

Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



***Bringing Columbia Home* by Michael Leinbach and Jonathan Ward**

Best Wildland Fire Leadership Level to read this book:

- Level 4, Leaders of Leaders
- Level 5, Leaders of Organizations

Why Read *Bringing Columbia Home*?

“This isn’t a space book. It’s a story of everyday people who found themselves at the center of an accident of unprecedented proportions and then rose to the challenge to help their country.”

Bringing Columbia Home is not a book that has a primary focus on leadership, but you can see many examples of leadership at all levels (and different types) in action throughout the book. This is an especially good read for leaders of teams or organizations that can be expected to provide leadership in new or unfamiliar settings (the wildland fire community was a huge player in the response to the disaster). The lessons learned from NASA’s experience in responding to the event could be scaled and applied to any organization that conducts operations in the wildland fire environment.

There are several videos related to the book and featuring the authors available online. Find two of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Bringing Columbia Home: The Untold Story | Mike Leinbach & Jonathan Ward | NEAF Talks (1 hour talk):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcXU4rmqRjY>
- **The Story Behind the Space Shuttle Columbia Recovery Mission (30 minute interview):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW-ZOv-UaLs>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

Blog: <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

Professional Reading Program: <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

Main WFLDP page: <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp>

Bringing Columbia Home Discussion Questions

Part One: Parallel Confusion

Have you ever been a part of an emergency response where the response was different than what you'd trained for? How do you make sure you plan for an emergency wherever it might happen, not just where you think it will? As a leader, why might it be important to think of problem solving in terms of "prove it is safe" as opposed to "prove it's not safe?" How can pressure to complete a mission/task, complacency and past experience influence or bias your awareness of a situation?

Part Two: Courage, Compassion, and Commitment

How can you prepare for what's described in the books as a "non-credible event?" That is, something that is possible but considered "too unlikely to happen." As a leader in a wildland fire organization, have you ever responded to a non-fire event that was organized using ICS? What do you think of Mark Stanford's approach of "fixing three things" to integrating into a team (found in chapter 5)? What examples of "leadership in action" can you see in this section of the book?

Part Three: Picking up the Pieces

Have you ever been part of a large non-fire mobilization of fire resources? How might you approach these differently as a leader? How well do "fire" leadership skills transfer to these kinds of events? As a leader, how important is it to show appreciation to those you lead, to show them the importance of their task, especially in these kinds of situations? What kinds of things can you do to show appreciation in your team or organization? What are some examples of field leadership that stood out to you in this section?

Part Four: A Bittersweet Victory

Why is it important to pass along the lessons learned from our tragedies to new members of our teams? What kinds of things can you do with your team, like the KSC does with the new employee tours of the *Columbia* room, to really bring home the importance of these lessons? As a leader, how can you combat the culture of "normalization of deviance" in your organization? How can you promote cultural change in your team?