

# EAST PIERCE FIRE & RESCUE



## LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

*"When a person becomes a firefighter, the greatest act of bravery has been accomplished.  
What he/she does after that is all in the line of work."* Edward Croker

Letter from Chief:

East Pierce Fire & Rescue was founded on the motto *Where Compassion and Action Meet*. While a dictionary can easily define words like compassion and action, the intent of those words within the East Pierce community means far more than what a simple definition may state. Compassion is defined as “to suffer together,” and action is defined as the process of doing something. The impact of these two elements crossing is very powerful. Not only do we as an organization take on some of the pain, but we work towards finding a solution and making the situation better. What is very clear to me is that one foundational skill that must exist for us to achieve this motto in everything we do collectively, and that skill is leadership.

Leadership is odd in that many people will find it difficult to define, yet they know what leadership is the minute they see it. Leadership is not a single skill; instead, it is the culmination of all the traits an individual, a team, and an organization possesses. This means that collectively, we can continuously challenge ourselves to grow as leaders and develop a culture of service above self.

We each bring different experiences, backgrounds, and education into the organization. These differences make us stronger and challenge us to improve continuously. I believe that the mark of great leaders is not that they know everything or execute every action flawlessly, but, among many other things, they are humble, compassionate, persistent, and accountable.

Leaders can come from all levels of the organization and may or may not hold a formal rank. EPFR’s Leadership Philosophy was created over a decade ago and has stood the test of time which is a testament to those who had the foresight to draft it. The document is genuinely the expectations of our leaders; it describes how we are expected to treat each other and those we lead. Developing this leadership philosophy defines the ideal culture that reflects our core value: our employees are our most important resource in providing compassionate service. This philosophy identifies the traits that are expected of our leaders. As current and aspiring leaders of East Pierce Fire & Rescue, we owe it to ourselves and the public to be the best we can, every time, all the time.

This document is broken into three sections: service above self (responsibility to mission), leading by example (commitment to people), and integrity (self-responsibility). These sections are explained with common-sense examples that bring the philosophy to life. If we internalize this philosophy and portray these traits, we will become the department we aspire to be.

My thanks to the team that developed this leadership philosophy. I challenge each of you to review this document and review it often. It truly defines our ideal state of leadership and the level of service we expect from East Pierce Fire & Rescue employees.

Respectfully,

*Jon Parkinson*

Fire Chief

## Leadership Philosophy:

It is the mission of East Pierce Fire & Rescue to have exceptional people providing compassionate service and rapid response to our community's diverse needs. The leadership philosophy described within is intended to maximize our ability to consistently achieve that mission.

This document should be used to guide the relationships of all current and future members to ensure that we continue to reinforce the department's core values and guiding principles in our day-to-day relationships with the public we serve, each other, and ourselves. We have established a standard by which to measure our personal and organizational behavior.

You are expected to accept this philosophy as a general description of the way we will operate and act. The responsibility to learn and practice this philosophy lies with each individual. Each member must accept the responsibility associated with maintaining a positive and productive work environment, delivering quality service, and cultivating change and improvements in the future. This requires a high level of commitment by all involved to make it effective. It demands dedication to focusing on the best interests of the department and the public we serve. When we all act in accordance with the organizational leadership values and philosophy outlined in this document, and hold ourselves and each other accountable to those expectations, we will see a significant element of successful cultural change and organizational growth.

It's not one thing that makes a leader successful, but a continuous collection of knowledge, skills and abilities. Leaders aren't measured by rank or title but by experience, respect, and dedication. Leadership is a personal choice. It's tough work to show up every day and lead by your actions; it's tiring and can be frustrating. Nevertheless, it's up to you to make a choice. You can dismiss all of this advice and risk being left behind, or you can choose to become an everyday leader. If you make the personal decision to model the traits expected of all members, then, by your action, you will begin to influence those around you.

Leadership is a full-time, continuous occupation. It's about preparing for the next tactical incident, mentoring the newest member, attaining the latest measurable goal. It's constant, moving, fluid and dynamic. Your team was created by the organization to accomplish some goal. It is critical to remain focused on those goals. This leadership commitment must be front and center everyday in the offices, fire stations, and at emergency scenes in order to establish the "new norm" expected of all members. Cultural change is a moving target and takes time, so the work of the organization's leaders, both formal and informal, is never done.

