

# 2015

## Followership is Leadership



### **IGNITE the Spark for Leadership Contest**

South Puget Sound Region

Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

In 2014, the South Puget Sound region of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources underwent major changes when the region's boundaries were redrawn, adding one and a half counties to the region's fire protection responsibilities. That shift was a challenge to our resiliency and we identified our use of Collective Impact as a component that helped us overcome the adversity. This year we reflected on how our successes and challenges fit into the Followership is Leadership campaign, and discovered that Collective Impact was merely a framework for us to operate in; our success came from our mindset to lead change.

As an agency, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources is tasked with wildland fire protection on more than 12 million acres of private and state-owned forest land in Washington. The South Puget Sound region provides protection to those private and state lands in King, Pierce, Kitsap, Mason, Thurston and eastern Grays Harbor counties. Geographically surrounding the south half of Puget Sound, the region is the most populous in the state, with nearly half of the state's population residing within its boundaries. The region's fire program is staffed by 9 full-time/permanent employees, 35 seasonal engine crew employees, one co-op engine crewmember, and one seasonal dispatcher. Additionally, the South Puget Sound region has numerous line-rated and support personnel available for fire response, as well as inmate hand crews (supervised by the region's camp program).

Over the years, the South Puget fire program has developed a normal cycle of reflecting on changes we implement and building upon them. As we reflected on what worked and didn't work throughout the 2014 season, we realized that our process fit an existing framework. The process we had been using the previous couple years is a social change concept called Collective Impact. Collective Impact expands on the idea of collaboration. In the collaboration model, groups come together to discuss what they are doing and gather ideas, but then go back to their individual groups and continue on their own paths. The key difference with Collective Impact and our process is that everyone brings ideas to the table and they are guided to a common goal through a shared vision.

We've found that this is something we implement routinely on the operations side of the region's fire program. The functional aspects of Collective Impact include five components: common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization. Our most common uses of Collective Impact are in the development of our seasonal engine crews. The greatness of Collective Impact is that it allows every stakeholder to have a voice in the process. Through our teambuilding and leadership training for our engine crews, this approach empowered the crews to make decisions that supported the fire program's collective agenda.

This approach is scalable, and in many ways the Collective Impact framework is similar to the Incident Command System. Therefore, it has become an organic process for us and we are able to use these principles across the board in all the non-ICS functions we do. We realized that we can use it across functions within the district (when there are competing priorities between dispatch and field needs, for example) and across workgroups throughout the region (like matching business unit needs with the fire program's needs). As a result, we were able to work toward improvements for the 2015 fire season through the action items identified during our 2014 region-wide post-season after action review.

## **Changing the Mindset**

Through the middle of the 2015 fire season, we struggled to define what made us different. We did many of the same things as others. We consistently observed our counterparts using the same Collective Impact principles that we determined to be instrumental in our success.

One differentiator we found was our timely reaction to change. It's something we as wildland firefighters expect throughout an operational period, but once we've backed out of an ICS role, we often struggle to embrace change. Whether it is "We've always done it this way" or "We already tried that and it didn't work" or "That's the worst idea I've ever heard", most of us are resistant to change. We like the way things are working and they generally work well, so we dig our heels in when something new comes down the chain.

When we reviewed our successes over the past twelve months, we discovered that we were often the first to accept change and, as a result, were able to help guide the direction of the change. In other words, we were able to take the intent from above and implement it with our ideas while meeting the delegated objectives. We were actively participating as followers, and by doing so, we were assuming new roles in leadership. This is the area where followership transitioned to leadership; where we assumed the mindset that we began calling Leading the Change.

We discovered that we weren't just doing this among our immediate workgroup; we were able to do it with our seasonal employees, with other workgroups in our region, and with our agency and cooperators. Whenever a change was implemented that impacted us, we looked at the direction we could go with the constraints imposed by the change. While others spent considerable time fighting the change and entrenching themselves in a position, we looked at the change as a whole and focused our attention on the positive outcomes of the change and directed our efforts towards a change that makes us collectively better. That's not to say that we always agreed with the change; we spoke up early and often to give our perspective, however, after we raised our objections we used our skillset to implement the change in a way that benefited our needs while meeting the intended objectives.

