



Compromise is a Necessary Leadership Characteristic

by Assistant State Fire Marshal Tim Bradley

One of the problems with being in a position of leadership is that occasionally you have to make the final decision on an issue that has more than one valid and supportable point of view. I got into a discussion once with a lady who became quite agitated when I told her, that in reality, government was a great deal about compromise. She insisted that government “was about the will of the people.” I could not disagree with her point, but I tried to explain to her that if government was “about the will of the people,” and everyone didn’t have the same will (which is usually the case), and both sides couldn’t be completely right or completely wrong all the time, didn’t someone have to compromise? She replied that you never compromised if you were on the right side. At that point, I used an old and wise debating tactic that has served many people well through the years. I smiled and gave up. The economy has recently created situations at every level of government in which huge budget

cuts are predicted. If you serve in a county or municipality where cuts are not an issue, consider yourself fortunate and unique. In most areas someone will have to make hard decisions about what to keep and what to cut.

I am always amused at people who draw lines in the sand early in their career with stubborn expectations that the line will never be crossed. Compromise is often necessary to resolve two seemingly valid arguments that represent opposing points of view. When faced with a shortfall, a chief is given the decision to either cut fire prevention staff, go to three-man engine companies, close a station or delay upgrading airpicks to become NFPA compliant, his only avenue is compromise. If he stands firm and refuses to cut, he simply leaves the decision to the city fathers who have less knowledge about the running of a fire department. Then he could tell his folks with dignity that he didn’t make cuts, the city did—in which case the department may have

suffered a huge loss but the chief maintained his virtue.

Perhaps it would be better for the department if he could barter solutions that combine various smaller cuts but don’t eliminate anything. With this course of action, the chief made the tough choices, but the department didn’t see such a significant loss. To get sprinklers, we often compromise setbacks, wall ratings or occupancy levels. The wise leader is the one who realizes what compromise is acceptable, not the one who refuses to compromise on principle. Irish political philosopher Edmund Burke said in 1786, “All government – indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act – is founded on compromise and barter.” While I would maintain we should resist the impulse to compromise our beliefs, virtues or ethics, the truth is that on most other things there are very few straight lines in the sand.

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin was considered the wisest man in

America. He had been dispensing wisdom for years in a well-known published column in Boston called “Poor Richard.” He had harnessed lightning with a kite, convinced France to come to the aid of America in the revolution and negotiated the Treaty of Paris, which made England finally recognize America’s sovereignty. He was considered one of the legendary figures in his time, and he still is today. I recently read a biography of his life, and he was also recognized as being hardheaded. On Sept. 17, 1787, he rose to speak in favor of a draft constitution and, by doing so, helped forge and embody the spirit of compromise and conciliation that he knew was necessary to forge a democratic nation and to keep that nation working. For him it was a tough but necessary compromise.

Contrary to popular understanding, the United States Constitution was not written until a little over 11 years after the

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The History of Steam Fire Engines in North Carolina

Long before the era of diesel-powered pumpers, steam fire engines protected North Carolina’s larger cities and towns. Over 40 steamers served in our state. Most were delivered between 1880 and 1910.

Charlotte’s first steamer was operated by the Hornet Steam Fire Engine Company around 1865. Three others served the Queen City, including a 1902 American LaFrance named “Old Sue,” which was restored by firefighters in 1999.

Durham’s two 1903 LaFrance steamers were named “Black Pattie” and “Black Jack.” The former was the first in the state delivered with rubber tires. Durham also operated a 1912 American LaFrance that’s still owned by the fire department.

Elizabeth City operated an 1873 Silsby that formerly served San Antonio, Texas. Its second steamer, a 1902 Silsby, was named “Inez” after Chief G. S. Bell’s oldest daughter. It’s displayed at the Museum of the Albemarle.

Goldsboro’s Eclipse Fire Company operated an 1882 Silsby named “Mary Ellis.” Upon delivery of the first motor pumper in 1919, the steamer was placed in reserve. In 1940, it was retired and moved to Herman Park. It was scrapped during the metal drives of World War II.

Monroe owned an 1886 Silsby. Purchased with a municipal bond, the \$3,500 engine was first stored in a local livery stable. It was operated by the Acme Fire Company and placed in reserve by 1902. Later moved to a glass case at Jaycee Park, it was returned to the fire department in recent years and awaits restoration.

New Bern was served by four steamers: an 1865 Clapp & Jones, an 1868 Amoskeage, an 1879 Silsby and an 1884 Button. The Amoskeage



Durham’s 1912 American LaFrance. (Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection - Durham County Public Library)

was hand-pulled and considered of sufficient size until a large fire destroyed a portion of downtown. The Silsby and Button were still serving in 1913. Both are displayed at the New Bern Firemen’s Museum.