The reality of the fire service is that you will work for both good bosses and bad bosses. In the latter case, the question is, how did this happen, and what can I do while still maintaining my leadership principles? It's tough when you find yourself in a position of working for or around poor leadership. The perils of making the wrong choices out of emotion are pretty great and put you at risk of violating your personal commitments, integrity, commitment, and honor. Loss of leadership can occur at the company, the battalion, and the division levels, all the way up to the chief of the department. Unfortunate as this situation may be, it is important for us to understand how to survive, maintain morale, and continue accomplishing the mission of the department under these circumstances. If we develop and educate a new generation of leaders who are unhappy and discontent with the ways of the past and willing to do their duty we will change the face of the fire service. Although this will be a long endeavor requiring patience, skill, and savvy, it can be done, and this leadership philosophy is a tool to help all aspiring and existing leaders stay focused.

Get involved with the department and be concerned with where we are going. Become as informed as you possibly can about our job. Be the best you can be and stay positive.

In the following pages you will find a philosophy that identifies and defines the leadership traits expected of all EPF&R members. Living this philosophy requires a deliberate commitment and conscious effort on the part of all of us each and every day. It is intended to describe and maintain an environment in which the department can remain committed to its mission and, at the same time, improve the capability of the members, keeping them motivated, healthy, positive and productive.

# **LEADERSHIP TRAITS**

## **Service above Self (Responsibility to Mission)**

- Prioritize
- Followership
- Perseverance
- Seek, accept and provide feedback
- Sense of service
- Provide clear direction
- Technically competent

## **Lead by Example (Responsibility to People)**

- Communicate expectations
- Respectful
- Positive attitude
- Initiative
- Acknowledge accomplishments
- Mentor
- Fairness
- Compassionate

## **Integrity (Responsibility to Self)**

- Do what's right
- Accountable
- Confident
- Self-aware
- Self-disciplined
- Seek improvement

## **Service above Self (Responsibility to Mission)**

- **Prioritize**
  - Leaders set the priorities. Accomplish the mission first, sustain the welfare of the company second, and take care of yourself third.
  - Don't forget what the department was formed to do or from where we came. Bottom line: the fire department exists to deliver service; it is not intended or funded to service our egos and personal agendas.
  - Leaders are responsible for getting results out of people, so the mission can be achieved effectively. Work to keep others positive, productive, and healthy contributors within the organization.
  
- **Perseverance**
  - A leader who does not work hard or devote extra effort cannot expect his people to do so. You must set the example; your people will follow your lead.
  - Commitment involves choosing a course of action and sticking with it. When things get really tough, team members want you to reaffirm that you'll see them through the situation. They want to know they can depend on you.
  - A leader possessing a force of personality gets things done. This attribute embodies the traits of initiative, courage, bearing, decisiveness, and endurance. A leader possessing a force of personality displays a bias for action, makes decisions in a timely manner, seeks responsibility, accepts the consequences, and is highly competent at her/his job.
  
- **Seek, accept and provide feedback**
  - Feedback is clear, constructive, candid, and regular. Guidance is specific, thoughtful, individually-tailored, and intended to help the recipient grow both personally and professionally.
  - Use failures or policy breaches as moments of learning, to teach what should have occurred and reinforce expectations. Listen to your team, and if changes need to be made, especially when they pertain to you personally, make them. If we take the time to listen more, talk less, and communicate frequently, we can avoid misunderstanding, stop the effect that silence has on issues and problems, and effect meaningful change.
  - Leaders maintain control by soliciting feedback regarding the status of the unfolding situation and the results of action.
  - Failing to provide feedback represents failure in a basic responsibility of leadership: to guide team members in learning accountability, accepting responsibility, and being effective communicators. Providing feedback represents a potentially powerful form of influence. When given in a timely and appropriate manner, feedback builds the leader's credibility among team members, demonstrates respect for them, and increases their respect for their leader. Praise in public and discipline in private, always considering the people involved and the situation.
  - Leaders seek and accept feedback to maintain accurate situation awareness about ourselves. We are willing to examine and probe blind spots, seeking feedback from others. Seeking and accepting feedback and sharing information enables leaders to increase what is known among team members and contributes to the development of a strong team.
  
