

Hazing?

02/25/10 345 W - + 9 - 8

Discussion topic for the day. Hazing in the fire service. Which we'll define as tough treatment for newcomers. Presumably not abuse. Perhaps not even accurately labeled as hazing. If that's the wrong word, please advise. Language police, there's your opening.

Hazing of probies is a tradition. "Hey new boy!" However, not all traditions are good. Does hazing add sufficient value to the (modern) fire service to merit the continued practice? Let's weigh some pros and cons.

Pros? Continues a tradition. You were treated that way, and you get to treat that way. Also, tests the stress-handling ability of an incoming personality. (That's the argument, right? If they can take the heat at the station, they'll better take the heat at a fire?) Also, may teach or condition humility (right word?), which helps facilitate knowledge transfer from the old guys to the new guys. (Probies as apprentices, in a concept swiped from a book on fire service sociology that I am probably misremembering.) What else? Any military comparisons to be drawn, from those in or familiar with the services? Ditto for other occupations?

Cons? When things go too far. Ha, but that never happens, right? And that one's certainly a generational sliding scale. Oh, the scary stories the older guys tell. Another is when the outside looks in, when the public or press or officials observe behaviors and see something more harmful or dangerous than those hazing think it is. (Might be an oxymoron alert, there.) Another involves differences. When the new person is "different" than the older ones-- by color, creed, worship, gender, etc.-- there's the potential for misperception. "They're treating me this way because I am _____." That one, that last one, seems like a biggie. If everyone but one is in on the joke, is it still right? Or, more importantly, is it still the preferred means to that end?

Hazing. Good or bad? Useful or harmful? You tell me.

I'll be the first to comment on this.

I'll preface this by saying "hazing" is a frat-boy word. Yes, we're a fraternity, but I prefer the traditional Irish term "shenanigans".

It's a good tradition. It builds character and in a way solidifies a bond between the vets and the new meat. The cliché is "we pick on you because we like you. If we didn't, you should be worried." There are boundaries, however. The target should not have to worry about his personal possessions being damaged, nor should one's turnout gear or other equipment relating to safety or the job be messed with. It's a matter of testing out the new guy's skin thickness, to a point. Yep, the newbies are going to screw up trying to do things right and impress the vets to keep from getting picked on. That's going to garner more attention. But every one of us has gone through it.

But it's up to the vets to know where to draw the line. They need to get a feel for what they can and can't do to the new guy. As far as race, color, creed, etc., goes, to me, unless the probie has a feeling of entitlement because of any of those factors, they should feel a sense of pride that the vets would want to treat them like one of the fold, just like everybody else. It's the ones that have the chip on their shoulders that make this tradition lose its luster with the brass collars.

As far as continuation of the ritual throughout the firehouse and throughout everyone's careers, well, I'm all for it. The exception being, again, leave peoples' personal stuff and job-related gear and equipment alone. Also, the shenanigans should be funny, not cruel or malicious. Speaking from experience, screwing with someone out of spite or malice is done in poor taste. If you don't like a person for whatever reason, "hazing" becomes cruel and unappreciated.

Make it funny, creative, and endearing (if that's even possible). It will bond everyone on your crew if done right. It's meant to be fun and harmless, and to weed out the non-hackers.

Just my thoughts.

Duda - 02/25/10 - 09:10

Shenanigans are important as a way of bonding and as a stress reliever. Everyone needs to be on the same page and certain items are off limits. The games should be careful as to not cross that line and then get a lot of people in trouble.

Apex Batt Chief - 02/25/10 - 12:10

Im going to keep myself anonymous because the people who might read this, have "friends in high places".

A message to the "old heads" from a "new boy":

-I can tell the difference between doing something in "good fun" and when youre trying to piss me off, just to piss me off and "find my goat"...If I dont wanna play your games today, leave me alone. Im not here to play your games, Im here to do a job, not to play games, let me do my job.

-Respect. I understand I HAVE to respect you, otherwise it'll show up on my end of year review and affect my pay, however, It is VERY difficult to respect someone that has no sense of respect for me.

-I may be a new boy, but Im a grown man too. Im not your punching bag or doormat. "Its tradition" does not mean you get to disrespect me at will.

-If Im doing something wrong, TELL ME, TEACH ME, dont just talk trash about me to everyone you know and blast me at the end of the year. IF I DONT KNOW YOUR EXPECTATIONS, I CANT MEET THEM. I CANT FIX WHAT I DONT KNOW IS BROKEN.

-Turn on your brain to mouth filter. If you had said that to a stranger, how would they have reacted? Probably not the way I did. I kept my mouth shut because you outrank me and I have to.

-You are You. You LOVE Andy Griffith, Nascar, CMT, Smoky and the Bandit and Fox News. Thats fine. But if go to watch something else after 6, dont bug me about it all day and night. Its not that Im being unsociable, its that I dont feel like learning Barny's life lesson or watching 500 left turns today. Let me, be me.

