



This is an expanded version of a column first appearing as "Thoughts on Leadership" in the June/July 2006 issue of *Wildfire* magazine, the official publication of the International Association of Wildland Fire, published by Primedia Business Magazines and Media.

What's Your Philosophy?

In my last column, I wrote that leadership and management differ from one another substantially and that, while both leadership and management are essential to the function and effectiveness of organizations, they are not the same thing. I also wrote that fire agencies need both competent managers and effective leaders and that management and leadership represent different roles within an organization. However, I also wrote that managers and leaders are not different classes of people and that, in lucky organizations, the same person may be both an expert manager and a skillful leader.

It appears certain that our largest wildland fire agencies are locked in a cycle of workforce reduction through budget-driven downsizing, politically driven outsourcing, and the attrition associated with an aging workforce and changing society. Under these circumstances, not only *can* agency personnel perform both as manager and leader; not only *should* agency managers lead; but given the shrinking workforce, they are going to *have* to perform both functions and both roles

In this column we'll tackle the management side of the equation. As I reflect on my last column, I am reminded of the importance of crafting and maintaining a personal philosophy of management. Such a philosophy should embody your personal approach to the tasks and activities associated with directing an organization or an organizational unit. You might think of your management philosophy as your own personal doctrine, so to speak. A potential employer did me a big favor years ago, when they asked me, in a job interview, what my philosophy of management was. I hadn't given it much thought before then. I didn't get the job, but that interview got me actively thinking about my personal management approach. I've been thinking about it ever since, and encourage both my students and my clients to develop their personal philosophy of management as well.

As important to organizational effectiveness as leadership and management both are, we do not want to confuse the two. By doing so, we fall into the trap of equating leadership, a process of influence, with people holding a formal position. Sadly, we all know that the people in positions of authority, those assigned to manage their organizations, may not actually exercise effective leadership.



My own philosophy of management includes five key elements, being:

- ✓ Organizational Effectiveness
- ✓ Organizations Functioning at Their Best
- ✓ Building Commitment
- ✓ Combining Management and Leadership
- ✓ Managers and Supervisors with the Appropriate Mix of Skills

Let's look at each of those elements individually.

Organizational Effectiveness. Organizations are effective when they balance efficiency & effectiveness, concentrating on both “doing things right” and getting the right things done. Another important aspect of organizational effectiveness is striking a balance between producing and preserving your production assets and ability to produce. The best selling author Stephen R. Covey refers to this concept as “the P/PC balance” in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Organizations functioning at their best. Organizations are functioning at their best when:

- Everyone shares a common view of what the organization does (mission and where the outfit is going (vision).
- They have developed their people to function at their maximum effectiveness, evidenced by the fact that organization's personnel perform their jobs competently, willingly, and collaboratively with little need for direct supervision. Over time, the organization's employees develop from dependence to independence, and will eventually function inter-dependently.

Commitment. Commitment is the accomplishment of the organization's goals by a willing, devoted workforce versus a workforce motivated by manipulation, coercion, force or fear. An important key to developing commitment is involvement. If you want people to be committed to the organization's goals, they must participate in the decisions that affect their part in those goals. Trust is also an essential element of organizational effectiveness and at the heart of fostering commitment.

Combining competent management with effective leadership. It is possible to succeed by management alone, but truly effective managers, those that contribute the most to their organizations, combine management skills with leadership skills. Demonstrated leadership fosters the kind of commitment described above.



Managers and supervisors with the appropriate mix of skills. Management, including supervision, requires three broad skill areas; technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. As an individual advances in an organization, the appropriate mix of these skills changes. The need for technical skill decreases while the need for conceptual skills increases. The common denominator seems to remain the critical need for human skills at all levels. Technical skills include specific managerial competencies contributing to planning and administration, such as information gathering and analysis, problem solving, budgeting and resource allocation, time management, and monitoring progress. Management experts typically regard conceptual skills as those contributing to strategic planning and action, particularly understanding the mission, vision, and operational environment of the organization. Human skills include communication and teamwork competencies that enable the manager to convey information and create understanding, create and supervise teams, and manage one's own ethics and credibility.

In our shrinking wildland fire organizations, agency personnel will increasingly find themselves responsible for both the functions of management and leadership and performing both as manager and leader. Considering that, I encourage *Wildfire* readers to craft and maintain their personal philosophy of management. By doing so, you create; for yourself, the opportunity to think about your personal management doctrine that guides how you manage and embodies your personal approach to the tasks and activities associated with directing an organization or an organizational unit.

Shaping your personal management philosophy takes an important step toward becoming a truly effective manager, which in turn, enables you to simultaneously provide your organization with both effective leadership and competent management.

About the Author.

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