- **Followership**
  - Support the organization, embrace change, resolve conflict, buy into the future, and set a positive example.
  - We all must operate within the philosophy, culture, and values of the organization. Even if the culture is in need of significant change. Cultural change can be important to organizational growth and is most successfully led from the inside of that culture and value system.
  - The right to lead is given by followers. A leader, based on actions, direction, character, credibility, ethics, and commitment, earns followership.
  - Stay an advocate of the fire department and help other members be successful, including your boss.

- **Sense of service**
  - A good firefighter has a heart full of pride and dedication regardless of the station assignment and call volume. These are the firefighters pushing themselves in a gym, on the drill ground, or in a classroom because they refuse to wait on the real world. The best firefighters are those who proudly embrace the profession as one of preparation, knowing full well we do battle with complacency and ego more frequently than we ever fight fire.
  - Every contact with the people in the community must be viewed by the members of the fire department as a moment of truth – an opportunity to serve, show that we care, deliver our message, and listen to the needs and perspectives of the people. Seize the opportunity to communicate with the public when you're out, and make that personal connection.
  - When they say, "somebody do something", you're the somebody they're talking about.
  - What would people say about you if one day...you were just gone? Are you making the most of every day and taking every opportunity to be the best you can be? Are you really here for others – service above self - or just drawing a paycheck? Do you still have the passion for the job you held as a rookie?
  - Be humble. We have a responsibility and duty to act as no other would in risking our lives to save a stranger.
  
- **Provide clear direction**
  - Don't assume that you're communicating just because you're talking.
  - A positive and productive work atmosphere is the order of the day, and the leader creates and nurtures it. Members clearly understand what is expected of them regarding their performance and behavior, and this is communicated by the leader.
  - Demonstrate a strong command presence. Communicate clearly, effectively, and with as little emotion as possible. Otherwise people will do one of two things: They will engage in what they believe needs to be done, or do nothing.
  
- **Technically Competent**
  - Be trained and equipped to perform the job. It is our responsibility to attain levels of competency through training and to be able to use the equipment provided in order to perform effectively.
  - There are two fundamental reasons why we train: 1) We have dangerous jobs and as leaders, we're responsible for the safety of our personnel, and 2) we have a responsibility to provide a well-trained firefighting and emergency medical response force to the people we serve.
  - There's no room for error in the fire service. When someone calls 911, they don't get to choose who responds. For that reason, when a crying mother hands you her breathless child, or someone yells as you pull up your rig to a house fire, "There's an elderly lady inside!" you must be at your very best. No exceptions. No excuses.
  - Train as if your life depends on it, because it does! Not just your life, but your crew's and the public's as well.
  - There are multiple jobs that an officer must learn well, but none is as important as being able to command a fire or rescue ground. The fire ground is combat, clear and simple. It is an environment that wants to win and take as many lives with it as it can; your job is to stop that from occurring.
  - Great teams do the basics with a high degree of proficiency and as habit. Good habits breed smart, tough, aggressive, successful teams. Bad habits breed timidity: Timidity breeds casualties and mission failure...The basics are easy to talk about but hard to maintain. They require vigilant, iron-willed leaders who maintain an unflinching standard day in and day out despite fatigue, boredom, and complacency. The challenge for you – the leader – is to internalize these expectations in your team, to ingrain them so fully that they are inherent, lest you be taught a bitter lesson.

