



Leadership Suggestion From The Back Seat #1: You will always be the Manager of the crew, but you don't always have to be the leader.

You have the badge or the title on your business card, and you therefore have all of our respect regarding your status as our manager. But you're surrounded by smart, experienced people who can be an incredible resource to you if you will just ask our opinion, or at the very least accept our input. Our crew was one of the first on scene at one of the biggest brush fires in San Diego History in 2007. At 2 am, going code to the location to which we had been dispatched, we rounded a corner and came upon a 20-25 foot wall of wind-driven flames along the edge of the canyon, and it was clear that the flying sparks were already lodging in the eaves of the homes all around us. It was a pretty unsafe and scary place to be. Our engineer/driver, who had about 30 years of experience, started to offer his opinion to my less experienced captain about what we should do, and she immediately shot back with a very harsh "shut up!". And he did. For the next 8 hours we were out there fighting fire house to house. Not a word from him. In fact, she wouldn't take input or suggestions from anyone. Not us, and certainly not the other crews. I hate to admit it, but as a crew, we were honestly quite hapless and rudderless out there, with our captain repeatedly changing her mind and wasting tons of time with useless tasks because she was unsure of what to do next. Or how to do it. We were ultimately, but quietly, pulled off the strike team by the Chief. As we watched our strike team leave the staging area that afternoon without us after a quick refueling, I felt sorry for her, for us, and especially for the people whose homes we may have saved if we had utilized all of the Human Resources and experience available to us.

Leadership Lesson from the Back Seat: there's a big difference between management and leadership. As a manager, you are a facilitator of our success during our day to day operations and tasks, but you don't always have to be the leader. In fact it makes us better as a team when you aren't always the leader, because input from the whole team allows us to make the best possible decisions, and one of your most important jobs as our leader is to create the next leader. What better way to accomplish this than allowing others to lead based on their strengths and insight at the moment? None of us is as smart as all of us. Leave your ego (or your fears) at home and do what's best for the team and the people/customers/clients you serve. It's a win/win for everyone.

XO, Robyn



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