

**Charleston Training Chief Resigns and The News Therein**

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This week, the [Courier-Post in Charleston reported](#) that the training director of the Charleston Fire Department has resigned. He was hired help to implement changes in the department after the Super Sofa Fire that killed nine firefighters on June 18, 2007. Among the improvements during his tenure was extending recruit training from eight-days (!) to 20 weeks. Federal and state standards are also now being met, though the article isn't specific on those standards. Presumably training? The article also discusses the chief's reason for leaving, and challenges he's cited in the performance of his position.

The news has made some of rounds. Firehouse.com, The Secret List, South Carolina on Fire, for starters. At least one "fire blog" has carried same. For your Sunday discussion, is this a story that should have legs? At least for fire service readers? Or is it a little too much like "inside baseball." How do readers feel about such personnel stories in general? Can they be sufficiently objective, or are they naturally grounded in one side of a two-sided story. (Though don't all stories have three sides? Mine, yours, and the truth?) Finally, what's the relationship of this latest development to the lessons still being learned from the before and after of a very difficult period in the history of Charleston Fire Department? Discuss as desired.

Mine, yours, and the truth. Definitely.

**DJ** - 11/14/10 - 16:00

I would like to hear from both sides on this one. I've followed this story since the day of the fire because I truly could not believe that a FD operated like that in the 21st century. I believe that the Charleston FD is handcuffed by the Mayor and the "good ole boy" mindset. But for the CFD to ever to overcome this, there has to be a change in the City Council/Mayor management system and a complete overhaul of the CFD Administration, from the Chief down to the BC's. One item that I believe is leaving the fire service is the "Para-Military" management style. I have never met Chief Ghi but from what I read it appears he has that tone of a drill sergeant and some FF's couldn't or didn't like that. OH WELL! If you're not in a position to give orders, you take orders, NO QUESTIONS! I don't know, but I hope it gets better down there soon or history is bound to repeat itself. Let's hope not.

**NCTruckie** - 11/14/10 - 18:48

Its also the 21st centry, the whole take orders, don't think mentality needs to go. Some officers like the whole "do as I say, not as a I do" guys from the old school have now been passed by. Only so much respect goes with the rank.

**Truckie?** - 11/15/10 - 13:30

Truckie?...I couldn't disagree more! Your comment is so ridiculous and off-base it doesn't even deserve conversation. If that is truly your mindset, please submit your resignation, I hear Walmart is accepting applications.

**KP** - 11/15/10 - 21:52

There are definitely 2 sides to the story. Reading the article and then reading some of the comments that the firefighters posted, i am still leaning towards a Charleston hierarchy that really doesnt want to change as much as they say they do. If they were trying to get 50 recruits through, Ghi would need alot of resources, plus if SC has certification hrs close to NC then it would take most of that time just in classroom hrs. He would need about 7 asst. instructors to help split the the recruits to manageable numbers. I can see why they only caught 1 or 2 hydrants or only pulled lines once or twice. Charleston is not that big so i would have to guess they probably didnt have the resources for that size academy. Maybe some smaller back to back academys would have been alittle easier to manage. I know Raleigh has made alot of adjustments over the years with handling larger recruit classes to get more hands on training along with all the classroom hours which occurs over 26 weeks but none with over 40 recruits (i believe). I also believe "para military" is a MUST. Now days it seems like firefighters agree on less and less all the time, just take meals for example, if we acted on the fireground like we do trying to plan for meals then by the time everyone agrees with the plan the house would have burned down. Therefore rank and taking orders are very important, you dont have to agree with it but u do have to follow them except in extreme cases where you or your companys safety is threatened due to negligence but i dont think that

is very common.

**gen3fire** - 11/15/10 - 23:37

KC, what's your take on generational differences between firefighters in all this? I might be easy to think that older and older school firefighters might be more resistant to change than the younger bucks entering the system. Or is it more (or also) a factor that each new generation brings more ideas and opportunities to the table?

Or are both perspectives really a red herring? The requirements and nature of the job and profession seem to expand outward with each generation. Sure, wet stuff still on red stuff, but with educational, technical, computerized, specialized, and other aspects added in recent decades. And which needs to be adapted to, and thus, changed for.

Maybe it's both. The people are different, and the job is different.

**Legeros** - 11/16/10 - 07:07

The firefighting part of the job isn't that different, yes there is more things to deal with such as light weight construction, more plastics, EMS, etc. But I think the bottom line is most firefighters take the job to serve and to help people. The biggest changes to me have to do with documentation, thus computers and better data collection. My 15 yr old has been using computers since kindergarden, I didn't use computers until Senior year in high school, generation before me didn't see computers until they were in their 30's. I also feel that some of the older guys just simplify things much better while younger ones are more analytical. But that's how the service progresses. The basic things that doesn't seem to change is "risk a lot to save a lot", "risk little to save little" and get between what is burning and what isn't. Common sense rules on the fireground where as you can analyze and try different things in training and non-emergency situations. There are just a lot of opinions on how to do it, so the rank structure comes in to help speed up the process. Doesn't mean the ranking officer is always right or that he/she always has the best way but when you're on the fireground they make the call and they also shoulder the responsibility and I think a lot of firefighters when they are new (including myself) don't realize the responsibility aspect until they start becoming the older firefighters. I hope that makes sense.