-I didnt grow up in flowing wheat fields and little house on the prarie intros. I may have grown up with unsavory characters where respect is something you fought for, so you'll have to excuse me if I dont find your OBVIOUS disprepect (not counting things done in good fun, remember, I can tell the difference) funny or endearing.

-Its called "The Golden rule"...treat others as you would be treated.

Here comes the part where all the other guys say to get the chip off my shoulder, but you guys gotta remember, that chip didnt get there all by itself. Would you want your son or daughter treated that way by a stranger? I respect your rank and time in service, I want to learn from you, I want to look up to you and genuinely and wholeheartedly respect you as my superior but more importantly as a man. What you may have been able to do to your last newboy or girl, you might not be able to do to me. We're all different people. It doesnt make me any less of a person, just different. Give me a chance, you just might like me and find out that Im not as stupid and worthless as you think.

From recent experience - 02/25/10 - 12:29

Hazing or shenanigans, it's all the same activity. I think that hazing results from the lack of a structured system to facilitate the proper orientation/indoctrination of a new employee into an established work environment. In the "old days", we lacked a progressive plan to provide on-the-job training and thus, many of us resorted to doing what we thought would make the new person a good employee. While many of the good employees we have today succeeded in that system, they did so of their own accord and ethic and not as a result of hazing. No one, regardless of whether they function in the workgroup as a supervisor or not, should have any expectation of anyone to do a task they would not do so themselves. If it's truly an environment of teamwork and cohesion that you are looking to build, then build that through setting the example and not through putting someone through a senseless maze of tasks.

Olson - 02/25/10 - 12:29

@ From Recent Experience, sounds like you have an issue with one individual. The Fire Service much like the military has a foundation of team work, and you need to know that you can rely on the person next to you, regardless of how much you like them or how much they like you. The thing you need to remember is when it comes time, will that person have your back and will you have theirs? If you would not put your life on the line to help a fellow Fire Fighter I think its time you consider a new career.

"Hazing" creates a nearly unbroken bond, I have been out of the military for over 10 years now and have a bond with the people I served with that will NEVER be broken and is as strong today as it was during the war. As long as hazing is not going to cause personal or property damage then it should continue. And personal injury does not include feelings; I don't care about your feelings. If you want to worry about feelings become a psychologist.

OIF/OEF VET - 02/25/10 - 13:11

Hazing, does not create a nearly unbroken bond. Going through "sh**" together builds it. Dont confuse the two. I understand the bond between servicemen as I too was one. I understand that you dont care about my feelings, but when you go out of way to impact me and my job, you know, that thing that keeps my heat on and food on my table, then we have issues. I may be just a piece of crap new boy, but again, Im not your punching bag. And youre right, its not about feelings, its about getting the job done. Leave me alone, and let me do my job, leave your games at home.

From recent experience - 02/25/10 - 13:26

nd when I wrote "you", I dont mean YOU, Vet, Im speaking (writing) in generalizations.

From recent experience - 02/25/10 - 13:32

Are there companies / stations / departments where solidarity and fraternity are built exclusively on the fireground, because they are so busy, and have such down time? Or is hazing integral to the process?

Can you get there from here any other way?

LJM - 02/25/10 - 13:51

Good natured fun does build comaraderie or "esprit de corps" or whatever you want to call it, not just emergency response. The key being, good natured.

Recent - 02/25/10 - 14:06

Good natured fun. Hmmm. Someone's 'good natured fun' is someone else's 'hazing'.

Going through 'sh**' together does build those types of bonds that so many in the fire service (and LE and EMS) speak so fondly of. To me, going through sh** together is like getting caught in a flashover and the 1 1/2" goes flat. It's like really coming through on a tough call where everything clicked just right. It's like going out under fire to bring your buddy back. It's like going through basic training together. I've been through those. But do those bonds last?

My experience of 51 years is that they quickly become nothing more than memories of the Glory Days.

What constitutes 'good natured fun'? Is it putting hot peppers in a co-worker's hot dog? Is it swapping out his tuna for cat food? Or drenching them while they are in their bunk with a hose? Maybe it is short sheeting someone. Or filling a locker with shaving cream.

My advice, for whatever it is worth, is 'read' your co-worker(s). If you can't tell which ones are not going to deal with it very well, then you don't need to be engaging in 'good natured fun' with anyone. Not everyone is receptive to it, and there can be career-ending consequences. Just because someone is not receptive does not mean they cannot be one of the group, team, company, or whatever. When the time comes, they can be just as dependable as the guy (or gal) that does accept (or put up with because of fear) the 'good natured' fun.

In my younger days we thought it was fun. Looking back, I can think of a couple of people that maybe could have worked out alright, they just got tired of it. Others that we thought 'had our back' would throw you under the bus in a heart beat.

I can tell you which ones 'have my back'. And I don't have to 'have a little good natured fun' with them to know. And if you don't want to care about your co-worker's feelings, that is what is going to determine whether or not they 'have your back'.

