



# *Paul's Leadership Tips*

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## **PAYING ATTENTION TO LIFE'S LESSONS**

Our lives are often shaped by direct and indirect influences. In the past we've discussed the various experiences that often affect our lives. It's always interesting when we find ourselves doing or saying something that our parents did, and it's usually a shock! However, there are so many other examples that have an effect on us, even though we don't always realize it when it is happening.

These lessons are available to us throughout our lives. NFL pro football player Irv Cross was a defensive back with the Philadelphia Eagles and the L.A. Rams who transitioned into broadcasting at the end of his professional career. He spent fifteen years as the co-anchor of the "NFL Today" show. His success in the broadcasting field opened the door for other minorities to become play-by-play announcers and analysts. This year Mr. Cross was the recipient of the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Pete Rozelle Radio-Television Award for his "long-time exceptional contributions to radio and television in professional football." In his acceptance speech, he told the gathering that his fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Ewing, was his inspiration to succeed in life. Her positive influence on him led him to tell the Hall of Fame crowd that shortly after his mother died, Mrs. Ewing had consoled and encouraged him and he believed that "had she not put her arm around me that day, none of this would have ever happened".

A person more familiar to the entire world was Princess Diana. When she suddenly and tragically died, we were deeply amazed at the sense of loss that was felt not only in England, but also throughout the entire world. If our knowledge was limited to the negative things that were published about her, we would have missed some of the wonderful things she did with her life. The simple fact is that she displayed courage and integrity, and used her celebrity status and personal charisma for positive causes. Her efforts to aid the needy, at raising awareness for finding a cure for breast cancer and her tireless efforts to eliminate land mines worldwide were far more notable than any alleged eating disorder.

Sharing these thoughts about Princess Diana and Mrs. Ewing can teach us several things. There is always a complete story, not just the story that the media or negative individuals want to portray. It is our responsibility to seek the entire story. Secondly, be aware that what we do can have a tremendously positive or negative impact on others. Our encouragement can help another person achieve all that they are capable of, and conversely, our negative actions can impede any success that may be within their grasp.

While most of the time we see very positive encouragement in the fire service with Firefighters working together to assist our citizens, at times professional jealousy can interfere with our teamwork. When others are successful through promotions or outside activity, there can be a human tendency to become resentful. Consider the following example: A fire service friend of ours opened a very successful restaurant in Central California. Due to this success, this organizational "leveling mechanism" went into effect. Very few members of his department dined at the restaurant. When asked about this, the overall feeling of his peers was that this individual accomplished a lot, so they felt they didn't need to make him even more successful!

In a perfect world, we should be able to derive as much pleasure from the successes of our peers as we do from our own accomplishments. We often refer to our life's work as a "family", so we all need to think about having pride for the victories and the accomplishments of our fellow firefighters. We should feel good for them and not bad for ourselves.

Another life lesson was provided to us at an elementary school. Several years ago my grandson (PS) won a school award for reading accomplishment. While attending the award ceremony, the principal used a reward system to keep the noise level in the cafeteria down to a dull roar. After ringing a bell to get the children's attention, she would pick a child's name out of a bowl and give away a gift certificate to a local fast food restaurant. When the winner's name was read, some of the children would moan or boo because they didn't win. The principal took this opportunity to explain to the group that that they should not feel bad because they didn't win this time, but feel happy for their classmate that did. The children responded by applauding for the next winner. Sometimes lesson for kids can be beneficial for all of us!

We all have a personal billboard. Most of us have messages on our own personal billboard that deal with being treated with respect and dignity. Here are some of the messages:

**Be nice to me.** Very simply put, treat others as you would like to be treated. Often referred to as the "Golden Rule", it's a simple message that says I want to be treated with respect, and in turn, I will treat you with dignity and respect.

**Speak positively about me.** This also applies to your friends, fellow workers and your department. Since both of us are Italian, our mothers were very much alike. Besides throwing shoes and chasing us with broom sticks when we misbehaved, our mothers both told us more than once, "If you can't say something nice about someone, say nothing at all." Even though they weren't the originators of this saying, it was still very good advice. We also realize this is easier said than done, and we have admiration for those individuals that live by this rule.

**Keep an open mind.** Some of the people we interact with may seem to be perfectly impossible to deal with. They may appear to be petty, small minded, and manipulating. It often helps to try and find some redeeming quality that you can focus on, or better yet, try to determine if it's some bias that you have that's making you feel this way toward them. In the end, your quality of life will depend on your attitude. Someone once told us that only you can make yourself miserable! And remember, if your words will brighten someone's day, speak them, if those words will tarnish someone's reputation, keep them to yourself.

**If you are going to fight, use pillows.** Sometimes our emotion overtakes good judgment. We know this also because of our Italian heritage! Under the strain of emotion and/or stress, we often can say things we later regret. The words no sooner leave our lips and we know we have made a mistake. The message here is to get our mind in gear before our mouth gets going. Often, a simple slip of the tongue can have a negative impact on both a personal and a professional relationship. In any discussion, we should try to get all our points across without creating harm or being vindictive. Remember, it's okay to disagree, but not to be disagreeable.

**Build bridges, don't burn them.** When we realize that we have overstepped or overreacted, we must seek to repair the damage we've done. In many cases, this involves letting go of grudges and preconceived notions, and making an authentic effort to rebuild damaged relationships. It also involves making a serious commitment to learn from this error and avoid repeating it.

**Don't argue about bedtime if your pajamas have feet in them.** This is a message for all of us, not just our younger firefighters. Sometimes, when we are new to an organization it's better to observe and evaluate than to criticize. However, no matter how long we've been with an organization, sometimes we are too quick to make decisions or disparage people, organizational procedures or changes. It is always best to get all the facts and find out what the rationale for the actions were before you openly criticize.



In summary, we would like to acknowledge all of those wonderful people that helped to guide us along our way; our parents, the Princess Diana's and the Mrs. Ewing's, the firefighters that mentored us while we were learning our trade, and so often, our fellow workers. None of these people were "perfect", but they were there for us, providing lessons, displaying character and integrity every day. It is our duty to return that favor.

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

