



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Top Guns Have to Practice Too

There is a TV show called “Hot Shot” that appears on the History Channel from time to time. As much as I don't really care much for most of the contemporary programming on television today, I spend a lot of time on this History channel. Periodically I learn something. One example, was watching a group of extremely qualified marksman struggle with a primitive weapon. These individuals, who are all crack-shots with modern weaponry, were asked to engage in exercising marksmanship using an Atlatl.

If you are not familiar with the Atlatl, it is something like a spear, but that is not what made it different. The Atlatl wasn't just thrown using the human arm. It was actually launched into its trajectory by the use of a sling device that was carried by the hunter. That device tremendously magnified the arc that the spear took when aimed at an object. Through the course of the presentation on the show, the host mentioned that in ancient civilization, once they conquered the use of the Atlatl, early humans went after larger and larger game. It is speculated that the Atlatl was directly responsible for the demise of the Woolly Mammoth. In other words, a small person could generate a tremendous amount of spear throwing power. It allowed the user to take control of a situation.

I would like to compare that to the concept that sometimes gets ignored in the hustle of day to day operations. That is called force multipliers. The military is relatively familiar with the term but it seldom appears in the context of fire service literature. It is defined as a "capability that, when added to and employed a combat force, significantly increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment. The term force multiplier is any element that you can use your advantage to increase your influence over an outcome.

An interesting dilemma about force multipliers is frequently they are almost impossible to clearly identify. Let me give you an example. In my opinion a force multiplier that has an impact on the fire service is the element of pride. You can't go to the grocery store and find a pint of pride – nor can you go to the hardware store and find a gallon of pride. Pride is something that is intrinsic in an organization that feels good about itself and wants to make sure that everybody else realizes that the competency is clearly there. I would like to say that this is typical force multiplier in what we call high responsibility organizations. Just capture in your mind an image of the following organizations – “Seals – Special Forces–Top Gun”.

All of these organizations have a sense of self-worth that translates into them being regarded as being highly competitive. In some cases, generals and presidents recognizing this element of confidence use their reputation to decide who gets assigned the most difficult tactical and strategic opportunities. Force multipliers provide a realistic approach to the use of these resources for high security missions.



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I would like to give you one example that fits into the fire service. There are many examples of force multipliers in existence in our organizations, but I would like to submit for your evaluation in this column the specific act of positive thinking. A person's attitude has an impact on the ability to perform. I would submit that we spend an awful lot of time cleaning up messes caused by people who have poor attitudes toward their job which is often a force reduction element. Therefore, one can make the argument that having a positive attitude about your life and your job is a force multiplier.

This column asks you to ask yourself this question: what are the force multipliers in your life? What are the things that make you feel good about yourself? Is it the plaque on the wall? Is it recognition by your peers? Is it a sense of self-satisfaction when you look at something you have just done and you felt really good about it? In my opinion, the concept of the force multiplier is also very internalized. Sometimes entire organizations are missing the force multiplier and yet individuals within it are still practicing the concept at their own personal level.

Recently I had an opportunity to participate in an evaluation process for some chief officer candidates. The concept of force multipliers came out extensively in some of the discussions about how to get along with City Hall. Is having a good relationship with City Hall a force multiplier? I can almost guarantee you that having a bad one is certainly the opposite of that.

I will give you a word that matches up with the concept of the force multiplier; it is the word synergy. If you are familiar with the concept, it merely means that two plus two doesn't equal four. Two plus two at a time adds up to be more than four. Synergy is hidden the back of concepts of teamwork and cooperation. Synergy is witnessed when people begin to believe that they are working for something that is bigger than themselves and subsequently all the contributions somehow make it even better than anybody had a reason to expect.

Well, I am not sure how many of you want to run out and buy an Atlatl so see how good you can be at spear throwing, but I will admit to having a lot of laughs watching the seasoned marksmen struggle with the idea that they had to master something that they were unfamiliar with in order to get their sense of accuracy back. Between force and our organizations for both a positive and negative aspects of it, look for those force multipliers. Practice them. Get your hands upon them. Don't let the energy of your organization be dissipated by negative factors.