

CTRL-ALT-DEL

It's 1530, day one of a 48 hour tour and the rig had a hap hazard check out, there are bits of trash littering the front yard and app room, yet the lap-tops are out and the X-Box 360® is in full effect. Sound familiar?

Lately I have noticed a frightening trend in our department which I am sure is a small cross-section of the nation's fire service. We are slowly disconnecting from each other and taking the time on the job for granted. The surfing of the internet, playing of video games is driving a wedge between those that have truly done the job and love it, and those who may never actually understand the job. I blame wireless internet and video games and a lack of leadership putting down the heavy foot. Don't get me wrong, the internet is an extremely valuable resource. Where else could you have read this tirade? It is a great training tool as long as you are studying the job. There is a time and a place just not during business hours. We have many of those 1-4 year firefighters that have already lost their ways. They came out of the academy a dry sponge ready to soak up every little bit of information they could but unfortunately we have failed them. Why do the probie packets stop after one year? I feel there should be department wide agendas or checklists as to classes or certificates that should be attained by years 3, 5, 7, 10 or whatever they may be. These aren't mandatory, but there for those to want it. You will naturally have people rise up and go after these classes and certificates and those who will remain behind the screen or controller. I think that if more people buy off on those ideas, the more contagious becoming, and continuing to be a student of the job will become.

We are on the razors edge of losing the senior Jakes that have in some cases been there done that. They are going to retire and take those experiences with them. There is so much to learn from our past so we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Modify it maybe but don't make a new one. Little tid-bits about your department and why certain things are called what they are. What ever happened to the shift baseball teams? What ever happened to sitting on the ramp with a cup of coffee or Rockstar® and listening to stories of fires gone good and bad, to those pranks that were executed with such precision and planning? What about that thing we call tradition. If we don't take the time to listen and share it, it will be gone. I can't tell you how many times I have launched coffee out of my nose thanks to those stories but now there are fewer and fewer of us on the ramp. Instead just green glowing faces and sore thumbs from call to duty 19 or whatever they are up to now. Not too long ago a company actually sent out a printer message stating their x-box had died. I'm sure to them it was funny, but how awesome it would have been instead to get the message of a great class they had taken or a great in house drill they could share. I know for a fact that if the captain I worked for as a probie had been there the X-Box would have never died because it wouldn't be there all together. It is amazing how much has loosened up in the short time I have been on the job.

How many times has a brother/sister put out the call for help and only a few showed up. I was at a fundraising event where an engineer from another fire department was complaining about taking one of his fellow firefighters to his doctor's appointment and wastes his time mowing the little patch of lawn. There is a lot of talk of "Brotherhood" tossed around but do most people that call themselves firefighters really understand the true meaning. I would like to think that I have a pretty good interpretation of the word but I may not actually know myself. Maybe I am completely wrong in my view. I feel that a brother is someone that would at the drop of a hat be there for one of their own, be it family, or friend. I have gotten into plenty of hot water with the wife because I have forgone family time to help out a Brother, but she understands. I don't know how else to get these other people to buy off on it. My old company tried to put together a New Years Eve party to celebrate each other and wish

a safe beginning to the New Year and so few showed up. Maybe it was our fault for not offering something free or discounted. I bet if we had guitar hero there or free Wi-Fi we could have packed the place. Tell you what maybe next year we can celebrate New Years online and guys can text each other. It seems that lately we are too busy for each other, or just not that interested. I'm not saying that we have to spend every waking moment with each other but why not get to know the guy/gal that you may have to lay your life on the line for a little better than just 10 days a month. Plan a station barbeque, fishing trip, or night out significant others included, remember we are a family. Cops do it by themselves, we don't.

In our not so distant past my department went through some pretty rough times. We had companies make some not so wise decisions and we as a whole took a beating from this. The department's reaction was to clamp down and squash company pride. We went into seclusion and the circle of trust quickly shrank. Companies internalized and tried to take care of only themselves, and rightly so. We didn't know who to trust. There was the 1-800-drop a dime phone line and we were all in our own corners. I say it is time to re-emerge and knock off the nuclear fallout and get back to taking pride not only in our companies but our departments as a whole. Challenge neighboring stations to be the best, push each other a little harder, and strive for excellence not for perfection. That mentality is contagious and soon we will all have a little more bounce in our collective step. The current administration is trying to do this, and I hope that it is not too late to reach those sitting behind the screen or in the recliner and get them motivated. Fire up the prankster workshop and get to the apparatus room and train. Get out into the district and walk some roofs, test some hydrants and pull some hose. Reload it, and then pull it again, but for the sake of our fire service, tradition, and for brotherhood.