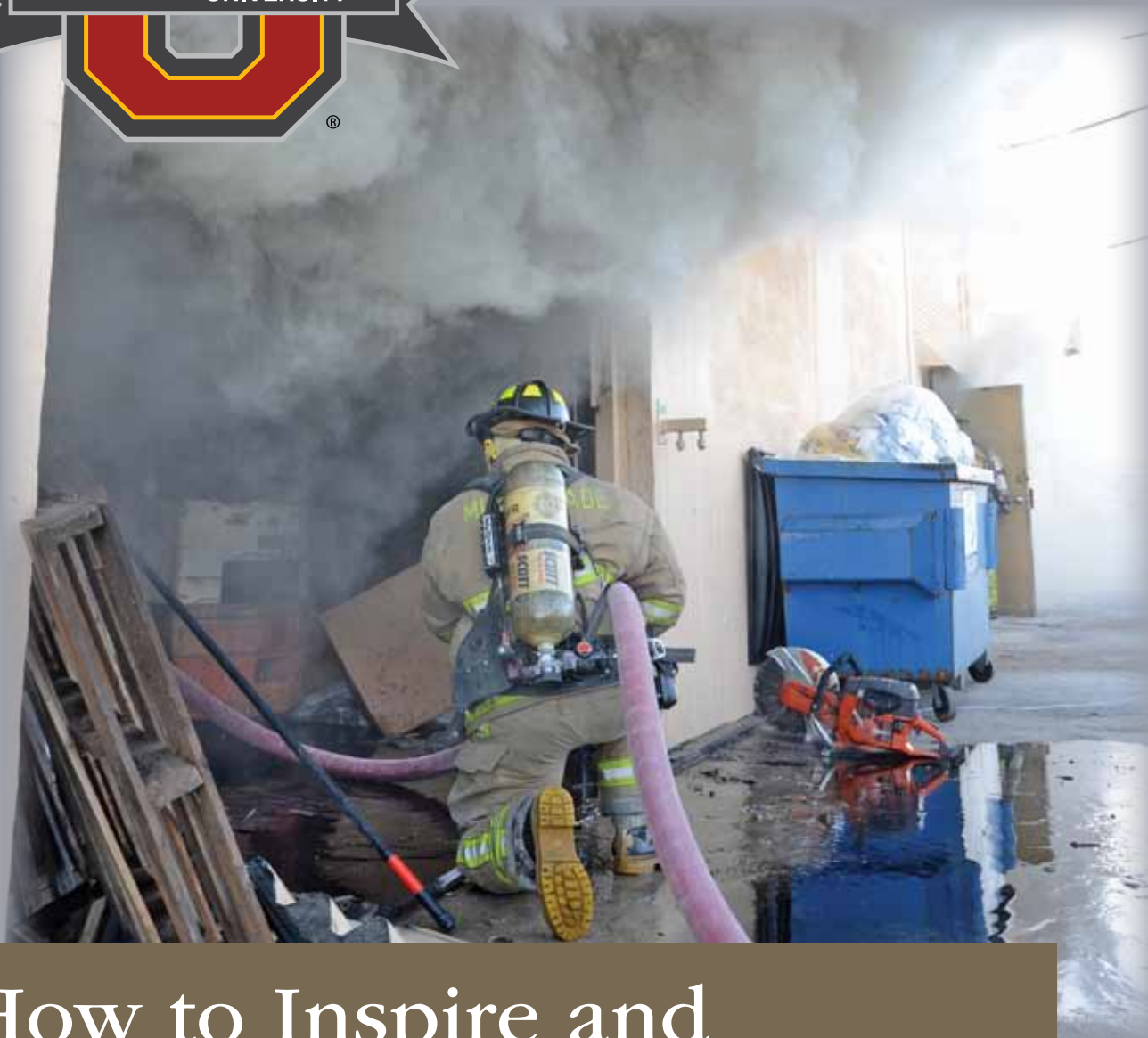




## Continuing Education Course



# How to Inspire and Motivate Firefighters

BY ANTHONY KASTROS

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# How to Inspire and Motivate Firefighters

## Educational Objectives

On completion of this course, students will

- 1) Discover why the fire service needs strong, effective leadership
- 2) Determine certain behaviors that erode public trust in firefighters
- 3) Discover where the ultimate display of poor leadership is found
- 4) Understand that next to communication, motivation is one of the greatest skills that a leader must understand

**BY ANTHONY KASTROS**

**T**ODAY'S AMERICAN FIRE SERVICE IS DYING (IN SOME cases literally) for strong, effective leadership. We have a giant gap between the challenges we face and the level of performance currently meeting those challenges.

On the average day in the average firehouse, we often see unmotivated individuals with bosses who lack the skills to inspire their crew to train and perform on a level that is commensurate with the level of pay and public trust that has been bestowed on our profession.

If you are the exception to this rule, you are in the fortunate minority. I am glad that you enjoy the feeling of knowing that you get the most out of your people and that they enjoy operating at their potential. I hope this article will help you to improve or at least continue in that vein.

Beyond the average, on the bigger scale, we have seen unprecedented increases in despicable behavior, sexual transgressions on duty, drug abuse, poor treatment of the public, and lawsuits. This behavior has tarnished our public trust. The economic decline has made the public more skeptical and more likely to scrutinize our behavior more. Our "hero" status following 9/11 has been replaced with "zero" status as the citizens continue to read about our not-so-heroic behavior.

The ultimate display of poor leadership is on the fireground. Most line-of-duty deaths are rooted in poor training or a lack of training. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the top five causes of firefighter deaths on the fireground are the following: inadequate or improper risk assessment, lack of incident command, lack of accountability, inadequate communications, and lack of standard operating procedures (SOPs)/failure to follow established SOPs. All five are derivatives of leadership and training. Our lives depend on excellent leadership.

