

Applying business ideas to fire service leadership



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How do we create a template for success in an ever-changing dynamic environment?

In a time where we are having a hard time getting enough candidates to apply for Fire and EMS Service jobs, it may be time to rethink our approach to management and leadership to make us grow, thrive and become more efficient.

When we look at some of the most successful organizations in the World – Amazon, McDonalds, General Electric, etc. They have created a recipe for success that continues to grow and evolve even as leaders come up through the ranks, flourish and continue after retirements.

Over the past 30 years, I've been lucky enough to meet with some of the brightest minds in business and glean as much knowledge from them and apply it to the organizations that I represent.

Here are a few ideas that might be applicable to your team:

Creating vision and mission statements

First of all, as a leader or group of leaders, we need to clearly identify 'The Vision' of our agency, meaning what are the long-term goals we are striving for in the next 5–10 years and answer these questions:

- What are we going to do?
- Why are we doing it?
- How are we going to do it?

This then leads us into 'The Mission' which will need to address the following:

- Defining our short-term objectives

- Defining the who, what, why and how relating to those objectives
- Outlining the roadmap to make this mission successful in executing our longer-term vision.

Build your perfect team

Depending on your organizational or agency structure, you need to start promoting and building a support team that believes in your organizational 'Vision and Mission'.

I'm a firm believer that if you surround yourself with enough good people, that you will never fail; however, this takes time. In many cases, you may be promoted to the Fire Chief or Administrator bypassing others on your leadership team (and some may not be happy). I've found the best way to address this is through clear, concise dialogue to make sure we are on the same page along with listening to their needs in making the organization thrive. My brother always suggested it's easier to attract flies with honey than manure, and heavy-handed one-way directives typically aren't successful.

Have patience, if your perfect team members aren't on the team today, keep building, guiding and training the next leaders to be promoted into the roles that fit and can execute your organization's vision.

Span of control

As a leader we need to make sure we are creating multipliers of our vision. To do this, we must delegate tasks and have confidence that those tasks will be executed.

Command and control teach us that we can effectively manage three to seven people, which should be our leadership team consisting of our Chief Officers covering off key organizational components such as: Operations, EMS, Administration, Logistics and Fire Prevention.

The organizational vision and mission must be instilled clearly and communicated to each of these Division Leaders, and you must trust them to carry this on to the members through the ranks, having a ripple effect of the ideas that you want to instill.

90-day management cycles

In our business organization, our leadership team meets in person or virtually every 90 days to discuss our vision and mission. During this meeting, each leadership team member under the CEO (Fire Chief) is tasked with (5–7) measurable tasks or objectives and reports back at the next meeting on

if they were all executed. We keep those organized and visible for all team members to see during a 90-day cycle to keep 'Top of Mind' via simple white boards in each office or through digital management tools such as Trello or Slack.

I'm a strong believer that 'Visibility creates Accountability' in a team setting and we can all keep each other accountable to make sure the individual's tasks are completed while accomplishing organizational goals.

Just think, if you can delegate small measurable tasks amongst a full team, what could you accomplish over 1, 5 or 10 years?

90-day example:

Fire Chief (5–7 Direct Reports)

- Division Chief of Operations – 7 Tasks
- Division of EMS – 7 Tasks
- Division Chief of Training – 7 Tasks
- Division Chief of Logistics – 7 Tasks
- Division Chief of Administration – 7 Tasks
- 90-Day Result – 35 (Objectives Completed)
- Annual Result – 140 (Objectives Completed)
- 5 Year Result – 700 (Objectives Completed)

Imagine as a leader, if you could create small multipliers of your Vision executing on your behalf every day?

More importantly, imagine all of these small tasks truly moving the needle of your organization to execute the future of your organization!

Summary

Although there is no perfect recipe for success, we can increase the probability of an organization's success if we look at building our Fire or Public Safety Agency from the same set of eyes as successful businesses.

Take a step back this week and look at your agency from a 30,000ft view and begin asking yourself:

- What is our Vision?
- What is our Mission?
- Do I have the right leaders in place?
- What are our goals for the next 90 days?
- What are our goals for the next year?
- Can I break these goals down to small objectives that can be achieved?

Good luck and never stop 'Planning, Building and Executing'.