



Paul's Leadership Tips

Chief Paul H. Stein

paulhstein@aol.com

A TRAIN RIDE

Over 25 years ago a friend of mine (Bob Haynes) retired from the Los Angeles Fire Department. When he left he wrote this article about his career. I rediscovered the article in my article archives. As I read "A Train Ride" two thoughts came to mind. First, Bob hit the nail on the head regarding fire department careers and second, nothing has changed. I took the liberty of updating some of the article terms but, the article is Bob's creation. I hope you enjoy reading "The Train Ride by Bob" as much as I did.

When I first came on the job, I met a very well respected Firefighter. He seemed to be good at everything he undertook. I found, however, that he was not as happy as I thought he should be. He told me that he was going to retire. Having just come on the job, I was flabbergasted at anyone wanting to leave such a great job. He told me that it was time for him to leave, because he was tired of all the "bull". He didn't want to stay too long and start disliking everything...And he was gone!

Now that I have gone down that road also, I reflect on the larger picture. I liken it to a train ride.

The train stops at the station and a very tired man gets off. As he leaves, a warm seat is open on the train, and a young and energetic man is waiting to board. He has stars in his eyes, and is eager to get going. He boards the train and takes the only seat available. It is warm and comfortable. He looks around and notices men of all ages and sizes. They all seem to have one thing in common, they love this train ride. As the train gathered speed, all aboard seemed to pull together. The rookie looked up and discovered the beautiful scenery on each side of the train. My God, he thought, what a wonderful ride. Why would that man have gotten off? But I'm glad he did, because I was able to take his seat. The train sped down the tracks with an enjoyable hum. About this time, it was time to eat. Well, on this train they fed very well, very good food and lots of it. My two favorite things when it comes to food. Watch out for the chef, he can be ornery, but quite talented.

As the years go by, I continue to bathe in the thoughts of all the wonderful things this train ride has to offer. I am trained well in everything you can imagine. I am very confident in my abilities to keep this train going up steep grades around tight corners but always on track toward our goal. At times I feel weary because of the workload, but I'm always ready for the challenge of what is around the next bend. As I become more involved in the ride, I begin to notice that I am surrounded by some of the highest quality people that I have ever known. These people would lay down their life for anyone on this train. Obviously I became closer and closer to them. I found myself enjoying leisure time with them. I was involved in all phases of their personal lives. These people truly were my life.

When I had been on the train for many years, I started to notice the smoke from the engine. It wasn't bad, but I didn't like it. Each day I noticed the clickity clack of those damn tracks. It wasn't too bad though. The Chief Engineer was barking orders at everyone on the train and the Captain of each car would try gallantly to carry out those orders. Since I was an old timer, I could tell the difference between a good order and the "bull". I often wondered how the poor Captain could keep a straight face when relaying some of that fodder. They were generally pretty good at sifting through and keeping only the good stuff.



Each time the train would stop at a station, some old timers would get off. Almost immediately, their seat would be filled with a strong, smiling, and smart young man. He was really enjoying this ride. It didn't take long for them to soak up the good stuff necessary to really be an asset to this train. But as I sat back in my seat, I noticed that damn clickity clack. The smoke from that struggling engine was really beginning to annoy me. About this time, we took a real sharp curve, which threw me out of my seat. At that point, I decided that my ride was almost over. All these great people around me hadn't changed, I had. So, yes, at the next station, I got off that wonderful ride, and left my seat open for a wide-eyed, pink cheeked young rookie to enjoy. I only hope that my peers have as much respect for me as I do for them.

My wonderful ride was over. I hope that I left the train a little better than I found it. I looked away from the station, and saw a big beautiful world out there. I walked off the platform and into the rest of my life. From time to time I see that big train charging down the tracks, and wave at those onboard. I really miss the passengers on that train, but I don't miss the clickity clack and the smoke belching from that monster I call the train.

Once again, thank you Bob. As I said in my beginning thoughts, he hit the nail right on the head. Most of us loved our fire department careers. We contributed our skills, experience, labor and knowledge to the department. We entered buildings where people were running out of and sometimes we wished we could go with them. Our entire careers, revolved around helping people. Our courage was tested on the fire ground and our character was tested in the fire house.

We are proud of our careers and have made lifelong friends. However, over the year's things, conditions and people change. Like most of us Bob knew it was time to get off the train.

*VIVI BENE--LIVE WELL
RIDI SPESSO--LAUGH OFTEN
E AMA MOLTO--LOVE MUCH*

