



Leadership Suggestion From The Back Seat #2: Give us Respect as a Gift, not as a Grade

In the fire service, and in other similarly top down leadership cultures, the new people on the team are assumed to be, mmm not real swift...until proven otherwise. Our Probies (probationary firefighters in their first year on the job) are constantly talked down to, made to eat on their own and not with the crew, drilled every day, micromanaged, made to clean up after everyone, expected to cook all the meals, etc, and nobody cares who they are or where they came from. As though they just landed from Mars as brand new infant firefighters. I understand culture and initiations. But the extent to which we do this isn't cool. And for many Captains/Leaders, this attitude of anyone in a lower rank being an underclassman, unworthy of respect, extends in general to all of us back seaters, at least the first several years we're on the job. But I was lucky enough to have a captain in my first year on the job who lifted me out of this torture and welcomed me as a valued member of his crew. From day 1, he gave me the respect of being a real human being, with pre-fire department life experience, a sport I was passionate about, and valuable input to add to conversations. He even let me (gasp!) watch TV while we ate! And he not only became my hero and someone I was bonded to for years, I learned my trade so much more quickly and deeply because I wasn't afraid to ask stupid questions I'd be judged for later; he never micromanaged me and he assumed the best of me. That was truly a gift that I try to pay forward to this day to my team.

Leadership Lesson from the Back Seat: How you treat people in their lowest and loneliest moments MATTERS. Especially when people are new or of a lesser "rank". And its in those moments that you can make a memorable and positive impact as a leader just by giving your respect as a gift and not as a grade.

XO, Robyn



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