Unfortunately, most fire departments do not have the level

of leadership training necessary to navigate today's workplace. New officers are thrown into the seat and have to figure out the job as they go. It doesn't get any easier as we move up the chain of command. New chief officers and even chiefs have little to no mentoring or in-house training to meet the challenges of their ever-increasing responsibilities. The results of such lackluster leadership efforts are more firefighter deaths, lawsuits, feeble strategic planning, negligible succession planning, poor morale, and lack of vision. The chain of command deteriorates, as do many other traditional fire service core values such as integrity, honor, duty, and service.

On a daily basis, company officers are struggling to get their crews to follow them. The seeds of apathy grow and blossom into poor fireground performance. Video games, planning of fishing trips, and overtime quests are higher on the priority list than training.

Why? We don't train on people skills and leadership issues because it's a lot less fun than breaking things. Hands-on training that involves fire or destroying property is always the most attended and invigorating training around. It feeds the beast in every firefighter.

Many of today's chiefs came from the floor. That's a good thing because they are supposed to know what it's like to be a firefighter and do the job of a firefighter (and perhaps even understand firefighter motivation). The problem is that as they ascended the chain of command, some of them remained in a task-driven mentality and had to learn bad habits from their predecessors. The good old boys taught the next generation of good old boys. Along the way, some bad habits were passed along to that next generation.

### **PRE-1990: RANK REIGNED**

In the old days (now considered pre-1990), the old traditional rank driven by the "because I said so" style of motivating firefighters was safe and effective. The need to "understand" people

was limited to your understanding that my size 12 shoes will be on your backside unless you do what I tell you to do.

Think about forcing open a door. As a firefighter, if your boot doesn't work, you get the halligan and flathead ax. If that doesn't work, you get a bigger set of irons. The "old" way of motivating firefighters worked the same way. Free from laws, lawsuits, harassment allegations, or worrying about feelings, yesterday's leader could use "forcible entry tools" to "motivate" the young boot firefighter. The officer's level of success was determined by the number of firefighters who had a butt-chewing story to tell about him.

Rank meant something in the old days. A simple look from the captain could inspire action or incontinence. Equally important was the captain's job IQ. He had that kind of clout because he knew his way around the fireground. He had been to countless fires, and his helmet saltiness was more valuable than degrees on the wall. He knew tools, equipment, forcible entry, ventilation, and the pitfalls of feelings. When he wanted your opinion, he gave it to you.

### SHIFT TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Take a look around. The world has changed. Today, leaders of any organization are required to have "emotional intelligence." According to Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence is measured by the emotional quotient (EQ). The four components of emotional intelligence include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. They sound more like the topics of the next Dr. Phil show than components of a fire service training session.

Emotional Intelligence is the main ingredient of today's top CEOs and captains of industry in the private sector. Without it, leaders do not have the "people" skills to create motivated teams, communicate plans, or navigate personnel issues. EQ is now determined to be a greater indicator of a person's ability to effectively rise up the chain of command than IQ. The fire service is not immune to this.

Yesterday's leaders needed IQ to be effective with people. Today's leaders need EQ. Rank, fireground experience, and force are not enough. Understanding and communicating with people and their emotions are now the tools of the effective and inspiring leader.

Leadership training is often relegated to buying books and going to occasional conferences or daylong classes. Real-world, high-fidelity training that involves mock counseling sessions and intense job situations is extremely rare. Fortunately, some excellent training opportunities are available at FDIC 2013.

At all levels, today's officers are dealing with greater risk, litigation, fiscal scrutiny, information speed, public expectations, transparency, laws, and regulations.

### FIREFIGHTER TRANSFORMATION

And let's not forget the firefighters! They have changed, too. In the old days, Firefighter Mongo would sit in a recliner or work out in a gym or eat meat. When the bell would go off, Mongo would get on the truck, go to the fire, and break stuff. After the fire, Mongo would come back and go back to the

recliner or gym or resume eating meat.

Mongo is not extinct, but he's definitely becoming an endangered species. We love him because he doesn't ask questions, except for the occasional, "Can I break this, too?" He does his job, and he's good at it. He has only one feeling, and if you can find it, you can't hurt it.

Mongo is slowly being replaced by Firefighter Milhouse. Milhouse has lots of questions, and he tends to annoy the older bosses. He asks "why" a lot. He spends a lot of time on the computer, his I-Pad, I-Phone, My Space, and Facebook. One of his "why" questions made Mongo upset. We don't like it when Mongo gets upset.

He asked, "Why do we do it that way?" Mongo got upset because he couldn't understand why Milhouse would ask such a ridiculous question. Mongo told the captain, the captain got upset, and Milhouse stopped asking questions.

Go to any fire service conference, leadership workshop, or officer training, and one of the most common questions asked is, "How do I get my firefighters/fire department/boss to ...?" That question will certainly be asked a lot at this year's FDIC 2013.

Simply put, we want to know how to get people to do what we want them to do. Whether it's a member of your crew, your entire crew, your battalion, division, shift, or entire department, today's fire service leaders must know how to inspire action. Aside from communication, motivation is the most important skill that a leader must master.

If we are unable to inspire the proper behavior, small seeds of poor behavior will grow into large weeds that uproot the core values of the fire service and displace the public trust that is fundamental to our job.

On a good day, it stays out of the paper and is just a frustrating issue in your station. On a bad day, marriages are ruined, and innocent firefighters are flipped off by the public who just read the latest newspaper heading about sexual misconduct on duty. On the worst day, firefighters and members of the public may die from a lack of proper inspiration to train.

Many components of firefighter motivation and inspiration are explored in this article. Most importantly, we will look at real-world fire service techniques for inspiring action at all levels of the fire department. All the techniques and principles are real and proven. We will discuss actual case studies to assist with the "what it looks like" piece of the puzzle.

Motivating (inspiring) firefighters is critical. A fire department will become dysfunctional or even destructive without the proper inspiration. Whether trying to get someone to learn how to start a saw or inspire an entire department to move in a new direction, today's fire service leaders must master motivation (inspiration).

### THE SOURCE OF MOTIVATION

Our first priority is to understand a fundamental tenant of motivation: It comes from *within* the individual because motivation is intrinsic. Like a tactical *frequency* on the fireground, each person operates on his own *frequency* for life. This frequency is a conglomerate of the person's values, upbringing,

## ● MOTIVATION

experiences, perspectives, insecurities, morals, spiritual beliefs, fiscal demands, season of life, personality, ego, strengths, weaknesses, mood, hunger level, the number of times the fire department has angered him, and so on.

