less confusion than any other service delivery category.

Our customers have predictably become aware of the wider variety of other (than just fire) services we now deliver. They have utilized these services very actively. For example, for much of the American fire service the majority (70% to 80%) of our current response activity now relates to emergency medical services. This activity shift has caused the call receipt and dispatch process that occurs at the front end of the event to become a lot more involved and complicated. Attempting to sort out the details of a request for service relating to a medical, welfare, or other human support service problem requires a lot different caller information gathering and dispatch approach than the very straightforward way we used to answer the old alarm room phone, "Where's the fire?"

In spite of the current service delivery changes and complications, two basic initial deployment pieces have remained about the same. First, initial access to our system is still easy and quick. In most places and cases, dial three digits 9-1-1, and we answer on the first ring. Secondly, we still don't have much effective capability (or interest) to screen out requests for service. Given our basic concern for the customer's welfare along with today's screwy legal/liability environment and our basic pessimistic approach, if the caller says they need help, we send it.

Teaching Old Trucks New Tricks

Another piece of the paradox involves the use of old resources to deliver new services. As we evolved into the delivery of more human-



centered services (as opposed to just protecting buildings), we forgot to review and revise our hardware inventory. The big productivity improvement involved taking advantage of a workforce, which is the most expensive part of our system (85% of the bucks), that in the 1970s had space in their schedule to deliver more/different/better services. This workforce came with a very traditional fleet of fire fighting apparatus that was and still is in place. We sent the firefighters to school to change their skill level and to prepare them for how they would look in the future. We forgot to send the fire trucks (figuratively) to school so that they could also develop an idea of how they should look in that same future.

The effect of this imbalance is that the firefighters (humans) changed a lot — the trucks (hardware) stayed essentially the same. We are now delivering mostly EMS on the most recent up-to-date models of traditional engine and ladder apparatus. These units are absolutely essential for fire control activity that continues to be an important and essential service (in fact, fire is still our middle name).

The paradox part of the new system occurs when we struggle to fit a nonfire EMS or customer service request into the engine/ladder profile, particularly when the event is not serious. When we mount up on the fire-tank, we typically leave the station expecting to fight bears (major league event) and end up finding a medical emergency that features a bunny with a run-down battery (minor league event). This situation sets up a reaction where we begin to define that call (service delivery request) as a small-time unenergized rabbit (customer) abusing a system that is designed to fight big-time bears. This is where we struggle to get old equipment (along with our old mentality) to do what is essentially a new job that the traditional piece of rolling stock (and our original mentality) was not originally designed to do. Simply, a 1500 GPM centrifugal pump or a 100-foot hydraulically operated aerial ladder really doesn't directly connect with a customer who has sprained an ankle. While the old time equipment is a part of the system, it was designed for fire control, not delivering medical, social, and support services. While this may be a big deal to us as insiders, it really doesn't affect the customer much. In most cases, the customer actually having the problem could care less if we get to them on a spaceship, a ladder truck, or a pogo stick — when they need us they want us to get there quickly, solve the problem, and be nice. The point of the old equipment/new service paradox is that we now have enough smarts and experience with alternative EMS vehicles to know that they make a lot of sense for our service. As an example, parking a ladder tender (small squad body, four-door cab) that carries



EMS and fire fighting tools next to a big boy 100-foot senior tillered aerial and empowering the company officer to hop on the right one based on the type of call for service makes lots of sense (Phoenix has eleven of them....huge success).

Customer Profile

Today, many of our customers relate to and use our response system in a very different way than before. They have developed an awareness and understanding that we have a wider service delivery capability, and they have become more familiar and skillful at calling for those services. Today, they see us (and use us) in a much more full-service way than the old fire-only perspective. A major aspect of this change has been to not only dramatically increase our overall activity but also to greatly expand our customer base.

In the past, we generally encountered and dealt with customers that came with burning buildings. We have always had a very special concern and reaction to fire customers. We strongly feel that our response is absolutely essential and appropriate whenever there is any existence or even suspicion that a fire is present. In fact, in most urban places, there is enabling legislation (local ordinance — generally in the fire code) that requires the fire department be summoned by the owner/occupant if a fire is discovered. Today, the vast majority of our services are delivered directly to humans, not to a building or mechanical process. These “new” customers have caused a major change (that is still going on) that requires we effectively develop the skill and understanding to relate to a wide variety of people throughout the community. Some of these customers use our services in very non-traditional ways based on their socioeconomic status, ability to solve problems themselves, access to resources, basic intelligence, and overall sanity and stability — this covers pretty much all of us at various times in our lives. We have become in many ways the response agency of first resort and the response agency of last resort. Simply, at 3:30 a.m., when Mrs. Smith's hot water heater decides to blast its bottom off, and she is home alone and the water level is at her ankles and rising — who else does she call? When that occurs, we have the very real option of regarding the event as an opportunity or an inconvenience.



The Crux of the Paradox

The quick, easy, and nonbureaucratic access that customers currently have to our system sets up a process where they (the customer) get to define their own emergency. Although their problem may be critical to them, many times it is actually only a marginally urgent condition. Our response and deployment system becomes vulnerable to the difference between what the customer tells the dispatcher (based on the customer's “amateur” perceptions) and what the firefighters actually encounter on the scene (based on their “professional” capability and experience).

Another characteristic of our response system is that we have only one on-duty/available workforce and that workforce is dispersed in fire stations throughout the community. We have full-service firefighters or-

ganized in teams who respond to whatever occurs in their first-due (franchise) area. We don't have one group who only responds to big fires and another group who only goes to minor fires; we don't have a group of medics who only go on heavy-duty trauma and another group who specialize in cut fingers....and, we don't have a special hot water heater cleanup crew.

Delivering service in an environment where our members must operate every place and any place on the incident scale with regard to the type and severity of what they must deal with requires a new level of versatility, maturity, patience, understanding, and good nature.

This entire service delivery shift has created an occupational paradox that presents a current challenge. It goes something like this:

- We have greatly increased the skill level and service delivery capability of our firefighters and our entire response system.
- This increase has given us the foundation to advertise and expand our ability to deliver new services — particularly medical, welfare, and support programs.
- Our members come on duty prepared to use a full range of their technical skills and abilities. Only serious problems require they use their most advanced capabilities.
- Our customers are now using these services more and more.
- Sometimes our customers call us for problems that our members do not define as serious or critical.
- In the vast majority of cases, whatever the customer called us for is an emergency to them — regardless of how we redefine their situation.
- If our customers are really beat up as a result of a serious problem, our firefighters regard that situation as a “righteous” call; if the problem is minor, there is a temptation to define the event as a “snivel” call — a big-time problem occurs when our members act out that “snivel” definition.
- All of this mashes together in a way that our firefighters, who are typically more qualified (actually, a lot more) than ever before, develop a judgment that some of our customers are less qualified than ever before, because their problem did not come up to the firefighter's training/skill level or the expectations or qualifications they have for an authentic, legitimate customer (or event).
- When this occurs, our firefighters disqualify those people as customers and can begin to treat them in a callous, indifferent, sometimes rude, and disrespectful manner.
- If this process occurs frequently enough over a period of time, our reputation goes from being heroes to being jerks....as we lose customer support, acceptance, and affection, our organization begins to decline.

Here on paper, it is pretty easy to take a deep breath and lay out a nice neat paradox and then apply a little sophomoric deductive logic that is very clinical, clear, detached, and simple. The problem with this

simple approach is that it may really be too simplistic. The challenge we currently face in delivering very personal service to the entire (sometimes undressed and ugly) body politic may be the most difficult service delivery change (and challenge) we have taken on since Ben set us up.

It's a lot more straightforward and familiar for us to rescue and remove a customer who is in the very dark part of the shadow of death



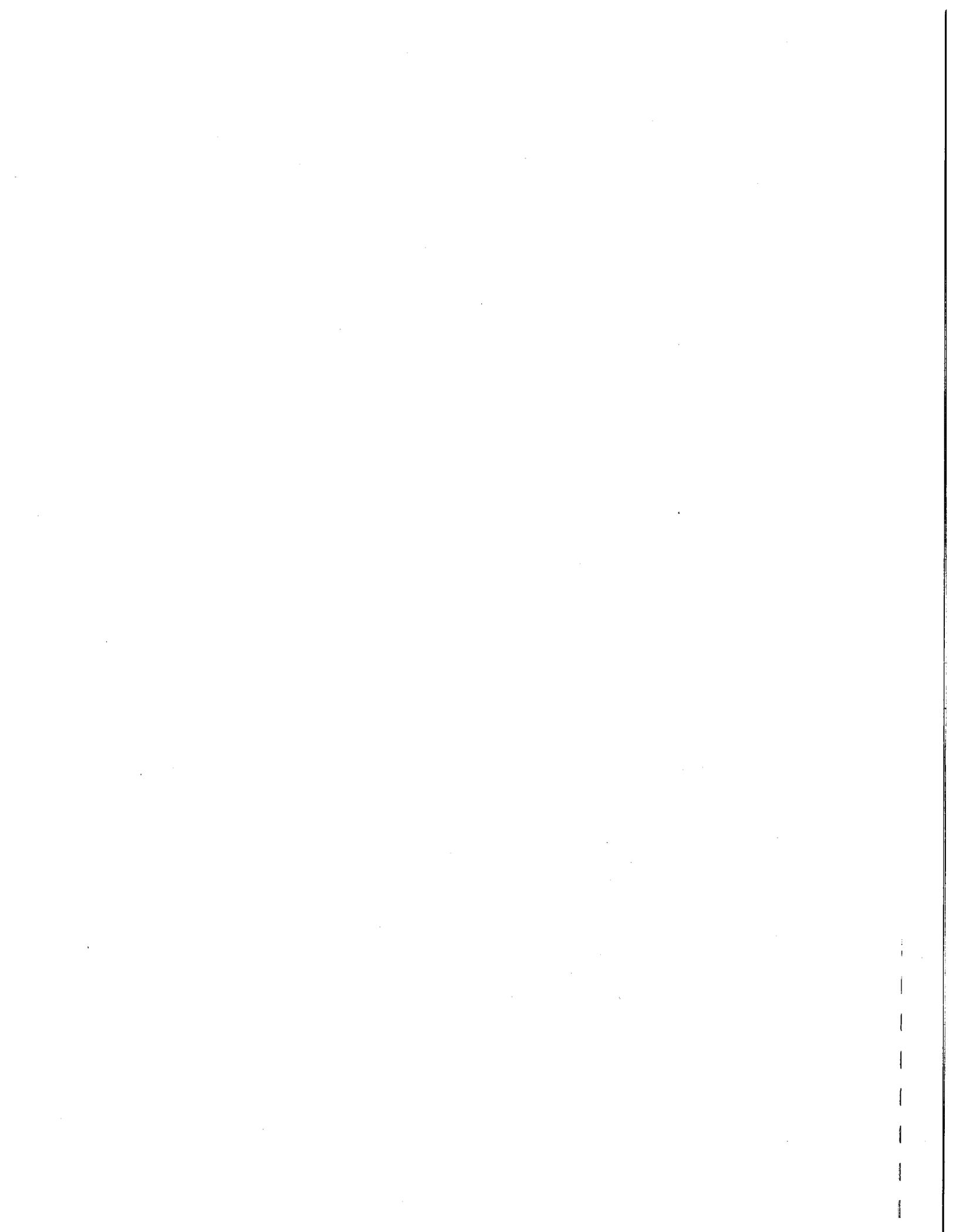
because they are in a fire-involved compartment than it is to respond to the needs of some customers. An 80-year-old customer tells the dispatcher at 3:30 a.m. that she has a crushing chest pain radiating down her left arm. When the closest BLS unit, ALS backup, and an ambulance (10 firefighters in attendance) arrive, they discover her problem is she can't turn off her clock radio (true story). Each firefighter has been on duty 19½ hours, hasn't been to bed, and

has already gone on 14 calls. There is an enormous (and understandable) temptation to turn off her radio with a pick-head axe, reprimand her for terminal stupidity, and slam the door behind us. As the firefighters who were actually on this call told the insane old Fire Chief (in a customer service meeting), "Don't worry Chief, we turned off her radio, did her hair, and two loads of wash(!)." This is WOW! service delivery in the most difficult situation and setting. To acknowledge their heroic action, we should (always) hang a gold medal around the necks of both the fire fighting team who saved the shadow-of-death fire customer and the medic team who was really nice when they helped a lonely, somewhat deranged, not too functional old lady at 3:30 in the morning.

