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Officer Development Series – *Leadership Skills*



Trust and Loyalty

By Deputy Chief Frank Viscuso

You will never lead people, nor will you have a loyal team, if others do not trust you. Trust comes from being true to your word. This means you doing what you say you are going to do. In the Fire Service, trust is the glue that holds the bond of brotherhood together. You may remember the famous scene in the movie *Backdraft*. The firefighters were battling a structure fire when the floor gave way and one of the firefighters had nearly fallen to the floor below. He was hanging on when another firefighter grabbed his arm and said, “You go... We go!” I was in the fire academy when that movie was released in the theaters and I still remember the feeling of chills traveling down my spine. I couldn’t believe I was about to become part of a team that had this type of loyalty toward each other. The euphoria wore off pretty quickly and reality set in once I realized that as a Probie, I had to earn trust and loyalty (just like everyone else had to).

Trust and Loyalty are two way streets. Every member on the team has to earn them if they expect to receive them in return – and they are worth earning, because no team can become great without them. As an aspiring leader, earning the trust of your crew is essential if you intend to develop a solid foundation for successful relationships. There are specific actions you can take that will help you to build trust. In contrast, there are also actions that break

It takes a very long time to build a good house with a strong foundation and solid structure. That house can be destroyed by a fire within minutes.

The same can be said about trust!

the bond of trust. Below you will find a quick list of Trust Breakers and Trust Builders.

Trust Breakers

- Lying
- Breaking promises
- Spreading gossip behind someone's back.
- Being judgmental or critical
- Taking care of your own needs at the expense of others
- Over promising and under delivering

Trust Builders

- Always telling the truth
- Keeping your word
- Under promising and over delivering
- Being dependable on a consistent basis
- Not participating in negative conversations about others
- Showing others that you care about their needs

When it comes to building trust, it's all about your actions! Words are not enough. If a person says "Trust me," my immediate thought is, "You mean; I couldn't trust you before?" When someone starts a sentence with, "To tell you the truth..." I'm thinking, "So, you've been lying to me up to now?" People with integrity don't have to tell you they are acting with integrity their actions do the talking for them.

Trust is a learned behavior

How do you get your team to trust one another? It begins when you, as a leader, show that you trust them. People will follow your lead. When you treat a valued team member with respect and dignity, others will begin to do the same. You must be the model for trust and integrity. If you are not, you run the risk developing a fickle and disloyal team. In the corporate world, this will result in failure. On the fire ground, it can be disastrous.