

ORANGE PEEL

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING A FIREMAN?

I was involved in a fire house conversation, in which I called myself a “Fireman”. The reaction from some was swift and scathing. It was as if I swore during High Mass or shouted fire in the theater or set fire to the Stars and Stripes. I was told that I am not a *Fireman* but a Firefighter. When I began to defend my position, my argument fell upon death ears. So when did it become a Sin to refer to yourself or a co-worker as a “Fireman”?

I ask you, what is wrong with using the term Fireman? I am sure there are many who would say that it is a passé, sexist throw back to times past and others would ask what the difference is between a firefighter and a fireman. The short answer: attitude. There are many firefighters in the world, all with the same attitude: they have the cookie-cutter hair cut, sun glasses and the “I fight what you fear” tattoo. They have the patch, the tee shirt and the badge but lack the true meaning of what is required to succeed at this job, what it means to be a *Fireman*.

So what is the real difference is between a Firefighter and a Fireman? Firemen understand not just the *how*, but the *why* operations are preformed on the fireground. We have text books and power points that show the how to fight a fire, but it is not until the firefighter takes it upon themselves to understand the why of the operation, that they may then call themselves a fireman. Firemen are street smart and understand the importance of the roots of our job: Hot, dirty, hard work that every generation has done before us. The title Fireman is rooted in these traditions. (Yes I know the real root is from the company member who kept the steamer hot and ready to pump water, but I digress.)

Too many in the fire services, from the probie to chief officer, take fire ground operations for granted; they find themselves tied to an SOP or the “we always do it that way” operating mode. They have not made the investment in themselves and their careers: to go beyond the *how-to* phase to the understanding *why* phase, and despite a long tenure on the job, they still find themselves fighting the fire vs. beating the fire. So I guess they are truly *Firefighters*.

So the only sin committed is not being prepared to do the job and not taking pride in your work. I challenge you to renew your commitment to yourself, our profession and your community and be proud of your commitment to not just doing your job but knowing why you are taking action and be proud to call yourself a FIREMAN.