

# Central Fire District

## From the desk of the Chief

### The Complaints Department

I am taking most of this article from an article printed in the July 2009 Fire Rescue magazine. The article was written by Deputy Chief Mike Bryant of the LA County Fire Department and I thought it was just great. It addresses an issue that frequently raises its ugly head in every work environment and can be very destructive to an organization. So I will share with you Chief Bryant's comments and some of my own with the hope that it will help us all.

Over the years Central Fire District has earned a reputation of being one of the best trained and efficient volunteer organizations in the state. You as a volunteer with your positive attitude and desire to serve have created this image and others out there are striving to become more like you.

Have you ever been in a meeting or on a scene when someone started to complain about other personnel, the District, the rules and regulations or just in general complaining about everything. When that happens it almost always causes a decrease in the positive attitude and environment we all prefer to work in. Let's analyze this problem a little.

Why do firefighters and EMT's complain? If you were to ask them they would most commonly tell you that they are not complaining they are just *discussing*. The difference, says Chief Bryant, between complaining and discussing topics lies in our attitude and motivation. Discussing a situation involves taking a balanced approach, in which we actively try to understand the origin of the problem and identify a remedy. A discussion of a problem means that we assume responsibility for part of the problem and the solution. We can simply tell others the facts and move on: if we need help in fixing the problem, we ask for it directly.

Focusing on discussion rather than complaints doesn't mean you can't discuss certain topics. We can discuss almost everything in the right place and at the right time, without being a complainer, it is all about attitude.

The key difference: Discussion involves talking over a problem with knowledgeable people to seek a new perspective on the situation and *input of how to resolve the problem* or issue. Don't just bring a problem but always be ready with a way to solve it.

As a leader in your station you must be sure that you are not to be part of the problem. Don't complain yourself and your troops will be less likely to be adversely affected by the complainer syndrome.

Here are some ideas to consider from Chief Bryant's article:

- *Admit it's a problem and you might be your problem.* Often the most difficult part in learning how to handle complaining is recognizing that you are the problem. If someone recorded you for a week, what would it reveal about how much time you spend complaining, arguing and saying the district, your station, or your coworkers stink?
- *Accept responsibility for your own life.* I believe there are three kinds of people in life: accusers, excusers and choosers. Accusers are always going around saying, "its your fault." Excusers say, "I'm a product of my environment. It's not really my fault." Choosers, on the other hand, are successful because they accept responsibility for their decisions and craft a new way forward. **Don't complain about how the ball bounces if you dropped it.**
- *Develop the attitude of gratitude.* Learn to be grateful for what you have. It's a tremendous antidote for complaining. We in the fire and ems service have so much to be grateful for, yet we take so much for granted.
- *Practice speaking positively.* Complaining is a habit. Habits are only broken when we replace them with another habit. Take out the negative complaining and replace it with positive speaking. That's easier said than done. When I hear someone complaining at work, it drives me nuts and sometimes it is difficult to speak positively to them. But I do know from experience that positive affirmation always gets better results than complaining or nagging.
- *The bottom line:* We all need to vent sometimes, but by keeping complaining to a minimum, we can ensure a positive environment for all personnel.

I thought this article by Chief Bryan was valuable. I am going to make an effort to be more positive in my actions and in the things I say. If we all make that an active effort we can make ourselves happier and Central Fire District an even better place to serve.

Thanks for listening. Be safe out there!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Jim