I have been attempting to somehow figure out, understand, and write about fire service reality for almost 40 years. The lessons never end, regardless of longevity and persistence. I have never used the word "paradox" before (other than to describe two M.D.'s). When I ponder the use of that somewhat unusual (to us) word in the context of our current situation and challenge, I come up with the following reflection about having a long-term customer relationship. I (a typical customer) have gone into a hardware store and bought two 3/16" x 2 1/4" machine screws from a friendly, helpful, nuts-and-bolts guy. Later, I went back and bought an \$1,150 table saw. I took my car (that I thought was out of order) into a Chevy dealer to get it repaired. It wasn't broken. They thanked me for coming in, didn't charge me, and wished me well. Later, I went back and bought a \$28,000 Suburban. I went into a restaurant and ordered a glass of iced tea. The entire restaurant crew treated me like I had ordered a 10-course meal. Later, I went back and took 55 people to dinner.

I guess the point of all this is that we, as both individuals and as an organization, probably send a stronger message and define ourselves

to the customer more when they don't need us badly, as when they do. In fact, many times the customers who need firefighters really, really badly, either don't know what is going on or they don't survive what is going on that gets us involved. It's pretty tough to run a service business when all your "authentic" customers are unconscious or die. Sooner or later, the customer will need us. Sooner or later, we will need the customer. If we disqualify the customer in the short term, they will disqualify us in the long term....we should all reread and reflect on the last sentence, if we want to stay in business.



7. Basic organizational behavior must become customer-centered.

We have discussed the various parts of the service delivery system required to consistently produce standard problem-solving customer service. Each separate element involves a somewhat different set of people, activities, and approach. *Quick* requires us to concentrate on our basic deployment and how we maintain consistent, fast, backed-up system status and response. *Effective* involves managing and refining the action parts of the system. *Skillful* is the product of paying attention to the programming and practice of our firefighters. *Safe* involves strong procedures, smart discipline, and application. *Caring* is the result of positive, progressive, sensible, humane, everyday management that emerges out of a thoughtful, decent organizational philosophy. *Managed* comes from applying sound, modern principles that get the best from the organization and its human resources.

To be consistently effective, these somewhat separate activities must line up in a flexible, but connected formation, all directed (pointed) toward delivering service to a customer. This organizational approach makes the customer the focal point of all organizational activity and centralizes our individual and collective effort. The answer to almost every organizational question must in some way include the customer. In fact, if the customer doesn't show up in the answer, we should ask ourselves why we are screwing around with whatever the question was about (if you attend a meeting where "customer" is not mentioned in the first 15 minutes — leave).

Creating and maintaining a central customer focus becomes a difficult, ongoing leadership challenge. There are many distractions, barriers, and interruptions that naturally occur in just getting everyone who is directly and indirectly involved in the delivery of service through the day. Many organizational support activities have a beginning, a middle, and an end all to themselves. A lot of those activities don't directly connect with a customer, and it's pretty easy for those who are responsible for those functions to lose track of how what they do ultimately connects with Mrs. Smith.

Given the typical compression from every direction that typically occurs in management jobs, it is particularly easy on that level for us poor souls (chiefs) to have the trees begin to obscure the forest. Currently there is an incredible amount of management development stuff available. Any fire officer with a mailbox generally gets 3½ pounds of



propaganda (poor postal souls) every day advertising the latest and greatest management development gadget, gizmo, seminar, book, consultant, course, video, Ouija Board, or school. Many of us become customers of at least some of these many offerings (that's why the mail keeps coming).

If a hundred years of intense management and organizational development, an almost endless array of inspirational platform speakers, a bazillion pulp trees that paid the supreme sacrifice to become management self-help/how-to books, all the MBA-MPA graduate education in creation, or the virtual army of management consultants (who at this very moment are winging their way to their next client) do not in some way assist, facilitate, support, or help workers and their bosses to more effectively deliver service directly to a real live customer, then their effort and effect is plain, garden-variety moonshine.

The preceding very aerobic paragraph is not meant to trivialize or demean how important sound management technology and technique is to effective organizational operation. Clearly, we must continually use current management development to keep up. We must never stop going to school (not necessarily in a classroom) and listening to those who can inspire us. We must read, read, read, and read some more. Sometimes bringing in a smart outsider with "new eyes" can clear away enough trees for us to get a glimpse of the forest. Whether all this activity becomes management gold that is directive or it becomes management mumbo-jumbo that is just distracting, is up to local organization leaders.

These leaders must attend, pay attention, reflect, and refine what is currently out in the management development environment to somehow sort out the beef from the baloney. They must then package up and apply the good stuff to where Engine One and Mrs. Smith come together. The point of the entire management development drill is to improve actual service delivery — not to drink seminar coffee in the lobby of a two-star hotel and mentally masturbate in a highly collaborative manner with industry peers (current word = networking).

The entire organization must become directed by the simple, timeless, and primitive reality that Mrs. Smith is why we are in business. Anyone in the food chain who loses that customer-centered focus is taking their organizational room and board under false pretenses (sorry about that).

Lots of Empire-State-Building-sized egos, useless/pointless power games, executive insecurity, micromanagement control freaks with 25 years of severe toilet training, and goofy leaders who lost their way along the way currently exist in many fire departments. They create a detached and deranged internal environment where workers and bosses on the line deliver service in spite of and not because of these lost souls. Sadly, many are stumbling around toward the top of the fire service chain of command.

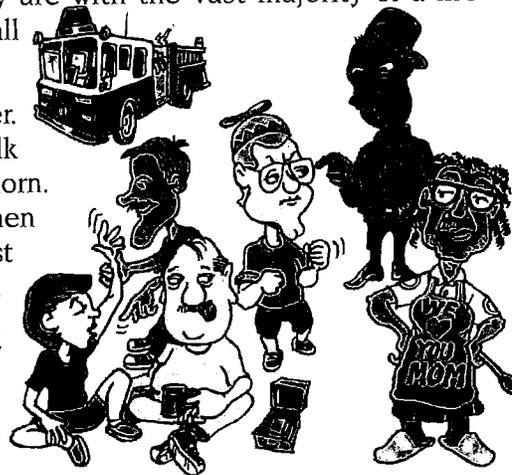
We must recognize that basic fire department customer service delivery on the business end involves three major players: workers, bosses, and customers. The customers are those who receive service or are in

some way connected to the event. Workers are firefighters who operate on the task level. They do the skilled manual labor that directly solves the customer's problem. Bosses are first level supervisor company officers who personally and directly manage and lead the service delivery event. These three players are intensely connected operationally and come together right where service is delivered. While there are a lot of other people and places required to create the READY, GET SET, only workers and their bosses can do the GO part of the organizational service delivery operation.

An absolutely essential fire department customer service player is the company officer boss. They are typically Captain and Lieutenant types who do first level supervision as an integral (inside) part of the service delivery team — right where and when the service delivery event occurs. They don't need to make a phone call to get permission, check a form or a computer screen, deal with a middleman (or woman), or look up in the ops manual to determine what is going on. They can directly see, touch, feel, hear, smell, and sense the activity, progress, and outcome of service delivery as it is actually occurring.

Company officers operate inside the basic fire department service delivery team — the fire company. They are the only bosses with continuous access and control of the fire company peer process (the most powerful organizational influence). Their presence and effect are so consistently powerful because they are with the vast majority of a fire department's human resources all the time.

They sit next to you at dinner. They ride in the shotgun spot, talk on the radio, and blast the air horn. They are the last person you see when you get up to go to the head and first person you see when you get back. He/she is as cold/hot, clean/dirty, sad/happy, hungry/full, wet/dry, up/down as their company members....simply, you can run, but you can't hide (as Joe Louis said). We break into the fire service at the booter (rookie) end of the fire company where we make the coffee, raise the flag, and ride backwards. Our first, and in most cases, most important boss is a company officer because he/she gets to touch the clay (us) while it's soft. We pay our dues by working our way through our basic work group — the fire company. Our development and experience as a company member prepares us to become a company boss. When we make that change (promotion), typically we move over in the front seat 3½ feet to the right. Company officers don't "emerge" from MBA programs....they emerge directly out of fire companies. You can fool the spectators, but you can't fool the players. You can jive the BC when he/she stops by to deliver the mail and get a sick leave form signed. The Fire Chief down at the Puzzle Palace occasionally sees your name on a roll call and gets a warm glow. The Mayor and City Manager still think Engine One is the first car of a freight train. The Shadow and your Captain know what actu-





ally lurks in the hearts of firefighters.

The Captain on Engine One also is the only person in the organizational food chain who can directly control the service delivery event at Mrs. Smith's at 3:00 a.m. The officer can directly support and reinforce effective action and directly coach and redirect action that is out of balance. Everything that occurs ahead of the event is important preparation. Everything after can be useful review. No one else in the system has the 3:00 a.m. control except the company officer. The 3:00 a.m. roll call looks something like this: the Fire Chief (who just completed a 40-hour total quality management seminar) is tucked in with his bear and blanky; the quality control guy/gal (who has a stunningly effective measurement matrix) is nighty-night with visions of Baldrige Awards dancing in his/her head; the Mayor (who now routinely calls voters customers) is unconscious, having nocturnal fantasies about being Governor; and the Battalion Chief (who routinely practices space-age management) is stuck on the opposite side of Mrs. Smith's, looking at the wrong side of a 250-car freight train that is slowing on its way to Bolivia. Very simply, we live or die (sometimes literally) on the brains, guts, and on-line direction of the company officer.

All the TQM, organizational development, and strategic planning saints and angels preaching and pontificating until the 4th of July, and then waving the flag for customer service, can't have a fraction of the effect of an on-line company officer who walks the walk of the effective customer service game plan right where and when it occurs.

As a young firefighter, the author (very lucky) worked for such a company officer. He was smart, tough, and nice. He was the Chairman of the Board of the business of our company and he minded that business. He had a crew cut and on one arm (very big) he had "U.S.M.C." and on the other "Mom." (Those tats provided a quick and accurate snapshot of him.) He hadn't gone to graduate school, so he talked in nice, short, understandable sentences. If he liked what you were doing, he told you to keep doing it. If he wanted you to start doing something, he told you to start. If he wanted you to stop doing something, he told you to stop. He listened to his crew, took care of us, and brought out the best in everyone. He was very patient with mistakes as long as they were new ones. Virtually everyone who worked for him got promoted (or else).

He had the simple, straightforward expectation that his company would do whatever work was required for as long as it took to get the job done. You didn't stop fighting until the fire was all the way out (and then some).

Probably the most powerful thing about him was he always modeled his own expectations. He had the brains, experience, and stature to manage mightily without micromanaging. He established high quality standards for his company and then patrolled the perimeter of those standards without ever raising his voice. I started working for him in 1959, and he had what looked like (to a baby firefighter) old-fashioned values, but he was (and still is) as modern (actually timeless) as anyone I have ever known. He was one of those rare people who went through

the human assembly line when everything was going really well. It must have been Wednesday morning when the workers were happy and oriented. They used all the right parts and all the parts fit together. They made him out of all real stuff with no artificial junk. He was, like a lot of really exceptional people, not so much an ordinary person with something added as he was a regular person with nothing taken away. He simply was a complete, intact person and the boss from heaven.

NOTE:

I use the term "boss" (throughout this booklet) with the realization that it is a somewhat outdated and perhaps even politically incorrect term in the most contemporary context. The reason I use it is that to me, no other word describes the special on-line relationship and connection that exists between the boss, the workers, and the work (customer). I was raised to believe that everyone both needs a boss and has a boss. Through the years, I have seen a lot of problems occur when folks forget that reality — a lot of really effective stuff happens when we remember it. I have also noticed that bosses are so influential (actually powerful — another politically incorrect word) that the difference between a good boss and a bad boss is closely connected to occupational heaven and hell. The reader can certainly substitute any other word that works for them.