## **Lead by Example (Responsibility to People)**

### **• Communicate expectations**

- When behavior conflicts with the core values, leaders must step up and have the tough conversations with their personnel to get their behavior aligned with the core values
- Establish your expectations for the team up front. When asked to identify the most important things they need and expect from a supervisor, workers have always said “tell me what is expected of me.” Yet this critical expectation of leadership is many times avoided and therefore results in unnecessary conflict.
- As a leader, you can (and should) push your team to train, educate themselves, reach for their goals, work as a team and stay true to the organization’s mission.
- Sometimes leadership means making people do what they know deep down they should be doing anyway. It often means being unpopular. Your people need you to be a leader, not a buddy. Making the “easy” or popular decision, instead of the difficult and unpopular but correct decision, will reward you with failure.
  - Leaders ensure their people are ready to accomplish the mission safely and efficiently so that everyone goes home.
  - Buddies, if they survive, grieve at their friend’s funeral.
- Tell your team what you expect from them and what they could expect from you. Vow to give them your very best effort every day, and expect the same from them.

### **• Respectful**

- Accept the differences in us and respect the opportunities that diversity offers. When brought together, these differences provide a clearer focus and usually result in better decisions as a group.
- Always set a positive example and practice sound personal and professional values.
- To gain respect from our people, we first respect them by getting to know them, looking out for their well-being, keeping them informed, putting forth the effort to build strong teams, and employing them in accordance with their capabilities.

### **• Positive attitude**

- Display traits and behaviors that are contagious to others and help maintain the passion that initially attracted us to the fire service.
- Your attitude, not someone else’s, and the way you choose to look at the world, determine your success.
- The extent to which your attitude and actions affect the people you come into contact with is called your circle of influence. Used properly, it can influence people to do the right things. Be positive, say good things, be nice to people, and watch your circle of influence grow. It can also work the other way with a bad attitude.
- Everyone looks to their leaders for direction. Leaders have to model behaviors that spread feelings of well-being and optimism. Express confidence in and be quick to praise your people. Treat mistakes as teaching opportunities. Give them permission to laugh and have fun at the same time that they’re doing great work.

### **• Initiative**

- Leaders demonstrate a firm command of their job, honesty, fairness and commitment to their organization and require this of their team.
- Continue to make your mark in the fire service, and on a regular basis say to yourself, “Wow, what this place could be if...” and see what you can do to get it there.
- “It’s not my job.” When you hear someone say this, what he or she is really saying is “Excuse my inaction”; “Allow me to redirect the blame to So-and-So”; and “Allow me to avoid any responsibility.” When you say it isn’t your job, it clearly indicates that you know something has to be done but choose not to do it! The fire service is a team sport; it requires people to help other people in the organization when they recognize something needs to be done. If you see something that needs to be done, do it! If someone asks for help, help them!
- Foster initiative within your team. Everyone needs to be able to fill a void when it suddenly opens up. Teach your members to look for openings, changes, and opportunities, and let them take a risk. They will see things you will not, which may be needed in order to accomplish the task at hand.

- **Acknowledge accomplishments**

- Reward good performance and behavior at every opportunity, but do not ever reward unacceptable performance or bad behavior.
- “Look for their positives...Anyone can pick out the negatives. You do that and the negatives tend to go away. Catch them doing something right. It’s easy to catch them doing something wrong.”
- When we say goodbye to a fallen comrade or to one who has passed, it’s time to pay them a tribute. However, we should be honoring each other while we’re all still here and still have a chance to really let people know what they mean to us and how much we appreciate them. Let’s not wait until after they’re gone. The time for honor is right now.
- Leaders recognize efforts that move their teams toward stated goals. Teams value recognition as evidence that their leaders understand and appreciate their dedication and hard work.

- **Mentor**

- Empower your members by delegating truly challenging work and helping them develop (personally and professionally). Give them the responsibility and the authority to do their jobs.
- Great leaders create more leaders, not more followers.
- Who we are as employees is directly related to how we learned about our job and who influenced us to learn it properly. When it comes to influencing new employees, no one has a greater opportunity – or responsibility- than their leaders.
- Teach your people how to do things the proper way, if you don’t they have little respect or understanding for what they’re doing.
- There is no more effective tool than mentoring. Mentoring develops a new employee’s knowledge of values, beliefs and practices, thereby instilling in them, early on, the organization’s culture. Mentoring leads to well-rounded members who can be more productive within the organization. Mentoring has also been shown to lead to better job satisfaction, better decision-making and greater perceived competence, all of which are paramount in the fire service.
- Build a high level of competence in team members. Some of today’s members are the leaders of tomorrow; it is the leader’s responsibility to mentor and help them cultivate the right tools and skills that they will need to face the challenges of the future.

