



Lieutenant Dean Nelson

## **Fighting the Mentality... Training Properly or Just Good Lip Service?**

I have been reading articles on Line of Duty Deaths most recently published “Spinning Wheels? ... Nah – I Don’t Think So...” and “Why Are We Still Losing Firefighters?” I find these articles to be very interesting but yet very true. As a Lieutenant and training officer for a volunteer department, I still find some facts troublesome to fix. The proper amount of training one should be doing vs. what they are actually doing and their mentality towards it.

As we are all well aware, the volunteer scene has dwindled as jobs have diminished in small rural American communities over the past two decades if not longer. Even with mutual aid, our local companies are still taxed to the limits. When it comes to training, individuals do not want to take part in it or they have the mentality that it’s never going to happen around here. Unfortunately, it seems to me it will take a more local LODD to wake up individuals in some locations to make the move to get the proper training.

In the short time I’ve been involved in the volunteer service; I have experienced some of the contributing factors noted toward these LODD’s. Some of these factors have included 1) no two in/two out rule established, 2) No accountability established and 3) lack of SOP’s. Fortunately it has remained to be a safe outcome for our individuals thus far. I hope the out come remains this way and will continue to better itself throughout the fire service. Ultimately I hope we wake up and realize we are not exempt from any thing that has happened in past history. I have experienced calls where there have been multiple companies working a multiple story commercial structure fire. The crews were working as an offensive mode of attack when the incident was clearly defined as a defensive attack. The structure’s roof was caving in yet there were multiple crews inside working fire suppression and no-one to back them up in the event of a MAYDAY. I have experienced incidents where firefighters were not competent in their SCBA skills; they were not properly wearing PPE. This type of awareness does not require college courses or a degree. These are simple strategies and tactics with an overall objective.

The question in my mind remains “Why won’t individuals train?” That’s a good question, some say “It hasn’t happened here” or “I don’t have that kind of time”. We have all experienced who is a better fire service vehicle operator over another, or a department that does not carry out adequate SOP’s. It still remains a mystery to me why firefighters all the way up to Chiefs will not pursue the proper training after all that is taught and spoke about with LODD’s. As a member of an organization, it is the responsibility of a line officer and yourself to maintain your training. Without proper training amongst an organization, this will reflect in your operational duties to your customers (public). Members and Line officers can produce the needs for training through various ways. Some ideas that come to mind are reviewing SOP’s and reviewing your organizations past years’ training. Is there a particular topic that has not been worked on in a while? Example: When were the last time simple search and rescue procedures were performed on drill night? Firefighter safety and survival depends on many things. This is just one of the many areas that will ultimately make the fire ground safer. As a member, you can look at what your training officer presents for training. If there is a lack in certain areas of training, make suggestions on the types of training you would like to be performing. Offer assistance to help facilitate or organize training. A good line officer and training officer will listen to his fire fighters and make an effort to get the training required. With thorough knowledge and well practiced skills, an organization has the ability to make a safer fire ground.

It seems to me that a lack of passion for the job is there. The fire service is ever changing. We are fighting fewer fires with more limited resources and they are burning hotter than ever before. By being a student of the fire service, no matter what rank, gaining the knowledge and improving skills help drive the passion for the job. It also appears that we have individuals that just want to wear the suit and say "I'm a Firefighter". I have a hard time figuring out where it says fire won't kill today or tomorrow, or Volunteers vs. Career Firefighters... I have heard time and time again, "We are just Volunteers"... Well the Red Cross takes volunteers everyday & Life Safety is not as much of a risk there. I am sick of it! It comes down to a mentality issue. Is forty hours of your time spent in a class room or practical hands on training too much a year if it may save your life or prevent injury? "It hasn't happened here in 30 years, it's never going to happen." Is another great line, Never say Never, right? As stated time and time again, these are all preventable mistakes seen year after year throughout. Life safety of our crew is of the utmost importance. No building is worth the life of a firefighter. Preventable mistakes can be prepared for such as establishing incident management, two in/two out rule, carrying out proper SOP's and recognition of fire behavior. It's time to look in the mirror and ask do I have 10 years experience? Or do I have 1 year of experience 10 times over? Until individuals take the initiative toward their own "Personal Safety" and follow through with the proper training and implement it in operational duties on the FD, we are going to have these types LODD's.

I would say, "We are just asking for trouble and dodging a bullet" by not taking some pride and passion for the job.

### **Final Note**

I can not give you a clear definitive answer on the question of how to fight the mentality. I don't know if it's in the leaders of our FDs or if it is a more local problem. I do know if you want to join in the fight to help reduce the risk of LODD's you must take a stance yourself and do your part even when no one else does. That means... buckle our seat belts, train properly, motivate people to take interest in these common flaws we as the fire service seem to forget. Just remember proper amount and type of training reflects on your department operational duties and the next call we need to be ready for.

Dean Nelson is a 9 year veteran of the fire service. Dean is currently 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and training officer of the Chadwick Fire Department. In addition to his background as a volunteer FF & Officer, he also served as a firefighter for the Department of Defense.

Dean graduated from the Department of Defense Fire Academy. He is a certified Instructor I through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress while also being certified as FF I/ FFII, Hazardous Materials Awareness/ Ops, Airport Firefighter, Driver Operator /Pumper. Dean is currently working on his Associates degree in Fire Science.

He has been involved in organizing several training programs dedicated to firefighter safety & survival.