What he did so consistently and naturally was to be an extraordinary example of what being customer-centered actually (not theoretically or academically) means. He didn't talk about it much — he just did it. If his crew was nice to a customer, he just smiled (we liked it a lot when he did that). If the situation (or us) got intense, he stopped smiling and put his hand on your shoulder and helped you. If he sensed you were getting impatient, feeling grumpy or rude, or in any way unprofessional, he put his hand on your shoulder and squeezed (we didn't like it when he did that). If the customer got ugly with us, he patiently smiled and reasoned with them. If he sensed the customer was going to get physical with us, he put his hand on their shoulder and squeezed (they didn't like it when he did that). The ongoing application of his standard for taking care of the customer (and us) in the street became a way of company life.

Our company was a downtown engine company and a lot of our customers were on the down side of the luck scale. The problems that went along with their environment were typically not very elegant (to say the least). Simply, there was a lot of wear and tear and not much maintenance on those who lived in that environment. He would interact with someone at a buck-a-night flop house as if we had responded to the Ritz. Many times I would have cheerfully strangled (stopped by fear of shoulder trauma) some deranged knight of the road whose problem at 3:00 a.m. was that Martians were entering his body through his navel and the spaceship was spinning brodies (360's) on his pancreas (or wherever).



He would listen patiently, send one of us to find a piece of cardboard for a navel shield, put it over the guy's belly, and explain that he had plugged up the intergalactic super highway. He would tuck Mr. Spaceship in and we would go back to the station.

He would explain to us (but more importantly he would show us) that life was tough at the Ajax Rooms, and who knows, maybe Martians were really going to make their power play from the guy's belly button. He showed us that some folks don't have much going for them to begin with and emergencies are pretty democratic and unforgiving and tend to equalize anyone and everyone. He showed us that our performance and behavior could make a big difference in our customer's lives. While he would never (ever) preach to us, him saying in his own very basic street-oriented way that up and in is really pretty close to down and out, stayed with a dumb kid who was trying to figure out what end of the line the water comes out and the meaning of life all at the same time. Strong company officer bosses like him have the ongoing opportunity to move customer-centered from a theory we talk about to an actual outcome we can practice and see.

Currently, it's pretty popular and looks modern to beat the customer-centered drum. The problem is, it's a lot harder for us to consistently pull it off than to just blab about it. Most of us fire service managers are the product of a 200-year tradition that has regarded those who needed and received our services as "fire victims." We have basically concentrated on the system, approach, and mentality required to conduct the heavy-duty hydraulic and tactical support operations required to physically control fires in structures. While we have always been concerned about and nice to "fire victims," we basically regarded them as accessories that came with burning buildings. During prefire planning excursions, we would look into the windows of the buildings in our first-due area, right past the people in those buildings, and try to fantasize how the building (and us) would react under fire conditions. During actual operations, we would interrupt the fire fighting routine long enough to rescue and quickly stabilize anyone who the fire beat up, and then get on with our regular fire fighting routine. We have all at one time or another had victim status bestowed upon us as the result of a lot of different dismal reasons. It's generally not nearly as much fun as a day at the park. Victims typically lose control over any options or choices that relate to their welfare or best interests. Our role is to serve as their advocate during what is generally a negative ordeal that has put them in a very vulnerable position/condition. Then we must, as quickly and effectively as possible, return control back to them so that they can make the personal decisions that return control to them so that they can get back to normal.

Fire fighting is an action-oriented, contact sport that feels good to the participants. Fire fighting is the activity that provides the most primitive way that we complete the circuit of our identity. Our most defining and overriding reality is where fire and water come together. In many cases and places, we have a lot longer term connection before, during, and after the fire with the structure than we do with the humans involved with the event.

In fact, we attempt (very appropriately) as quickly as possible to move any nonfire people out of the hot/warm zone. As we do this, we are typically bundled up in ugly, yellow, fire-resistive murf suits, wheezing through SCBA facepieces — not exactly a real friendly costume to wear when you're trying to establish a close, warm, personal relationship with a customer.

We have historically approached our jobs in a highly manipulative (using tools and equipment), technical, and mechanical way and we probably always will. We are the local agency who responds and operates to interrupt and control fires and other emergencies. Our strength is, and always has been, our capability to quickly deliver teams of highly motivated workers who together do organized, coordinated, skillful manual labor within a rapidly shrinking and dynamic window of opportunity. Being customer-centered means that we continue doing the physical stuff, while we add (both actually and symbolically) a new customer service manual in our system. This manual is inserted ahead of and integrated with our old drill manual, which describes our basic work evolutions (hose, ladder, tools), and our SOP manual that outlines our operational formations and moves (command and control). The new customer-centered approach becomes a highly complementary (not competitive) partner of our traditional service delivery system. The combination forms a very effective balance between taking care of both the human and physical needs of the incident. Customer-centered fire service organizational behavior emerges out of the following changes:

- The customer must appear (for the first time) in both our organizational design and mentality right next to fire company workers and their bosses. The organization must now surround and no longer geometrically and philosophically separate the fire companies (and customer) from the policy and support part of the organization. This design change must become a planned, practical approach that involves a long-term organizational shift in re-direction, commitments, and investments.
- Customer-centered means that customer needs, perceptions, and feelings begin to design and drive how the service delivery system looks and behaves. This change requires we include a new dimension of customer consideration as a natural value added piece of our regular problem-solving routine. The current, big-deal word for such changes — paradigm shift — will require and involve a scary change from the traditional vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry, to a new 31 flavors of fire service delivery. We have always done the very best we could for our customers, but we haven't spent much time asking them what they really want....simply, we decided what we thought they really needed, delivered that service, and went home.
- In the brave new customer-centered world we are constructing, it will be necessary for firefighters to come from the factory with a basic characteristic of liking people and an overriding inclination and desire to help those people. We must develop a system to attract, recruit, test, train, place, and support such candidates who can survive a career of intense service delivery to folks having a

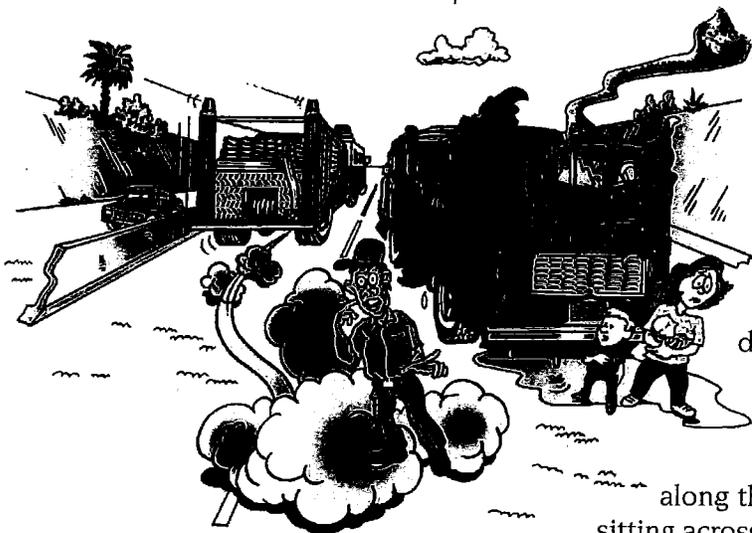
really bad day. Firefighters without this basic inclination and skill should take up smoke jumping into wilderness areas where they can commune with bears and spotted owls — simply, fire service work in the city will be far too human intensive for these grizzly souls.



- Delivering service today is becoming more complex and requires that we combine some new stuff with the old. While solving the main problem will always be the basis of our service delivery system, we must now begin to widen our view and move away from the inclination (tunnel vision) to focus exclusively on the major incident problem. While the main problem is what gets us and the customer together, that problem typically creates another whole set of other personal and family challenges for our customer(s). If we are prepared and inclined to deal only with the technical/tactical part of the event, we necessarily will leave those other parts unsolved when we disappear from the scene. Another way we can short change the customer (and ourselves) occurs when we evaluate our effectiveness only on the outcome of the main core service we delivered. In some cases we attend and operate on human and physical situations with a defensive outcome for those (and what) is directly involved....simply, sometimes the customer dies or the building burns down. Most of these situations leave a lot of people and confusion behind. These survivors are also our customers. We must begin to assume responsibility to deliver service to the entire situation. Our involvement in virtually every situation should extend beyond solving only the major incident problem.

This approach is not meant to be all things to all people. It basically means that we must assist our customers, whose lives have been in some way disconnected by a problem that has brought us together, with the next step(s) to reconstruct their lives. No other agency is able to do this in the way that we can. The customer has come through our regular system (911), we are present, we know the most about the customer's problem, and we have developed a relationship with that customer.

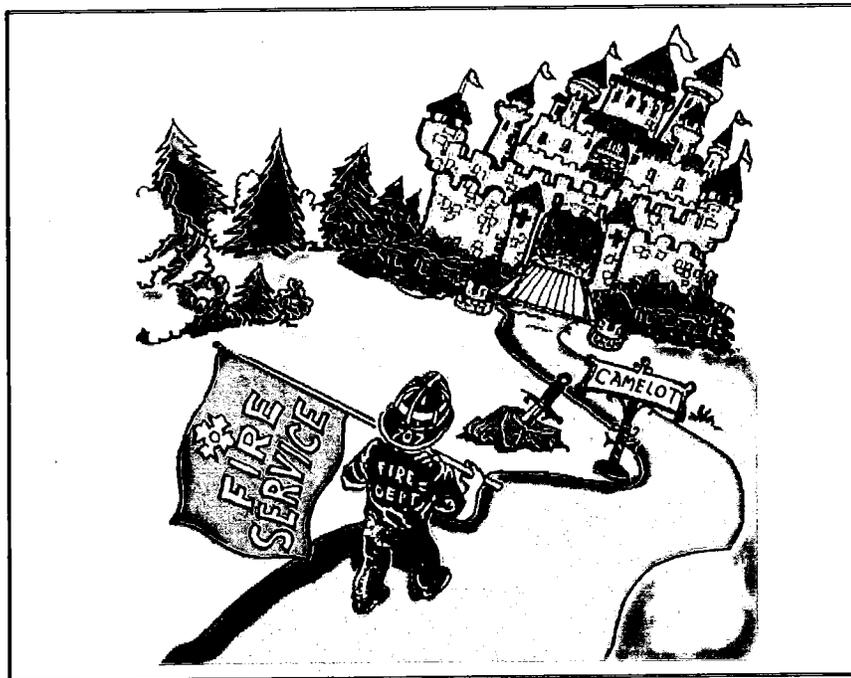
Most every firefighter has packed up and returned to quarters to wait for the next alarm and left a vacationing family with a burned out van standing along the side of a busy expressway, a burned out family sitting across the street from their recently vaporized home, or



a catatonic, grief-stricken family standing around a bed with a sheet pulled over a loved one. Today, there is no way to package up these traditional responses so that they make sense (or in a way that we can be very proud of them). We know better and we can do better. We must develop the habitual inclination and capability to evaluate and approach our customer's events in a holistic way that considers a full range of the needs that come with that situation. We must also provide our troops with the systems, training, and support required to actually provide those services in the street. A lot of those services will require that we effectively connect our customers with other agencies who can provide medium-range social and support services. This will require fire service leaders to develop and service different and better relationships with these other agencies. All of these changes move being customer-centered from blab to action.

