Chapter 1

Fire and Emergency Services Culture
Culture and the Fire and Emergency Service

- Whether paid, combination, or volunteer, fire service general highly respected.
  - High sense of self-esteem among members
  - Given rise to the development of the fire and emergency service culture.
  - Culture means norms, traditions, attitudes, behaviors, and demographics.
Traditions

- A tradition is a practice that is handed down from generation to generation.
Traditions

• Three types of fire and emergency service traditions
  – Broad fire and emergency service traditions
    • Serving the public before self
    • Maintaining a high state of operational readiness
    • Having pride in the organization
    • Looking out for each other
FIGURE 1.2 The pinning of the insignia of rank by your company officer is an example of a tradition of unknown origin.

Courtesy of Christopher Downing
Traditions

• Three types of fire and emergency service traditions
  – Policy-Based Traditions
    • Established by policy
    • Shift changes
Traditions

- Three types of fire and emergency service traditions
  - Traditions of unknown origin
    - Rookies doing dishes
    - Promotional ceremony
Traditions

• The role of traditions
  – Ties that string a department together
  – Preserved for symbolism
  – Must also assess effect on present
Procedures

• Departments have similar general operating approaches.
• Departments have own specific procedures.
  – Standard operating guidelines/procedures (SOGs/SOPs)
Norms

• Actions and beliefs that are part of routine operating principles for a fire and emergency services department.
• Take on ominous tone when risk not considered.
• Lack of risk management proven formula for tragedy.
Attitudes

- Attitude plays a vital role in defining responders
FIGURE 1.4 Doing whatever it takes to get the job done regardless of the consequences has been a part of the U.S. fire service attitude for years. 

Courtesy of George Russell/ Nashville Fire Department
Hazardous Attitudes
Firefighters Fall Prey To

- Invulnerability
- Antiauthority
- Impulsivity
- Macho

- Resignation
- Air show syndrome
- Pressing
Attitudes

• Become part of the culture of a shift
• Firefighters may be led into situations that they return from unscathed countless times.
• Old philosophy: “Whatever it takes to get the job done.”
• New philosophy: “Balance risk with benefit.”
Behaviors

- Action in response to stimuli
- Influenced by many factors
- Complacency lures firefighters into dangerous situations
- Should have guarded behavior or, “heightened situational awareness”
Personnel Diversity

- Awareness that people of different cultures react differently
Community Served

• Critical element that determines a fire department's culture is the community the department serves.
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

• Change driven by three factors
  – Cultural
  – Pivotal event or tragedy
  – Legislation
    • Some consider visionary leadership
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

• Pivotal events and culture change
  – Change due to tragedy most easily accepted by those closest to tragedy
    • Particularly those involving serious injury or death
    • Less impact on those further removed from event
    • Repeated events with no adverse outcome promote continued response as in past.
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

• Technological advancement and cultural change
  – Catalysts for change
  – Despite improvements in PPE still a lack of change in firefighter death rate
  – Advancements in technology may be allowing firefighters to go where they could not before
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

- Legislation and cultural change
  - Most dynamic and far reaching
  - Driven by tragedy, labor unrest, and political activism
  - May be enforced by stiff penalties
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

- Timetable for cultural change
  - Hands of the individuals impacted by the shift in culture.
  - Some accept change readily, others object with all their might.
  - Humans resist change when they are comfortable with their performance.
Changing the Fire Service and Emergency Culture

• Contributing elements
  – Four elements that impact cultural change
    • Accountability
    • Responsibility
    • Leadership
    • Management
FIGURE 1.8 Two firefighters were hospitalized after falling through the first floor into the basement. It can happen anywhere, and it does.

Courtesy of Buddy Byers, District Chief, Nashville Fire Department
FIGURE 1.10 Individuals are personally responsible for being properly prepared before the beginning of each shift.

Courtesy of Martin Grube
Elements That Impact Change

• Accountability
  – Taking ownership
Elements That Impact Change

• Responsibility
  – Shared burden to achieve change
Elements That Impact Change

• Leadership
  – Motivates individuals
FIGURE 1.11 Crews that are vigilant and focused create the best culture for brotherhood.

*Courtesy of Travis Ford, Nashville Fire Department*
Elements That Impact Change

• Management
  – Achieve results from establishing and enforcing the fire department's safety policies and procedures.
Elements That Impact Change Sub-Classifications

- Sub-Classifications
  - Personal culture
  - Crew or work group culture
  - Organizational culture
Accountability

• Personal cultural accountability
  – Holding oneself to a high standard if change is to occur
  – Personal accountability falls somewhat on the crew supervisor.
Accountability

• Personal accountability
  – Chief officers must develop a sense of personal accountability.
  – Personal accountability must be in line with a culture that promotes ensuring every member of the department goes home at the end of their duty.
Accountability

• Crew culture accountability
  – Military cohesion
  – The same logic can and should be applied to the fire and emergency service.
  – Basic element in any fire department is the crew.
  – When situation resolved that crew responds to without incident, agency looks good in public eye.
Accountability

• Departmental culture accountability
  – Successful functions require trust among members and understanding of roles.
  – Culture change is difficult due to traditions, norms and history.
Accountability

• Departmental cultural accountability
  – Department must insist that members at the crew and personal level are accountable for actions that do not support a safety-focused performance model.
Accountability

• Departmental cultural accountability
  – Culture shift that puts safety first is dependent on top management and leadership in the organization being accountable for making the goals, expectations, performance, and discipline part of every day’s operation.
Responsibility

• Personal culture responsibility
  – Individual is the root of any change
  – Personal responsibility within each person
Responsibility

• Personal culture responsibility
  – Those with strong sense of responsibility
    • Self sufficient
    • Don't blame others
    • Often catalyst for change
Responsibility

• Crew culture responsibility
  – Cohesiveness depends on members finding common ground.
  – Like-minded view is fundamental to success and safety
Responsibility

• Departmental culture responsibility
  – Cultural responsibility most difficult to infuse given today's society.
  – Fire and emergency service attracts its members from the general population.
FIGURE 1.13 Officers should never be afraid to make the right decision when it involves sending everyone home at the end of the shift.