While a Leading the Change mindset can be used in nearly any context, below are examples of how we have been successful utilizing it across the leadership spectrum in 2015. These ideas (or variations of them) can be applied across the wildland fire service; regardless of whether your organization is federal, state or local.

### **Followers and Leaders of People**

The people that we are able to influence most are our seasonal engine crews. As a result, that has been our starting point in developing leadership for several years. This group also serves as our test case for many of our ideas which then morph into something greater.

## **South Puget Initial Attack**

The first mindset change we made this year was done to address our engine crews' perceptions of themselves, which we made by redesigning the logo for our crew t-shirts. We shifted from our generic DNR FIRE shirt to one that included our primary function: Initial Attack. Doing so generated a significant shift in our crew's perceptions of themselves. They stopped thinking of themselves as mop up specialists from the west side of the state whose only job is to go mop up fires on the east side of the state. Instead, they recognized their primary function as initial attack resources, which they always are in-region and often are when dispatched out of region. DNR FIRE is still prominent on our crew shirts to remind everyone that we are still a part of (and contribute to) something bigger, however, the design focuses on the silhouette of Mt. Rainier and South Puget Initial Attack – two elements that are unique to our region.

## **A-Team Pro Tip**

The four operations fire staff are products of the region's engine crews and we take great pride in where we came from. We also try to pass along our knowledge to our crews in an efficient manner. The challenge that we found is that we're often overloading them with information when we have all the crews together for training sessions and information was being lost or not shared well. Additionally, when we observed a learning opportunity, we could only share it with the crews that we were working with at that time (and generally forgot about it until it happened again with someone else). This year we started capturing these learning opportunities and sharing them immediately with the engine crews via text message. In true AAR fashion, the pro tip was focused on "the what". The tip was limited to 160 characters and sent out to prompt the crews to think about a potential issue; often this led to follow up questions/comments from the crews to us which fostered additional discussion.

## **Teambuilding Day**

The leadership program that we have developed to date stems from an idea hatched by one of our fire operations staff in about 2010. After attending L-280 and L-380, he started putting together an abbreviated teambuilding and leadership day during our crew training. Over the past several years, that training has morphed into what it is for us today – one day committed entirely to building cohesion among our 12 seasonal engine crews. While we have an overarching intent of teambuilding throughout the season, this one day is the catalyst and sets the tone for the season. The one shortcoming of the L-series courses is a lack of focus on team development; it is only a 45 minute module in both L-180 and L-280. We believe that being an effective member of a team needs to come before being a leader, so our teambuilding day has become that driver for us. Seeing our team day as the missing link between L-180 and L-280, we've affectionately named it "L-181".

Each year we change the theme of the day, however, the objective is always to show each firefighter how critical their individual inputs are to the program's success. This is where we begin to instill in them the idea that their active participation empowers them to take action

based on intent, even when their leader-of-the-moment is not present. This year we started the day by introducing everyone to SMART objectives that the fire foresters developed at the program-level, then had each firefighter and engine crew write their own individual and crew objectives that supported our intent for the program. This was just the icebreaker exercise for the day, but it (along with the rest of the team day) set the tone for the entire fire season.

### **A-Team Leadership Award**

This year we saw significant growth in the leadership of our seasonal engine crews. As the season neared the end, a discussion started among the fire foresters about a leadership award for exemplary performance. Everyone bought in to the idea immediately and the criteria became quite simple: there had to be a unanimous decision about the recipient, it would only be awarded if there was someone deserving (does not have to happen every year), and the recipient will be invited back during training the following year to give a talk about leadership (even if the recipient has moved on to something else). The remarkable thing was the recipient was so evident that each of the fire foresters identified the recipient independent of a group discussion. What we established as the award was a Carhartt jacket embroidered with the crew logo, a combination we intend to maintain exclusively for the leadership award.

### **Leaders of Leaders**

Once we recognized the potential to influence a leadership mindset in our seasonal engine crews, we began looking at how we could expand that influence to other workgroups within our region. Initially, this was the most difficult group to influence; this is where competing priorities were most prevalent. However, this also produced the most rewarding relationships with people across the agency whose primary jobs are non-fire, but who spend a large portion of their summer on the line supporting the fire program.