- Historically, the American fire service has used a vertical, power-based military model where authority was the main organizational influence. The model is pretty simple — authority is a function of rank. Those who have rank have authority. Their basic role is to control those who have neither (rank or authority). The boss is in the center of this old model, and the organization is in place (in effect) to basically deliver service to itself (the boss). Leaders must now vacate the center of the system to let the customer in. Simply, the highest profile (and status) part of the system must become the connection between the workers (fire company) and the customers. Leaders must replace artificial rank-induced control with genuine service delivery support. In this new system, we must stop playing in our own organizational poop and work for the customers. Today's management environment requires that leaders play nicely and share the toys in a completely new way. Rather than acquiring, guarding, and expanding the traditional organizational goodies that make us fearless leaders so breathless (power, influence, authority, respect, love, etc.), today's leaders give those same capabilities away to the troops. This sharing creates a "boomerang" effect where empowered workers not only become more and more effective, but also give those same capabilities back to the bosses — plus some extra. The "boomerang" process is really pretty simple. Bosses empower workers on the task level. Workers extend respect, support, and cooperation (empowerment) back up the line to bosses on the strategic level. This new process lets everyone win and makes the old-time (military) officer's instruction manual very obsolete. How our service continues to expand the effectiveness and capability of our human resources will depend directly on how today's leaders catch on to this new routine.
- Keeping in touch with the customer's needs will become an ongoing fire service challenge. The ability to continually repackage the organization and how we deliver service will directly regulate our survival in a rapidly changing future. Those flexible souls who can continually redefine their jobs ahead of the change curve will grow and prosper. Those who can't, sadly will become roadkill on

the employment highway — members who staunchly maintain “they hired me to fight fire (only)” will become “sail firefighters” — occupational roadkill that is run over and smushed so flat they can be recreationally sailed like a frisbee. Successful fire service redefinition will be the result of connecting customer needs with smart, agile organizations who are seeking opportunities to serve those needs. Simply, we must move quickly and smartly to always keep the customer in the center of the organizational bull’s-eye. Developing the inclination and ability to manage a moving organizational bulls-eye will become the exciting definition of future fire service success.

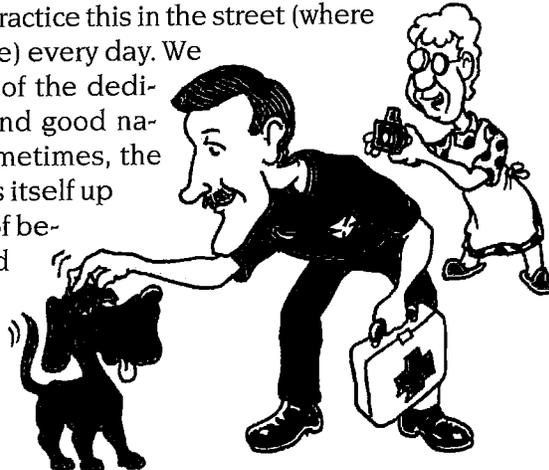


8.

We must continually improve our customer service performance.

This little paper has presented a pretty good slug of customer service ideas and maybe a vision or two. What most of this really means is that we must keep our organization moving and changing to match the needs of our customers and our department members. The current fire service environment has lots of positive and some scary challenges and opportunities. We must package up our organization to somehow effectively fit into that environment.

We should approach the future with a great deal of optimism. Our history reflects we can do about anything that is required to reach our objective — we practice this in the street (where we should really keep score) every day. We do this basically because of the dedication, brains, fortitude, and good nature of our firefighters. Sometimes, the American fire service beats itself up by a self-characterization of being backward, inbred, and resisting change. This is baloney — while firefighters are naturally skeptical, not easily impressed, and don't change just for the sake of change, we are not going to hell in a hand basket or a 1500 GPM pumper. Our customers will love us for the next 200 years for the same reasons they have for the last 200. We are there when they need us, we care about them, we get the job done, and they can trust us (WOW!).



What we are about now is making a good thing even better, gently overpowering and bringing along the negative people and stuff in our business, and always redirecting ourselves in a positive direction.

While everything is not perfect and never will be, I'm sure happy we didn't seek employment in the savings & loan business, the U.S. Senate, or as a television evangelist. We must continually improve our approach to the management of change to prepare us for what is next. We must recognize that customer change must drive effective fire service change in the future.

I dug out my most recent notes on change and came up with the following blivets:

- Expect change (don't be surprised).
- Regard change as a process, not an event.
- The past no longer predicts the future (like it did in the past).
- The future will arrive sooner than we think.
- The future will not be what we expect.
- Currently, most fire-service change is driven by crisis.
- Traditional (MBO) planning can't keep up.
- Support must now replace old time control.
- Systems are mindsets.
- Don't fall in love with the past.
- It will never be like it was.
- Change will generally beat up the change agents.
- Change agents are tough and will survive.
- Closed systems die.
- Even though we change, there will always be problems.
- They pay us to solve those problems.
- We should always shoot for the best set of problems.
- Very little is sacred anymore — everything is fair game for improvement.
- Success/fun = "Let's try it."
- Effective longevity at all levels = constant retool/renew.
- When you're through changing — you're through.

We must develop a change plan for our own:

- Happiness
- Survival/welfare
- Sanity
- Prosperity/growth

A major function for fire service leaders is to set the stage and then manage the change process. Simply, we can "move the machine" and improve our service delivery capability (or really anything else) only to the extent we can create a steady stream of effective, ongoing change. This capability will determine if we control circumstances, or if circumstances control us. We have a fire service plan for every other blessed thing, so here goes my laundry list of basic organizational pieces that together give us a fighting chance to capture and manage the management process:

- Management by opportunity
- Relationship management
- Continual learning/unlearning/relearning
- Corporate communications

- Organizational geometry and behavior
- Action management
- Respect the past
- Organizational foundations

Management by Opportunity

Most of today's (older) public managers were raised with a management by objective education foundation. This system was based upon and worshipped quality, quantity, time, and cost as the elements managers used to plan, measure, control, and execute organizational outcomes. It was a great system if things were going along in a slow and steady sort of way. It was designed (on purpose) to create predictability, minimize risk, and to eliminate surprises. While some of the traditional MBO pieces will probably always be useful to managers, today the overall, old-time MBO approach is way too slow, incremental, and cumbersome to keep up with changes and to take advantage of our chances to move ahead.

In today's environment, the smart money has changed the O in MBO from objectives to opportunities. This is an important shift in our mentality and approach. When seeking opportunity becomes the basis of our game plan throughout the organization from the fire gods in the puzzle palace to the firefighters in the street, we begin to use our collective energy to improve operations in a way that actually matches current reality.

This is not a nice neat change package — continually foraging for opportunities creates a lot of the confusion, disorder, and new energy that the original MBO system was in place to explicitly control (actually eliminate). This change causes some old roles and some old rules to not apply anymore. Effective leaders must now listen smart from the top; workers must now talk smart from where we actually meet customers up close and personal and can best see and understand their needs. Middle managers must actively and skillfully keep the whole game plan moving and everyone and everything connected. Sometimes this new approach looks a lot like we turned the asylum over to the inmates....because we have. For 200 years, us regal, exalted, fire service managers really thought we had our human resources absolutely under control — and then went home at four-thirty every afternoon. Little did we know, the troops (inmates) had fun, got the job done, and took care of the customers just fine until we got back at eight-thirty the next morning. All the new opportunity-based MBO does is make it official. This approach requires leaders to lead, managers to manage, workers to take responsibility for the work, and for everybody to focus on customer service, listen to each other, help each other, and to put the small stuff in perspective. This new approach actually authorizes workers to have a good time (fun) doing their jobs.

Relationship Management

Basic relationship management plan:

Do whatever is required to create high quality, long-term, lasting, genuine trust, trust, trust, trust, trust, trust, trust, trust, trust, trust,

fective, and nice. We distribute her comments to the troops that responded. The Battalion Chief conducts a (routine) coffee-table critique of the event and thanks them for their efforts and positive customer response. The troops suggest that smaller pieces of black plastic would be less cumbersome than their large salvage covers for small local jobs (like Mrs. Smith's) and that a battery-operated saw would be quicker and cleaner than a manual dry wall saw. The BC assigns those who suggested such changes as pilot program managers and coordinates the improvements with the department's logistics staff. The system (bosses) was accessible, open, and supportive of making changes that will improve our performance.

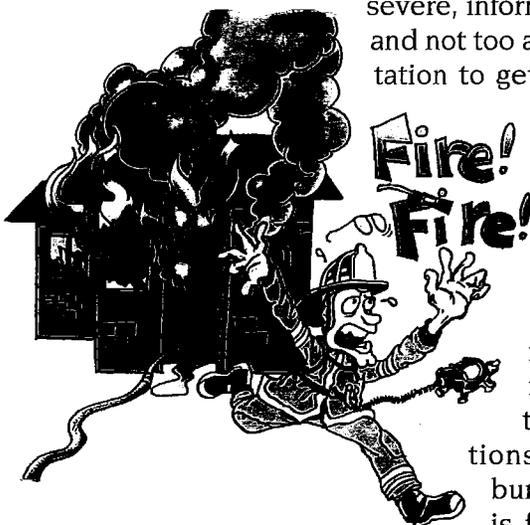
Imagine the power and impact of this event within our world after we re-create it 1,000, 10,000, or a bazillion times. It isn't complicated or mysterious....it is based on a trust-induced relationship.

Exactly the same outcome occurs inside our organization as it does with Mrs. Smith, and there is an internal organizational translation to Mrs. Smith's 4:15 a.m. situation where she wakes up and smells smoke. What happens next is based on how she trusts us and the system. When we wake up at 4:15 a.m. and smell smoke (in effect) inside our department is when major change is occurring. We are scared; we don't know what will happen to us. We are worried about our own survival and welfare, and the survival and welfare of everyone and everything we care about. What happens next is based on how the participants ask and answer two timeless questions we all ask ourselves about our organization and our boss — Can I trust you? — Do you care about me? Imagine if we get the same service as internal customers as Mrs. Smith received as an external customer and the effect it will have on how we feel about each other and change in general. Everything occurs or doesn't occur after trust. Don't ever sacrifice a relationship (trust) for an outcome.

Continual Learning/Unlearning/Relearning

It may be that our old, original fire fighting lessons provide the most practical and understandable direction for managing current fire service change. On the fireground, time is compressed, consequences are

severe, information is generally incomplete and not too accurate. There is a huge temptation to get excited and lose your head.



Conditions continually and quickly change as the event evolves. We must develop, apply, and then revise an incident action plan to match current conditions. On the fireground, the feedback loop is very short and unforgiving, so if our power curve gets behind the incident profile, fire conditions overpower us and the fire burns past us. A major challenge is for firefighters to quickly as-

semble information, act on that information, and then move on to the next operational opportunity. We continually unload old information, receive, process, and act on new information. We must be careful to not fall in love with an old, outdated attack plan that is not working — our response should not be working harder on the wrong plan — it should be to identify and move on to support the opportunities within the new plan. We are operationally effective to the extent we can change quickly enough to always be in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time.

Today's management conditions closely resemble a fire fighting operation and in the same way requires us to have the ability to learn/unlearn/relearn. The learning/unlearning/relearning process provides the capacity, and over time, develops (in us) the natural inclination and organizational agility to change to match current and forecasted conditions. This is when change becomes a process we expect and not an event that always surprises us.

On the fireground, if we can't learn effectively, the roof comes in on us — today, it works about the same down at the office. How we continually learn from "the roof coming in on us" will pretty much determine our success and survival.

A dynamic piece of this learning process is what actually happens when we go out into the real world and take care of real customers who have real problems. Simply, for us, "customerland" produces the ultimate lessons. One such lesson is that it is virtually impossible to always deliver perfect service and that there is generally a lesson (or two) involved when we don't do it just right. If we are serious about getting better, we must pay attention and capitalize on those local experiences (lessons). They are the most relevant because they involve the actual use of our own local resources. Lessons are not all created equal. Sometimes they come in packages that can be integrated into our ongoing system and produce nice, easygoing incremental changes. Other times, they come flying through the transom and bash us in the head. Particularly in these cases, we better have a system already in place to effect change quickly (that's what this section is all about).

Our local service delivery system is made up of people, hardware, and systems, and those basic system elements have good days and bad days. Sometimes the bad days are a result of human flubs — fatigue, anger, inattention, hearing/seeing difficulties, pride, ego, bad manners, bad decisions, impatience, lousy supervision, temporary burn-out, etc. Hardware requires good design, maintenance, and operation. Operational and management systems currently must struggle to stay ahead of rapidly changing service delivery reality. One of the major ways we keep it all working okay is to continually use all of the pieces and parts. When it works good, we reinforce it — when we screw up, we fix it.

Our last customer service story may serve as an example of an experience that produced a major lesson and an opportunity to improve our customer service performance.

