



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Common Courtesy

This is going to be either a really quick column to read, or it is going to take you a few minutes longer as you contemplate what to do after you put it down. Let me ask you a question at the outset. Have you received an Assistance to Firefighter Grant? If you have never received a grant then the rest of this column is not going to make much sense to you at all. However, if you are a recipient of an AFG grant, I would like to pursue a couple of thoughts with you about common courtesy.

And, I am not talking in a general fashion; I am talking to each of you specifically who has received this grant. No matter if it was a small one that helped you overcome an obstacle in your department or a huge one such as the new fire station, the amount that is being given out to your fire department, makes no difference. What I am about to talk about is whether or not we are doing a good job letting our federal legislatures know that we appreciate their efforts.

So, here is the test! Have you ever written a letter of thank you to your local federal Congressman or Senator or to any of the individuals who set on the various committees that support the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program? If the answer is yes, please accept my respect. You have engaged in a common courtesy that wouldn't be much different than someone giving you a very nice birthday present or for that matter a Christmas Present.

However, if you have received the grant and never expressed any appreciation to those who made it possible, you might be contributing to the reason why there is more and more resistance to ongoing funding of these types of grants. It is probably not very politic to talk about that resistance. As a matter of fact, we have so many of our leaders fighting diligently to keep the AFG program alive and moving forward and I know they know we appreciate what we have been given.

But what brought this to my attention recently was a speaker who was explaining the AFG program to the attended gathering. When the event was over, I walked over to the side of the room and had a brief conversation and he revealed a little sensitivity that I want to relay back to you.

Essentially what he said was that in spite of the fact that they have given away millions and millions of dollars there are more complaints than there are compliments. He didn't get real specific. I didn't pursue specificity. I am quite sure that there are those of you out there that have picked up the phone and expressed your appreciation. Moreover, I am hoping that some of you took the time to write letters expressing that same sentiment. But, if you haven't there is an opportunity for you to act now. We should never take the AFG program for granted. While there are many number of people who have expressed concerns about how it is done, the fact is that it is being done is important to all of us. We



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have to have a strong sense of appreciation for just how far the federal government has gone to try to help us solve what is essentially a local problem.

There is no fire department of the United States. As a matter of fact I am not even sure if there is a monolithic structure that can be called the fire service of the United States. We represent anything from the small rural fire department in places that might not even have a zip code, all the way up to some of the most well organized, well trained, and well staffed metropolitan fire departments in the world.

That doesn't exempt us from good common sense. It doesn't hurt to say thank you.

Then of course, you have to mean it. Superficial issuance of a compliment may have the opposite effect. What I think we ought to be doing right now is sitting down and examining two factors. The number one factor is has the AFG Grant Program really made a significant difference to the American Fire Service? If it has, we should start helping the government understand that by giving specific feedback on what a difference it made in our communities. Finishing up the paperwork on your grant application does not terminate with the final financial statement. It should have the follow-up with letting people know how much we appreciate what they have done for us.

My last point regarding common courtesy is that we need to recognize the diligence and hard work of all of those who sit on our peer review committees and who are part of the "bureaucracy" that make this system work. I know that the term bureaucracy has a negative connotation. However, in this case without the dedicated staff and a huge amount of volunteer work and the leadership by current and past administrators the AFG program would have remained a pipe dream.

Take the time to say thank you – I bet you will feel better also!