### **Leadership Library**

With last year's submission to the IGNITE contest, we received a set of books from the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program to establish a leadership library for our region. What started out as a handful of books from NWCG is now a collection of about two dozen (and growing) books and videos donated by region staff who found a bit of leadership wisdom in each title. Our library is housed at our dispatch center in our region office and the titles/availability are posted on our dispatch center's intranet site. Employees that work outside our region office are able to access the library information and make requests, and our dispatch staff is able to send the books out to our satellite locations.

### **Fire Training Academy and the L-280 Roadshow**

For the past decade or so, DNR's fire training up to Single Resource Boss had been handled at a region level. In 2015, the agency made a decision to change how training was handled for those

qualified up to that level and established two fire training academies. One thing the academy staff found during our planning was a significant need of L-280 for the target students. Our region's fire staff had already assumed roles in the academy organization and volunteered to instruct the academy's L-280 courses. Realizing that the academy did not have the capacity to put on enough L-280 courses, we also volunteered to teach an additional L-280 course for one of our other regions. As a result, we were able to put on four L-280 courses in May and June and expose over 100 students to more of the ideas in the L-series courses.

Equally important was the opportunity we had to include non-fire program staff with qualifications across the spectrum as part of the cadre. Our cadre was a diverse mix including Safety Officers, Type 3 Incident Commanders, and nearly all operations positions from Firefighter Type 1 to Type 2 Operations Section Chief. We intentionally selected this group to facilitate the stations during the field day in order to expose the students to leaders that will very likely be their line supervisors on large fires across the state in the future. Doing so allowed the students to experience scenarios with real-life players giving them direction and to apply the intent to the situation. This was also an opportunity for the facilitators to see the next generation of leaders developing while providing the connection between the two in a training environment, so the relationship was in place when faced with an evolving incident.

#### **Hose Drills – Seasonal vs. Permanent**

Throughout the fire season, many permanent agency employees help maintain our minimum staffing standards by occasionally working on engines. These employees are fully qualified firefighters, but do not routinely operate on engines. As a refresher for the non-fire program employees and to break down the barriers between seasonal and permanent staff, we attempt to pair up engine crews and run them through proficiency drills. This season we called on the permanent staff more frequently, so we had more opportunities to bring the two groups together. This helped each group gain a greater appreciation of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately resulted in a more cohesive group when the two groups ended up on a fire together (regardless of their assigned position on the line).

#### **Shared Ideas on Leadership**

As we enlist help for fire from our non-fire workgroups, we get the opportunity to interact with many people who can provide differing and unique perspectives on leadership. So when those groups ask us to participate in their non-fire development, we jump at the opportunity. This fall we were asked by another workgroup to present the No-Doze exercise to their group, an exercise that we learned about in L-380 and had used with our engine crews and permanent fire staff. By participating and sharing the ideas in that exercise, we were also able to participate in their time management exercise using the concept of Big Rocks First. Reflecting on the idea of Big Rocks First, we have already been able to identify a need for our engine crews' training in 2016 to more efficiently manage their daily operations.

## **Leaders of Organizations**

Our success to date has driven us to push our ideas up the chain to the top of our agency and to the leadership of our cooperating partners. The fire districts that we share wildland protection with are impacted the most by this, so we've paid particular attention to their needs and made conscious efforts to develop ideas with them.

### **Annual Refresher Module – Leadership Greatness and Apollo 13**

What started as an idea for our 2015 annual refresher about leadership, taking charge and leader's intent among our region staff grew to be shared across the agency. We recognized an area where training was lacking at our local level, so we developed a leadership module for our annual refresher that was built around David Marquet's "Greatness" speech/video and the "Houston, we have a problem" scene in Apollo 13. We shared the idea with other regions and our division counterparts when discussing our annual refreshers, and our leadership module was distributed throughout the agency for use in annual refreshers across the state. Later in the spring, we recognized another opportunity to share the module when WFLDP posted a question asking how groups use Apollo 13 from the Leadership in Cinema program. We responded to WFLDP with our thoughts and the module, which was then shared as a "From the Field for the Field" post on the fire leadership blog.