This customer service example involves another EMS situation that occurred on an airplane that landed in our town. We became aware of the customer service details of this particu-

lar incident only because one of the passengers who was on the same flight and became directly involved wrote a letter to the Fire Chief. The letter writer is a critical coronary care registered nurse who was a passenger on the flight along with a 65-year-old man who had a serious heart attack about an hour before their scheduled landing. It was pretty easy to see that her letter was not junk mail — it was well stated, perfectly typed on high-class personalized stationery, addressed directly, correctly, and confidentially to the Fire Chief. The nurse lived in the midwest and was travelling home from a medical conference. Early in the letter she described and validated herself as a highly experienced practitioner, a supervisor, and a medical educator. She had so many letters behind her name that it looked like an eye chart.

Luckily (for the medical customer), both the critical care nurse (letter writer) and a cardiologist (M.D.) were passengers on the plane and attended to the man. They were able to stabilize and monitor him during the remainder of the flight. He had suffered a serious attack, so their care was intense and continuous right up to the time the plane pulled up to the arrival gate.

The pilot called air traffic control as soon as he was informed of the medical problem. The flight was then fast-tracked onto our airport. They alerted 911, and we dispatched a paramedic company and an ambulance. The units were waiting when the plane landed. The man was serious enough that the pilot decided to hold the passengers in their seats so that the paramedics could quickly board, do their thing, and remove and transport the customer to a medical facility. The plane lands without incident and gets to the gate okay....so far, so good.

Enter our two young, brave paramedics. Both are well trained, experienced, very capable, cross trained firefighter-medics assigned to a busy downtown unit. They are both in their mid-30s, handsome, athletic, and proudly display their paramedic patches on their snazzy-snug navy blue uniform t-shirts. Both are really good guys, but are susceptible to falling into a trancelike state when they are struck by a self-induced impression of their considerable inherent coolness.

Now our guys make their grand entrance. The flight attendants quickly direct them to the customer. At that point, the critical care nurse attempts to make contact with the medics to give them a basic, standard description of Mr. Smith's airborne coronary adventure and his current condition. The foolish cardiologist also attempts to get involved in the treatment transfer process. At this point, our medics abruptly and aggressively indicate to both the original care givers (middle-aged, informally dressed, probably looking a little rumped after their high altitude treatment experience)



to clear the area so that they can apply their medical magic. The nurse, probably accustomed to routinely dealing with regular (i.e., rational) medical folks, who as a standard process effectively communicate and connect during the transfer of medical command and treatment, gives it another shot. Our guys are now on a roll and they don't get any smarter as this operetta plays on. They explain again, with enthusiasm, that they are prepared to forcefully (!) remove any amateur medical interlopers who interfere with their Godlike treatment. At this point, the nurse/doctor team realize that they are dealing with the deranged, so they stand back and observe the paramedic treatment process.

The nurse indicated (with amazing objectivity) that the treatment the medics extended to Mr. Smith after they demonstrated their astronomical interpersonal skills was exceptional. She commended them for their gentle treatment, skillful stabilization, correct medical support, and adept removal from the plane. She related that she trained paramedics and would be proud and happy if her students performed (technically) as well.

The next (and final) paragraph got her back in the swing of describing her feelings. She finished up by saying that she had never been treated as badly as she had been treated by Frick and Frack in her entire life and that she would never (ever) consider coming to our moth eaten town even if we were handing out hundred dollar bills on every street corner. Clearly stating that the Fire Chief has to (also) be a low-grade imbecile to employ such uncivilized cretins provided a strong ending to the letter.

As he finished re-reading the letter, the tired old Fire Chief took a deep breath, decided to expand the letter into a multi-media experience, and dialed up the letter writer on the phone (number on the stationery). The phone rings, the Fire Chief holds his breath, and she answers on about the third ring. She sounds just like she writes: smart, awake, experienced, capable, and tough. The Fire Chief introduces himself, tells her how much he enjoyed reading her letter (as opposed to falling into a fully involved basement), and asks if they could discuss what happened. She thanks him for calling and basically restates the story, with added emphasis and emotional detail. The Fire Chief listens patiently, grunts and uhmm uhms to let her know that he is still hanging on the other end. When she runs down, the Fire Chief indicates that he will initiate an investigation and will get back to her. She thanks him again for the call and restates how important she believes high quality medical care is. She also says that failing to effectively transfer the patient through the pre-hospital food chain puts that person at a treatment disadvantage (and isn't nice). The Fire Chief agrees, they say goodbye and hang up.

The Fire Chief asks administrative staff to dig the details of the call out of our incident response records. They investigate and indicate that indeed we received such a request for service at the airport on the day and at the time the nurse indicated in her letter. The records also reflect that we treated and then transported a 65-year-old man to the closest hospital. Staff checks with the hospital and learns that the customer was treated in the emergency room, transferred to a critical care coronary unit where he resided for three days. He was then moved to a regular medical area and was released seven days after his initial admission. The call actually occurred as the nurse had described — she had not mistaken landing in Albuquerque for landing in Phoenix (darn).

The Fire Chief then shares the epic letter with the chain of command who handled the call and asks the BC to investigate and find out what happened. The BC is given a copy of the letter, so the medics can see exactly what the nurse has stated. The BC visits the medics to get their side of the story. The medics read the letter, are straightforward and forthright. They remember the basics of the call including the man and woman who were tending to Mr. Smith when they got on the plane. They state “yeah, we probably told them to get back and let us achieve our next miracle in modern medicine.” The BC asks the medics if they had any conversation with the caregivers. The medics state that they had no idea that they (nurse/doc) had any medical experience, so there was little reason to converse with such amateurs. The BC asks how they could have learned anything about them when they told them both to hit the road. The medics shrug and restate that they had no idea who they were, they looked like average frumpy airline passengers. The medics agree after reading the letter and learning that plain old Jack was a cardiologist and plain old Jill was a critical care nurse, that they probably should have asked them who they were and what treatment they had provided prior to the arrival of our two miracle workers. The BC also suggests that if they had conducted a sensible conversation, the medics could have recorded what airborne treatment was extended, gotten some details about the nurse and the doctor (like maybe a business card), and extended some sort of nice thank-you for stepping in and helping Mr. Smith in his time of need.

As the BC continues the discussion, he becomes concerned about how routine the medic's response and reaction appears and asks “Is this normal procedure for you guys?” They explain that sometimes customers come with folks who are trying to assist them prior to our arrival. In those cases, it may



be necessary to quickly clear the area to effectively focus on the medical treatment process — or whatever the incident problem involves. The BC asks if they ever deal in a positive way with those who are already on the scene when they arrive. They respond that their usual approach is to quickly determine the customer's problem and then go to work solving those problems (tunnel vision).

The medics indicate they feel badly for the confusion that their airplane approach has created. They also observe (correctly) that the Department has never developed any formal direction for dealing with those folks who are part of an incident when we arrive. The BC asks them to think about and record what action the Department could take to improve our interaction with the Good Sams we encounter in our service delivery travels. The BC reports up the chain of command that what the nurse described in her conversation with the Fire Chief was essentially correct and that things did happen the way she related.

The Fire Chief thanks the BC for his follow-up and asks him to begin development of an SOP to deal with our on-scene interaction with on-scene incident participants. The BC begins development of such a program and uses the medics to assist. They write the SOP and process it through our regular procedure review process. Once reviewed, the SOP is placed in the regular training system used to implement new Department procedures. The Good Sam SOP is really simple and includes the following checklist:

- Include Good Sams in the initial situation evaluation (size-up).
- Quickly establish positive contact with Good Sams.
- Ask them what has already happened and what has been done to help the customer/situation.
- Check and verify their welfare.
- Find out who they are and if they have any special expertise.
- If you need assistance and they are okay — let them continue helping.
- Don't let them get hurt.
- Be certain to thank them.
- Get details for a commendation, if appropriate.
- Include their personal details and their action in the incident report.

After the BC reports back on his interview with the medics, the Fire Chief calls the nurse back and describes what action has taken place. He indicates to her that her description of the incident was accurate and that our Department made a mistake in how we treated her and the doctor. He apologizes

for their actions. He then tells her that her letter triggered the development of a new procedure that will establish a standard approach to positively deal with Good Samaritans. He promises that he will send a copy of the procedure and the implementation plan along as soon as they are ready. She thanks him for the second call and says that she looks forward to the next installment.

When the SOP and the plan are complete, we send them along to her. The nurse writes back and thanks us for our responsiveness to her complaint. She ratchets back some of the feelings about us that she described in her initial letter. In fact, she indicates that she would no longer be pleased if killer bees invaded our city and stung everyone 1000 times (I made the part up about the bees) — actually, she complimented us on how we handled the situation.

Buried in this little scenario is another little laundry list of how we might react to complaints and screwups:

- Do whatever is necessary to stabilize the situation.
- Quickly contact the person who complained.
 - Tell them that you have received their complaint.
 - You are investigating.
 - You will recontact them.
 - Obtain any additional information they have (listen).
- Find out what actually happened.
 - Listen to all participants.
 - Don't be defensive.
 - Don't decide anything until you have heard everyone's story.
- If we screwed up, develop a basic plan.
 - First recover from the event that caused the complaint.
 - Develop a plan that fixes the problem so that it doesn't happen again.
 - Use the regular in-place management/operational system whenever possible to help solve the problem.
- Contact the customer.
 - Tell them we screwed up.
 - Tell them we are sorry (apologize).
 - Determine if we can do something that makes them feel better.
 - Describe the plan to fix the problem.
 - Use the participants (as much as possible) to develop the solution that will prevent the problem from

occurring again — focus on fixing the problem, not assigning blame.

- Many times complaints/screwups create well-disguised opportunities (for clever, crafty managers).

Corporate Communications

During periods of active change (like now), learning and communications are joined at the hip because to be effective they both must be based on current, accurate, relevant information. The ability of the organization to provide such information will become a major element in maintaining the ability to change effectively.

Given our decentralization, shift arrangement, and activity, a fire department can be a strange animal to communicate with. Firefighters have a humongous need for information, and if the organization does not supply it effectively, other more informal ways develop — firefighters become very creative in using these informal networks (to say the least). An absolutely incredible informal information exchange system exists in most fire departments. In many cases, it is impossible for the formal system to beat the informal system.

Our organizational ability to manage official communications in most cases is still fairly unrefined. We must create and then operate a practical, on-line system to effectively assemble, package, and transmit timely, accurate information throughout the organization in the form of a deliberate organizational plan. Every change has an information/communications component that will generally regulate the effectiveness of the new plan. Providing enough information in the beginning of a proposed change makes life easier for everyone involved. This does not occur consistently unless the organization builds a corporate communications system into the regular department management process.

Almost any survey, questionnaire, or inquiry into organizational effectiveness and problems will result in firefighters marking "communications" as the most serious department problem. This can be a reflection of both a substantive difficulty and a personal perception and feeling — change agents must pay attention to both. It probably requires a lot of mechanisms to effectively connect everyone involved with timely, adequate information — written stuff, SOPs, newsletters, memos, bulletins, buckslip weekly info packages, meetings, critiques, personal face-to-face interaction, classes, videotapes, interactive video, cable, satellite department transmissions, carrier pigeons, smoke signals, tom-toms, etc. All this not only exchanges real information, but perhaps even more importantly, gives people in the organization the very personal feeling that the system is anxious, open, and positive about providing enough information to do our jobs effectively and will work hard to do so. It's hard to trust the system and the people who manage it when you feel they are not telling you enough or that they aren't telling you the truth. The system is based upon trusting each other and simply cannot operate unless everyone tells the truth — even when it is painful to do so. Anyone dumb enough to screw around with the truth in an organization like a fire department (very permanent/very long memory) is in for an enormous amount of personal grief. Sooner or later the

nontruthful fairy tales always catch up to the teller and generally have some sharp edges that can cause lots of pain. Truth is the same for all people. There isn't a bigger and better truth for Chiefs and another for the Indians. We must keep on communicating until our people feel communicated with. Don't lock up information or ever believe anything is off the record....only idiots and sophomores believe there are really any secrets in a fire department.

