UNITED WE SERVE, DIVIDED WE FAIL
Casting Volunteer Vision to end the ‘Inevitable’

You can be exposed to it anytime, in just about any place. From the station bays to the backroads, it’s in serious conversations all across America. And it will directly will affect the future of volunteer fire and rescue.

A metastatic word that creeps into perceptions. It has the ability to stall even the most potent efforts for renewal. There is no PPE that can stop it. After being internalized and left to burn, it’s more dangerous to the volunteer departments than a flashover.

Every effort for growth is incapacitated from this non suspecting and seemingly innocuous word... ‘inevitable’.

Why is inevitable such a problem? This mindset can stall even the most intentional forward motion. After all, why do anything... if what will be, will be... one day?

For the station recruiter and especially for the leadership, this subtle resignation requires our attention and contention. Outside our doors, we know the challenges of identifying and attracting potential members. Or overcoming work-life balances that are anything but. Or navigating training requirements that are dependent on periodic and inflexible schedules.

For sure, much of this has created new barriers from years past. But inside our doors, what if our internal climate and culture is competing for the biggest obstacle?

It’s understandable that the visible changes from what ‘once was’ have taken place. Not to mention a slowing status-quo by small and often overworked leadership teams. Most with membership who are frustrated with structures from decades past.

All of this certainly adds to a drifting department mindset in a new era. It’s almost understandable to disengage and just let time take it’s course.

Except it’s not.

No doubt, these are uncertain times for those who give daily in America’s fire and rescue communities. But here’s something to consider that may sound trivial at first:

“It’s not the volunteer that’s lost, it’s the vision of today’s fire service.”

Vision is the single most powerful ingredient in any recruiting outreach. It attracts new blood and infuses the current rolls with a sense of being and belonging.

It’s main responsibility is setting the tone for Purpose, Identity, Security and Acceptance.

A purpose that answers a bigger ‘why’ in exchange for our time and dedication ask. Identity that carries unity and forward direction for every individual. A sense of security that is more inclusive and diverse. All with the acceptance of another’s perspective and dialog. Even when we don’t always agree.

A department with vision has an internal cadence set by men and women of inspiration in the face of uncertainty.

A place that resists romanticizing the old days (as good as they were), in favor of writing new stories to unify and partner the now generation. Recognizing the intrinsic value in every person who gives for the sake of the call.

It’s a company that fosters a value in it’s extended family from top to bottom. In its firefighters, rescue techs, red hats, career crews, life members and admin staff. Someone who will make food and fellowship a priority whether you’re coming or not.

We need leaders who can merge the old with the new, speaking life over polishing brass titles in name only.

We have to know our own sense of ‘why’ before we can communicate it in recruiting. Certainly before keeping those who do make the initial commitment.

One thing is absolutely certain. Nobody responds well to silence, drama or a sense of being lost after joining. Foster an environment of equality, unity, mentoring and fellowship. This is your best chance at growing into the future.

Last, let’s continue building closer relationships with our brothers and sisters near us. This is also modeling unity. We serve together, we should share and accel together.

Regardless of the ‘what-if’s’ that remain, create a new era that meets your next generation with fresh attention.

Because the volunteer is still out there.

Jeffrey Fitzgerald provides strategic marketing and media vision to fire-rescue.

LEARN MORE AT WWW.FIREDMEDIA.TV