DJ - 02/25/10 - 15:33

I am a newer fireman still, and "hazing" or whatever you want to call it was one of the best things that happened to me. It shaped me up and I learned a lot from it. There is a line that needs to be respected and people's personal items should be off limits, or if you break it you better replace it. Bottom line, I'm just earning my keep and I wouldn't be the same person today without the hazing I went through.

Been Hazed - 02/25/10 - 17:17

Great posts. Old guys and New Boys need to remember that respect is earned and not given. Keep that in the back of your mind when you are

"playing around".

USMC - 02/25/10 - 18:29

It is an honor and a privilege to be "hazed". I am not a Career Fire Fighter but have been trying to get on a department for some time. I would love to be a part of such a long standing tradition of brotherhood.

VET, I know what you are saying about hazing helps build strong bonds. You need to know your team BEFORE you go into combat. That's why we train together, you have to build trust before you put each others lives in each others hands.

Recent Experience, you are a piece of crap new boy because you THINK that you are a piece of crap new boy. Being a new boy is just as important as being an "old salt". No matter how much stuff you take you should walk with your chest out, your head held high and be glad that you are in a position that 1,000's of people would love to be in. I would gladly take your position any day! I think that maybe you should humble yourself and you might actually learn something. If you have an issue with someone in particular go to your chain of command and have the issue addressed, but don't let that one person or few people ruin your time in the fire service, because it sounds to me that you are not enjoying your career at all.

Hopeful - 02/25/10 - 19:03

I like "recent experience" will remain unknown. But, I understand what he is trying to say. He has no chip on his shoulder. But, there are people out there who could care less about developing a new employee and enjoy nothing more than to make them look stupid. Of course there are also those out there who are so shitty at their job that all they can do is give the new person hell because that person might actually make them look bad.

I have not been around long enough to know how it all is but I am starting to understand things.

I have been hazed out of love and I have been hazed out of disrespect.

But I have kept my pride and learned who to respect and hope to become. More importantly, I have learned who to keep my distance and pray that Ill never be like.

But the ones who did it out of love, taught me a lot and created a greater sense of pride that I carry with me daily.

Anon - 02/25/10 - 19:15

Hopeful, you saying that it is an honor and a privilege to be "hazed" is just the reason that you have been trying for so long to get onto a department. If you think that the only way that you will be accepted as one of the firemen in the house is to be abused for anothers entertainment, then you lack the basic integrity to even consider being in the fire service. Try wally world or somewhere

Hopefully Never - 02/25/10 - 19:51

Hopeful,

I too volunteer on my days off and can only thank you and every other vollie out there for doing what we do for pay, for free. It takes a special kind of person, with alot of heart to expose themselves to the stuff we see and deal with for their community and their brothers.

Ive wanted to be a career Firefighter my entire life. Ive wanted to be a part of a certain department my entire life. You can only imagine how I felt when everything Ive ever wanted came true, due to hard work and kind people. I add the kind people because as Im sure we all know, no one makes it anywhere in life all by themselves. Anyways, imagine that you love going to work, its everything youve always wanted, then you get transferred to a place where your "brothers", truly go out of their way to ruin what little bit of a reputation you have. Where you feel you need to put on a suit of armor everyday before you go to work. Where you truly feel unwanted, like youre a burden and everyone in that station makes you feel that way. Where you run a corner and hear them talking trash about you to eachother or on the phone with another station, telling stories you KNOW arent true. When you go them about it, they smile and say its all good you just misunderstand, when you go to your officer, you find that he's good buddies with your Lt, who's good friends with the FF. They wont talk to you either on a call or at the station. You check off the truck by yourself, check the bottles and EMS bags by yourself, you clean the bathrooms, the bay and the dayside by yourself. When you finish, they talk about you in another room loud enough for you to hear it, about how slow you are. They compliment you to your face then write the complete opposite in a special folder that can ruin your career. Your dream, has become a nightmare. Everywhere you go people are talking about you because "your brothers" have been spreading lies and malicious rumors about you. All you can do, is go to work, do your job and go home. You do the same job and are just as respectful to everyone you work with, and when they work with you, it

seems they like you. But when you return back to your home station, there it is again, and you feel like quitting, everyday. In all seriousness, its called a "hostile work environment". I didnt go that route, because even though, I knew what they were doing was wrong, they were still "my guys" and I wouldnt EVER do that to them. I would tell myself, "Im willing to put up with, whatever I have to put up with, for as long as I have to put up with it, if it gives me the chance to help just 1 person". Could I have gone to my chain of command? Yes, and I did. But at the end of the day. I was just a new boy and they were just "pickin wid im".

Its easy to sit from a distance and say what you should and shouldnt do. But until you're career, until youve experienced the feeling of absolute disdain from everyone on your crew even though youre as respectful as can be and do the absolute best you can, everyday. I consider your opinion that of someone uninformed. Ive talked to a few people and am NOT the only one to have experienced something of this nature at a certain department. Apparently, Im the only one who wants to type about it.