Organizational Geometry and Behavior

Old-time fire department organization charts resemble a big, tall, narrow, upside down ice cream cone. The Fire Chief is perched at the top, firefighters are on the very bottom; lots of layers are in between. It reflected what was essentially a military model that was designed to do highly regimented work, control the troops, eliminate disorder, and deliver the mail. The guys on the top told the guys in the middle what to tell the guys on the bottom to do (only guys in those days). The system used rules, ranks, and the chain of command as major management-control mechanisms. It wasn't a bad design if you were fighting a war in 1914, but the design and the mentality that goes with it really sucks when applied to operating a fire department today. It was indeed designed to fight a war with an outside army, and indeed required (and still does) a war to change anything in or about the organization. Another design characteristic is that a customer never showed up anywhere in the chart (actually, the point of the whole military drill was to kill the enemy, not to serve any customer). There are a lot of ideas currently floating around regarding how modern organizations should look — while the design is an important element in effectiveness, it seems the most important part is how the system acts and what that action produces for the customer and the members. The fire service is generally shifting to a flatter, more modern organizational design, but during the transition, the baby should be seat-belted to the tub. Simply, everyone needs to be brought along so that we all arrive together wherever the new design is taking us.

Action Management

Another organizational element that has already been mentioned in several places is an action management model that combines, connects, and integrates the development of SOPs, training, application, critique, and revision. This approach is a basic, straightforward way the organization can decide on the details that relate to the use of resources and assets in a standard situation. This design also provides the basis for training on the SOPs that will actually be used. SOPs then provide the framework for how operations are conducted (Ops manual). After those operations are completed, the SOPs provide the structure for a standard review and critique. Based on the lessons learned and reinforced, an action plan for improvement is developed. Revisions are driven by that plan. The ongoing use of this model becomes a powerful mechanism to get good and stay good.

A logical development in improving customer service (or anything else) is to plug it into this model. Good service isn't voodoo, and lends itself as much to the application of the action model as any traditional

tactical activity (like laying hose and raising ladders). The action model is a practical way to translate a good idea in someone's head to an effective service delivery operation that actually occurs in the street. The ongoing application of this model (and approach) begins to change how we feel about it being possible to improve our operations because we have a very simple (actually routine), safe, effective way to do it. The system also becomes the "entry point" for us to begin to manage not only performance but also attitudes about service delivery. In fact, the quickest and most effective way to change our members' attitudes is to first consistently change their behavior. The most effective way to send a really believable message (as an example) to our troops about customer service is to write a salvage box SOP, train everyone how to use it, provide the boxes on the rigs, and integrate loading up the stuff Mrs. Smith loves when she has her fire into the regular incident management system. After the troops go through this routine, hug and kiss them and buy them ice cream. This feels good and makes them want to do it again (and again). This is a natural approach and the next logical step in improving the service we extend to both our internal and external customers.

Respect the Past

Continued improvement necessarily involves changes that occur at what is (in effect) the end of a series of ongoing efforts, events, projects, and organizational investments that got us where we are today. This series of activities forms a history that reflects a cast of organizational characters who have been involved up to our current stage of development. This history and those characters not only describe the past, they also set the stage for the future. These players have an interest, a stake, and a certain predictable affection for what it took to develop, defend, learn, and apply all the pieces of what are (now) in place. These old soldiers have the scars that become the trophies that validate them as players who have earned their colors. We all move through our departments with about the same glacial speed, so in most cases, many of these former program players are still hanging around in the organization. They have a certain built-in influence (i.e., control) over the formal and informal process(es) that regulate how (and sometimes if) changes occur.

Many times, the latest change agent shows up in the "middle of the movie" as a savior "riding a white horse." These characters can be directed by a preoccupation (tunnel vision) on how the change will improve the future. Problems occur when such agents of a brighter tomorrow (typically smart/energetic/aggressive/empowered) look only forward and fail to balance the future with the past. What this balance requires is for the change agent to look more like a quiet person who is dealing with the next logical change — and skip the white horse routine. That person can then naturally also look backward to acknowledge the past efforts that form the foundation for the next set of improvements. This approach makes the past more, not less, valuable. All of our lives would become a lot easier if we added this standard balancing step in the change process....it's pretty easy to do a basic history check to see who has an emotional, psychic, or nostalgic feeling about the program, activ-

ity, or thing we are currently fooling with. We can then acknowledge, celebrate, and thank the participants for what has been done up until now. Showing more genuine respect for the past would also create a regular internal process where organizational improvements naturally and continually emerge out of effective past efforts. Those who were involved in the past program development become the respected and recognized program ancestors. It also makes a lot of sense and creates a more effective level of continuity to wherever possible involve and include past program players in new program changes.

Another benefit of this approach is that everyone in the organization might be more conditioned and prepared to plan for and expect continued change as a regular and positive organizational process. Simply, such regular change is how things keep getting better. Documenting the details of development would create a valuable description of how and why the organization looks as it does — this documentation becomes, in effect, “writing on the walls of the caves.” It then becomes an important tribal ritual for the members to read those “walls” to develop a more effective perspective of how they fit into and become a part of that writing (history). Our family-oriented structure and mentality inherently have a variety of very powerful ways to cause respect and loyalty mistakes to be very expensive and painful. Effectively connecting our past, present, and future is a big time element in making us all happier and healthier customers in and around the change process. Successful, long-term change management requires that we are not paralyzed by the past or terrorized by the future.



Organizational Foundations

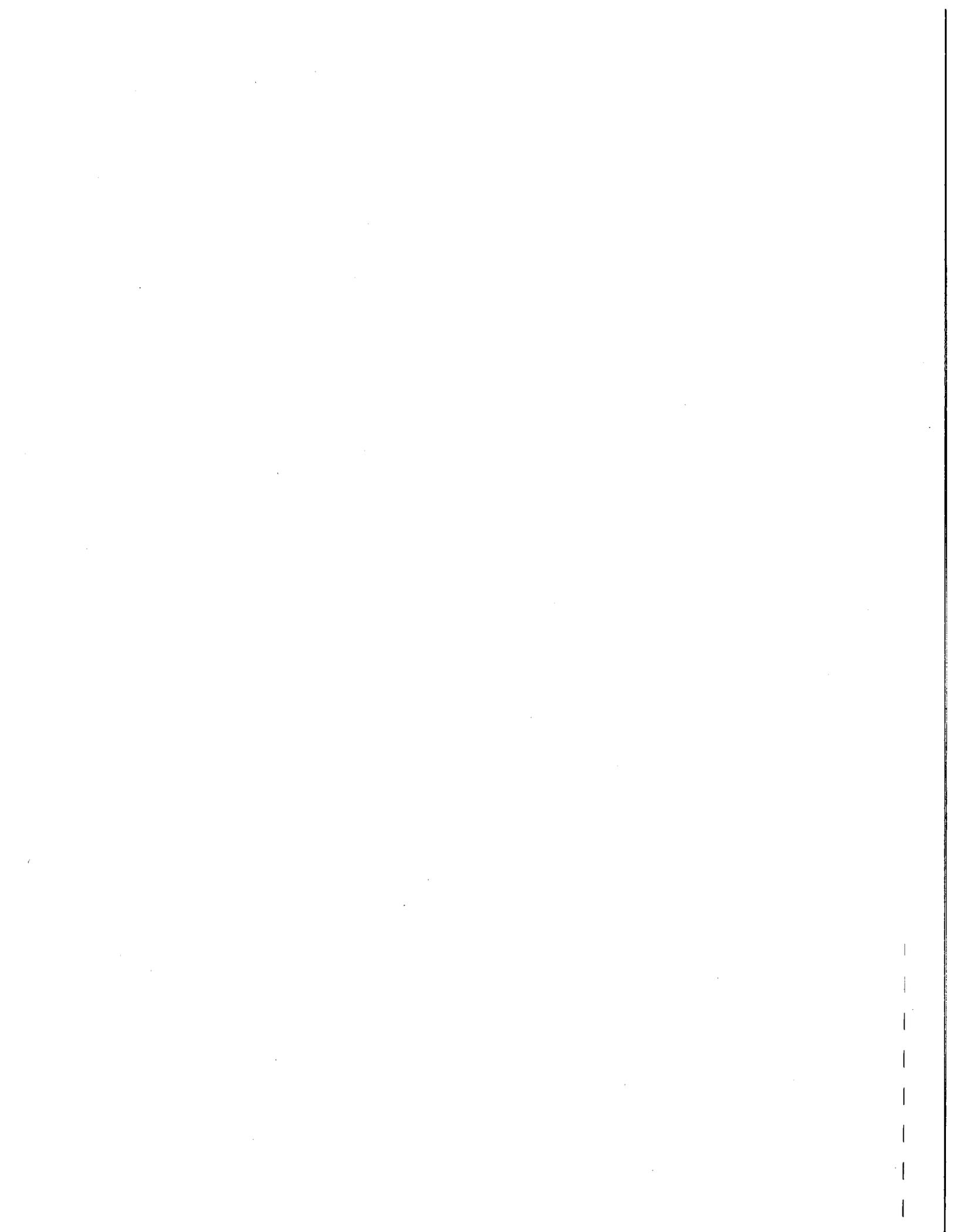
....And finally (whew), how in the world do we survive all this gut-wrenching, bone-crushing change? How do we get through every new management craze? How do we react every time the Fire Chief awakes from a trance and sees a new vision? The way we keep going is by relating and returning to the foundations of our organization. They are the basis of what we really are and what we will always be. We don't talk a lot about them, and I won't either. These are the ones I'm not ready to change:

- Firefighters look out for each other — we will put our welfare on the line to protect and save each other.
- Firefighters stick together.
- We go in together; we come out together.
- Being a firefighter is a lifetime deal.
- We prove ourselves by executing in difficult situations.
- We help our friends; we will defend ourselves against our adversaries — we have a long memory of both groups.
- Loyalty is the glue that holds us together.
- We will not leave our wounded or dead behind.
- We all wear the same uniform (colors) — in the Phoenix Fire Department we are all blue.

- Firefighters must earn the right to belong.
- People trust firefighters.
- We are heros to kids.
- Firefighters make and keep a promise to protect the customer.
- Customer service will always be human being to human being.
- Everything is passed on — we are an old, continuous, long-term service; our ancestors set the stage for us; we are now setting the stage for the next generation.
- We have inside language, rituals, ceremonies, rites of initiation, acceptance, passage, and exit.
- We have our own warped, twisted sense of humor.
- The past gives us our identity, the future gives us our purpose — we must respect both.
- We will embrace positive change to remain effective.
- Fire is still our middle name and always should be.
- God meant fire trucks to always be red.







Personnel

RECORDS OF EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE
(GREEN SHEETS)

**PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT
ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS**

M.P. 105.05A

6/94-R

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to establish an additional method for the Fire Department members to be recognized for exceptional performance. This procedure will guide Phoenix Fire Department supervisors in dealing with exceptional performance by using the Record of Exceptional Performance (Green Sheet) to document the incident. If supervisors have any questions concerning exceptional performance, they should be directed to the Department Personnel section.

POLICY

It is the policy of the Phoenix Fire Department to appropriately recognize members of the Department for exceptional performance.

Green Sheets may be presented to any member of the Fire Department, a person active in the Department Cadet program, or a citizen in active volunteer service.

There is no limit placed on the number of Green Sheets any individual may be awarded.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREEN SHEETS

Any supervisor of the Department may recommend a member for a Record of Exceptional Performance (Green Sheet). The recommendation should be made to the member's immediate supervisor via telephone or written documentation. The member's supervisor will acknowledge receipt of the written recommendation if requested by the sender.

PRESENTATION OF GREEN SHEETS

Green Sheets will be presented to the member(s) by the immediate supervisor at an appropriate time. The original will be forwarded through proper channels to be placed into the member's personnel file. A copy will be given to the member and another copy is to be forwarded to the Fire Chief.

Personnel
RECORDS OF EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE
(GREEN SHEETS)

**PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT
ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS**

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6/94-R Page 2 of 2

ROUTING AND RETENTION

The immediate supervisor will forward the original copy to the District Commander or Section Head for review. The District Commander or Section Head will forward the original copy to the Personnel Services Division to be placed into the employee's personnel file for the duration of employment.

CITY OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA

**FIRE DEPARTMENT
RECORD OF EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE**

1. Employee	2. Division/Section
3. Classification	4. Date prepared
5. Initiator of commendation, if other than supervisor	
6. Description and date of exceptional performance	
7. Supervisor's comments and date of presentation	
8. Employee's comments	
9. Supervisor's signature	10. Employee's signature

Original: Personnel file
Copy: Employee
Fire Chief

90-01D New 8/89

PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

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Sectors

OCCUPANT SERVICES SECTOR

The purpose of this procedure is to establish the role and responsibilities of the Occupant Services Sector.

