

Snapshot Size-Up #126



Fitness Challenge

I was in my office reviewing fire reports when I heard a group of firefighters cheering. It sounded like they were watching a game on television. As I listened more closely, I could hear the faint sound of someone “on air.” Unsure what was happening, I walked down the hall and found four firefighters in the weight room. One of whom – the Captain – was on the elliptical machine. He was wearing full Personal Protective Equipment including bunker gear, boots, gloves, helmet, SCBA and a face piece. Soon, I heard the captain’s low air alarm begin to sound. I watched as he continued moving, at a rapid pace. I asked what was happening and one of the firefighters said, “We’re seeing who can go the furthest before their air runs out, Chief.”

After the Captain’s air ran out, they told me that all the groups were competing in this fitness challenge. I’m sure they wondered what my reaction was going to be. To be completely honest, I thought this was great. Just one week earlier, everyone was worried about possible layoffs because a group of individuals started talking about “how bad things are,” and how local politicians had set their sights, once again, on our salaries. Morale was low, but these firefighters found something positive to be focusing on – a health contest. They were having fun while getting fit during their down time. Their spirit reminded me that ‘attitudes are contagious,’ and theirs was certainly worth catching... and I did, because one hour later, I was inspired enough to spend thirty minutes in the weight room working out.

I don’t know who started this challenge, but I can only imagine that one or two people were talking about it and decided to incorporate an SCBA drill with their workout. The result is a department wide challenge that some are now training for. The result is better attitude, better health, and better awareness of the limits of their on-air capabilities. Where is the downside to that?



Deputy Chief Frank Viscuso’s articles have appeared in *Firehouse* and *Fire Engineering Magazine*. Frank is the co-creator of FireOpsOnline, and author of three books including the best-selling fire service text *Fireground Operational Guides*.