*Currency* is another analogy for internal motives. Like money, a person places value on certain things and no value on other things. If you tried to pay for dinner at a restaurant in New York with some pesos, you would get a funny look from the waiter.

When you try to motivate a firefighter with motives that are not of value to that firefighter, you will get the same funny look. On a good day, you'll just get a rolling of the eyes or shrugged shoulders from your crew. On a bad day, you may get an embittered, disenfranchised firefighter who wished his boss understood him and wasn't so clueless.

An excellent book that illustrates this principle for marriages and personal relationships is "The Five Love Languages" by Dr. Gary Chapman (Moody Publishers, Oct. 28, 1991). It is a must-read if you want a successful relationship, and it can also give you insight as a leader.

### MOTIVATION VS. INSPIRATION

More accurately, the term "inspiration" rather than "motivation" should be used when describing our attempt to drive someone else's behavior. Again, motivation comes from within the individual. Without understanding this fundamental principle, we will fall into the common pitfall of attempting to motivate others by our own motives. Big mistake!

Unlike motivation, inspiration comes from outside the individual. The word "inspire" is broken down into "in" and "spire" or spirit. We do not inspire ourselves; we motivate ourselves. When we get inspired, it comes from outside ourselves. We are inspired by a view, a speaker, a song, a performance, or a leader. We were inspired because something outside of us triggered something inside of us. That something inside is our internal motivation. Our job as leaders is to know the internal motivations of our troops to inspire them to act.

As leaders, we must know our firefighters. We must know what motivates them and use those things to inspire them to act. We don't give motivation; we find motivation. We use the knowledge of that motivation inside individuals to inspire them.

*Example:* If an incident commander (IC) were on the scene of a fire and on a different tactical channel than the companies on the scene, those companies would not act according to his orders. The IC would not be tuned in to communicate with his companies on their frequency. The result would be either inaction or action different from what the IC desires.

The same thing happens daily when bosses are not tuned into their firefighters. We speak on our own frequency because that's what we are used to. Like a foreign language, that frequency will not foster the desired behavior and often will create frustration and resentment between the boss and the troops.

In some of today's entitled, softer, gentler, inquisitive firefighters, rank is usually not enough of a currency. They don't care enough to do something because you said so. Even if

that works for the short term, it will not affect the long-term internal frequency and motivation of the individual. This is the reason firefighters act differently when the captain or chief is around. It's a temporary, rank-driven behavior.

Temporary, rank-driven behavior will not ensure that the troops are doing the right thing "when no one is looking" or when the boss isn't around. We cannot be everywhere at once and must rely on internally stimulated motives to drive long-term behavior and prevent small issues from becoming larger ones.

This cycle of missed frequencies, resentment, and frustration happens on a daily basis in the fire service. Our bosses haven't taken the time to understand us; they try to inflict us with their motives, and we resent them for it. The boss thinks that he is valuing us, empowering us, or motivating us. Instead, he may be missing our language and creating resentment on our part, frustration on his part, and the relationship becomes strained.

### TUNING INTO YOUR FIREFIGHTERS' FREQUENCIES

Tuning into your firefighters' frequencies is an important component of understanding their motivation. As we discussed previously, each individual has a frequency that resonates his internal motivation. As leaders, we must tune into that frequency to find members' motivation and effectively inspire action.

So, how do we tune in and find that frequency to inspire action? First, observe. Watch and listen to your troops. Don't just look at them as a group. Study each one individually. Look at what perks him up, his friends, his off-duty activities, and his way of communicating. Most bosses don't take this much time to study their troops. Here's a list of questions to ask yourself when observing or thinking about an individual:

- **Does the person want to promote?** This is a common source of motivation in many of our troops. The more valuable question is, "Why does he want to promote?" If it's for monetary gain, that reveals many other factors in his life. He may have a lot of kids at home or a hefty alimony payment, he may be trying to build a home, or he may have a side business, for example.

Promoting may just be a symptom of the need for cash, which is a symptom of yet other issues. Your job is to dig down deep to the most root causal factors, which will lead you to the most effective motivation inside.

Perhaps he wants to promote to exert authority or because he has something to prove to himself or the department. Some state that they want to promote because they are frustrated with the boss. Others promote because they truly believe that they would do a good job and could better serve the department as an officer.

- **What are the person's insecurities?** Are they related to being short, fat, or wimpy; failure; others' opinions; or need for acceptance? Everyone has insecurities, and they are extremely significant to internal motivation.

How do his insecurities manifest themselves (talks a lot, jokes, boasts, puts others down, gets angry)? Where is the

source of the insecurity (childhood bully, critical parents, bad boss, bad fire department experience, passed over for promotion)?

Insecurities are very tricky because most firefighters cloak their issues. You almost have to analyze the opposite of a behavior. For example, a buffed-out firefighter who wears tight t-shirts and works out a lot may be compensating for a weak self-image. Here, you may need to bolster his confidence to inspire him, even though he appears to have plenty in reserve by seeming arrogant.

You would be surprised at how easily a big, strapping hulk of a firefighter may open up to you. Seemingly unapproachable firefighters are often masking hurts from their past. The key is to build trust first and ask the right questions at the right time.

Another example is a boisterous engineer who jumps on young firefighters who mess up. He may be compensating for a failed promotional exam and feels the young bucks are a threat. If you simply address his behavior by telling him to stop jumping down their throats, it will be short-lived. If, however, you help him promote and ask some of the younger firefighters to help him with studying, then you are on track to seeing some major changes.

Here, you have an even greater opportunity to have the engineer and firefighters help each other reach mutual goals. They can help him study the books, and he can help them with mentoring and the finer points of street-smart firefighting. He will be appeased that the younger kids are “appropriately” serving him, and the younger kids will be happy to get him off their back. Ultimately, these motives will give way to sincere relationships and mutual respect.