The Occupant Services Sector shall be established by the Incident Commander at all working structure fires, and as early in the incident as is practical. The Occupant Services Sector should also be established at any incident where the need is identified; Fire, EMS, Special Operations, etc.

The Occupant Services Sector is a critical extension of our service delivery, and serves as the liaison between the Fire Department and those citizens (responsible parties) directly, or perhaps indirectly involved in or affected by the incident.

If necessary, Command will request additional resource in order to establish the Occupant Services Sector. An additional engine, ladder, or battalion chief is acceptable. If necessary, at prolonged incidents, in order to return fire companies and personnel to service, Command may assign staff personnel to this function. The Occupant Services Sector responsibilities may extend beyond the termination of the incident.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Occupant Services Sector should consider offering the following services to the occupant/responsible parties. It should be noted that other occupant service needs may be identified and should be addressed as part of the Department's customer service goals.

- Carry out responsibilities under supervision of loss control officer.
- Explain what happened, what we are doing and why, how long we expect to take until the incident is under control.
- Obtain from occupant/responsible party, any significant information regarding the structure and/or its contents that might assist Command tactically with the operation. Inform Command of this information.
- Provide cellular telephone access.
- Communicate the location to which evacuees have been sent. (Notify the Investigations Sector of this location also when passing on this information.)
- Identify any mental health needs of the occupants/responsible party, as well as any spectators or evacuees. (i.e., affects of shootings, mass casualty, highly visible critical rescue, etc.)

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Sectors

OCCUPANT SERVICES SECTOR

- Notify Red Cross, Salvation Army, or other relief agencies.
- Notify other necessary agencies and/or individuals.
- Provide coordination of salvage efforts with the loss control officer.
- Where safe to do so, and after approval from Investigations Sector, coordinate a "Walk-Thru" of the structure with the responsible party.
- Determine the location of valuables in the structure and notify Command/loss control officer.
- Work with loss control and proper utility services to restore power, gas and water, as quickly as possible to reduce additional losses through a loss of business to affected occupants.
- Provide use of service vans as necessary.
- Coordinate site security.
 - Fire watch
 - Private security company
 - Necessary insurance services
 - Any services identified as necessary and possible
- Handout and explain the "After the Fire" brochure.
- Assist the occupant in notifying insurance agents, security services, restoration company, etc.
- Provide blankets, and a shelter, where practical to do so, (i.e. and apparatus cab, neighbor's house, etc.) to get occupants out of the weather and at a single location.
- Provide on-going service and support until the customer indicates our services are no longer needed.
- The Occupant Services Sector shall report to Command unless a loss control Branch/Section is assigned, at which time he/she shall report to the loss control officer.

MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Occasionally, the public is witness to a critical life-threatening event that can have substantial psychological impacts on them. These persons may be survivors of a critical event or a witness to a mass casualty, or a parent of a severely injured child, or a witness to the death of a family member, etc.

PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

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Sectors

OCCUPANT SERVICES SECTOR

Additionally, witnesses may have misunderstandings of fire department operations that cause a delay in removal of the patient (i.e. trench collapse, an electrocution rescue that is delayed due to energized contact, etc.). Addressing these issues early, on-site, or as soon as possible following the event, can minimize these misunderstandings, and reduce psychological effects, and produce improved relations with the public.

The Occupant Services Sector should consider additional help for these needs. Assistance and advice on availability of mental health services can be obtained through the department's Critical Incident Debriefing Team, the Employee Assistance Program Contractor, the American Red Cross, and in some cases, through the victim's personal medical insurance. Support from the Fire Department Chaplain (CAR810) or local clergy may also be available.

AMERICAN RED CROSS SERVICES

For residential fires where the occupant has suffered a loss of living quarters and clothing, the American Red Cross may be used to provide support.

The American Red Cross can provide some clothing, food, toiletries, and arrange for temporary shelter/housing for the occupants. When contacting the Red Cross, provide the following information:

- Address of the incident.
- Address where victims can be contacted.
- Phone number of contact location.
- Number of displaced persons with information on age, sex, etc.
- Fire Department Incident No.

Policy and Procedures

HANDLING PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS

PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

M.P. 214.01F

05/95-R

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OBJECTIVE

The objective of this procedure is to provide field personnel with guidance in handling pets and other animals that are encountered as a result of an EMS, fire, or other response. These pets or animals may require medical attention and the RP is unknown or unable to care for the animal, or the animal presents a danger to the general public. The pets or animals we encounter might also be trapped or injured.

The pets that we encounter are oftentimes considered by the owners a part of the family. While our primary mission is for the protection and care of the people, we should attempt to provide some level of care to animals in distress whenever feasible and safe to do so as a part of our commitment to customer service. We should display an open, caring concern for pets and animals when we deal with the public in these types of situations.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Caution should be used in approaching any animal, especially one that is injured. At no time is the safety of our members or that of the public to be compromised by attempting to capture an animal. If there is any doubt, contact one of the agencies listed in this procedure and request that they respond. When dealing with pet or animal rescues, they should be handled similar to "property" when evaluating the risk/gain profile of the incident.

HANDLING PETS

Rescue Efforts (fires, trapped or injured pets)

Rescuing pets or animals during an incident should take the same priority as any loss control activity. An evaluation should be made in terms of the risk or exposure that our personnel would face, versus the likelihood of a positive outcome.

Treatment of Injuries

Animal injuries can be treated in a similar manner as BLS injuries to a human. For example, bleeding can be controlled by direct pressure, elevation, and bandaging. Burns can be cooled with water. Oxygen can be administered for breathing difficulties. Broken limbs can be stabilized using splints. At no time, however, should any attempt be made to provide fluids intravenously.



Policy and Procedures

HANDLING PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS**PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT****STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

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Caring Attitude/Empathy

We should realize that to many people, an animal or pet is considered a family member. We should attempt to treat their concerns with empathy and demonstrate a caring attitude toward their concern. In addition, if the incident has resulted in the death of an animal, we should attempt to assist them in the disposal of the animal by contacting the proper agency, such as the Humane Society or the ASPCA for guidance.

If there is any question regarding the handling or care of a pet, any of the agencies listed in CAD are more than willing to provide guidance and assistance. They all stated that if they are not able to help, they will put us in touch with the proper agency. A case in point may be in the situation where we have treated and transported a rider who has fallen from a horse – what do we do with the horse? The proper agency in this case is Arizona Livestock, but ASPCA stated that they may be able to provide assistance in securing the animal until further action can be taken.

CONTACT NUMBERS

Whenever there is any question regarding handling an injured, non-injured, stray or trapped animal, both the Humane Society and the AZ Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals are willing to either provide direct assistance, or serve as a clearing house in directing us to the proper agency or veterinary service. Both have 24-hour hotlines listed in CAD. To access this information by MDT, type MDTINFO ANIMALS.

Stray animals

For stray, uninjured animals, the call should be referred to the Maricopa County Animal Control (for the telephone number, see "MDTINFO ANIMALS" in the CAD system).

Injured animals

The two primary agencies that can be contacted to respond to injured animal calls (where the animal is not a threat to human safety) are:

Humane SocietyAZ Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals(both numbers are in CAD under "MDTINFO ANIMALS")



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Both agencies have personnel available 24 hours a day and will respond valley-wide when requested. In the event that they are not able to handle the particular animal involved (for example, an exotic animal), they will provide you with the proper agency to contact for assistance.

If it is necessary to move an injured animal out of a roadway, the recommended procedure is to wrap the animal in a blanket and immobilize it before moving it. Muzzling the animal with material such as kling or a PackStrap would be suggested. This will help to minimize the danger to the rescuers.

Animal Rescue (non-emergency)

In the event that you should encounter an animal that is in distress, but is not injured (cat-in-tree type of call, contact the following agencies (the telephone numbers are in CAD under "MDTINFO ANIMALS"):

Humane Society

AZ Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

If they are unable to provide timely assistance, they will direct you to an agency that can help.

Dangerous Animals

When there is a danger to human safety, Animal Control will respond. (Also request that PD respond.) Their telephone number can be accessed on the CAD via "MDTINFO ANIMALS." Responders should take actions to ensure that the safety of the public and Department members is not compromised while waiting for the arrival of Animal Control.

Immediate actions to be taken if the animal's life is in danger

If an animal is injured to such an extent that its life is in danger, at the discretion of the ranking fire department officer, the animal may be transported to a veterinarian for emergency care. There is a list of emergency animal clinics listed in the CAD under "MDTINFO ANIMALS." The cost for this treatment will either be passed on to the owner, or if the owner cannot be identified, then ASPCA will pay for the treatment. No cost will be incurred by the Fire Department or a member for bringing in an injured animal encountered as part of a fire or EMS response.

The animal should be transported only to those clinics listed. They are equipped with full emergency care facilities and have agreed to accept animals transported by the Fire Department to their facilities.