### **Fire Open House**

There was a significant impact to our cooperating agencies when our region boundaries were redrawn in 2014, with the local fire districts being impacted the most. At the time, our region's fire staff was invited to an open house put on by our adjacent region's fire staff (Pacific Cascade Region). The open house was an annual event for Pacific Cascade, but we were there because the boundary adjustment was in the process of being implemented. One thing that we recognized while participating was how great the relationship between PC and its cooperating agencies was in that county. We used that idea in 2015 to establish an open house for all fire districts within our region. We used that time to discuss a variety of topics including fire outlook, fire pay practices (DNR dispatches local fire districts out of region), training (DNR provides certification of training for fire districts in Washington state), and local coordination of initial attack. More than any specific information we provided, the open house gave us the opportunity to meet face-to-face with our cooperating partners in a controlled setting. Doing so gave us a significant advantage this fire season when we were able to recognize and make a connection with our counterparts as we arrived on scene of rapidly expanding incidents.

### **Cooperating Agency Initial Attack AARs**

We instinctively do after action reviews with our crews, but we recognized that our partner agencies were often being left out of the discussions. We also recognized that our collective effect on initial attack could be greater if our partners knew the same things we knew. Often our partner fire districts transfer command to us and are released to provide fire and aid

coverage in their districts, so follow up can be a challenge. However, this season we found times when an AAR with our partners was imperative, so we initiated and facilitated those discussions. These AARs were typically specific to incidents that became extended attack, but the focus of the AAR was on initial attack. The participants were those involved in the initial attack as well as our fire management and the local fire district chiefs.

### **Developing Training Opportunities**

With our emphasis on taking on new challenges, our engine crews have recognized areas of need and taken the initiative to address them. One example comes from an engine crew who, after talking to one of the local assistant fire chiefs, saw a need for a wildland awareness training for structural firefighters as first responders to wildland incidents. Our engine lead (who has a structure fire background) then approached the fire foresters with an awareness PowerPoint he put together for the local district. The presentation he developed was a 2.5 hour awareness overview that included the 10 and 18, LCES and the urban interface hazards, but more importantly, provided a situational context that the structural firefighters could understand. He addressed the 10/18/LCES/WUI using examples from local fires and lessons learned from a fatality fire that occurred in the fuels and terrain that the local fire district was familiar with. The target audience for this training was the structure engine officers across the department who are typically the first on-scene, but very often not trained in wildland tactics. This idea developed by one of our seasonal engine crews for a single partner agency is growing into an awareness presentation that will be delivered jointly by our staff and wildland professionals from our various counties' fire districts to the structure fire officers across our region.

## **Leading the Change**

Within our organizations – particularly in governmental organizations – change is often dictated by something well outside our control and we are tasked with implementing the change. Instead of being a blind follower and doing something that someone else told you to do, become an active follower in your organization who is the transition point in the chain and become the one to lead the change. This way of thinking is best summed up in the following passage by Sergeant First Class Michael T. Woodward, in the US Army journal *Infantry*:

Effective leadership requires followers who are more than Pavlovian reactors to their leaders' influences. When followers actively contribute, are aware of their function, and take personal pride in the art of followership, then the joint purpose of leadership and followership – higher levels of mission accomplishment – is achieved effectively.

This mindset on change is not limited to or unique to our program, nor is it something that can only be implemented when you “have the time”. By all measures, Washington State had its worst fire season on record in 2015 (over one million acres burned to date). The above examples are what we have been



able to implement throughout an extraordinary fire season and we have at least half a dozen ideas so far that we plan to implement for 2016. All these examples stemmed from a change outside of our control where we saw an opportunity to implement an idea and help guide the change. While the ideas hatched and pursued may be different, the mindset can be used effectively in any group – an engine module, a Hotshot crew, a fire district, and even at a state or federal agency level. The only limitation is your willingness to accept and promote the mindset. This is when followership is leadership; where the synergy between the two produces greatness and the opportunity to Lead the Change.