• **What are the firefighter’s goals (promotion, classes, skills, fitness, station assignment)?** Even if some of these motives may be for the short term, they are still valuable. Again, dig deeper, and connect these to more root causes.

• **What is the firefighter good at?** This has multiple benefits. First, you are able to tap into something that makes him feel good. Everyone likes to do things they are good at. It strokes the ego and says, “See, I am the go-to person for this skill.” Next, you are able to ascertain the right person for the right job at the right time. You are poised to put your people in a position to succeed. Nothing makes a firefighter feel better than hearing someone say, “Hey Bob, you are better at this than any of us; can you fix it?”

In addition, learning what someone is good at gives you a window into their world. Many derivatives can be found from knowing someone’s passion.

• **Whom does the firefighter admire, and why?** Birds of a feather do indeed flock together. Firefighters run in packs, and you can learn a lot about them by looking at their tribe. In addition, they may speak with respect and admiration toward certain individuals or officers or their traits. This lends more insight into their values and motivation.

• **What are the firefighter’s off-duty activities, hobbies, and interests?** Like knowing about one’s passions, skills, and friends, knowing about extracurricular activities can continue to open other windows into the person’s motivations.

• **Does the firefighter have children?** Parents have a perspective on life that only comes from having a child. The level of love, care, fear, frustration, and joy that comes from being a parent can forge new currency in one’s life and open up new frequencies from which to connect. In addition, the stage of life of our children brings new challenges and perspectives.

• **Has the firefighter been through a divorce?** Divorce leaves scars for life. It can also tarnish one’s ability to trust all people, not just the other gender. Feelings of failure, abandonment, anger, and embarrassment can again change the currency and frequencies in an individual.

## CASE STUDY

I was the captain at a firehouse that averaged about 17 runs a day. In addition to the three-person engine, we had two probies in the house on the medic (ambulance). The medic crew members were also firefighters, but they spent the majority of their time treating and transporting sick and injured customers.

Whenever we could, we tried to give the probies on the medic some good fire training and experience. Three of us were on the engine: the engineer, the firefighter, and I. I dubbed the engine firefighter “Senior Man.” Senior Man was just that. He had more seniority than any of us, and he was extremely experienced. He didn’t seem to have any aspiration to promote.

To run a busy house with two probies, I had to have Senior Man engaged. He needed to feel empowered and valued rather than play second fiddle to the two high-maintenance probies who had training and evaluations on a daily basis.

Senior Man wore that name as a badge of honor. Once, when one of the probies couldn’t start the circular saw, I simply looked over at the smirking, experienced jake and said, “Senior Man, show the probie how to start the saw.” One or two pulls later, the saw was popping and purring like a kitten trying to cough up a fur ball. Senior Man just chuckled. He then went through the delicate intricacies of fondling the tool into a gentle state of submission prior to starting. The probie learned a lot, and Senior Man felt good about himself.

Senior Man loved to tinker with things. He was very mechanically inclined. Although an extremely talented firefighter, Senior Man was often jabbed at by others in the department because of his pedigree. He wasn’t the most well spoken, articulate, or emotionally intelligent guy, but he was a great firefighter. He was like our old friend Mongo. This information would be helpful in tuning in to his frequency and inspiring some action.

One morning, I was in the kitchen and noticed a large puddle of water coming out from under the toe kick next to the dishwasher. I probably could have taken the time to fix it myself, having installed my own dishwasher at home. I needed the help because I had several reports to do, probie paperwork pending, and some drills for which to prepare. I looked over at Senior Man drinking his coffee. I realized that this was an opportunity for him to shine as well as for me to get more time to take care of other business.

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“Hey, Senior Man, could you please check the dishwasher? It’s leaking, and you are way better at this stuff than I.” Senior Man got up and checked it out. I walked away to tend to the other business of the day.

A little while later, he burst in my office and stated that he could fix the dishwasher and that anyone who had the slightest bit of mechanical aptitude could fix it, too. I asked, “Where do we need to go to get the parts?” He responded, “Home Depot would work.”

I asked, “Is there anything else you think we need to get there?” Senior Man proceeded to go around the firehouse and make a shopping list of stuff we needed to fix all the pesky leaks, creaks, and drips in the firehouse. We went to Home Depot. At the entrance, Senior Man body-checked me for the shopping cart and proceeded to go up and down the aisles. We wound up at the register with several hundred dollars worth of miscellaneous nuts, bolts, fittings, screws, and tools he felt were needed to do the job. We were way over our \$100 limit.

I said, “Well, Senior Man, if you think we need it, then we need it. I will call the battalion chief (BC) and get us more money.” We got back to the station; Senior Man body-checked me again, got the bags of stuff, and proceeded to work four hours straight, through lunch, and fix 793 things in the station that day.

He spent the next several shifts giving us a tour of the items he repaired, along with some side lessons on plumbing, electrical, and general framing standards. It was beautiful.

If I had just asked him to fix the dishwasher, he would have, but he may have felt that I thought it was beneath me, and he certainly would not have been as productive or empowered and would not have felt as good about himself. That was worth being told I was a wet-behind-the-ears youngster of a captain who had no mechanical aptitude. Sometimes, we need to throw ourselves under the bus if it makes our troops look good.

Looking back, I used his enjoyment and skill at tinkering to put him in a position to succeed—not just with less significant issues like the dishwasher but also with opportunities for him to get respect in the eyes of the new firefighters. When he showed the probies how to start the saw, he became a mentor to them. It made him feel good about himself and caused him to invest in them. Opportunities like this are always there to help your troops step up and feel empowered and be positioned to succeed.

Knowing that Senior Man was often jabbed at (as described above), I saw his insecurity in this area as an opportunity to place him into a position of superiority. I told him that he knew more than I and that I needed his help. This was a contrast to what he sometimes heard from others. In addition, having a younger captain may have caused further insecurity and resentment, but by calling him “Senior Man,” I immediately acknowledged his time on the job. This removed any need to feel adversarial or prove himself superior by trying to control the crew or making derogatory comments about his younger boss.

