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Leader Alan V. Brunacini

Throughout the years that I, Firefighter Stuart Vaughn, have received training at many different fire departments, and facilities throughout the South Eastern part of the United States. Amongst all of the different times that I received various training on leadership and officer skills one mans name kept coming up. The man's name was Alan Brunacini, chief of the Phoenix, Arizona Fire Department. "He instructs and presents workshops, seminars, conferences to many fire departments and training institutions throughout the country in various topics that include Fireground Operations, Health and Fitness, Incident Command, Labor/Management Relationships, Command Safety, and Customer Service. Chief Brunacini has authored *Essentials of Fire Department Customer Service*, *Fire Command*, *Timeless Tactical Truths*, and *Command Safety*."

(City of Phoenix, 2004) “Fire departments nationwide have tried to emulate the Phoenix way. And departments worldwide consider Brunacini’s books on safety, customer relations, and leadership to be definitive works.” (Collom, 2006) One of the stories that I heard about Chief Brunacini that stood out the most was told to me while attending Fire Officer I in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The story went like this.

After returning from a fire alarm activation that turned out to be a false alarm, Chief Brunacini in his command vehicle and a ladder truck company were returning back to quarters when it started to rain heavily outside. While driving back to the station Chief Brunacini radioed back to the ladder truck company to pull over and pick up an elderly woman who had been sitting out on a bus stop bench waiting for the bus to come pick her up. Chief Brunacini pulled over and escorted the elderly woman into the ladder truck and directed them to take her where she needed to go. After seeing that she had entered the ladder truck safely and was along her way with the ladder truck company, Chief Brunacini returned back to his vehicle and proceeded to return to the fire station. On the way back to the station, a Safety Chief that had been riding with Chief Brunacini and who later would tell me this story asked Chief Brunacini, “What are you doing, do you know the liability and risk you’re taking by picking her up and transporting her on your apparatus?” Chief Brunacini then responded back to the Safety Chief, “Do you know the liability there would be if I had drove passed and left her?” The Safety Chief telling this story of when he visited the Phoenix Fire Chief then went on to say about how Chief Brunacini was known to manage and lead his fire department. The Safety Chief explained that Chief Brunacini was teaching him that you have to treat the community as customers as well as the people in your

organization. He believed that you need to tend to their needs and give great customer service, even if that meant that you were putting yourself out there for some risk. That is the way you were to treat the public and your own people.

That story and some others are some of the main reasons that I wanted to write my leadership paper on that of Alan V. Brunacini. Many times, I've thought about that story and hoped that one day, I'd be a leader that would stand up and emulate some of the characteristics that Chief Brunacini showed that day such as inspiration, courage, service, and initiative.

Leadership Styles

“Leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.” (Wikipedia, 2007) Many believe that for an organization to be successful, the employees need to be productive. “For employees to be productive, they must feel that the job is right for their abilities and that they are being treated equitably.” (Ivancevich, 2005, p. 12) When motivating and influencing employees to feel equitable, leaders should embody nine specific principles to do the job. The nine principals consist of, “know the job, know your men, keep men informed, set a good example, make timely decisions, train men as a team, accept responsibility, know yourself, and delegate.” (Hamm, 1967, p. 14) Although there are the nine main principles, there are many different styles of leadership that embody them. Three of the many styles of leadership were discovered in some early studies by psychologist Kurt Lewin. These styles consisted of the Authoritarian/Autocratic, Participative/Democratic, and the Delegative/Laissez-Fair.

“Authoritarian leaders provide clear expectations for

what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. There is also a clear division between the leader and followers. Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group. Democratic leaders [Participative leaders] offer guidance to group members, but they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. Participative leaders encourage group members to participate, but retain the final say over the decision making process. Group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and creative. Delegative leaders offer little or no guidance to group members and leave decision-making up to group members.” (Wagner, 2007)

Some other types of leadership that can be seen that are contributed to Martin Evans and Robert House include, directive leadership, supportive leadership, participative leadership, and achievement oriented leadership. “Directive leadership which is closely associated with the authoritarian leadership, associates know exactly what is expected of them, and the leader gives specific directions. There is no participation by subordinates. Supportive leadership, the leader is friendly and approachable and shows a genuine concern for associates. Participative leadership, the leader asks for and uses suggestions from associates but still makes the decision. Achievement-oriented leadership, the leader sets challenging goals for associates and shows confidence that they will attain these goals and perform well.” (Luthans, 2006, p. 421)

Some other styles of leadership are known as the Bureaucratic Leadership, Charismatic Leadership, People-Oriented Leadership, and Task-Oriented Leadership. “Bureaucratic leaders work “by the book”, ensuring that their staff follow procedures exactly. This is a very appropriate

style for work involving serious safety risks or where large sums of money are involved. A Charismatic Leadership style can appear similar to a Transformational Leadership style, in that the leader injects huge doses of enthusiasm into his or her team, and is very energetic in driving others forward. People-Oriented Leadership, the style of leadership is the opposite of task-oriented leadership. The leader is totally focused on organizing, supporting and developing the people in the leader's team. Task-Oriented Leadership, the leader focuses only on getting the job done, and can be quite Autocratic. He or she will actively define the work and the roles required, put structures in place, plan, organize and monitor." (Mind Tools, 2007)

