

SHARP

Be Sharp

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Over the past several years, I've heard a lot of people talk about mission statements and the need for them. I've even heard others talk about "personal" mission statements. I must admit that it took a long time for me to come around to the "personal" mission statement idea, mostly because I had it backwards. I thought I needed to create a mission statement, then live by it. I then realized what I really needed was to create a mission statement that fit me, the way I live or want to live.

I was always mystified by Steven Covey, author of "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," who stated that his mission statement was only one word, but he would never say what that word was. How can a mission statement be only ONE word? Then, I had my own epiphany! A personal mission statement that was only TWO words. I'm really not a very bright guy, so to come up with a mission statement that was only two words blew my mind!

I want to share my mission statement with you. I think it is not only how I live my life, but how and why the Fire Service does what it does. Here it is. Are you ready? **Be SHARP!** That's it, two words; **Be SHARP**. Actually, it's an acronym for the full mission statement, but it is definitely easy for me to remember.

The "**S**" stands for **Service or Serve**. (def: contribution to the welfare of others, to comply with the commands, demands and needs of... to be favorable, convenient, opportune, servant, servant leadership, serve others)

Isn't this what we do every day, every shift, every time we respond to a call? It doesn't matter if you are paid or not, shift or days, we all serve others each and every day. We are willing to lay down our lives for people we don't know. We study, test, and study some more. We train at all hours of the day and night; we respond any time any where we are called. It is in our very nature to serve. I hope that others will remember me as someone who was willing to count the cost and continue to serve others.

I think Arthur Ashe defined a true hero when he stated, "*True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.*" Most of that is true anyway. Our jobs can be very dramatic, but most of us do it with little or no fanfare, mostly because we don't want or need it. That's not why we took the job.

You've probably heard the following quote by Mahatma Gandhi, "*I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again*". I like that but I really like this next quote, "*He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies*". Tertullian

The “**H**” is for **Honor**. (def: high public esteem, fame, glory. Honesty and integrity in one’s beliefs and actions. High respect for worth, merit, or rank.)

In today’s society, I think that honor is one of the qualities I miss most. I have the opportunity to spend a lot of time around teenagers, and the lack of respect they show is amazing. The sad thing is, they learned it from adults. We as leaders, people who have influence, must respect and honor others. We certainly know how to show respect to rank, and we generally honor our “customers” when they are in need. For me the rule is simple, treat others the way I would like to be treated, and treat others more highly than myself.

The “**A**” is for **Attitude**. (def: Manner, disposition, feeling, position etc. toward a person or thing. Attitude determines altitude.)

Attitude is what keeps us on course; and, it is also something that must be constantly evaluated, like a plane flying from Los Angeles to New York. The pilot knows where he intends to land, but must make constant corrections to his course throughout the flight for wind and weather. Our attitudes are exactly like that. We must evaluate our attitudes throughout the day to make sure we will be able to reach our “destination”.

And exactly how can you tell what your attitude is? Are you angry, or bitter? Is it easier to find fault rather than compliment? Do you find yourself making comments under your breath that you really don’t want others to hear? Do you find that others tend to avoid you at times? If any of the above get a “YES”, then maybe you have a bad attitude. One of the areas where we have the greatest ability to make the right choice is in our attitude, how we respond to situations and people. Keep a good positive attitude and you will not only have greater joy in your life, you will also be a source of joy to others.

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude. ~ Thomas Jefferson

The “**R**” stands for **Responsibility**. (def: moral, legal or mental accountability, Able to answer for one’s actions, conduct and obligations.)

In our department, we have a truck with compartment doors that open up. You know the type. They are great in the rain because you can stand under them and stay a bit drier. One bright morning as I was checking the inventory on the truck, I left a compartment door in the up position while I got into the cab to answer the radio. While I was there, I thought I would just ease the truck out of the truckhall, so I could pump it. You can see where this is going, and you are exactly right. The door came crashing down along with my pride. I quickly jumped from the truck to see the door on the floor rocking ever so gently. Life as I knew it was now completely changed. (My yearly evaluation was being written at the time of this incident).

I had at least three choices: run, blame it on the person calling me on the radio, or take responsibility for my actions. I chose to take responsibility. Actually, I even offered to write my own reprimand. I deserved it! And unfortunately, that’s what I received.

Our jobs come with tremendous responsibility. We have the lives of people in our communities in our hands. They depend on us to help them in those very abnormal situations they find themselves in, that we call normal. The burden of responsibility can

be very heavy, at times.

We must be willing to take responsibility for the things we do wrong and learn from them. We must also be willing to accept responsibility for the things we do right. The men and women of the Fire Service have added tremendous value to our lives. Not only through the work we do every day, but also by the community service we perform, the tours to children we give, the smoke detectors we install, and the list goes on and on.

Be bold enough to take responsibility when appropriate, and learn. Failure only happens when we do not learn from our mistakes. Also, be willing to accept responsibility when it is earned through good deeds.

And finally the “**P**” stands for **Pride**. (def: self-respect. A feeling of self-esteem arising from one’s accomplishments possessions, etc.)

I don’t want you to think that walking around with your chest sticking out is what I mean by pride. It’s not boasting about your accomplishments; it’s about accomplishments that are done to the best of your ability. This quote by Morgan Freeman says it very well, “*Never let pride be your guiding principle. Let your accomplishments speak for you*”. Do the best you can and you will never be disappointed.

I recently heard of a young man who asked Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, “How do you get ahead in business, how do you stand out, or ‘get out of the pile’?” His answer was simple, “Always do your best, and go the extra mile. When others ask you to take on a task, many times they already know the outcome, but they are giving you an opportunity. Give it all you have, and you’ll get out of the pile and stand alone.”

I must confess that now that I have my own personal mission statement; I really do think about it often. I can remember two words! If you like it, make it your own; or maybe, there is something here that will help you determine what your personal mission statement should be. My hope for you as you serve your department and community is that you do it with the attitude of a servant, honoring those you contact, showing them the respect they all deserve; and, that you do it all to the best of your ability.

Serve others - Those who want to be raised up, must learn to serve

Honor everyone and they will honor you.

Keep a good attitude, it makes all the difference in the world on how high you will go.

Take responsibility for your actions, good or bad. It is the mark of a man or woman of integrity.

Be proud of all you accomplish, and keep your vision and focus pure.

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David G. Small is a 21-year veteran of the Hobbs NM Fire Department, recently retired from serving in the position of Battalion Chief. He has been an instructor for many fire service courses and CISM for over 15 years. He has been the recipient of several awards from the NM State EMS Bureau for innovation in EMS and has served on several boards and committees within his community and state.