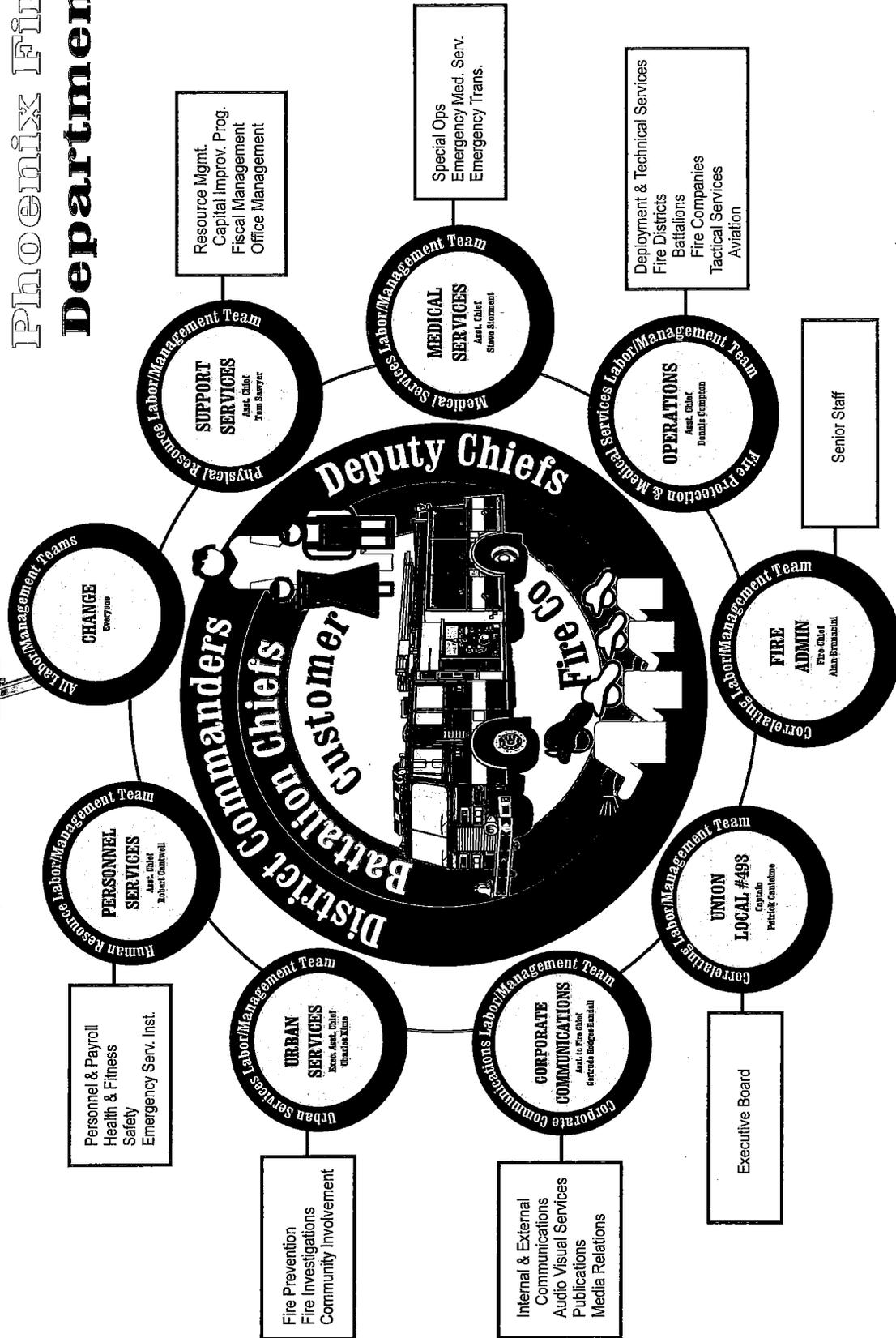
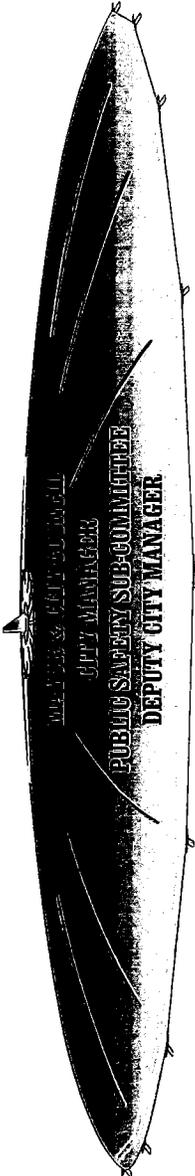
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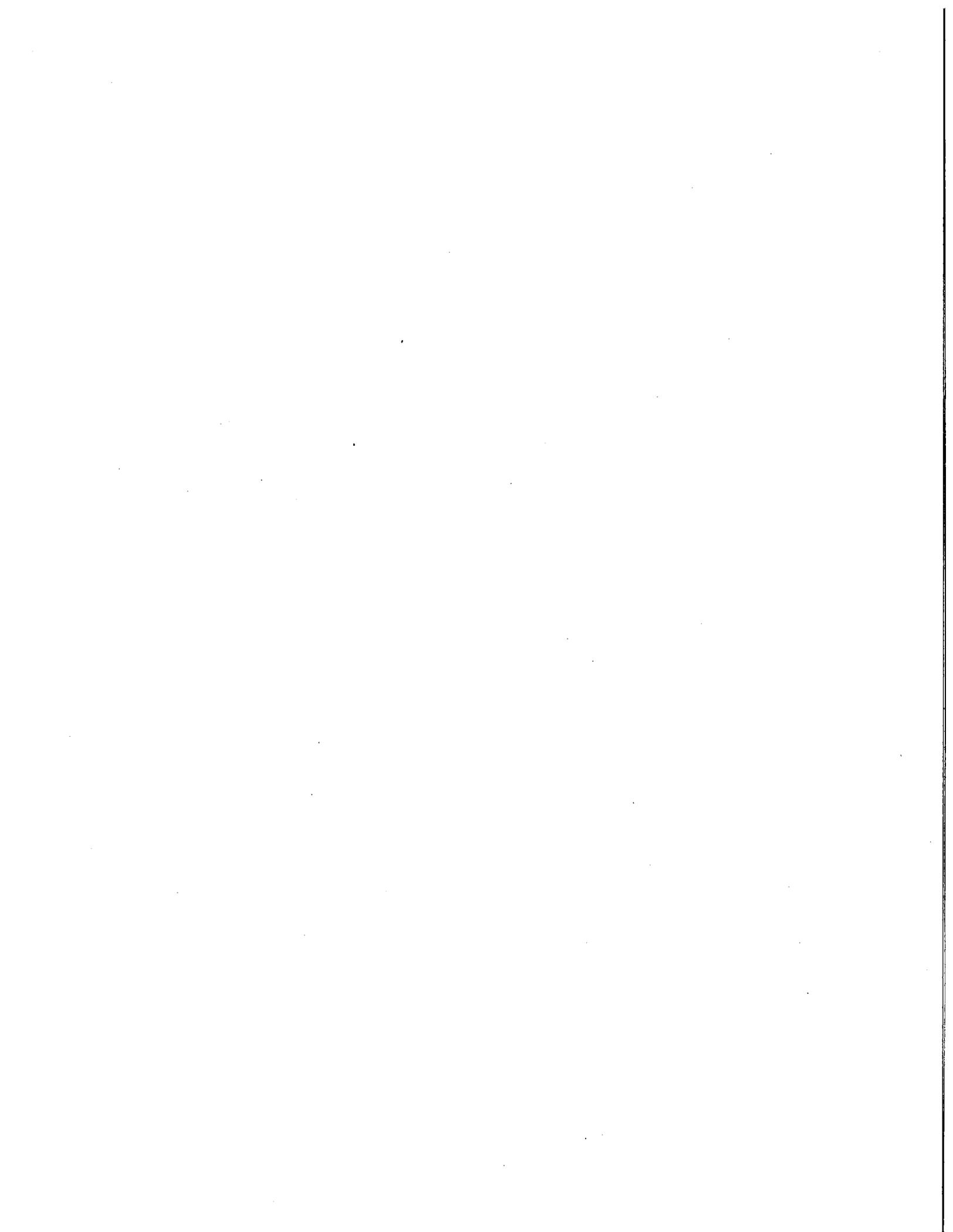
It is very important to remember that an injured animal may present a danger to rescuers. At no time should a member's safety be compromised in handling an injured animal. If an animal is considered dangerous, the call should be referred to Maricopa County Animal Control.

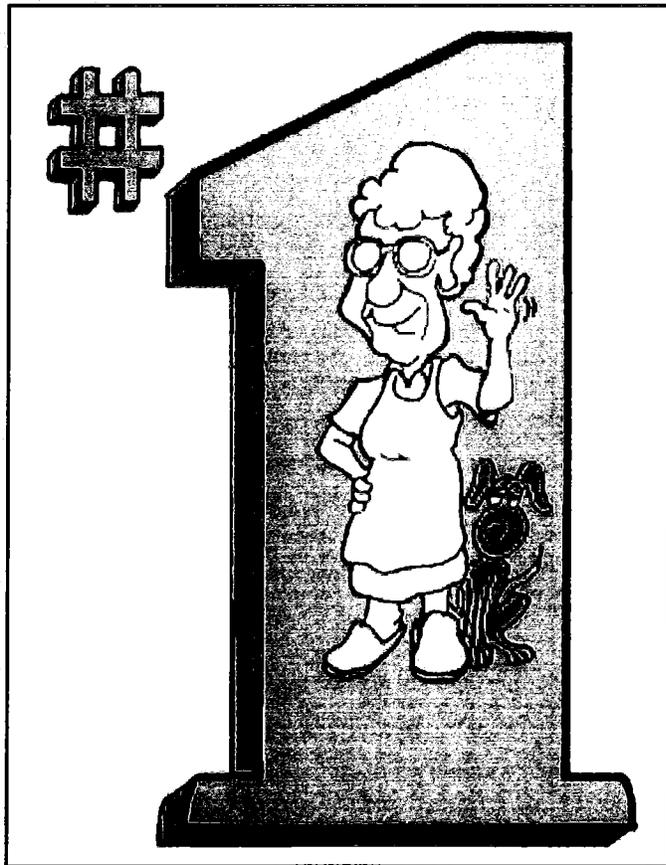
Other Agencies

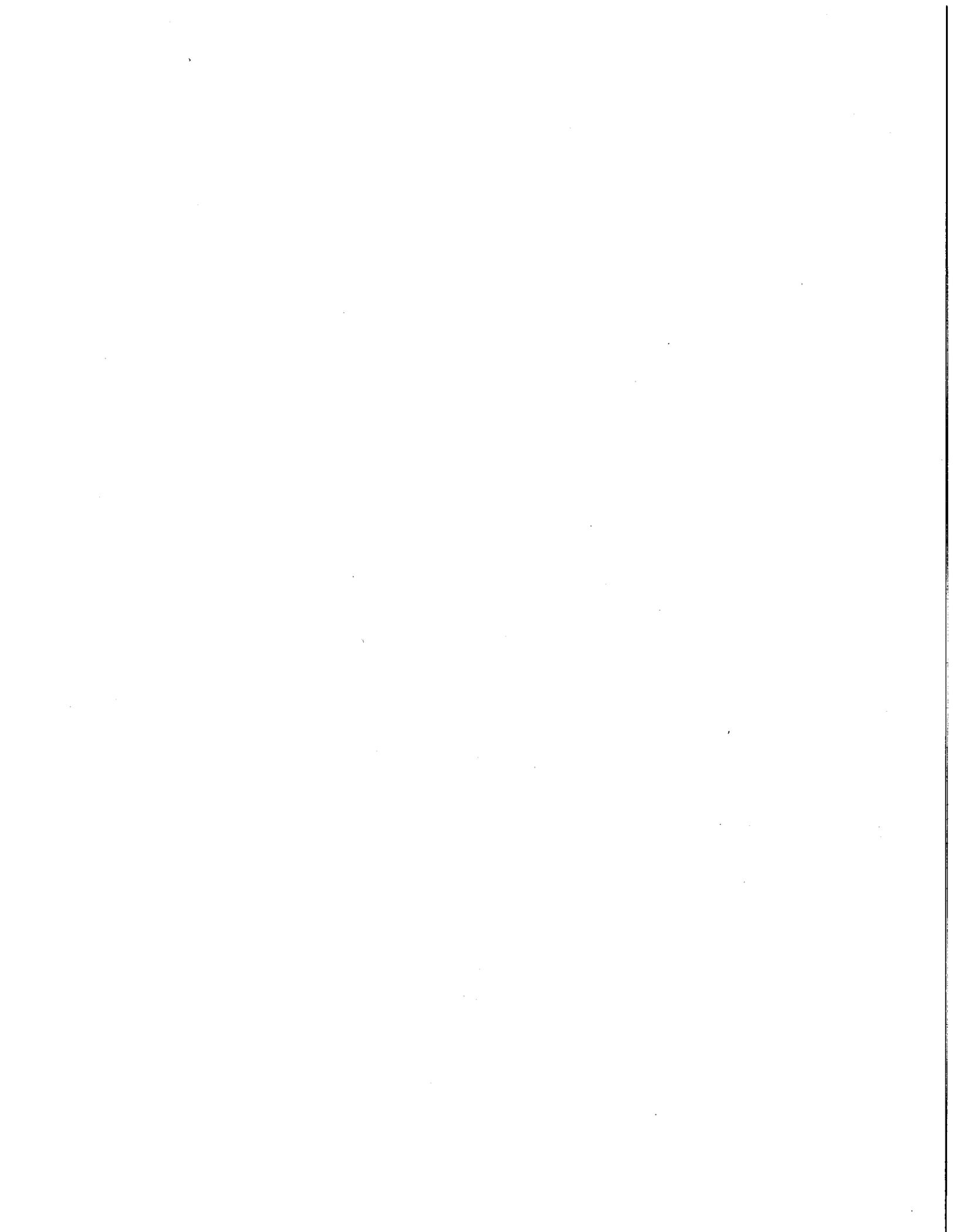
There are other agencies that can respond and deal with injured animals. They are listed under "MDTINFO ANIMALS" in the CAD system. The first call, however, should be either the Humane Society or ASPCA since they have personnel available 24 hours. If they are not able to handle the problem, they will refer you to the appropriate agency.

Phoenix Fire Department









About The Author

When Alan Brunacini was four years old, he watched a big fire in a tire store. During that fire, which was a total loss to the store, he made a career choice to become a firefighter. Based on that decision, he joined the Phoenix Fire Department seventeen years later in 1958. He happily worked his way through the Department ranks and became Fire Chief in 1978. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University's School of Fire Protection Technology. Along the way he also got a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science



and a Master of Public Administration degree from Arizona State University. Since the tire store fire, he has been a student of fire department operations and has conducted seminars and workshops on incident command and firefighter safety for the past twenty-five years. He is the author of the popular textbook **Fire Command**. He has written many articles about his ongoing search for fire service reality, particularly during periods of rapid change. This manual on fire department customer service has emerged out of those reflections. He lives in Phoenix with his very beautiful wife Rita, three very funny firefighter children, six very gifted grandchildren, a bunch of very friendly pets, and a back yard full of 1952 Mack pumpers, that call out to him to be restored.



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