



Paul's Leadership Tips

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THE THREE A's ACCOUNTABILITY, ATTITUDE AND AFFIRMATION

BY
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In today's culture, there are certain words that seem to be used frequently, and often their actual meaning can get lost in the rhetoric. As most of us in the Fire Service know, getting "back to the basics" is always a good idea. In this article, we will try to get to the essence of a few important words and their application, both in our daily lives, and in our Fire Service careers.

Accountability is one of those words that gets thrown around a lot these days. As citizens, we want our government to be accountable; as parents, we want our children to be accountable to us; and in the work place we want accountability to be a "two-way street", as our supervisors want us to be accountable to them, and we require the administration to be accountable to us. Like most words that seem to get overused, it's always a good idea to define the actual meaning. Accountability is defined by Webster as "*an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.*"

If you "Google" the word accountability, you will find that most of the information available applies to corporate America and deals with their "bottom line", i.e. profitability. As we all know, our "bottom line" in the Fire Service is really life, death and survivability. While some may feel that accountability has become a lost requirement, we believe organizational accountability must be at the highest levels in the fire service. So, what does accountability mean to us?

To be brief, it means doing your job to the best of your ability every day you come to work. It means knowing your level of responsibility to your peers, your supervisors and your subordinates. It means making good decisions based on facts, the willingness to admit and correct our mistakes and solving problems at our level, rather than pushing them up to the next level of authority. Accountability applies to every rank in the Fire Service, from Firefighter to Fire Chief.

Our personal level of accountability comes both from how we were raised and to the amount of ownership we have in our careers. Do we just do as we are told, or do we show initiative and go beyond what is required because we understand the traditions of the Fire Service?

It is no secret that supervisors cannot watch us every moment, and often, at the higher ranks, the level of supervision is minimal because it is understood that we do have ownership of our jobs. When we understand what that ownership means, our responsibility to the Fire Service and the act of going beyond what is required is not a burden, but a privilege. By performing at this level, we become a part of our long tradition of selfless public service, honoring those that came before us and preserving what they sacrificed for the firefighters that will follow us. Here is how we see it. Everyone in the organization should hold themselves accountable, and not depend on someone "looking over their shoulders". In the end, this is the highest form of respect we can give the Fire Service and ourselves.

Our level of personal accountability is often affected by our attitude. Our attitude reflects how we view others and ourselves. More importantly, it is a determiner of how we approach life's challenges. A positive attitude is essential for a successful life. The desire to be the best you can be is usually fostered in us by our parents and often our teachers. As we grow older, our

attitude really becomes our responsibility. The desire to excel at life is something that comes from within you, something that can be encouraged but cannot be “taught”.

As Training Officers and oral board interviewers, we were often asked to evaluate new candidates for the Fire Service. Without question, a positive attitude was a quality that was at the top of our list. We honestly felt that we could teach almost anyone to lay fire hose, put up ladders and perform basic EMT functions, but we could not teach them to have a positive attitude. We couldn't teach someone how to get along with their peers and supervisors, to fit in with a paramilitary organization, to adapt when things didn't go their way or to become a team player. These are traits and abilities they had to have and be able to demonstrate to us before they were ever hired!

Our attitudes are not determined by the past, not by others, nor by the amount of money or education we have amassed. Simply put, we alone determine our attitude, and we have the option everyday of our lives to decide what that attitude will be. Have you ever heard someone say “that person makes me unhappy?” The fact is that only you can make yourself unhappy. It's the same with attitude. We shape it ourselves.

So, what are some techniques for maintaining a positive attitude? Affirmation is a technique very similar to visualization. Professional athletes “visualize” or imagine themselves performing an act before they actually accomplish it... the three points shot, the touchdown pass, etc. Affirmation is seeing things in a positive way before they occur, putting yourself in the best possible condition to actually accomplish an act or the attitude you are seeking at the time. Alexander Haig a four-star general and former Secretary of State said it best; *“Make your life an affirmation, defined by your ideals, not the negation of others. Dare to the level of your capability, then go beyond to a higher level.”*

Affirmation and a positive attitude is reflected in a few examples of famous people that initially faced negative reinforcement from others, but really defined their own destinies:

- Woody Allen, an Academy Award winning, writer, producer and director attended New York University where he failed a course and was eventually expelled.
- Leon Uris, the author of multiple bestselling novels, never graduated from high school, having failed English three times.
- Burt Reynolds was initially told that he had “no talent” and Clint Eastwood's slow talking mannerisms and prominent Adam's apple were pointed out to him as reasons not to seek a career in film!

We are all aware of friends and family members that have overcome obstacles because they refused to listen to the “negation of others”, but heard their own affirmations, maintained a positive attitude, persevered and overcame whatever obstacles that was in front of them. Many of us have encountered some form of discouragement or defeat and have stayed the course, ultimately achieving what we were seeking.

Our positive attitude, whether it came from something inside of us, our constant affirmation that we would accomplish our goals, or just the fact that we were not going to give up, provides the best feeling an individual can have. Always remember Henry Ford's advice, *“If you think you can do a thing, or think you can't do a thing, you're right.”*

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