- **Fairness**

- Value and listen to every member.
- Be as fair as possible, avoid the appearance of favoritism, display trust in people, be honest in your interactions with others, and simply be nice to people. This enhances a person’s sense of self-worth and organizational value.
- We’ve got an awesome family, but we’re human. Once in a while someone is going to make a mistake and that’s okay. They’re called “on accidents” not “on purposes.” Occasionally someone is going to mess up and commit one of those “on purposes” when they really should have known better. When that happens, we need to step up and let them know it’s not right. Don’t be afraid to initiate discipline when necessary.
- As an officer, you don’t have the luxury of choosing which policies you want to enforce. If a policy is foolish, not enforceable, or doesn’t meet your needs, change it through the proper process.
- If you are fair and consistent and always bear in mind how your decisions will affect your team, all the while considering what is in the organization’s best interest, you are well on your way to gaining respect and being a good leader.

- **Compassionate**

- Share in the hardship, make a regular habit of exerting effort that is above and beyond the call of duty, and hold yourself to the highest professional and moral standards, particularly when no one is watching.
- Take care of your people and they will take care of your customers.
- Treat every encounter and incident with empathy, compassion and importance. Calling 911 is the most important call most individuals will ever make. Do you treat it with like significance and care – with dignity, respect and critical importance?
- Be nice to other people. It doesn't cost anything and dramatically improves every aspect of our lives and the lives of those around us.
- People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will not forget how you made them feel. Every customer is important and deserves to be treated respectfully.

### **Integrity (Responsibility to Self)**

- **Do what's right**

- Develop a moral compass by which to live.
- Do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason, and you cannot go far wrong. This is usually what is best for you, others, and the organization as a whole.
- Some people in the organization will shun you for trying to lead, be fair, and treat people with respect. Don't worry about what others say; instead, do what you know to be the right thing, and eventually, when it's clear what the right thing is, everyone will have to follow suit or be left behind.

- **Accountable**

- Require members to be involved in their jobs and participate in improvement efforts, at least in areas that directly impact their performance. We should be committed to performing and improving in the jobs that we are assigned.
- Admit when you have made a mistake. Take responsibility for your mistake, develop a plan to correct it, try to prevent it from happening again, and move on.
- The truth is, the vast majority of things your people do they are doing right. The bad news is that when things don't go right, there are significant consequences. Your role as a leader in your organization is to spot those "problems lying in wait" and do something to address the issue before it becomes a tragedy.
- When people realize that you mean what you say, and you hold them accountable for their action and/or inaction, they come around fairly quickly.
- Accountability involves a person being held responsible for his or her actions, decisions, or outcomes within their particular areas of responsibility. To be held accountable, a person should know what is expected of them up-front and should be aware of the consequences of not getting the job done in a way that is acceptable. Conversely, provide positive feedback when they do well.
- Lack of accountability leads to blame shifting, negative attitudes, retired on active duty (ROAD) status, chronic complaining, sloppy or incomplete work, laziness, and myriad other characteristic signs of a highly infectious organism that multiplies exponentially, sucking the life out of everything around it! Company Officers have a unique opportunity to see it, stop it and prevent it from spreading.
- You must lead from the front. You have to demonstrate that you're accountable and responsible. You need to be a cheerleader, the primary motivator, setting in motion those things that allow people to get things done successfully for you and the organization. You must be an enabler, not a restrainer.
- Seek and accept responsibility for your actions. Leaders accept full responsibility for poor team performance and credit subordinates for good performance.

- **Confident**

- Exhibit a strong sense of pride and accomplishment.
- We all face tests of our confidence. It's during those times that we must go forward and move past our apprehensions. The really difficult part is that everybody gets to watch the outcome of your decisions, but very few people have the information you had when you made them. As a result, you'll find no shortage of critics with almost every decision you make.
- Being a leader takes courage to make hard and tough decisions. Sometimes as a leader, you have to make decisions that are not popular. But you have to make decisions based on what's right and not what's popular. In the end, if you make decisions based on good solid information and integrity, you'll come out on top.
- Be a progressive risk taker who allows for and listens to new ideas. Don't be afraid to try new techniques and operations, erring on the side of progress.

