

Foreword

I come from a family with over a century of unbroken military service to our country. I grew up watching leaders in action, including my grandfather and my father, both career Army infantry officers and combat veterans. I learned early in life how important competent and confident leadership is to any team endeavor, especially one in which human lives are at stake.

I didn't follow my father into the military, but I did commit myself to another form of public service by becoming a wildland firefighter with the Bureau of Land Management. I started in 1976 as a seasonal firefighter on engine and helitack crews on the Fortymile Resource Area in Alaska's Interior. I was a smokejumper for 17 fire seasons for the Alaska Fire Service and worked my way up through the ranks to Base Manager. I also served as an Operations Section Chief on Alaska's Type I national team. After serving as BLM's State FMO for Montana and the Dakotas, I finished my career at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise as BLM's Chief of Fire Operations. Throughout my career, I studied the art of leadership and worked to improve my own leadership traits and skills.

Sound leadership is critical to the success of any organization, but it is especially important in a high risk profession like firefighting. Fireline leaders make decisions and take actions that determine whether fires are caught or not, whether taxpayers money is used wisely or not, and potentially whether firefighters and members of the public live or die. In our business, leaders must make sense of confusing and uncertain situations, and lead firefighters in a way that allows them to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous and stressful circumstances. These leadership skills are not easy to learn or practice, but our profession requires us to commit ourselves to a lifetime of learning and practicing competent leadership.

For many years, even decades, our firefighting training focused on the firefighting environment and the technical side of this complex profession. We taught new firefighters how to read fuels, topography, weather and fire behavior, and how to develop tactical plans to contain and control

wildfires. What we neglected to focus on was the human environment that we were operating in on the fireground, and how to lead effectively in that environment. We knew little about how to develop and train leaders, how to communicate clearly under stress, how to be effective decision-makers, what the effects of fatigue are on human performance and how to set a positive leadership example. Serious accidents and fatalities have finally taught us that we must master the leadership and human environment of firefighting as well as the fire environment if we hope to field and lead strong, error-resilient fire organizations. That requires all of us to commit to the study and practice of sound wildland fire leadership.

Reading a book is not going to make anyone a great leader, but it is a first step that can lead towards that goal. Chief Teie is a man committed to the lifetime study and practice of leadership, and his book, *Leadership for the Wildland Fire Officer*, is an outstanding reference for any firefighter at any point on the leadership journey. Chief Teie and his team have done a thorough and clear job of describing and explaining leadership skills, traits, and techniques that all of us need to know and practice when the smoke is in the air. They have incorporated many lessons learned from their own careers and from famous fires from around the nation. This is a book written by wildland fire leaders with many seasons of authentic fireline leadership experience themselves, and it shows.

I recommend that you study the material in this book, watch how a leader you admire works, and make a commitment to be the kind of competent, ethical leader that other firefighters will willingly follow into danger. Wildland firefighting is not getting any easier. It continues to grow in complexity, risk, and danger and you must be up to the challenge. The people who you will lead are depending on you. You cannot let them down.



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