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Leadership Development Series



The “Best Ideas” have to win

By Deputy Chief Frank Viscuso

One evening, a young couple in their early twenties was returning home after a night out on the town. The young man behind the wheel had had a few drinks earlier in the evening and was driving through town much faster than he should have been. As they sped down a hill towards the cross road at the end of the street, the man lost control of the vehicle. It spun sideways, counter clockwise, stopping abruptly only because of the telephone pole that was in its path.

The young woman screamed on impact. The car hit the pole with such force that the vehicle wrapped around the pole and formed the shape of a horseshoe. The exact point of contact was the passenger side door. The woman’s femur broke in half.

Another man witnessed the accident and called the fire department. Our members responded and upon arrival immediately began the extrication process. Kearny firefighters are no stranger to vehicle entrapments. When you have 24 Bridges, two spans of the NJ Turnpike, Routes 280, 1 & 9, and the first elevated highway in the country running through your community, you get good at extrications. In fact, we have so many, that it has become the most common rescue functions our firefighters respond to. They are very good at it, and they perform with speed and precision.

This entrapment was different. The man was able to exit the vehicle. Upon arrival he was sitting on the curb, dazed and confused. The woman was enclosed in the steel wreckage. She was screaming, and rightfully so. She was wearing a skirt and her femur was protruding from her exposed flesh.

Our members worked on the vehicle for 15 minutes, but they were unable to make progress. At the time, our tools were used and

worn. We had been having problems during training evolutions with the cutters, but budgeting challenges didn't allow for us to repair or replace them. The incident commander made the decision to call for the response of a neighboring rescue company from Newark. They arrived within a few minutes, with newer, more powerful tools. After another 15 minutes; however, the firefighters were no closer to extricating the woman than when they arrived. To make matters worse, she was beginning to show signs of shock.

The firefighters were baffled. They couldn't seem to make any progress on the mangled scrap of metal that hardly even resembled a car. The group came together to discuss their options when one firefighter said, "If we could just take out that pole and work on the car from the other side, we would be able to get her out."

This was not an option. They couldn't cut the pole down because of the live power lines on top. Another firefighter paused. He looked at the vehicle then back at the group of firefighters. "There are enough of us here to pick up the car and move it away from the pole." He proposed.

It seemed like the best option. They collectively agreed to give it a shot. Within seconds, the firefighters were able to move the vehicle far enough away from the pole that they could access the passenger side. It took only a few minutes after that to remove enough of the vehicle to extricate the woman from the vehicle.

That story demonstrates the power of a team working together, and illustrates the point – the best ideas have to win. A team leader has to be humble enough to realize that the best ideas may not always be their ideas. They should feel secure enough in their position to allow other people to propose ideas and smart enough to implement the best ones.

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