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Who Can I Blame?

Where Has Taking Personal Responsibility in the Fire Service Gone?

One lesson that I try to hammer into my kids heads is that of taking responsibility for your part. I honestly can not even take a guess as to how many times those words have come out of my mouth. Hopefully one day that repeated conversation will finally sink in and mean something to them. There are so many lessons and values that we need to teach our children and I believe that taking responsibility for your actions is very high on that list. After all, how can we learn, grow, and help others if we can't own the decisions/actions that we take.

Somewhere along the way the fire service has allowed excuses and scape goats to be more of the norm instead of taking responsibility and ownership. We want to blame Millennial's for the disconnect that is creeping into firehouses but don't put any effort into looking for ways to engage that generation. We want to blame administration for not starting formal leadership/officer development programs yet do nothing to mentor and lead our own little circle of influence. We like to gripe at our training divisions for lack of good training instead of being your crew's spark plug and inspiring your crew to come up with their own training everyday. The list can go on and on.

It is not by accident that I said we, I have unfortunately played a negative part in all of those areas. I have blamed the younger generation, I have blamed my training division, and I have definitely found lots of things to blame my administration for. But to what end, has any of that blame made any positive changes; never. Did any of that blame make myself and the firefighters around me any better; absolutely not! How can someone truly grow and improve if in their mind everything is someone else's fault? It won't happen; we will be stuck where we are at and probably more likely, we will continue to become worse everyday.

I am now to the point that the blame of Millennials highly irritates me. It's like saying that one of my kid's has a terrible work ethic because of the generation that they're apart of. Uhh no, they have a terrible work ethic because I have allowed them to have a terrible work ethic. That would be something that I failed at, not them. I didn't do my part to mold them in the proper way, so that would be on me as their parent. Bring that right into the fire service, if you have a younger member on your crew who isn't bonding and being engaged then do something about it. That might mean that you have to get creative and find new ways of getting them engaged and involved because they are motivated by different things. That's our job as teammates, we should want to put time and effort into creating better relationships and learning what each other's interests are.

Something else that really irritates me about this conversation is all of the people that gripe about the younger generation being on their phones constantly. From what I have seen, outside of a few holdouts, everyone is constantly on their phone. Stop blaming Millennials because I guarantee you that they aren't the only ones doing this. For all of those that gripe about this I would like to know what you are doing to make this better. Because if you are just griping and not coming up with solutions then you are part of the problem. Lots of crews have no phone dinners and movie time at night, whatever you want to do to limit that distraction then do it. Take steps to make positive changes don't just gripe and throw blame around.

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off their phones and regain their passion for the job!***

Something that I believe that the fire service is in desperate need of right now is good senior leadership. I completely believe that everyone has a part to play and something to give in leadership but there is no substitute for the voice of that senior man/woman. New firefighters bring a spark and enthusiasm (hopefully) which is great and can be used to help an experienced crew excel. But if you have a veteran of your department on your crew that spreads positivity, enthusiasm, and a drive to get better everyday; there is nothing that will rival that influence. Our senior firefighters have got to get out of the recliners, off their phones and regain their passion for the job! This is vital for the direction that the fire service is going.

What are we doing individually to help prepare our crew members for the next level or just making those around us better in general? Are we waiting for an official procedure from the top or for the BC/Station Officer to plan out what that looks like? I would say that either of those things would be helpful and nice to have happen but that's not always a luxury that everyone has. I think it's easy for us to use the absence of

that direction as a scape goat to blame for the lack of preparation that our crew members get. Administration doesn't seem to make developing leaders a priority so I guess we won't either. That is such a weak excuse for a lack of effort on our part.

So why can't we be the ones to step up and make a plan to help our buddies out. To me it doesn't matter what rank you are or how much time you have on, you have something to offer someone. Even new firefighters, you should be coming on hungry to learn and train. That drive and desire can be contagious, spread what you have. Let's be the reason that our brothers and sisters get better and succeed. We don't need to wait until someone above us tells us how to better ourselves and others, that should be something that we do just because it's the right thing to do.

Who can I blame is a very easy question to answer, because that answer will always be myself. It doesn't matter what is going on around me, what other stations/shifts are doing, or what administration is or isn't doing. If I am not putting forth the time and effort that is required to make my circle of influence better then I am to blame. And until we as the fire service completely embrace that mentality, the fire service will struggle.