

Rhythm & Flow

The Benefits of Training that Aren't Being Talked About



“what separates a crew that accomplishes the tasks acceptably and a crew that accomplishes the tasks exceptionally is how well they work as a team”

Articles upon articles have been written about the benefits that come from training. Training is great for building morale and great for building team unity. Training is necessary to fill the gaps when there is a lack of experience and it's a must to eliminate skill deficiencies. The benefits seem to be endless. I am not here to talk about any of those because many have, and I am definitely not disagreeing with any of them. The purpose of this article is to talk about what I have found to be one of my favorite benefits from training. The benefit that I am referring to is the rhythm and flow that a crew gains from hard work and training.

By rhythm I mean that crews are acting independently to complete their own specific tasks while all individual efforts are focused towards accomplishing a single main objective together. By flow I am referring to the ability of a crew to move fluidly

through an incident from completing one task to another. I honestly can't think of an article, book chapter, or podcast that I have heard of in which this topic is discussed. Although I admit that most likely, I'm not really the first to think of it. But that aside, it is a beautiful thing to see a crew that can work a scene without barely saying a word and yet everyone is focused on completing the task at hand.

I would loosely compare it to that connection that a veteran quarterback and receiver combo share. They have been together and practiced so much that on any route that the receiver runs the quarterback knows exactly where to throw the ball because he knows that that is where the receiver will be. From the outside it may almost look a bit chaotic, confusing, and even mismanaged. But a closer look reveals that the leader is doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing and excelling at it.

I think before we go any farther, we need to discuss what factors have to be present in order to be able to achieve this working rhythm and flow. To create a culture in which rhythm and flow within a crew are possible requires empowerment and decentralizing command. This is not an environment that a weak leader can replicate, it takes strength and confidence in yourself and in your team. As a crew we have been able to gain a working rhythm on scene and in training because we put a lot of work in on the front end. This doesn't start on the training ground and it doesn't start on scene. It starts at the station around the dinner table. For us it starts with a playbook that we have put together laying out each crew members roles on a variety of calls from Automatic Alarms, VEIS, Car Wrecks, to several varying Structure Fire Situations. Of course we can never cover every situation that we will be faced with but that playbook covers a good variety of things that we're faced with and allows me to focus on what I need to be doing instead of dishing out assignments that my crew should already know ahead of time. It's a good baseline

Straight Forward First-In Structure Fire

303

- > Get TIC from Firefighter en Route
- > Give Initial Radio Report – Establish Command
- > Conduct 360° Walk Around
- > Give Follow Up Radio Report
- > Assign Incoming Units

E-3 Driver

- > Spot Rig for Best Tactical Advantage
- > Charge Attack Line
- > Pull and Set Up Back Up Line
- > Set Up Water Supply
- > Ladders to Above Grade Windows

Irons FF

- > Get Irons and Pike Pole or Hook to Front Door and Assess if FE is Needed
- > After Door is Forced Search the Immediate Area
- > Control the Door Until Water is Being Put on the Fire
- > Assist in Pushing Hose Into the Structure

Nozzle FF

- > Get Nozzle and Coupling to Front of the Structure
- > Lay Out Preconnect for Easy Deployment Inside
- > Assist with FE if Needed
- > Mask Up
- > Check Nozzle Pattern and Pressure

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and allows me to be more mindful of what conditions and hazards are present with the scene/structure involved. Since I am more focused on the whole picture, I can identify problems easier and more quickly call an audible when needed.

Having a playbook is one of the biggest areas of growth that I have encountered since becoming an officer. I was never on a crew that had anything like this, so I never knew it was possible. We never really knew who was doing what until we pulled up on scene. My first year as a station captain that was how I ran my crew as well. Looking back now, it makes me shake my head at myself because it's crazy. Why would I not want to have a preplan of as many possible scenarios as I could so that I don't even have to say a word and I know my crew is doing work as soon as the air brake is pulled. Like I mentioned earlier we all know that situations sometimes dictate actions not consistent with our playbook and an audible is required, but that's as easy as communicating the change to those that are involved whose tasks are needing to be adjusted.

“You must trust that each of your crew members are working to complete their task while you are completing yours.”

The playbook mindset is not conducive to the micromanaging mindset. You must trust that each of your crew members are working to complete their task while you are completing yours. How thorough is my 360 going to be if I am looking back making sure that my nozzle firefighter is laying out the line right or watching to see if my irons firefighter is using the haligan correctly to force entry? We must break away from the thought that being in charge means I need to make every decision that is needed to be made on scene. If I ask my irons firefighter to force a door I'm not going to tell them how to do it, I am going to trust that they will size up the door and use their knowledge learned from training and experience to guide them in choosing the best way to force it. I do not pretend to know it all or even much of anything really but I guarantee this; a crew that is micromanaged will have absolutely no rhythm as a crew while working to complete tasks and there will be no flow to their operations. This is due mainly to the fact that anytime one thing is accomplished; work is then halted until the correct method for accomplishing the next task is given. It's inefficiency at its best!

Something that I like to say is the key to all of this and really to leadership in general is the officer must put their crew in a position to succeed and to do great things! Putting them in a position to succeed means we train until we don't think about basic skills anymore our bodies just do them; it means that we go over our playbook regularly to ensure that we know our roles and the roles of others so that we have a greater situational awareness without saying a word. The difficult thing about achieving this is that it is very delicate. If you replace any of the team members with someone new then the whole thing is thrown off and you start all the way over. Backing off on that training and practicing is another quick way to lose what rhythm you've worked hard to gain. In my short time of being a station captain I have had a lot of changes to my crew and this is where I quickly recognized how important that crew rhythm and flow is. Those of you that have had crew swaps probably know what I mean. This is no knock on the new crew members, it just means that there is a lot of work to do to get the crew back to where it needs to be.

The only prerequisites to create rhythm and flow within your crew is hard work and time. Time together getting to know each other at the station, time working out together seeing where each other's strengths and weaknesses are, time studying and discussing the playbook, and hard work training through live scenarios to get a real feel for how things will play out. Since putting out our playbook, many changes have been made to it because going from my mind to paper doesn't always equate to the most efficiency compared to physically doing it. So, as we train through scenarios, we find different ways to do it even better.

There are a lot of crews out there that do their jobs well, they get things done in a decent amount of time and can check all the required boxes. Personally, that is not a goal that I have as an officer; my goal is to blow those crews out of the water and to be the example that all other crews strive to be. No matter what scenario that you can think of what separates a crew that accomplishes the tasks acceptably and a crew that accomplishes the tasks exceptionally is how well they work as a team, their rhythm and flow.