- **Self-aware**

- Leadership is a privilege not a right.
- Be your own toughest critic. Stop worrying about what others are doing wrong and think about what you can do right.
- To be most effective, be a situational leader, flexible in your approach, adapting your leadership style to the situation at hand and the individuals involved.
- Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny and legacy.
- Start viewing your current work assignment as a challenge and embrace it enthusiastically.
- If you don't love this job, if you're not willing to stand up for and protect our fire service family and its image, it's simple: get out. Leave, go away. Because what we really need are more people who feel pride and ownership and love for the job.
- Decide what you would like others to say about working for [or with] you, then pursue a course to make that vision become a reality. It helps for us to know what we really stand for as leaders, but we should probably keep that list short and meaningful.
- Where we work, there is no time-out, there is no next time, there is no second chance. When the 5% calls, you had better have your game face on. No one should have to endure poor strategic and tactical decision making, indecision, lack of physical or moral courage, or inability to do the assigned job at an incident.
- The bottom line is to choose what you are going to be and not pretend to be something else.
- The starting point for leadership development is self-awareness. In many ways, our greatest challenge is to know ourselves. Understanding our abilities and limitations, seeking feedback, learning from our mistakes, knowing where to improve, recognizing when to seek others with complementary strengths – these are all behaviors that enable us to become better leaders.

- **Self-disciplined**

- People are looking at your actions to set an example.
- Most people are basically driven to behave and perform in a way that is consistent with the organization's expectations. All members must accept and share responsibility for creating a positive, productive atmosphere based on the concept of self-discipline.
- Self-discipline relates to voluntary compliance with performance and behavior standards. An important piece of self-discipline lies in a periodic evaluation of our personal and professional well-being.
- Stop determining your work attitude and output based on what others are or are not doing.
- Complacency means you know what your responsibilities are, but instead of taking care of them, you decide to risk getting caught not taking care of them. How do we allow ourselves to become complacent in a job that could kill us on the very next call? The first step toward controlling complacency is to be honest about where your skill level is compared to where it should be. At the end of the day, you know what you know, and you know what you don't know. Our biggest concern should be "Did I do something today to make me a better at my job?"
- Discipline is simply doing what you are supposed to do in the best possible manner at the time you are supposed to do it. Even when no one is watching.

- **Seek improvement**

- Being our best is their best chance.
- There is no substitute for staying competent in our chosen field.
- People who have stopped learning, or have the sense that they are "fully trained," are on a downhill slide in their careers. In fact, in the emergency services business, they are dangerous to themselves and others. Always pay attention, learn from experience, continue training and education, and keep an open mind to change and improvement.
- Go out and be the best you can be. Study your position. Evaluate your performance constantly and always try to improve yourself.
- Maintaining and improving your behavior and performance should not be optional. Nobody can expect to stay current in today's workplace without ongoing training designed to maintain basic skills and knowledge, as well as prepare for a changing future as job duties and organizational missions change.

The fire service requires a lot from its members. There is so much to do to keep the department running smoothly. The mundane daily tasks, which we do well and professionally, are necessary evils. What it really boils down to, however, is the 5% of the time. What's the 5%? It's when what might happen actually happens. That's what you are paid for, what you have been trained for, and when you are expected to shine. Your very existence in the station is predicated on the inevitability that something will go wrong somewhere. This is the business of the business, what we live for, and it should never be taken for granted. Everything else you do, from rig checks to cleaning the station and training, is paying dues. This gives you the honor and the right to be there when the 5% happens. When things are going poorly for someone, when their world is crashing down around them, even for a moment, it is our job, our calling to be there, fix it and fix them to the very best of our ability. There are two rules. The first rule is to always take care of the customer. The second is to perform your job at the highest level of technical competency. - Chase Sargent, *From Buddy to Boss*