Over time, we had established mutual respect. With this

foundation, we had a great time in our assignment together. We helped each other be successful. That’s the difference between motivation and manipulation. Manipulation is completely self-serving. Motivation (inspiration) is finding that frequency within individuals to help them be more productive and successful and complete the mission of the team. Sometimes, we just have to help people get out of their own way to bring out the best in them.

### SYMPTOM VS. PROBLEM

The next essential component of inspiring your firefighters is to understand the difference between a symptom and a problem. There is a reason for every behavior a person exhibits. A cause and effect happens constantly throughout the day in every individual’s life. The cause is the internal motivation. The effect is the behavior.

Defining a problem is the first key to solving it. Firefighters are typically rushed. We are often in a hurry by trade; that’s our job. We get to fires quickly and like to see instant results. Here is another example where the task/breaking stuff part of our job we love so much does us no favors when dealing with solving people problems.

In our haste, we often rush to a solution before clearly and accurately defining the problem. We often mistake symptoms for the problem. What we see on the surface should not always be taken at face value.

A perfect example is a medical call. You are on the scene where a patient is complaining of chest pain. Chest pain is the symptom, not the problem. There are many reasons for chest pain besides a myocardial infarction (MI). Other causes could be indigestion, esophageal spasm, or trauma.

If we rush to a conclusion or focus only on the symptoms, we may easily misdiagnose the patient. This could lead to improper treatment. Think of a headache. The headache is the symptom caused by anything from a hangover to a brain tumor. If it’s a brain tumor, then taking aspirin will not cure the problem; it will only temporarily (if at all) treat the pain, or symptom.

When attempting to inspire or stop behavior, we must look at the behavior as a symptom. The internal motivation is the driving force to initiate, alter, or stop the behavior. Again, we must accurately define this driving force if we are to use it to inspire change.

Use the external behavior to help you diagnose what’s going on inside. This may sound like cheap firehouse pop psychology, but when you get the hang of it, it becomes very powerful.

The external behaviors (symptoms) are only part of the puzzle. Think again of the patient with the chest pain. There’s more than the chest pain to help you diagnose the problem. Other critical factors include the patient’s medical history, medications, and what he was doing when the pain came. Still other factors include the severity, description, and radiation of the pain and so on.

Unfortunately, patients rarely diagnose themselves. You would almost never walk into a medical call to find a 72-year-old female who states, “Hello, my name is Gertrude. I would

rate my chest pain at a 7 on a 1-to-10 scale. It's sharp and is radiating down my left arm. By the way, I have taken two nitros with no relief and was just watching TV during onset. I would say we should go with the myocardial infarction protocol."

The patient, unless he is a doctor, does not have enough knowledge to make that assessment—in other words, he does not have adequate self-awareness. As mentioned earlier, self-awareness is one of four critical components of emotional intelligence and a rare commodity among firefighters.

To find more useful information, you would have to look at the initial dispatch information. When you got on scene, you would process additional information like whether the house smelled like she was a smoker, if it was a stressful environment, if family was present. As you approached Gertrude, you would look at her skin signs, her feet for pedal edema, and if any medications were next to her. Then, you would begin asking questions, place her on the heart monitor, take her vital signs, and so on. You would do a patient assessment.

The same principles apply to firefighters. We must assess them. When assessing a firefighter to determine internal motivation, he will not likely say, "Your being promoted at a faster rate than I arouses my insecurity, and I am threatened by that. Therefore, I am taking it out on you by being a pain in your @\$%& because I do not have a more positive way to deal with my internal feelings. Sorry. I suggest attempting to help me promote so I no longer see you as a threat but an ally."

## **FIREFIGHTER SYMPTOMS AND UNDERLYING PROBLEMS**

Let's look at some real-world firefighter bad behaviors (symptoms) and see what the actual motives (problems) were that drove those behaviors. Again, these are actual behaviors from actual firefighter case studies:

*Symptom:* Firefighters leave the fuel tank at just over the policy minimum for the oncoming firefighter, requiring him to always fill the tank.

*Problem:* Firefighters on A shift did not like this firefighter on B shift because of his personality quirks and regular criticism of the A shifters not doing their job.

*Solution:* Spoke to the firefighter about being less critical. Spoke to the captain of the A shift firefighters who were not filling the fuel. Created opportunities for them to develop mutual respect for each other.

*Symptom:* The crew rebels against the newly assigned captain of a two-company house. Nothing he did was right. Issues with drills, calls, and daily tension.

*Problem:* The captain came in like a bull in a china shop with a crew that was already established. He changed the chemistry too much without attempting to blend in. The crew resented him for it.

*Solution:* The captain called for a sit-down meeting and humbly asked what was wrong. He offered to leave if that was the the only solution. He promised to be open-minded and not defensive. The crew opened up and vented. The captain acknowledged the crew's input and acted on it without getting defensive.

*Symptom:* A probationary firefighter was struggling with simple skills. The captain was growing frustrated with the firefighter's inability to "get it." The firefighter seemed to be good only at cleaning the station.

*Problem:* The probationary firefighter was 40 years old and just left a 20-plus-year career in another field, including more than a decade in management. He felt pressure to succeed since he convinced his wife and kids of the career change to the fire service. He was good at cleaning because it was the only task associated with his former profession.

*Solution:* The captain and probationary firefighter were both taught about the firefighter's life cycle and that the 40-year-old probie was only a few months old in firefighter years. The captain needed to look at the probie in a different light. This relieved tension on both sides, and the probie flourished.

*Symptom:* A senior firefighter was constantly derogatory about others with less experience, including his captain. He was always telling war stories and "been there, done that" tales to puff out his chest.

*Problem:* The firefighter felt that he should have been a captain from the last test and resented the younger captain and the younger firefighters with whom he was competing.

*Solution:* The captain met with him and told him he was a great informal leader but he was losing street credit because of his attitude. He was advised to stop taking his frustrations out on all the younger troops and to be the mentor he could be. He was told to use his powers for good and not evil. He responded very well, retested, and promoted.