I got moved. And love my crew. I love coming to work again. I love being a Firefighter again. I dont feel like I have to wear a suit of armor anymore and enjoy my time spent at work.

Ultimately, Id like to think I did learn a few things from it. How NOT to treat people. To as you put it, "walk with my chest out, head held high and be proud to be in a position that 1000's of people want". But I also learned that those same people that you are supposed to rely on and trust in, will smile in your face while stabbing you in the back. A bit harsh, but its a reality. However unfortunate.

Again, this is the part where people extrapolate all kinds of conclusions and assuptions from what Ive just written and are sure to say, You shoulda just dealt with it, or stop crying pu***, or you need thicker skin boy....whatever. You werent there, youre not me, and you didnt go through it.

Theres a big difference between "good fun" and Hazing. Needless to say, Im not a big fan of the latter.

Recent experience - 02/25/10 - 21:04

From Recent Experience- It sounds like you don't even want to be in the station as a team player. When shenanigans are played on one another it shouldn't be just on "new boy". You can tell by my name what position I hold. When games are played I dish them out as well as receive them. My guys will pick on me and play pranks on me just as I do to them. I remember lots of fun games around my stations. Now back on the topic of you. Station life is about living as a family. No one should force you to watch Andy Griffith or NASCAR just because they are in charge. Decisions around the station such as dinner or tv time should be mutual agreed upon. By leaving the room just because you can't watch what you want to is not showing team spirit. Try to discuss it with your "old hat" instead of just leaving. You can learn as much about your team dynamics by sitting around dayroom together and watching tv or playing Xbox as you can on the training ground.

To all the "old hats" out there. This type of thinking by new people is just the breaks of dealing with generational issues within the fire service. The new generation wants to be coddled more than other generations. They have been given everything by their parents and society as a whole. It is what we are going to be dealing with from now on in the business. There is alot of information on the web about how to deal with new generations.

To everyone reading this. There is a difference in Hazing and Shenanigans in my opinion- Just because someone hides your clothes or bedsheets you haven't been hazed. Just because someone sprays water on your car at night to freeze you haven't been hazed. If they hold you down and force you to lick toilet you have been hazed. If they dare you to eat a teaspoon of cinnamon and you do and get choked up and they laugh you haven't been hazed. If they pour salt in your drink at dinner you haven't been hazed. If they belittle you in front of others it would depend's. If they pick on your race, sexual preference, religious beliefs. Those are off limits.

MOST THINGS ARE A JOKE PEOPLE LIGHTEN UP AND LEARN TO TAKE IT AND DISH IT. WE HAVE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT.

And I am not scared to write my name as these comments are mine and mine alone and do not represent my employer.

Lawrence Scooter Carter

Apex Batt Chief - 02/25/10 - 21:08

Been there on the bad end, man. It happens.

Sigh - 02/25/10 - 21:32

"The new generation wants to be coddled more than other generations. They have been given everything by their parents and society as a whole."

With all due respect sir, thats a total blanket statement. What I was "given" by my family, was food, water and shelter. I grew up powdered milk poor and worked for everything I own. No spoon fed here. Im working class and very proud if it. Please dont assume that because I was born a certain year that you know how I was raised. My Father taught me that if I wanted something, to work for and earn it. I have and will, as long as Im able.

"If they belittle you in front of others it would depend's. If they pick on your race, sexual preference, religious beliefs. Those are off limits."

Thats where you got it right. Maybe the issue is just a generational one. Maybe if you older people stopped referring to anyone under thirty as a coddled incompetent we could get somewhere. Maybe if you would stop associating our age with our credibility and life experience this problem wouldnt exist.

Maybe we should line up one side versus the other and walk towards eachother snapping our fingers in unison, with packs of lucky strikes rolled into our sleeves "Runblefish" style. Nah, that'd be too much fun and besides, theyve got SCMODS.

Talkin' bout my generation - 02/25/10 - 22:07

Great topic Mr. Blogger, would you care to chime in on this too?

Hopeful - 02/25/10 - 22:08

Here are some thoughts, though my two cents isn't nearly as good as the sense expressed above.

Pretty good spectrum on display, here. Best to worst. What happens when "hazing" goes righter versus wronger.

Working with people is tough. Working with people in the confined space of a career station can be a pressure cooker. When the relief valve works for everyone, everyone wins. But `taint always the case.

I wonder how advances in human resources management handle these needs? Probably with a long list of "don't dos." Duda opened with some good ground rules. Could you put those into SOPs and guidelines? Probably not. Liability.

So crews take their cues from their leaders, or their peers, or how they were treated when they were new. The cycle repeats, though probably with lessening severity.

I'll wager each generator is less rough on their newcomers. Some of that is likely due to the brain factor. Used to be, a firefighter was a strong back and little else. Today, you're a strong back with a smart mind. You guys and gals are specialists, and knowledge gathering starts at day one.