# References

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*Cover Photo:* South Puget Sound engine crews participating in the No-Doze exercise during the 2015 Teambuilding Day. We experienced the exercise in L-380; it was developed by Molly Duran, M.A. for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). The exercise is for leadership style self-awareness. We plotted the leadership style results of our crews so they could re-evaluate their assessments as the season progressed and into future fire seasons.

*Map:* Washington State Department of Natural Resources map showing the region boundaries and South Puget Sound's geographic position within the state.

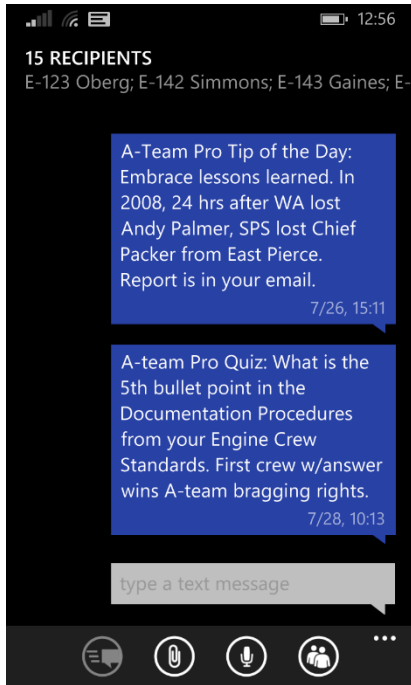


*Collective Impact:* Stanford Social Innovation Review article introducing the idea of Collective Impact [http://www.ssireview.org/images/articles/2011\\_WI\\_Feature\\_Kania.pdf](http://www.ssireview.org/images/articles/2011_WI_Feature_Kania.pdf)

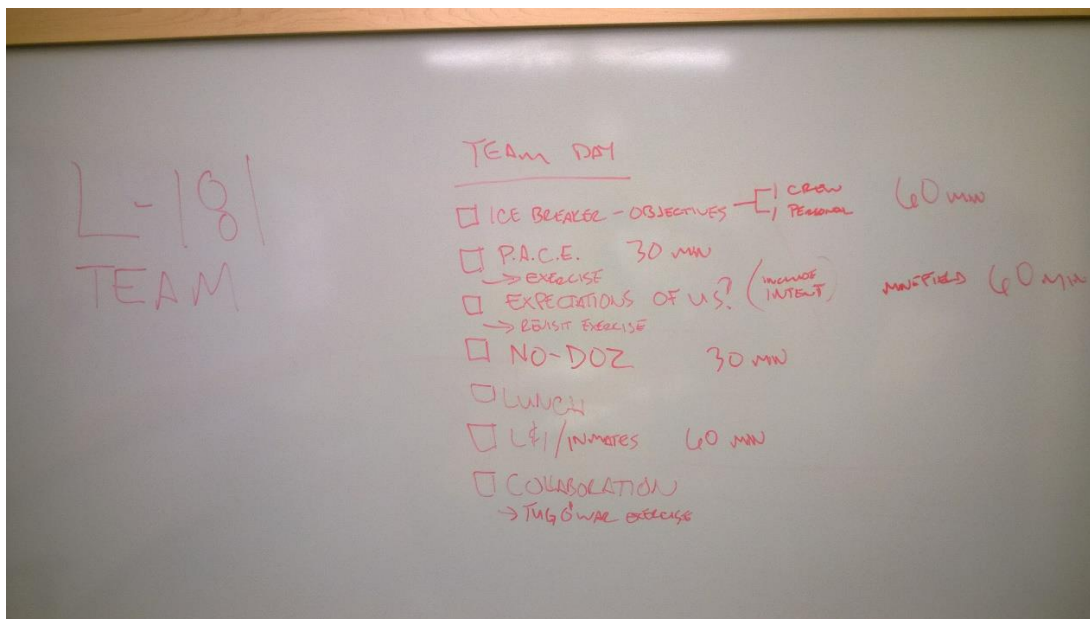
*South Puget Initial Attack:* South Puget Initial Attack logo was designed so our crews would take pride in what they do. The design has two distinct features: our primary responsibility of initial attack fire protection within South Puget Sound region and a silhouette of Mt. Rainier (which is within our region boundaries and visible throughout the region).