**gen3fire** - 11/16/10 - 09:17

I'm not going to keep on about Charleston, because we all know things have to change down there to prevent another tragedy. Black gear and leather helmets don't make you a good firefighting department, your tactics do. They suffered a huge loss a few years ago, but the mindset has to change. You CAN be aggressive and safe at the same time.

Being autocratic has its place, to me it's on the fire-ground. No time for debate, if something needs to be done and an order is given, DO IT. For the longest time, members were trained to follow orders. But, we also have to train our members to be able to think when it comes to the job. Recognize fire conditions when you see them. Be able to adapt tactics if things aren't "normal". This comes with not only training, but time on the job and real world experience. The Boss is there, but he/she has a lot going on when they pull up to a worker. It's got to be a sigh of relief for an Engine Boss, when they pull up and he can rely on his crew to make the stretch and be ready to roll while he's performing a size-up. Same goes for a Truck Boss, to be able to rely on the second crew of your Truck to make a call which will positively affect the outcome of the incident and not have to micro-manage.

Around the firehouse, I already know how I'll be if I ever make it up a little further (Lord help us). Empower your crew (especially the senior members), or else you'll produce a bunch of "scaredy cats". If something isn't getting done, then it's time to step in. But, this is how decision making skills are developed. Take a fresh rookie on the job; if you tell them every single thing to do, and every single move to make, they'll be "that guy" that expects to be told EVERY SINGLE THING TO DO when they get more time on!!! Sure, you have to explain the job to them and they're learning, but around the firehouse the Boss shouldn't be in the "give orders" role. After you have confidence in the new guys, let them "make the call" on car fires and dumpster fires of what line to pull and where to attack it from (but step in of course if safety is an issue). If they veer off track, rely on the senior guys around the firehouse to put them back on the track (of course unless directives/policies are broken, then you as a Boss have a job to do).

Stay safe (but aggressive)...

**Silver** - 11/16/10 - 11:50

And now a funny story; way back when I was a fresh faced, 21 year old Lieutenant with a combination department (I was a vollie), I was asked to fill in for the paid officer for a 24 hour tour (I think I begged him actually). "Heck yeah", I said, as I was finally going to be able to get some first-in experience. Woohoo!!!

That cold December morning, at around 0900 hours, house fire gets banged out and we're on a reserve engine. I had just taken a bite out of my bagel when the pre-alert from Rick the dispatcher hit; "House Fire, Sweetgum Drive". I was still chewing as we walked across the bay floor to load up. The Fire Chief was paid during the day, and he ran 75% of the calls anyway, so I was good to go, right? I remember walking past his shiny silver Caprice in the first bay as we headed to the engine bay, but felt it odd that he wasn't loading up. I figured "ahhhh, must have been on le toilet", typically right around his usual "office/reading time". So I'll stall for just a sec so he can come down and pull out, and we will fall in behind him.

As the engine cranked, and bay door raised, I noticed him walking (he never ran) up the street coming from the Police Station/ Town Hall. At that exact moment, I thought "holy crap" (those that know me, know it wasn't crap though), I'm going to be first due and have to actually make decisions. My stomach dropped and foot got heavier on the Federal. As we crossed over US #1, there it was, a well defined smoke column. What the heck was I going to do??? We were going to beat the Chief!! HE ALWAYS called the shots, and to think I have a newer guy on the back and myself to make the initial decisions which will determine the outcome of the incident.

We pulled up to what was a "good" worker, knocked it out, and then were mopping up. Here it was, 30 minutes into the incident, and I still had that piece of bagel in my mouth. I was so nervous during the whole deal, I forgot to chew.

Moral of the story; empower your members to make minor decisions on their own, or else they'll rely on the Boss all the time and end up with cotton-mouth and a 30 minute-old piece of chewed bagel still in their mouth. Oh yeah, it'll make them better in the future too...

**Silver** - 11/16/10 - 12:40

Silver it was actually a cold January morning. Jan 6, 1999 and you were covering for me. It was also a new firefighters working fire. You did a good job.

**apexbattchief** - 11/16/10 - 14:30

Scoot, I remember it was right after Christmas. Couldn't remember what month, but you are correct, I was covering for you so you would know. Anyways, point was to empower your members so they aren't so reliable upon someone else always telling you what to do, and watch out for the chewed bagel pieces!

**Silver** - 11/16/10 - 16:10

Name: (real name  
preferred)  
E-mail: (optional)  
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

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No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

**What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?**

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Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

**Small print:** All html tags except <b> and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.