Respect? Don't forget the difference between respect for the position, and respect for the person. The former is learned, the latter is earned.

Finally, let's touch base at retirement. See if the method was worth the madness. Show and share your scars.

SCMODS.

Legeros - 02/25/10 - 22:35

okay... so.... we've heard the two ends of the spectrum here. So in a class I was recently in we talked a great deal about this, about the generational gap, about the newer generations finding recognition for each and every accomplishment they make. I don't know how to start. There is a great deal of things that our "new" people go through as part of being accepted into our "team." Being "hazed" ugh I hate that term, or being "razzed," is that better? is part of coming into the fire service. I was hazed, I had practical jokes pulled on me, shoot I still do, it's how I know I'm loved!! Now, if you can't take the joking, the playing or the plain and simple fun at your expense.... well... you might want to look at a job where you sit in a cube and stare at a computer all day. The bottom line is that people in the fire service are the biggest practical jokers that exist. It's a fact of life, a way of the walk. I cannot stand others that get all pissy and get their undergarments in a wad for getting pranks pulled on them. Smile, laugh, and get even!

I agree with brother Carter that there are certain things that are off limits, and those are the things that are protected by law, and good common sense. But as for good natured fun, well if the guys you work with don't know that it "affects" you then don't get pissed if they keep on. There is a personal line that should not be crossed, and if they don't know that they are crossing it, then don't get mad if they do.

shevais ([Email](#)) - 02/25/10 - 22:41

Most rookies or trainees have come to expect some type of welcoming to the Dept. It was around when I became a firefighter in the 70's and will be around in some form until we end this world.

rnl ([Email](#)) - 02/25/10 - 22:43

Wow, lots of differing opinions and I have to say I agree with bits and pieces of both. I've known guys that have been hazed (pissed on while taking a shower) and others that have been razed (baby powder on sheets, marker on the face, scaring folks, water tricks). I guess the best way I can determine whether a haze or a raz is going on, would be by asking myself this question; "is this something that might result in an a\$\$ whippin'?"

Peeing on someone, definitely worthy of a fight. Salt in a drink, which has been pulled on me by the way, absolutely not. You laugh, pour it out, and move on. Just know, I'll get ya' back. And if I can't pinpoint who did it, everyone goes down!! Same with markers on the face, signs on the back, fun with water, etc.

When it comes to making someone look stupid, well, when you have new guys you can put a comedic spin on things to make them feel a little silly, BUT THEN SHOW THEM THE RIGHT WAY. Remember, THEY'RE NEW! They're more apt to remember the mistake because of how silly you made them feel. The key is, teach them the right way. When it comes to some that have time on the job and they do something dumb, you just can't do anything with 'em and it just comes down to shaking your head, and walking away. Try to educate them, but if they refuse, just walk away and let them look like an idiot. Every agency has their few, some more than others.

As a new/rookie/probie (I hate using the term "new-boy" and would rather just say "new") you have a lot to prove, both around the firehouse and on the fireground. But, it's OUR JOB, to teach you right and wrong. When you come to the firehouse, you're not entitled to much. Most things come with time. Nothing more pisses me off when a rook is sitting on Facebook, or checking out meaningless videos on youtube. How about looking at firehouse.com, vententersearch.com, or pulling up useful videos on youtube to teach you more about your job. After all, this is what pays your bills, how about taking it seriously. I know too many that would give a left n*t to have your job, AND would take it serious. Get to work early, not five minutes 'til shift change. There was a good discussion on firehouse.com about shift change. If you show up at five minutes before shift change, you're considered a "slug" and called one.

This service does require a thick skin, not only for around the firehouse for jokes, but for those times when your emotional strings are tugged while on a run. We are human, yes, but we see things that the average citizen would cringe and crumble at seeing and are held to a higher standard. Razing is a way to break the ice, as well as take your mind off of the bad.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again, we've grown soft as a fire service. Too many people are sue happy, and it's scary to see that we've entered an "I apologize" world. Just recently, Tony Kornheiser (sp) with ESPN had to apologize for commenting about Hannah Storm's outfit the other day. He received two weeks off for that!! But, there are TV shows out there and all they do is criticize celebs and the way they dress!!! What in the world is happening to us?????

I'll conclude with this, it's important to read your rookie. There's a fine line in making them look/feel dumb, versus some good razing. I can read people pretty well, and can tell when someone is doing something to someone that's uncalled for and because they're serious, versus doing something to screw around. As a rookie, it was my job to go to the store every day. I did it with a smile until the boss sent someone else. It was my job to inventory the rig, and did that every day too. I know of a crew that laid things out pretty well for their probie on his first day; you help wash dishes every day, you hold watch every day, don't sit between 8-12 and 1-4, all until told otherwise. I must say, this guy has turned out pretty well and I applaud that group for getting him on the right path right out of the gate.

