

SHARP

Be Sharp

Dave G. Small, Battalion Chief (Ret.)

I'd like to take a few minutes of your time today to share something that I am extremely passionate about. Something I would like to call a "Lifestyle Mission Statement". Many leadership classes and books teach us that a mission statement is very important for planning and living our lives. They generally seem to cover goals, dreams, and ideals. My thoughts about a mission statement for myself are a little different. Yes, I do need a mission statement to help plan my future and to set goals, but I also need something that will help me get through each and every day.

Over the past several years, I've heard a lot of people talk about "Character Counts". Caring, Citizenship, Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, and Fairness, six pillars on which we must live. I have absolutely no problem with those character traits, I think they're great. My goal is not to change or replace them. My problem is that I have a hard time remembering them all. I need a "word" to live by!

As students and adult leaders, we should each have goals of not only those things we want to accomplish in life, but how we want to live our lives as well. Students will leave the hallowed halls of their school to pursue bigger and better things. Teachers and administrators want to make sure they make an impact on the lives entrusted to them. We will all leave a legacy, actually many legacies, throughout our lives. The questions I have for you today are, "how will you live your life, and what will your legacy be"? Is it important for you to be remembered as a great high school football player or administrator or teacher? Or do you want to be remembered as a person who made a difference, who made a mark not to be left on a plaque, but a mark on the hearts and lives of people?

I was amazed by Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, who stated that his personal 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, a "lifestyle mission statement" that was only TWO words. I'm really not a very bright guy, so to come up with a personal mission statement that was only two words blew my mind!

I want to share this mission statement with you. It is the way I want to live my life. 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).

As educators, isn't this what you do every day, every time you interact with a student? Whether you are teaching a class, leading a student meeting, or preparing for the next budget year, we all serve others each and every day. Perhaps as educators it is in your

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. Your motivation in whatever endeavor you pursue, the underlying cause that keeps you going must be something more than just money and fame, it must be to serve. Isn't an attitude of serving a quality we need to instill into all of our students?

I think Arthur Ashe defined a 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 us do our jobs with little or no fanfare, mostly because we don't want or need it. That's not why we choose our careers.

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 some show is amazing. The sad thing is, they learned it from adults who can certainly be just as dishonoring to others. We as leaders, people who have influence, must respect and honor others. We know how to show respect to position and title, and we generally honor our students or "customers" when they are in need. For me the rule is simple. Treat others the way I would like to be treated, and treat them 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. 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.)

I recently retired as a career firefighter and in our fire department, we had a truck with compartment doors that open up. You may 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 fire 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 building 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, once open now 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! Unfortunately, that’s what I received.

As educators your jobs come with tremendous responsibility. You have the lives of young people in your hands. They depend on you to help them in those everyday situations they find themselves in, that we call normal. The burden of responsibility can be very heavy, at times. Student leaders also have a burden of responsibility that comes with their position. Other students that you may not even be aware of are watching you. They learn from you by watching how you conduct your life.

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. As educators you have added tremendous value to young people’s lives. Not only through the work you do every day, but also by the lives you touch.

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 **Passion**. (def: any emotion or feeling as love, desire, anger, hate, fear, grief, joy, hope, etc. esp. when of a compelling or overpowering nature.)

I’ll be honest and tell you that I’ve had several different words to go with the “P”. Pride, was one of them because we must take pride in what we do, we will then do it much better. But passion is really the only word that makes sense in the end. The definition of passion uses the word *compelling* which means *to force or drive as a course of action*.

Passion is the fuel that keeps us going. It is really the factor that pushes us beyond average and mediocre and into excellence. Mary Lou Retton, the gold medal winning gymnast said, “Each one of us has a fire in our heart for something. It’s our goal in life to find it and keep it”. The fire she was talking about was passion.

My question for you today is, what is your passion, what motivates and drives you? Let me ask it another way. If you could do anything, knowing that you would not fail, what would you do? Would you become a great scholar, or possibly seek a profession in engineering or medicine? Maybe you would like to build the best cabinets in the world or study

photography, or maybe be the best spouse or parent ever.

My fear is that too many times we seek careers and jobs for the wrong reasons. Pressure from friends or family, bills, debt, responsibilities can all lead us away from our true passions in life. I encourage you, even when the just mentioned reasons dictate your directions, find your passion and pursue it with all your heart. Only then will you find real contentment and fulfillment in life.

I must confess that now that I have my own personal “lifestyle 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 family, career, students, friends and community is that you do it with the attitude of a servant, honoring those you touch, showing them the respect they all deserve; and, that you do it with responsibility and pride by doing it to the best of your ability. Above all else, pursue your passion.

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 when it comes to how high you will soar.

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, keep your vision and focus pure. And above all else, be **passionate** about the incredible life ahead and the goals you have set.

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David G. Small is a recently retired, 21-year veteran of the Hobbs, NM Fire Department, completing his career at the rank of Battalion Chief. During his career he served as an instructor for many fire service courses and Critical Incident Stress Management for over 15 years. He has received 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. Dave has also worked with youth for over 15 years through Ground Zero Youth Ministries. He currently travels and teaches courses on leadership, and communications, as well as providing motivational and keynote presentations.