Another very important leadership style is the Situational Leadership style. "According to Situational Leadership, there is no one "best" way to go about influencing people. Which leadership style a person should use with individuals or groups depends on the maturity level of the people the leader is attempting to influence." (Natemyer, McMahan, 2001, p. 323) This can be a very effective leadership style since it utilizes all of the different leadership styles depending upon "the skill level and experience of your team, the work involved, the organizational environment, and your own preferred or natural style." (Mind Tools, 2007)

Brunacini's Leadership

"Fire Chief Alan Brunacini believes in a gentle-hearted approach that takes into account the trauma of victims. In five words, his guiding principles are: "Prevent harm. Survive. Be nice." Nice means sitting on the curb with "Mrs. Smith," as Brunacini calls his constituency, and looking at the event through her eyes. It may mean explaining to people about services to get them back on their feet. Or

helping them to the van the department sends to fires, where a counselor waits with phone service, refreshments, a place to sit besides the sidewalk, and a solid shoulder for crying on. “More than anything else, act like a neighbor.” (Perlman, 1997)

“Some of the ideas that Chief Brunacini explain in his book, *Fire Command* 1st edition, are to distinguish between assumptions and facts, maintain a flexible approach to decision making, develop a standard response to reported viewed conditions, and shift to a management role after initiating action. He explains that the fire ground commander should realize that he has the opportunity to update his plan and other decisions by utilizing feedback during the operations. Feedback allows for revisions to the general approach, specific tactical positions, and all major decisions. A fire ground commander cannot make ALL ongoing fireground decisions. The efficiency of command decisions will improve once the fire ground commander delegates tactical responsibility.” (Brunacini, 1985, p. 6)

“Brunacini chooses to manage by emphasizing support of his people rather than control. “If they’re comfortable and relaxed and treated well, they will be nice to Mrs. Smith out there in the field.” (Perlman, 1997)

Chief Brunacini is such a leader that he is willing to admit when policies need to be reevaluated. Such is the case after a firefighters death occurred during a Supermarket structure fire where the roof flashed and left a firefighter disoriented and lost when the order to pull out came about. Brunacini explained, “Should we have got out quicker? Hell, yes. I hope we will in the future. Should we do things differently? Hell, yes. A fire fighter died.” (Villa, Zoellner, 2001)

Through all the different stories that I’ve heard about

Chief Alan Brunacini as well as all the different examples that I've explained, I believe that Alan Brunacini is a Situational Leader. I think he can be described mainly in this leadership style since this style embodies many of the other leadership styles but uses them during specific situations.

Brunacini can be seen as an authoritarian/autocratic leader when he is seen taking command and giving orders at the beginning stages of an emergency. He uses the participative/democratic leadership style after initial command has been established and his fireground intelligence has come back. He then delegates tactical command to others and takes allows for their input and guidance to reflect his decisions. Chief Brunacini can even be seen utilizing the delegativ/laissez-fair leadership style. Once he has delegated tactical command over, he allows for the acting employee to command that operation fully with minimal or no oversight.

Not only does he utilize all of the above, but he also utilizes the bureaucratic leadership style during the initial stages of an emergency. This is shown by him previously developing a standard operating procedure that will be followed until a specified time or decision has been made by command.

Chief Brunacini has proven to be a charismatic leader as well. He is constantly motivating and encouraging to be customer oriented as well as promoting his employees to pursue extracurricular activities off duty in order to help keep a happier firefighter. I think he definitely utilizes the people-oriented leadership style by constantly serving the people that are under his command as well as the people he serves in the community.

The one leadership style that I did not think that he utilized was the task-oriented leader. I think he is always

putting the well being of his people and public above the tasks that need to be performed.

Under Rober Houses styles of leadership, I feel Chief Brunacini utilizes the directive, supportive, participative, and the achievement-oriented leadership styles. Some of these are very similar to other leadership styles that I've previously compared him to such as directive leadership style being similar to the authoritarian leadership style, and the supportive leadership style being similar to the people-oriented leadership style.

Future Management In Public Safety

I think that many fire departments throughout the country are already practicing some of the leadership techniques that Chief Brunacini has written about, practiced, and taught throughout his tenure at the Phoenix Fire Department. I feel that his customer oriented approach of leading his people and serving the public serves as a great example for other public safety agencies to follow. I believe that through the teachings of Chief Brunacini's leadership style, public safety problems such as retainability, loyalty, and quality will begin to fade away throughout the public sector. I just wish that I could have served under a leadership style that was so "neighborly oriented".

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