

ORANGE PEEL

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Engine 6

WHO ARE YOU?

Who are you? Who, who? Who, who? This famous Who song asks a very poignant question. Who are you? As in what kind of firefighter are you? Before you answer think about it. Think about your career to this point. Think about all of your training and experiences. Start with your academy. What kind of academy did you have? Was it strict, as in yes siring, no siring everyone. Or was it “kindler- gentler” with more lenient instruction? Did your academy teach you the basics, soundly, in hopes that once you hit the firehouse you would build on those basics? Or did your academy try to teach you everything from hose to HAZMAT and only touching on the basics. Did you learn that straight stream, and better yet smoothbore, was a tried and true method of applying water?

That an aggressive interior attack with water application to the base of the fire was the most proficient way to put out the fire and protect anyone still alive? Or did you get the “fog is the way to go because we have always done it that way and beside you can use a fog pattern to cool you off if you get too hot” lecture. That spraying water into a well-involved room thru the window, from the outside, was the most proficient was to push the fire and boil anyone still alive? Were you taught that being fit was not only important to keep those sadistic drill instructors off your back but to help you to a better, longer, and healthier career and retirement? And that staying fit was one the greatest tools in your arsenal to fighting fire correctly.

Once you graduated from your academy and moved on to being a “probationary firefighter” what did you learn? Were you led to believe that training is a necessary evil and that the crew you were assigned to “had” to train because of you? Or were you assigned to a crew that believed that training is the cornerstone of the fire service? That training is a privilege not a chore? That without training we are just a bunch of pretenders with high priced equipment, pretending to serve the public and kidding ourselves into thinking “we are all that”? That you were not the reason they “had” to go train but rather another excuse to go train? Did your new crew explain to you all of your “probie” chores before parking themselves into a pre-assigned recliner? Or did they explain that everyone had a job to do and that no one stopped working until all of the work was done? Were you made to feel like you were one of a crew or one of the team?

And when you finally finished probation, did you rejoice in the idea that now you finally got to watch T.V., take naps and act like all the other firefighters in you house? Or did you rejoice in the idea that you had finally realized a lifelong dream? That although probation was at time tedious, it taught you a lot about being a conscientious firefighter? That you were now one of the brothers, simply titled firefighter?

At this point did you stop studying and reading because now that you had passed your probationary test, learning was a thing of the past? That you knew pretty much all you needed to know and anything you didn't would be covered in one of those lame "drills" you always had to go to? And did you think that all of those fire publications the other guys were reading were for flappers and couldn't possibly teach you anything? Or did you realize that your education had just begun? That although you had a good grasp on the basics there was much more to learn? That those publications not only had great articles written by guys who had definitely "been there, done that" but also had words of insight to make us strive to always be better?

And now that you are an assigned firefighter do you take pride in your company? Do you take pride in your crew? Do you take pride in working hard, together with you crew, to make yourselves the best in your department? Do you find yourself saying, "Engine 6, or Truck 104 or Medic 68 is the best around"? And do you say this knowing that there will be times that you won't be the best and that learning from your mistakes is a big part of being the best? Or could you care less where or with whom you work? That pride in your company is silly and that pride in your department should be enough?

And now that you are this established firefighter and are thinking about promotions are you hoping to promote because you get a bigger paycheck or off an ambulance? Or are you promoting because after so many years as a firefighter you have learned and experienced enough, not everything, but enough to adequately, at first, lead your own crew and spread your views and ideals on firefighting.

But maybe the most important question you can ask yourself when trying to determine what kind of firefighter you are is this. On the day before a shift do you say "I get to go to work tomorrow" or "I have to go to work tomorrow"? Because those of you who can truly say they say, "get to" understand that being a firefighter is an honor. That striving to be the best should be a job requirement not an ideal you mock. And if you say, "have to" then maybe you should review the reasons you are a firefighter. Is it for the 20 days off and benefit package? The public you swore to protect deserves more.

For me, I get to go to work. I get to go be a firefighter, the greatest profession in the world. And I know that I have to work hard to protect the privilege of being a firefighter. I am proud to say that I'm a firefighter. Who are you?