Stay safe...

Silver - 02/26/10 - 01:00

The concept and history of apprenticeship also adds some context to the discussion. Here's a Wikipedia on same, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apprentices..>

Legeros - 02/26/10 - 07:09

I would have to say that I have always heard it's not hazing if you do it to everyone. I also like silver's term "razzing". Though I have never been a career firefighter and may not carry as much weight in opinion as some of you others, I have been exposed to my fair share of razing. Before I entered the "real world" I had an abundance of free time and was pretty much a full-time volunteer. I stayed at the station, etc and

pretty much pulled a "regular" shift. I was razzed by most and left alone by some. The latter were those strictly business, need to loosen up, I'm an officer and nothing is funny, stab you in the back type. I would have to say that I have never been pissed on literally, but I was exposed to a lot. Now, being a volunteer, I could have left or quit at anytime if things got too bad, but I didn't. I didn't have a paycheck to keep me there, so yes, it may have been a little easier dealing with things knowing that. I can't imagine being "stuck" like that recent experience. What I can say is that in my little bit of time compared to most of you, I have learned a lot about people.

All people are different, even if just a little bit. There are people that you will get along with and people that you won't. There are people that will abuse their power and people who are great managers. There are those who will take you under their wing and those who will cut holes in your wings. The main thing that I try to do is gauge who is who and adjust accordingly. Everyone has limits and it is hard to suppress/control your emotions when those limits are crossed, but if you see someone is pushing a button to get a reaction, don't give them that reaction. They are pushing the button for a reason and if you don't give them what they want and show them the button doesn't work, they will more than likely stop pressing the button. As long as you can fill someone out and know how they are going to deal with you and what to expect, play into them. If you have an officer that you know doesn't like you and gives you tasks to do alone or continuously, then do them with a smile and ask for more. If a fellow firefighter talks loudly as to get to you, act like you didn't hear them and like it doesn't bother you. Kill with kindness and give people the reaction that they aren't expecting. I am one of those thousands that has tried to get a career job and I can't imagine what it would be like to have the struggles you have mentioned. I would hope that I could deal with them and wouldn't give up. I would hope that I could confide in someone with more experience and wiser to give me advice on the best way to handle the situation. On the flip side though, I wait day for the chance to try to get into an open slot.

To conclude, I have been razzed and I have done a little razzing. I know when I have crossed the line and I know when the line has been crossed. I also know that now that I am in a department that doesn't do much razzing, if any, doesn't have the strength and bond that I had before. Everyone seems to be more self-serving and gloomy. I'm not saying you have to have razzing to have a good department or bond, because you don't...it just seems, from my encounters that it seems to make that experience stronger and more genuine.

rookie - 02/26/10 - 08:01

@ "rookie" in ref. to "There are people that will abuse their power and people who are great managers". That's part of the problem with some, and I'm not attacking you rook, just speaking in generalizations on your comment. We need more LEADERS, and less managers. If you want to be a manager, go work at Wal-Mart.

Silver - 02/26/10 - 10:34

Razzing is more likely the term that needs to be used. If you are a career fire fighter, you have gone through it. Some is good natured, some is not. The key to beating it, is to laugh with them, pick back at them. To me Recent Experience, you sound like you think you are entitled to be treated as an equal from day one. Here are some things to remember...

You are sent to check off the truck by yourself for a reason, use it as an opportunity to learn your equipment and your truck. The engineer/LT/driver operator will check off his part of the truck. Its your job as the new boy to check the EMS equipment, most of the time you will be the one using it. Would you rather rely on someone else checking your equipment? The way you talk about your former crew I would want to check everything myself and be sure it works.

Your job as the new boy is to do the crap jobs like cleaning the toilet, moping the floor, cleaning the truck. Instead of complaining and thinking about what everyone else is doing, take pride in it yourself and do it 100%. When you get a red or white helmet it will be your job to worry with everyone else.

Bottom line is you are not working at Target. You are not treated equal from day one, you are not just given respect. You have to earn it. When you earn it, people will lay off. I am thankful my superiors rode me for months on end. It made me a better fire fighter. Don't look at it as a personal attack on you, 1000s of fire fighters have been there before you.

I'm not condoning racial, sexual, etc. mistreatment either. Thats wrong and there is no place for it in the fire service. But you will never earn the respect you think you deserve if you take a negative attitude like that to work all the time.

Been there - 02/26/10 - 18:03

To Recent Experience I see you are a volunteer, did this take place at the volunteer department or a paid department?

Concerned - 02/26/10 - 19:08

There's four pieces that are probably being discussed, or referenced, in our comparisons and perspectives:

Chain of Command – Learning the ranks, the respect for the ranks, and how various shots are called.

Apprenticeship – Being assigned basic tasks at a station, some are menial, some are education.

Razzing – Having your buttons pushed, as the crew plays and feels out your personality.

Hazing – Harder version of razzing. More personal. Less friendly. Probably less common.