## **BAGGAGE**

Baggage can cause insecurity. It is the accumulation of disappointments, negative experiences, sentinel events, mental/emotional trauma, and people who have hurt us. Baggage weighs us down and can create pain, anger, and resentment and feed the insecurities that lay dormant within us.

Sometimes we call it a "chip on the shoulder." Chances are you know someone at the firehouse who has a chip on the shoulder. Like baggage, it's carried around like a badge of contempt.

This, too, can be leveraged and used to trigger motivation, thus inspiring positive performance. Leveraging insecurity or baggage is not manipulation when the intent is to bring about a positive change meant to make the workplace and the employee's behavior positive, productive, and in line with the mission.

Baggage can come from the personal and professional areas of life. Professionally, baggage and insecurity can come from failed promotional attempts, administration, the union, the fire chief, an individual, or a call.

Personally, baggage can come from divorce, problems with children, substance abuse, financial distress, health, childhood emotional trauma, bad parents, being bullied, and a host of other issues.

The better you know your people, the better you will know their insecurities and baggage. Take every opportunity to spend time with your crews. Dinners, drills, meetings, and many other off-duty activities will increase your awareness of your folks. Take the time to take the time.

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### TILLING THE SOIL: YOUR PART

Before we can plant the seeds of inspiration, we must till the soil of our environment. Think of your sphere of influence as a field. You hope the seeds of communication and inspiration will yield a bountiful harvest of positive, productive, and invigorated firefighters who work as a team to get the job done well.

You must set yourself and your troops up for success. Like planting seeds, you must first till the soil. You wouldn't just throw seeds down on hard soil; they would blow away. So, you must prepare the environment for the seeds of inspiration to take root.

First, be humble. All people, especially firefighters, are repelled by arrogance. Be a servant-leader. Put your troops first. This is the main theme of any modern leadership text. The old "because I said so" mentality will only alienate in this day and age.

Listen twice as much as you speak. We have two ears and only one mouth for a reason. In fact, we have two eyes for the same reason. Watch and listen. You may learn something. It's the only way to learn about your troops.

Also, be open to feedback. Conduct 360° evaluations on an annual basis so your people can evaluate you. They are experts at judging you as a boss, so have them do an evaluation. It shows that you are humble and open to feedback and improvement. It also shows that you value their opinion. If you value theirs, they will value yours.

Next, admit when you are wrong or don't know something. Be sure to find the answer, but don't try to fake it. You will be more credible in the long run.

The second way to till the soil is to put your people first. If you passionately care for your troops, they will do anything for you. Get dirty, clean the toilets, roll the hose, be the last to eat and the first to do dishes.

One night, an engine company from my battalion was moved up to another battalion because of a large fire. The members were tired and hungry. It was way past dinnertime, and they were still out. I called the captain. They were moved up to another station. I asked him what I could do to get them fed. He said that they had steaks in the refrigerator of their station that they planned to grill. I told him that I would grill their steaks and have their dinner ready when they got back to the station.

I drove to their station. When they arrived at the station 90 minutes later, a steaming hot steak dinner was waiting with all the trimmings. I said, "Enjoy, men!" and left.

I did not do that to hold something over their heads. I did it because I cared about them. Genuine concern cannot be faked. As U.S. Marine Colonel Bryan P. McCoy said in his book *The Passion of Command: the Moral Imperative of Leadership* (2006): "Warning: Without genuine concern, this is all worthless."

If your troops have kids, know how many. If your troops have personal stuff going on, you should know because they would want you to know. It makes firefighters feel good to know their boss cares. You shouldn't have to ask. They should either trust you enough to come to you unsolicited, or you

should know them well enough to know when they are not "themselves."

One of my friends recently finished on top of a promotional list. Although he was on top, there was doubt as to his getting promoted because of budget cuts and demotions. I called to both congratulate him and tell him to keep his chin up. He told me that his BC didn't call about either and that he thought the BC was a %\$&!?! I later asked his BC if he had a chance to call his firefighter who did so well and congratulate him. He said, "No, but I've been meaning to." I told him that it might be a nice gesture. He finally did, but it was too little too late.

Stay tuned in to your troops' lives. The old adage is true: They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Third, walk the walk. You must lead by example. Never ask your troops to do anything that you wouldn't do yourself. The only thing as bad as arrogance is hypocrisy. We have all been at the firehouse kitchen table when the topic of captain or chief hypocrite comes up. We all remember. Don't allow yourself to be hypocritical in the eyes of your troops. If you insist that they wear safety gear, you must wear your safety gear. If you insist on their training hard, you must train hard with them.

Modeling the behavior you want is more than an appearance; it's an attitude. As Colonel BP McCoy writes, "You must win the hearts and minds of the men."

They must know that you know what you are doing and care about them while you do it. Then, they will fall on a pike pole for you.

When I was assigned to my battalion, I spent the first 30 days just watching and listening. I visited the crews and listened to their firehouse banter, and it gave me valuable insight into each individual and the respective crew dynamics. I learned their motivations, pet peeves, and values.

At the time I was first promoted, I had the reputation as a gung ho zealot who loved to train. (Remember the scenario above with the bull in a china shop captain? I was that captain.) Having learned my lesson from the two company houses I had alienated earlier in my career, I did not march in and rattle off my expectations with my eyes rolled back in my head.

Since my battalion members' average age was a lot older than mine, they were a bit hesitant to accept their new kid-BC. I was literally the youngest out of the 37 in our battalion. One of the truck firefighters asked, "What do you think of old guys?"

I told him that my dad was 52 when I was born because I was an "accident" and that my dad was a World War II Army Ranger and that my brothers were 15 and 18 years older and I loved "older guys" and could relate. In fact, I felt more comfortable around them. He just smiled and said, "Okay."

As my captains and I got to know each other, I would joke that they needed electric wheelchairs attached to their engines to get around the fire. They would say that my BC buggy needed training wheels. It was all in good fun.

At first, they dreaded that I would come in and drill their



brains out. I didn't. I simply watched, listened, and respectfully tried to learn their group dynamic. After about 30 days, they began to ask when I would have a meeting to share my expectations. They went from dreading a meeting about expectations to asking for one.