Courtesy of Daniel A. Nelms, Emergency Service Training
Leadership

• Personal culture leadership
  – Members in positional leadership roles are the instigators and enforcers of change.
  – At the personal level, a leader must believe that the shift to a safer fire and emergency service culture is a necessity.
Leadership

• Personal culture leadership
  – Leaders who approach the “safety first, safety always” policy with a passive approach betray themselves and the individuals they lead.
  – Leadership examples
    • Offensive
    • Defensive
Leadership

• Crew culture leadership
  – Crew takes cue from leader
  – When leader is genuine culture is more readily accepted
  – Cohesive crews take direction from leader
    • Adopt leaders values
Leadership

- Departmental culture leadership
  - In order for cultural change to take place, leadership has to have a mindset that supports open communication and an open-minded approach to change.
FIGURE 1.14 Moving toward a safer fire and emergency services relies on individuals following policies and procedures.

*Courtesy of Kevin L. Neville, Fire Investigator, Nashville Fire*
Management

• Personal culture management
  – “Lead people, manage time.”
  – Changing culture is about adjusting a person's values and perception, not a machine.
Management

• Crew culture management
  – Culture management becomes a function of the leader's approach and the crew's acceptance of needed change.
Management

• Crew culture management
  – Managing the change can be difficult at first if the change goes against long standing practices.
  – One element to address in the management of culture change is time.
Management

• Departmental culture management
  – Ultimately departments are affected by culture.
  – The department's role in culture management is a function of how its members perceive change occurs (or doesn't occur).
Management

• Departmental culture management
  – Most successful when every element of the leadership team convincingly professes to subscribe to a given change, and believes in the change.
Management

• Departmental Culture Management
  – Example of departmental culture management was the Seat Belt Pledge Program initiated by Dr. Burton Clark. Fire departments across the country adopted the pledge program.
  – Many departments registered 100% sign up and boast 100% compliance.
Life Safety Initiatives and Cultural Change

• 2004 National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) convened professional fire and emergency service leaders in Tampa to draft a set of firefighter safety initiatives.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety, incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.

2. Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.
3. Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.

4. Empower all firefighters to stop unsafe practices.
5. Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

6. Develop and implement national medical and physical fitness standards that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

7. Create a national research agenda and data collection system that relate to the initiatives.

8. Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.

9. Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries, and near misses.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

10. Ensure grant programs support the implementation of safe practices and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.

11. Develop and champion national standards for emergency response policies and procedures.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

12. Develop and champion national protocols for response to violent incidents.

13. Provide firefighters and their family's access to counseling and psychological support.

14. Provide public education more resources and champion it as a critical fire and life safety program.
16 Firefighter Initiatives

15. Strengthen advocacy for the enforcement of codes and the installation of home fire sprinklers.

16. Make safety a primary consideration in the design of apparatus and equipment.
Novato Summit 2007

- Fire service leaders convened again in 2007 for the Novato Summit.
  - Reviewed initiatives
  - 200 representatives were at the meeting
  - Developed 100 recommendations
Novato Summit 2007

• Recommendations called for actively promoting a shift to a more safety focused culture by:
  – Infusing safety in all department levels by defining expectations
  – Assigning people with the appropriate safety attitudes and skills to positions of leadership and training
Novato Summit 2007

• Recommendations called for actively promoting a shift to a more safety focused culture by:
  – Integrating the concepts of risk management into all department activities
  – Rewarding and providing incentives for safe behaviors while no longer rewarding unsafe, inappropriate behaviors
Novato Summit 2007

• Recommendations called for actively promoting a shift to a more safety focused culture by:
  – Rewarding and providing incentives for safe behaviors while no longer rewarding unsafe, inappropriate behaviors
  – Redefining the cultural definition of “hero” to take safety practices and attitudes into account.
The Challenge

• The challenge is to reduce the number of line-of-duty deaths by 50% before 2014
  – The Novato Summit perpetuated a new movement that renounces dying as “part of the job.”
Chapter 1 Summary

• Definitive definition of LODD may be years away.
• Needed is attention of factors we can control.
• Change to as safer fire service will require a sustained effort.
• Culture change is needed to make firefighters better risk managers.
Case Study

• THE SCENE:

Late one night, an engine was properly positioned at the scene of the accident while responders on the scene were treating the patients. Due to strict departmental Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines that the department implemented, all personnel were wearing turnout gear and an issued safety vest.
Case Study

• THE SCENE:

A vehicle driving down the same road that the accident occurred on failed to see the accident that had occurred and struck the engine, pushing it about ten feet sideways. The six firefighters on the scene did not get injured from this collision; however the driver of the vehicle that struck the engine had to be transported immediately to a level one trauma center.
Things to Consider

- Proper emergency vehicle positioning protects the crew.
- Traffic safety vests can provide a level of visibility that may protect responders.
- Every fire department must have a Standard Operating Procedure/Guideline pertaining to proper emergency vehicle placement on any highway/roadway incident.
Things to Consider

- Firefighters must have a structured and disciplined approach to the job.
- Other considerations?