

Growing Leadership Capability in Fire Departments

First-line leaders are the primary keepers and trainers of your organization's culture. They influence your workforce more than any Chief can hope to. They are your organization—its present and its future.

Throughout their history, fire departments have developed their future leaders through a ad-hoc system of informal mentoring, patchy leadership training, merit, and politics.

Selecting candidates for development opportunities often follows a corporate model of leader development, with minimal training and investment on first-line leaders followed by more substantial opportunity for upper management personnel.



At a Crossroads

Today, the fire service is at a juncture concerning the way it is developing its leaders and future leaders: to do more of the same or to set a new path.

Faced with more complex operations, more moving parts, more exposure, more risk, and higher consequences for failure, fire organizations are finding that the stakes are too high and the consequences too dire to spend years waiting for new leaders to evolve and eventually float to the top of the organization.

New demands drive the need for more adaptable and flexible leaders. But in spite of this need, most departments paradoxically build cultures that make adaptability and flexibility more difficult. Instead of building leaders, they build an ever-increasing mass of rules and policies guiding firefighters and operations—sometimes to the point that these become the primary force of leadership and influence in the organization.

The increased bureaucracy takes the job of applying judgment and discretion out of the hands of leaders, undermining trust, cohesion, communication, and synergy. This saga represents the classic organizational trap inherent to fire organizations everywhere in the U.S.—the slow march toward rules-based organizations, often erroneously promoted as a focus on safety.

In these situations, the culture is compliance-focused rather than intent-focused even though people intuitively understand that safety is an outgrowth of sound judgment and decision making and cannot be decreed by rules. A compliance-focused culture creates difficult ground to grow seeds of initiative, responsibility, and good leadership—the requisite materials for adaptive and resilient operations.

The Fire Service Leadership Gap

To the fire service, this problem is widely recognized as a gap in leadership. In response, the industry is now awash with retired fire chiefs providing, in articles and presentations, pearls of insight about what good leadership is and looks like. While all good, these efforts cannot hope to quickly enough meet the requirements for building a pool of effective leaders to rise to the demands of the world post-9/11.

Programs

- Fire Service Leadership
- Incident Leadership
- Advanced Workshops

In the end, the old formulas for developing leaders will not meet the new requirements of the business. MCS offers a family of proven products and services to assist fire organizations to achieve operational synergy through leadership development training and consulting efforts at all levels.