



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Acronyms and Quotes

I really like acronyms and quotes because they are the epitome of succinctness. Brief. To the point. Requiring very little interpretation.

For example, if I gave you the letters SOS would you know what I'm talking about? If I gave you the letters BS you have any difficulty defining what my opinion was of whatever was written was being discussed. This is a way with quotes "don't give up the ship" was probably uttered only by one person in the history of naval warfare, even if it is used today to try to encourage anybody to finish a job that they have started. John Paul Jones got credit for the quote. We use both acronyms as a form of mental shorthand to characterize communications all the time.

What got me searching on this path is a recent discussion regarding sporting teams and the use of mottos and such within the military. They are experts at creating images that get that Garner face and loyalty from a variety of human beings that may not even share any other common factor than their loyalty to a phrase or a symbol.

What do you think is the acronym or quote that best expresses the American fire service? There are those among us who believe that are symbology has hurt and helped us depending upon the conditions under which it was expressed. Many young people have joined the fire service based upon the assumption that if they pass probation the enclosed ranks with America's heroes. On the other hand firefighters have been verbally and even physically attacked recently. We are no longer looked upon as being exempt from criticism.

When I first started writing this article, I was focused on the idea of branding and positioning, but as I thought about it and begin to form a different perspective on this one minute message concept. You probably remember the one minute manager. What I'm going to for refer to is the one minute impression.

Before I talk too much about that impression, I would like to share an observation that has emerged from years of working with political figures with regard to their perspective on us. Is there an elected official anywhere who would turn down the chance to have their picture taken on the back of a fire truck especially if they had the opportunity to have their hands on the shoulders of some rugged looking individuals? One might think that this kind of this Association is highly desirable. But it is not well sustained over time. Politicians have to respond to pressure and frequently that pressure does not emerge as being favorable to the fire service.

One of things I learned in talking to many politicians is that there is a direct correlation between their level of understanding of what we can and should be doing and their understanding of what we need in order to do our jobs. I will make two statements: those people who understand the same facts that we understand tend to be more sympathetic to our positioning. Those people who think they know more about what we're doing than we do, are often less sympathetic to our position. This is when the worthy



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acronyms and the quotes come back into play. The more modern term for both of these might be the phrase "soundbite." What I'm referring to is whether or not our advocates and our allies are as well armed as our enemies and adversaries are. If our images reduced to a caricature it is easy to dismiss the fire services requests for consideration. The phraseology of how we explain what we do contains a great deal of jargon and insider information. That is counterproductive to obtaining respect contemporary society.