Does that sound about right?

Legeros - 02/26/10 - 19:14

Sounds right to me Mike.

Apex Batt Chief - 02/26/10 - 19:18

I agree, it sounds like to me that everyone has a different definition of what the difference between hazing and razzing is. I know that some of the things that I went through in the Military were hazing by most standards but I do not feel that it was malicious but rather tradition.

(Google: Wog Day) Things like Wog Day are hazing but it is an HONOR to become a shellback, which is a title that is earned, and not everyone has that privilege, just like not everyone has the privilege of being a career fire fighter. Some people don't agree that these types of initiations should occur but there is a lot of history in them. People now a day's do feel entitled and they don't need to EARN respect so they feel that a good ol' fashion ribbing is hazing. The sad truth is, there will always be the few that will ruin it for the many.

Hopeful - 02/26/10 - 20:25

Hopeful said it perfectly. People today think they are entitled to respect for people who have put in their time and earned their respect and rank. Its extremely sad. Unfortunatley it looks like thats where our society is heading.

The old days of sending the new boy out to get the "sky hook" off the engine are over!

Been there - 02/26/10 - 21:47

How about a quiz? Razzing versus hazing.

<http://legeros.com/ralwake/photos/weblog..>

Actions described, you classify which is which.

Survey closes at 0800 on Saturday, March 6, 2010. Results to be analyzed and posted later.

Legeros - 02/27/10 - 09:27

[No naming names / crews / stations please. If fingers have been pointed in above remarks, let me know if I missed them. Also, anyone who reconsiders their posted remarks, just drop a private message. No problem.]

Legeros - 02/27/10 - 11:53

Silver – no attack felt from that comment...I appreciate your choice of a better word...you are exactly right!

rookie - 02/27/10 - 21:09

How is fire service hazing defined? In many ways I guess, based on the fire service culture you're familiar with. Regardless, hazing was indeed considered a rite of passage in the past; but you've got to be careful. Individual rights (no matter how they're defined) are now more powerful than ever; and no matter what, it's a societal expectation. Solid leadership and communication will ultimately prevail; and finally respect will follow. Best advice... give the job expectations up front and follow the rules. We all know there is fine line between "hazing" and joking around. Unfortunately many do not now where that line is and cross it frequently due to their lack of understanding, knowledge, or maybe even something as simple as compassion. You wanna get disciplined or even fired... violate someone's "rights."

A.C. Rich - 02/27/10 - 23:45

Societal expectation is a powerful force these days. It's probably pretty tough for fire officials to explain even the most innocuous "hard play" to citizens or other officials, if they come to public light and questioning.

Of course, society doesn't really understand most of the nitty gritty behind reporting a fire and a red truck shows up.

Legeros - 02/28/10 - 09:05

You're right Mike. In some cases it's really hard to swallow, even for me. In these tough days of diminished tax revenues and increased demand for budget justification, the more we goof off, the less professional we may be perceived overall. Even if the citizens don't see our station activities, our staff have friends and family that are on the outside. We must remain customer oriented and part of that dimension are our internal customers (aka staff). Don't forget, the taxpayers are our actual "bosses" and as it has been said many times, "perception is reality!" We as firefighters seem to act as if we are compartmentalized in our own world and sometimes fail to realize that the impacts of our attitudes and actions may reach out farther than expected. Simply put... be professional.

A.C. Rich - 02/28/10 - 10:33

Observe the recent news out of Clark County, NV, where citizens complain of seeing fire trucks at the gym too much. Do they understand that firefighters are, for practical purposes, professional athletes? No. So the chief has to tell the troops to be more aware. Spend less time there.

Legeros - 02/28/10 - 10:43

AC, your comments me think of something else on this topic. Another aspect of the "new person experience" is the orientation for those coming from other occupations, and outside the fire service. If you have work experience in professions with zero comparison to station life, the earlier components— chain of command, apprenticeship tasks, razzing, hazing— might be entirely disorienting. For myself, or what I remember of 21 years ago, the razzing was the hardest to comprehend. To this day, I still don't understand the appeal of hours of contemplation on getting another person's goat. (Well, okay, until I apply later-learned perspectives of psychology, sociology, group dynamics, etc.)

Legeros - 02/28/10 - 11:13

Hazing in the 50's; grandfather and two others had battery acid thrown on them in the showers, in the 70's; father and other "new boys" were poked with electric cow prods (similar to today's tasers), electric wires sewn into bedspreads from lamps to create a shock when lamps were turned on, fire poles greased for someone unexpected to slide down, broke and sprained ankles etc. New boys locked in lockers and ammonia cleaner sprayed into it, also the mental side described above but a lot worse. In part so called "hazing" has become a lot less physical over the years and more mental.

