League of California Cities

Diversity, Equity & Inclusivity in the Fire Service:
Navigating and Implementing Strategies for Chiefs

Presenter
Mike Despain

37 Years of service
Multiple agencies
Many internal investigations
Many lessons learned!
31 years of service
15+ years FD research
100+ agency-wide trainings

Many lessons learned!

Fire Service DEI Improvement Model
Strategies for improving Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity within the fire service

Step 1
Provide Fire Service Specific training on DEI (not just policy review)
This is the most important for the success of the other steps – (Must be credible instruction as perceived by firefighters)

Step 2
Develop a comprehensive investigation process that can quickly and accurately gather facts.
Develop sanction process in advance of an investigation/hearing

Step 3
Work with community to bring diversity to the applicant pool
Reduce/remove unnecessary barriers to employment

Step 4
Remove unnecessary barriers to the training processes.
Bring in the best trainers that understand adult learning, use adjunct instructors for specialty skills.

Step 5
Telegraph the value of DEI on future promotions
Utilize DEI questioning and interview processes

Step 6
Conduct an agency assessment.
Send to agency legal council for confidentiality. Only the Chief sees.
Use strategic planning measurement to demonstrate changes over time

Step 7
Use annual measurements to provide information and disclosure to the community.
Transparency
Use annual reporting

Micheal Despain – MEDenterprisesinc@gmail.com
**Step 1**

*Provide Fire Service Specific DEI Training*

- This is one of the most important steps and needs to be done early in your process otherwise it diminishes the effectiveness of the other steps
- Don’t rely solely on “online” training
- Training must be provided by “credible” instructors as perceived by the audience
- Training must capture and keep the attention of the audience, then make an emotional impact so as to stay with them
  - Humor, provocative stories, emotionally impactful close

**Step 2**

*Accountability*

- Need a comprehensive investigation process
  - Must quickly and accurately gather facts
  - What do you do with the accuser and accused?
  - Consider outsourcing
- Develop your disciplinary/sanction process in advance
- Remember, the agency needs to execute flawlessly once an accusation has been made
**Step 3**

*Recruitment*

- Work with the community to bring diversity to the applicant pool

- Remove unnecessary barriers to entry
  - Physical ability testing
  - Candidate sometimes are required to pay for testing
  - Provide “day in the life” type training experiences for prospective applicants
  - Fire Explorer programs

**Step 4**

*Training/On Boarding*

- Assign your best trainers to the training process
  - Must understand adult learning
  - Prohibit the ”Drill Sargent” routine
  - Set clear expectations for instructors

- Remove unnecessary barriers to entry
  - Academy is the safest place to make mistakes
  - Is about getting the candidates through the process, not “survival of the fittest”
  - Candidates should feel like they are part of a team, and the team will work hard to help them
### Step 5

_Telegraph the value of DEI for future promotions_

- Let aspiring leaders know the importance of “people skills” over the traditional over-emphasis on “operational skills” in future promotional processes
- Utilize DEI topics in testing processes
  - Pre-reading/study assignments
  - Questions during the process

### Step 6

_DEI Measurement_

- Conduct an agency assessment
  - Use a qualified assessor
  - The report can be sent to legal counsel for confidentiality (initially)

- Implement DEI measurements in the agency’s Strategic Planning processes
  - Track changes over time
Step 7

Marketing

• Use annual measurements to provide information and transparency to the community
  • Celebrate successes
  • Disclose gaps
  • Engage community leaders

• It's all about maintaining public trust

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

“Move the needle!”

These events are dangerous!

No “harmless” risks - carcinogens

Aggregate exposure

Big events require outside resources

Mitigation, training & placard.
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

“Harass-Mat” Harassment/Hostile work environment avoidance training

These events are dangerous!

No “harmless” risks - carcinogens

Aggregate exposure

Big events require outside resources

Mitigation, training & placard

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

“Harass-Mat” Placard / Scale

0  Not Occurring

1  Occasionally occurs
   Quickly corrected.

2  Occasionally occurs
   Rarely corrected.

3  Regularly occurs
   Rarely or never corrected.
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

“Harass-Mat” Placard / Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Professional work environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Arguably a hostile work environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Hostile work environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin
Train at crew level – focus on Company Officers

Company Officers are expected to put out small fires

- Authority
- Training
- Tools
- Resources
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin
Policy counts!! Focus on the issues, not the theories

“Petty slights, annoyances, and isolated incidents do NOT rise to the level of harassment”

These are small fires

PUT THEM OUT

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin
Policy counts!! Focus on the issues, not the theories

Conduct becomes unlawful when it is a condition of employment, and

Severe

Unwanted

OR
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin
Policy counts!! Focus on the issues, not the theories

PERVASIVE
A reasonable person would consider the behavior intimidating, hostile, or abusive

How fast can a station go from “happy” to “hostile?”

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin
Hostile work environments develop over time “Admin carcinogens”

PERVASIVE
A reasonable person would consider the behavior intimidating, hostile, or abusive

How fast can a station go from “happy” to “hostile?”
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

Company Officers

Most challenging admin job in the country!

Agency only as strong as weakest CO

Both operationally & administratively

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

Company Officers

Chief – Where we’re going

Chief Ofc’s – How we get there

Rank & File – Tires on the bus

Company Officers

[DRIVING THE BUS!]
Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

Company Officers

Your family is on the bus
Their safety is in your hands
Pay attention

Meaningful Workplace Training – Ops vs Admin

Company Officers

Your family is on the bus
Their safety is in your hands
Pay attention

Cultural Change One Crew and One Shift at a Time