Raleigh’s first steamer was an 1870 Gould operated by the Rescue Steam Fire Engine Company. Hand-drawn for several years, its use dropped dramatically after the installation of fire hydrants in 1887. Its last public appearance was a fireman’s tournament in 1902.

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Inspection Tips

Using Cell Phones for Dispatch

Q: When it comes to grading, can a fire department be given credit for the use of cell phone or e-mail messaging for dispatch purposes?

A: Cell phone and e-mail communication for dispatch cannot be given credit in the North Carolina Response Rating System (NCRRS). Reliable absolute communication between the communication center and the emergency response agency is paramount. Fire departments cannot get credit for relying on e-mail and text messages or cell phone calls to dispatch personnel. County and city 911 centers responsible for the dispatch of department members to a particular incident should follow the recommendations of NFPA 1221, "Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems." This standard outlines recommended time goals and percentages from call receipt times to notify fire units. The NFPA standard recommends a maximum elapsed time of 75 seconds, 95 percent of the time, and 130 seconds, 99 percent of the time. These standards clearly cannot be met by fire departments or other emergency responders attempting to receive dispatches from inherently limited cell phone texting and e-mail.

There are hundreds of internet and phone service providers, and the "terms of service" of just a few of the major ISPs illustrates the problem of relying on e-mail and cell phone messaging for an emergency response agency. Verizon states that it "does not warrant that the service or equipment provided will perform at a particular speed, bandwidth or data throughput rate, or will be uninterrupted, error-free, and secure." AT&T acknowledges in its terms of services that "speeds may vary and are not guaranteed," and U.S. Cellular "does not guarantee delivery, timeliness, or that messaging services

will be available at all times." Alltel states that "in the event you have an urgent or emergency message that you are trying to send, Alltel strongly recommends that you also send the message through another service."

It is known that a number of counties and cities are providing cell phone texting dispatch of fire and emergency calls directly to cellular phone carriers from their 911 dispatch centers, therefore requiring hundreds of individual e-mails to be sent per emergency call. As a result, major problems occur within the counties' cell phone carriers. Many carriers can only be reached through internet e-mail, with no other means of backup connection, no prioritization of the emergency message and no confirmation of the emergency message being delivered or received by the emergency response agency.

In society today, many of us depend on cell phones for communication, both personally and professionally. There are a number of families who no longer have a hardwired phone in their home today because cell phones are easy to use, economical, and in most cases, have become what we depend on. However, for the protection of life and property, relying only on these methods of communications is dangerous at best and supported by an infrastructure that is not designed to provide emergency notification.

Dangerous and legal issues may occur when members of the emergency response agency start to depend on text messages or e-mail for dispatch and discontinue the use of radio paging systems that county or city 911 centers have established to notify responders of life safety and public need.

This is a reminder that cell phone and e-mails should not be used for dispatching any emergency response.

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The Capitol City's second steamer was a 1905 American LaFrance operated by the L.A. Mahler Fire Company. By the time a fully-paid Raleigh Fire Department was formed in 1912, the steamer was a special-called unit. It's presently parked at Station 28 with other antiques.

Rocky Mount's Steam Fire Engine Company operated an 1896 Silsby purchased for \$2,600 along with a \$111 hand hose reel. Its first fire station was at the corner of Sunset Avenue and Sorsby's Alley. The steamer was mule-drawn by 1912, and a motor-pulled reserve unit by 1917. It was restored in recent years and is displayed at the Rocky Mount Fire Museum.

Washington's Ocean Steam Fire Engine Company operated an 1888 Silsby. The horse-drawn apparatus was rebuilt in 1902 after fighting a large waterfront fire. With flames about to overrun the engine, firemen pushed it into the sound.

It stayed in the river for a week before being sent to Seneca Falls, N.Y., for repairs. It last fought fire in 1937 and was subsequently used to steam oysters at special events. The steamer is displayed at Station 1.

Wilmington was the state's largest city through the turn of the century and operated at least eight steamers built by Button, Gould, Nott and Silsby. The model years ranged from 1871 to 1886. Two were rebuilt with Nott boilers by 1910.

Its fire companies included Steam Fire Engine Company #1, Howard Relief Steam Fire Engine Company #1 and the Cape Fear Steam Fire Company, which was the country's first all-black steam fire engine company.

Steamers also served in Fayetteville, Greensboro, Greenville, Kinston, Reidsville, Salem, Salisbury, Statesville, Wilson, Winston and Winston-Salem. Learn more at www.legeros.com/history/steamers.

Mike Legeros is the historian of the Raleigh Fire Department.



(Above) Salisbury's 1907 American LaFrance Metropolitan before being scrapped during World War II. (Courtesy of the Salisbury Fire Department)

(Below) Wilmington Engine No. 4 in action, circa 1910. (Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives)