There is definitely a line and A.C. is right, in this day and age it is a very thin line. In some peoples eyes if you cant take the heat at the firehouse then u wont be able to handle the mental aspects of the job. (not saying its right or wrong). Others do go to far because they might not like the individual or just may feel uncomfortable around them. Emergency services is a different animal than 95% of other careers. Back in my granddad's and dad's career their was a lot more ex-military personnel as a whole and now it seems there are more college type people in the service. Most (not all) ex-military already know how to and can handle those type situations because the had been exposed to it there. Race, religion and gender are always hot button issues and putting people down for them and discriminating against them is a definite no-no.

At the same time, if 2 people are pokin fun at one another for being different what happens when one of them finally get upset. Is that person being hazed or they just wanted to dish it out and not take it? is it fair to call that "hazing"? They were willing to participate untill their feelings got hurt. Personally I don't care, talk s!@# about me, make fun of me (believe me i bring most of it on myself) pick with me, just don't steal from me, mess with my personal belongings, and be there to help me when the S@#%t hits the fan so i can go home and see my family again. Sticks and Stones people ITS not that difficult. Ohh and be ready to take it if YOU dish it out.

To Recent:

-"I can tell the difference between doing something in "good fun" and when youre trying to piss me off, just to piss me off and "find my goat"...If I dont wanna play your games today, leave me alone. Im not here to play your games, Im here to do a job, not to play games, let me do my job."

Do u really want to be alone?? That is what u are asking for. Learn to play! ever thought that if you open up and play back and pick back and find their goat that they might start slacking off?

"If Im doing something wrong, TELL ME, TEACH ME, dont just talk trash about me to everyone you know and blast me at the end of the year. IF I DONT KNOW YOUR EXPECTATIONS, I CANT MEET THEM. I CANT FIX WHAT I DONT KNOW IS BROKEN."

Are you having to be told the same thing multiple times? If you are, then yes you are going to get picked on!

"I may be a new boy, but Im a grown man too. Im not your punching bag or doormat. "Its tradition" does not mean you get to disrespect me at will."

You are new! Take it like a man! probably wouldnt last long if you didn't show that it bothered you so much.

"You are You. You LOVE Andy Griffith, Nascar, CMT, Smoky and the Bandit and Fox News. Thats fine. But if go to watch something else after 6, dont bug me about it all day and night. Its not that Im being unsociable, its that I dont feel like learning Barny's life lesson or watching 500 left turns today. Let me, be me."

If you don't like those shows then you need to leave the fire service!!!! LOL just kidding! Have you ever thought that if you are the minority at the station (by that i mean the only one who likes different things) then if you want to be part of the team, then you need to do things the others are doing and not be separate??

Sounds to me that you do have a chip on your shoulder and want to separate yourself from the group. Every station assignment is different and not all set up to fit your personal needs, some are closer to you while others aren't. Its up to you how to fit in, not everyone else.

gen3fire - 03/03/10 - 19:07

Wanted: firefighters. Must be strong, smart, and have or be willing to learn to have a thick skin. That last qualification is the kicker. Not just buffered against raw humanity— which the job sees and serves— but also adapting to your station mates, their personalities, temperaments, interests, and tendencies therein. Kinda like getting married to multiple spouses. Can be one heck of a honeymoon!

Legeros - 03/03/10 - 19:29

gen3fire – You crook knee Q-tip :-)) I'm sure u remember a certain LT who said he had "rhino skin" and we couldn't tick him off he we tried, and Nip had him pissed off in about 15 minutes. How about the kiddie helmet that A-Shift made with the persons match.com profile written all on it. As the saying goes: "what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger."

BP - 03/03/10 - 21:02

LOL!! Those were some fun times BP. Had Cini on the opposite shift. What about the late night training session on the truck. One of the best assignments i was on. Miss that crew!

gen3fire - 03/04/10 - 08:38

So what are you trying to say, Q-tip?

Cinni - 03/04/10 - 13:46

Very interesting topic. I pretty much agree with the majority of comments of 'razzing' vs. 'hazing.' Hazing is malicious and is way out of line. Getting razzed? get over it. If you can't "fight" back then just ignore it, they'll eventually get tired and move on to someone else. But, you really need to be able to laugh at yourself, that will go a loooong way to diffusing a razz attack. The survey was interesting too, and with good comments. My only point of contention is on FNG station duties: Checking truck, cleaning latrines, etc. = yes; the coffee bit, hell no. If you want coffee, make it your damn self even if you're an officer. I never made coffee for officers in the military, I played along in the fire dept. until I got some complaints about the coffee being too strong and that was the end of it. That task can't be tied to anything close to station duties even by the most convoluted logic. Maybe that's a pet peeve of mine, I don't know. BTW, for "OIF/OEF VET" who was out of the military for "over 10 years," your math is wrong, how can you be an OIF/OEF vet since you apparently DX'ed prior to 2000. Not trying to call you out, but I'm just wondering. Bottom line on razzing, quit crying and learn how to "pick back." It CAN be done without disrespecting rank/position.

Stay low!

Army OEF vet - 03/09/10 - 12:31

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

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No

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