**A-Team Pro Tip:** Texting became a great way for us to communicate ideas and challenge our crews. We used our pro tips to provide information, give them a brief thought with something to learn more about, and to foster friendly competition among the crews while ensuring their readiness.



**Teambuilding Day Outline:** Over the years we have used a variety of forms of notetaking for brainstorming and capturing ideas for our team days. While the overarching topics change each year, we've developed a structure that works well for us to present the material to our crews. This photo is the result of our whiteboard session outlining what we'd cover and the hands-on exercises we'd be using for the 2015 team day.



*A-Team Leadership Award:* Photo of the leadership jacket. The jacket was paid for by the fire foresters, reflecting our gratitude for what the recipient contributed to the program.



*Leadership Library:* Screenshot of the South Puget Leadership Library, which is posted on our dispatch center’s intranet site. This can be accessed from anywhere on the agency’s network. We used an existing Microsoft Excel template to create the library, and with a few simple modifications, we were able to make it work for our purposes. It is easy for our fire staff to administer if a book is checked out, and the users across the region can find information about the books in the library as well as current availability by simply opening a spreadsheet on our dispatch site.

SOUTH PUGET SOUND LEADERSHIP LIBRARY						
TITLE	REVIEW	AUTHOR	RATING	FORMAT	STATUS	
Fire on the Mountain	5 Stars	★★★★★	John Maclean	BOOK	AVAILABLE	
Young Men and Fire	4 Stars	★★★★	Norman Maclean	BOOK	AVAILABLE	
A Captain's Duty	4 Stars	★★★★	Richard Phillips	BOOK	AVAILABLE	
Beyond Tranquillion Ridge		Joseph Valencia		BOOK	AVAILABLE	
The Thirtymile Fire	4 Stars	★★★★	John Maclean	BOOK	AVAILABLE - 2 copies	
Lone Survivor	4 Stars	★★★★	Marcus Luttrell	BOOK	AVAILABLE	
Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun	4 Stars	★★★★	Wess Roberts	BOOK	NOT AVAILABLE	
Wildfire & Americans		Roger Kennedy		BOOK	AVAILABLE	

*Annual Refresher Module:* Leadership Greatness and Apollo 13 is available on the Wildland Fire Leadership blog - <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/2015/05/from-field-for-field-inspiring.html>

*Fire Open House:* Open House agenda for the county fire protection districts within the South Puget Sound region.

<p style="text-align: center;">2015 Season DNR FD co-operator pre-season meeting April 15, 2015 0930-1500 DuPont City Council Chambers <a href="#">1700 Civic Dr. • DuPont, WA 98327</a></p> <p><u>0930-1030</u> <b>Introductions</b> 2015 Fire Season Outlook predictive Services 2014 Fire Season Wrap up AAR</p> <p><u>1030-1200</u> <b>Finance/Agreements</b> -Incident Timekeeping -Billing/Reimbursement Procedures -What dose DNR need to hire/pay? -Must have documents/information in order to pay -Do we have current agreements (Forest land fire response) -Eastside dispatching process. (To DNR not WSP)</p> <p><u>1200-1230 LUNCH</u></p> <p><u>1230-1245</u> <b>Operations</b> -Status of overhead -Status of Seasonal Engine Crews -Engine locations</p> <p><u>1245-1330</u> <b>Training</b> -Status of DNR Training Academy -What the Academy means for FD -What training do local FD's need? (Need any DNR assistance?)</p> <p><u>1330-1430</u> <b>Dispatch/ Communications</b> -Red Card Submittal deadline and needs? -When should FD request to notify DNR dispatch of fire? -Status of DNR radio programing/freqs. -Changes to FD freqs.? -700/800 MHz Work Around</p>
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*Michael T. Woodward Quote:* SFC Woodward's quote from the journal *Infantry* was discovered in the book *Five-Star Leadership: The Art and Strategy of Creating Leaders at Every Level*, by Patrick L. Townsend and Joan E. Gebhardt. The book is recommended reading for instructors of L-280.

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