



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Organizational CPR

If you are a firefighter you have had basic first aid training. Quick – what are the first three things that we have to do to make sure that a person who is unconscious and down survives? A, B, C.

If your mind hasn't already locked on airway, breathing and circulation I would be moderately surprised. Those three letters have been branded in the minds of anybody who is in the life safety business.

Now let's change the scenario. What if your organization is comatose? What if your organization is in need of life support? What if your organization is suddenly in need of immediate resuscitation?

Let's keep it simple. Go to the ABC's again, except let's substitute three new words for the acronym. They are attitude, behavior, and code of ethics. In essence these three things stand for keeping an appropriate perspective. Acting on incidents on an appropriate fashion and doing so in a manner in which credibility is restored to the organization over time.

When someone goes down with a heart attack they are probably not going to be up running the marathon tomorrow morning. And it is the same way with organizations. They deteriorate over time and when they do go down it takes a lot of rebuilding to bring them back. The approach I am recommending here is a very simplistic one and yet it has its primary impact by providing life support to an organization when it is in distress. It is not a substitute for good leadership. Nor is it an effective replacement for strong management. It is the form of resuscitation for organizations that are not functioning inappropriately.

As readers of this column know I frequently get my ideas from conversations with other fire chiefs and these inputs come from all over the country. This particular column was inspired by a conversation with an individual who is experiencing very serious problems with his department. He was angry, disappointed, frustrated and his behavior was counterproductive, even vengeful and he was wondering why he was still having problems getting his organization back on its feet. He was visibly distraught over the conditions in the department. And, he let his disappointment show. His attitude was in need of adjustment.

What is Attitude? And attitude can be either positive or negative. This is because it is a mental position relative to a way of thinking or being; a leaning toward that which you believe. A positive attitude is, therefore, the inclination to generally be in an optimistic, hopeful state of mind. A negative attitude, hence is the inclination to be pessimistic and in a depressed frame of mind.

If you want to experience a positive attitude you have to work at it. If you go to the Internet and type in the words "positive attitude you will be amazed at the number of entries. One I felt that was compelling



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was an article by Remez Sasson that spells out specific actions that you can engage in to remain in a positive mood. There were literally hundreds of suggestions as to resources ranging from textbooks to quotes. One of my favorites was; "On the mountains of truth you can never climb in vain: either you will reach a point higher up today, or you will be training your powers so that you will be able to climb higher tomorrow. That quote was from Friedrich Nietzsche.

But once you overcome your attitude you must behave in a specific fashion. That leads to the concept of Behavior Modification. Behavioral modification is the use of empirically demonstrated behavior change techniques to improve behavior, such as altering an individual's behaviors and reactions to stimuli through positive and negative reinforcement of adaptive behavior and/or the reduction of maladaptive behavior through punishment and/or therapy. In short if you believe in making a positive change in life you have to actually act upon the behavior externally. Look behavioral modification up on Wikipedia and you will get a really good definition of what you might have to do to change your behavior.

And that leads us to the final letter in the ABC's of organizational resuscitation; Code of Ethics. To answer the question of "Why have a Code of Ethics?" you can visit the website of the Life Skills Coach Association and learn that there are at least 6 good reasons to follow up with having a code of conduct in the organization. Their list is as follows:

1. to define accepted/acceptable behaviors;
2. to promote high standards of practice;
3. to provide a benchmark for members to use for self evaluation;
4. to establish a framework for professional behavior and responsibilities;
5. as a vehicle for occupational identity;
6. as a mark of occupational maturity;"

So, if your organization is suffering from malaise and there is a feeling of despair start the resuscitation process. I sort of believe that this is also like our first aid duties in that it is mouth to mouth also. It combines taking ideas out of your head about what is positive in life, transmitting it to others and repeating until the organization is breathing on its own again. But, not unlike real CPR make sure you call for assistance before going it entirely on your own. That is what your mentors and role models are for.