

Monthly Message from the Chief

Recently, I had the privilege of attending a dinner for a long-time friend, Ed Wristen. He has retired from his position as Tulare Unit Chief. Ed is someone I have known and respected since the beginning of my career. He is a likeable man and a self-described “poor old country boy.” There is a lot more to him than that. His retirement letter, written by those who know him best, referred to his sincerity, devotion, and dedication to people and his unselfish service. It further noted that he was able to instill these same values in others.



These values, coupled with our willingness to help each other, describe the concept of the CAL FIRE family.

Ed was also recognized for advising his people to carry out their duties with dignity, integrity, and pride. Dignity and integrity are essential attributes of effective leadership and respect. Only when that respect is earned, can one truly enjoy a sense of pride. Pride should always be expressed with dignity. We need to practice these ideals as we go about our business. How the public views us is dependent upon how we reflect this philosophy. Also, bear in mind that in the age of the virtual community we find ourselves in the public view far more often; sometimes without our knowledge.

The next day Ed shared a quote from the late Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, USNR; the first woman to attain that rank. She stated “You don’t manage people; you manage things. You lead people.” I did some research on this incredible person nicknamed “Amazing Grace,” who was also credited with the quote, “Leadership is a two-way street, loyalty up and loyalty down. Respect for one's superiors; care for one's crew.” I particularly like the latter quote. It is something I believe in, and, if practiced routinely, strengthens us.

The first quote spurs me to share my belief that management has gotten a bad name in recent years. I agree that leadership has taken a back seat to management in many organizations with less than desirable results, but management and leadership are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I don’t believe a leader can be effective without exercising management of “things” as part of his or her duties. Bottom line: Everyone in CAL FIRE is capable of exercising both leadership and management in some fashion, and I encourage it.

CAL FIRE employees are assigned extraordinary responsibilities and are granted authority to meet them very early in their careers. These practices and the expectations that accompany them set us apart from most other organizations. They equal trust. I have often thought that the trust we place in our employees is

perhaps the single most important principal of our strength. Maintaining that trust is essential to our continued success. Those who supervise should ensure that their people have the training and tools to exercise their authority wisely and hold them accountable for their actions - we will become stronger by doing so.

I truly believe that for every person like Chief Wristen, who has lived by these principals and earned the ability to enjoy life to the fullest beyond CAL FIRE, there are others among us capable of the same extraordinary leadership

On another note, this last April has taken on the look of many past Mays. Due to the weather and fuel conditions we are experiencing up and down the state, preparation for wildland firefighting has necessarily accelerated. A 225-acre brush fire sparked by lightning at 6,000 feet in the Plumas National Forest on April 22 is a sobering reminder of the events of last June. It is also consistent with the preliminary seasonal assessment of wildland fire potential indicating we are three to five weeks ahead of normal in many parts of the state.

Recent wet weather in some parts of the state will give us temporary respite from the hot dry conditions ahead, but the stage has been set for summer.

The ability to adapt to these conditions is among our many strengths. CAL FIRE is the State's fire department, and more. We are among the finest public safety providers in the world.

Be prepared, be safe and take care of each other!