The soil was fresh to plant seeds of change and new ideas. We began training with simulation software. Many had never done so before. We trained on tactics, we had realistic live fire drills, and I showed them the utmost respect. If I had started day one with simulation training and expectations, the seeds of change would have been planted on rock and blown away with the first breeze of doubt.

Soon, we had a go-cart race. Almost the entire battalion came! Even the "old" guys showed up. It was a blast. The next shift, everyone was talking about the race. Morale soared. After that, we did a wine trip on a bus, a BBQ, and a boat cruise. The soil must be constantly monitored and maintained to provide new seeds an opportunity to germinate.

Along the way, weeds may crop up. The first place to look for weeds is in the mirror. Attitude reflects leadership. When you have conflict, look at yourself first. This honest self-evaluation will be invaluable when you mess up and need to ask for forgiveness. It must be genuine.

Finally, be decisive. One weakness of modern officers is a timid approach to making decisions. We must not overanalyze in this job. Information gathering is good, but not to the point of paralysis through analysis. Your troops must know that you mean what you say, have high expectations, and will hold them accountable to those expectations.

Don't be a pushover who is afraid to make decisions because you won't make everyone happy. You will never make everyone happy. Get over it. Gather input, make a decision, implement, and evaluate. Your troops will respond to your confident and decisive action.

The bottom line is that you must build relationships with your troops. Trust is not built overnight but over time. You cannot give an order for your troops to trust you just as you cannot demand respect. Both must be earned through sincere caring, legitimate knowledge of your job, setting the right example by walking the walk, and keeping your word. If you have these vital ingredients, you will be well on your way to inspiring your team.

### ATTITUDE REFLECTS LEADERSHIP

In the movie "Remember the Titans," there is tension between the black and white high school football players that now find themselves on the same team in the early 1970s American Southland.

At one point, the two team leaders, a black kid and a white kid, face off. The white kid ridicules his counterpart for lagging during practice, wasting his talent, and having a bad attitude. "I am the captain!" he exclaimed.

The black player tells his accuser how he is equally guilty of sheltering the white kids and being selfish. He says, "You want me to wear myself out for the team? What team? No, I'm gonna look out for myself, and I'm gonna get mine."

To this, the self-righteous white captain says, "See man,

that's the worst attitude I ever heard."

The black captain's next response cuts to the bone: "Attitude reflects leadership, Captain."

We often forget that the attitude of our troops is a reflection of their leader's attitude. If we are insecure and overcompensate, they will overcompensate. If we are critical, they will be critical. If we are lazy and apathetic, they will be lazy and apathetic. The first place to look for an attitude problem with one of your firefighters is in the mirror. You must honestly ask yourself if your attitude, actions, inactions, or any other behaviors or words have caused their behavior. You would be surprised.

Several years ago, we had just wrapped up a three-alarm fire the shift before in over 100° heat. We had two duplexes going in the middle of a hot summer day. My truck crew had worked their tails off. The captain was a big, very fit guy. He was in top physical condition and prided himself (rightly so) on being in great shape and hard working. He was never the slightest bit arrogant, but he definitely had fitness as a priority, and most of us envied his conditioning.

That day, the whole crew was wiped out after fighting a significant fire in full turnouts, on air, on the roof and elsewhere in 100°F temperature. Meanwhile, I was sipping mint juleps in the comfort of my air-conditioned BC buggy.

Back at the station, I made a comment in jest that the big captain was a fragile high-performance Ferrari and looked good but folded under real pressure. What was meant to be an innocent jab was the beginning of a bad story.

The next shift, we had a gas odor in a house. I noticed that the truck crew took too long in finding the gas detector on their rig. The morning before we left on our four-day work break, I called the captain in my office and criticized his crew's not knowing where the gas monitor was and said that they were playing too many video games during the day.

The next shift, four days later, the captain was visibly upset. He had a "bad attitude." He was angry and terse, and the hostility was obviously aimed in my general direction. I called him into my office.

I asked him what was wrong and if there was something that I had done. He didn't hesitate. "Yes. I work my \$&%! off around here and take pride in my physical conditioning. You made that stupid comment, which is really not that big a deal, but what really torqued me was that you ridiculed my crew right before a four-day break when we had busted our butts on a hot fire in the middle of a scorching hot day. That is bull\_\_!"

He went on to cite that they had all their drills complete, had not taken lunch at the normal time, and were still recuperating from the fire the shift before. I hadn't asked about or even taken any of those factors into consideration. I just ridiculed him and his crew from the comfort of my air-conditioned high horse.

He was right. I immediately apologized. Fortunately, he has the kind of character that is forgiving. He doesn't hold grudges and accepted my sincere apology.

### REINFORCING GOOD BEHAVIOR

Once the behavior we want happens, we *must* reinforce it. Firefighters generally want to make their boss happy. They

## ● MOTIVATION

may not always act like it, but they do. When you see any positive behavior, no matter how incremental, it is important to give some type of reinforcement. The key is to not overdo it and dampen your own credibility in doing so.

You don't have to whip out a certificate of appreciation to every engineer who just checks the fuel in the morning, but you should take the time to catch people doing things right. All too often, we only celebrate the mess-ups in this job. It seems to be another one of our cute little traditions. We love to shoot people down for messing up. The problem is that in this job, we all mess up at some point. If we expect to have any chance at building future leaders, some positive reinforcement has to be used.

The question you must ask yourself is, do you take notice, acknowledge it, and reinforce positive behavior? Even the little things deserve a comment from the boss. A well-run fire, a quick knockdown, and just keeping the rig sharp looking deserve the occasional "great job" from the boss.

So, how do you not overdo it? Well, first, you have to be sincere. If you acknowledge and reward poor behavior, then it tarnishes the effect of acknowledging positive behavior. Do not accept less than the standard you have set for your crew or your battalion. You will be surprised at how much your troops will want to make you proud—that is, once you have earned their respect and trust.

You must start out on the right foot. Be patient and humble, and take the time to earn their trust and respect. Win their hearts and minds; then set the high standard for your outfit. As you reinforce good behavior, they will know the standard and go to extremes to meet it. You will never have to push them onto the sword; they will fall on it.

Once you win their hearts and minds, you must keep their hearts and minds. This is not always easy. You may mess up, lose your cool, or even hurt their feelings. As long as you own up to your mistakes and humbly earn back their hearts and minds, they will lend them back. It takes a lot of maintenance, but the rewards of a loyal team of firefighters (whether a crew, a battalion, or the whole department), are a great blessing. I once had an extremely respected captain tell me, "There is

nothing we wouldn't do for you." I was taken aback and filled with joy. Those rare verbal acknowledgments from tough-as-nails jakes are rare and priceless.

•••

Next to communication, motivation is one of the greatest skills that a leader must understand. Firefighters need to be inspired into action by their leaders. As leaders, officers must continually master the art of inspiring their troops. Internal motivation is determined by each individual. The job of the boss is to know the troops well enough to inspire the best in them. Along the way, the boss must have a sober self-awareness and trust with the troops based on mutual respect and sincere caring.

The key is to know the individuals you are leading. This knowledge takes time and effort, but it is well worth the investment and pays enormous dividends for all the stakeholders: the individual, the boss, the department, and the public we serve! ●

**Editor's note:** The author recognizes the assistance of the late Kimberly Allyn with this article.

● **ANTHONY KASTROS** is a 26-year veteran of the fire service and a battalion chief with the Sacramento (CA) Metropolitan Fire District, where he is assigned to the line and manages the Metro Fire Command Training Center. He is author of the DVD series *Mastering Fireground Command—Calming the Chaos!* and the book/video series *Mastering the Fire Service Assessment Center*, both from Fire Engineering. He hosts The Command Show on Fire Engineering Radio. Kastros spent four years on a Type 1 Incident Management Team and 10 years on the Sacramento Urban Search & Rescue FEMA Task Force, which responded to New York on 9/11. He teaches leadership, command, strategic planning, and officer development for departments throughout America. He has a B.S. degree in business and human resource management and an A.S. degree in fire technology. He is a California state certified fire officer. He is a keynote speaker for the FDIC 2013 Opening Ceremony.

## Notes

# How to Inspire and Motivate Firefighters

### COURSE EXAMINATION INFORMATION

To receive credit and your certificate of completion for participation in this educational activity, you must complete the program post examination and receive a score of 70% or better. You have the following options for completion.

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Use this page to review the questions and mark your answers. Return to [www.FireEngineeringUniversity.com](http://www.FireEngineeringUniversity.com) and sign in. If you have not previously purchased the program, select it from the "Online Courses" listing and complete the online purchase process. Once purchased, the program will be added to your **User History** page where a **Take Exam** link will be provided. Click on the "Take Exam" link, complete all the program questions, and submit your answers. An immediate grade report will be provided; on receiving a passing grade, your "Certificate of Completion" will be provided immediately for viewing and/or printing. Certificates may be viewed and/or printed anytime in the future by returning to the site and signing in.

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### COURSE EXAMINATION

- 1) Why is the American fire service 'dying' for strong, effective leadership?
  - a. Budget cuts
  - b. Laissez-faire officers
  - c. Gap between challenges faced and level of performance meeting those challenges
  - d. Poor incident command training
- 2) Which of the following is a typical behavior that can tarnish the public's trust in firefighters?
  - a. Despicable behavior
  - b. Sexual transgressions on duty
  - c. Drug abuse
  - d. All of the above
- 3) Where is the ultimate display of poor leadership found?
  - a. Fireground
  - b. Firehouse
  - c. City Hall
  - d. Fire Administration
- 4) Most line of duty deaths may be perceived as being rooted in poor training or lack of training
  - a. True
  - b. False
- 5) The result of not training new chief officers can result in which of the following?
  - a. Firefighter deaths
  - b. Lawsuits
  - c. Feeble strategic planning
  - d. All of the above
- 6) Today, leaders of any organization are required to have what?
  - a. Command presence
  - b. Administrative training
  - c. College education
  - d. Emotional Intelligence
- 7) Emotional Intelligence includes which one of the following components?
  - a. Self-awareness
  - b. Self-management
  - c. Social awareness
  - d. All of the above
- 8) Without Emotional Intelligence, leaders do not have the "people" skills to create motivated teams, communicate plans, or navigate personnel issues.
  - a. True
  - b. False
- 9) Aside from communication, what is the most important skill a leader must master?
  - a. Teaching
  - b. Empathy
  - c. Motivation
  - d. None of the above
- 10) A fire department will become dysfunctional, or even destructive without proper inspiration.
  - a. True
  - b. False
- 11) Each person operates on his own frequency. This frequency is a conglomeration of which one of the following?
  - a. Values
  - b. Upbringing
  - c. Experiences
  - d. All of the above
- 12) We are inspired because of something \_\_\_\_\_ of us that triggered something \_\_\_\_\_ of us.
  - a. Outside/inside
  - b. Inside/outside
  - c. Inside/within
  - d. None of the above



# How to Inspire and Motivate Firefighters

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If you wish to purchase and complete this activity traditionally (mail or fax) rather than Online, you must provide the information requested below. Please be sure to select your answers carefully and complete the evaluation information. To receive credit, you must receive a score of 70% or better.

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Please check the correct box for each question below.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D  | 11. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D  | 12. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D  | 13. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D |
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| 9. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D  | 19. <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D |
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Please evaluate this course by responding to the following statements, using a scale of Excellent = 5 to Poor = 1.

- |  |       |     |   |    |   |
|--|-------|-----|---|----|---|
| 1. To what extent were the course objectives accomplished overall?                           | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 2. Please rate your personal mastery of the course objectives.                               | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 3. How would you rate the objectives and educational methods?                                | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 4. How do you rate the author's grasp of the topic?  | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 5. Please rate the instructor's effectiveness.   | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 6. Was the overall administration of the course effective?                                   | 5     | 4   | 3 | 2  | 1 |
| 7. Do you feel that the references were adequate?  |       | Yes |   | No |   |
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