

THE SECOND ALARM

BRINGING VALUABLE RESOURCES & NEWS
ONE ALARM AT A TIME

AUGUST 2014

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3



VALDOSTA FIRE
DEPARTMENT



A Department Without Limits

BIRTHDAYS:

FF CLIFTON WILKERSON 8/03

LT JOHNNY HENRY 8/04

FF THEOTIS JOHNSON, JR 8/10

SGT MARCUS HAYNES 8/16

FF CHRIS STEVICK 8/16

WILLIE NEWKIRK 8/18

SGT SHELLEY MILLER 8/18

SGT PHILLIP WOMACK 8/19

SGT DAVID THOMPSON 8/25

FF SCOTT GARREN 8/25

ALVIN JONES 8/31

CHIEF'S TOPIC OF THE MONTH

In the last two newsletters, I wrote about "Change" and "Unity." This month I felt compelled to write about Gratitude. "When we become more fully aware that our success is due in large measure to the loyalty, helpfulness, and encouragement we have received from others, our desire grows to pass on similar gifts. Gratitude spurs us on to prove ourselves worthy of what others have done for us. The spirit of gratitude is a powerful energizer." — Wilferd A. Peterson. We have been together for almost six months and I cannot express the gratitude I have for our department. We are continuing to create a team that is empowering our personnel and department for greatness. In May, I wrote about "change" and we have

made several changes as a department to improve our organization, safety and environment. In June, I wrote about "unity" and now Station One has on display "The Reasons We Fight" reflection wall. The other day, I was at a City Council meeting and I received "kudos" for the great things going on within the department. The other day, I was at Black Crow Media and received several compliments on our new community programs. Although the compliments were directed to me, they were compliments of gratitude to our department. I'm only successful as our team. Once again, I cannot express my gratitude of loyalty, helpfulness and encouragement from our personnel as we



Freddie D. Broome, Fire Chief

continue to work towards being, "A department without limits." Thank you again for your hard work and support, it never goes unnoticed.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

Lt. Dereck Willis, along with his wife, Erin, and his son, Ian, have welcomed a baby girl, Isabella Hope Willis, into their family and thusly into our fire department family back in June. Congratulations Willis family on the successful adoption.



If you have an addition to your family, and so part of the Fire Department Family, send that information in to the newsletter staff (smiller@valdostacity.com) along with a picture (if you wish). Celebrate your family with the rest of the Fire Department Family.

POINT OF INTEREST

Submissions to the newsletter should occur before the 20th of each month

ATTA BOY—DONE DID GOOD



Congratulations to Sergeant Jon Yeargin on being selected City of Valdosta Employee of the Month for July 2014. During a routine smoke detector installation, Sgt. Yeargin

personally gave a needy family a fire extinguisher so that they would at least have that bit of fire protection at their domicile. Pictured to the right is Fire Chief Freddie Broome, Mayor John Gayle, Employee of the Month for July 2014 Sgt. Jon Yeargin and his girlfriend Christie Wisenbaker.

Via The Valdosta Daily Times Rant and Rave Section: Thanks to Fire-fighter Heath Couch for his assistance in helping to make sure that a citizen's granddaughter had a properly mounted car seat despite the hot

sun. He was also noted for his "friendly and professional manner".

Captain Brian Boutwell was elected as the Area 2 coordinator for GMAG (Georgia Mutual Aid Group). Captain Boutwell's appointment will give VFD representation and a voice in GMAG.

Matthew Woody, a reporter for the Valdosta Daily Times, takes his hat off to the VFD for our performance at the structure fire located at Floyd St. and West St.

FAREWELL LETTER FROM CAPT. WISENBAKER

I've always been proud to be a member of the Valdosta Fire Department and I still consider myself a member. I've always valued the friendships I had here and I don't want to give them up. It may sound crazy but the hardest thing I've had to do is to leave. My best friends include those that have retired from the Valdosta Fire Department before and the ones working here now. I used to think that the pay stunk and that working twenty-four hours every third day was horrible. In the end, though, it was the people I was working with that made everything worthwhile.

I consider the Valdosta Fire Department to be a great bunch of men and women that do a fantastic job. They showed me that during the Perma Fix fire. And I've never been prouder of everyone than I was on that day. I was also here for the successful integration of women into the Valdosta Fire Department workforce and I think that they've proven themselves a valuable part of our department.

I have always tried to evaluate myself after every call and tried to see what I could have done better. You'll always find something that you could have done better. Then you try to make that improvement. Something I've always wanted to do was to get people to pull together but I could never do

that. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies.

I'd like to acknowledge some folks, but if I do it would seem like I'm leaving some folks out and I don't want to do that.



I'd like to mention some of the funny things that have happened at the fire department but I can't do that either because it wouldn't be appropriate to mention them. But I've laughed so hard at some things that it made my head hurt. It's always good if you can laugh at yourself as well. Sometimes all you can do is laugh at something stupid that you have done.

I'd like to tell people to enjoy this job while it lasts. Some people think it will never end, but the end is out there.

I guess now I'm seeking people to tell stories to on the outside. Really, one of my goals now is to keep the retired guys current and we're going to try and get the retirees to have a monthly breakfast. It's all about fellowship. And we're going to try not to make it a gripe session about what

bad things happened in the fire department but we're going to focus on the good things that have happened, the positive.

Stay safe. Enjoy the job. Expect change. Enjoy the fellowship. Stay positive. Stay in touch.

Your Friend,

John Wisenbaker

EMPOWERING BUGLES—NOTES ON LEADERSHIP

How to Start a Conversation You’re Dreading

I anticipated that the conversation would be difficult.

Shari* (*names have been changed) and I had worked together for many years, and I knew she was expecting me to hire her to run a leadership program for one of my clients, Ganta, a high-tech company. But I didn’t think Shari was the right fit for Ganta or, frankly, for the role of running the leadership training. In fact, I had become increasingly critical of her recent performance, though I hadn’t mentioned anything to her about it yet.

That was my first mistake. I should have said something before it got to this point.

So why didn’t I? I’d love to claim that it was because I liked her, and I didn’t want to hurt her feelings. Or because I hoped things would get better without my intervention.

And while those things were true, there was a deeper truth: I was afraid of the cringe moment.

Do you know that uneasy moment – right as you’re saying something that feels risky, but before the person responds? That’s the cringe moment.

In other words, I delayed speaking with Shari because I was afraid of how I would feel [giving her the negative feedback](#): awkward, uncomfortable, and maybe even unreasonable.

But I couldn’t avoid it anymore. And because I had waited so long, the conversation promised to be even more awkward and uncomfortable. And now that she was getting a more extreme message with no warning, I would feel – and

appear – even more unreasonable. The cringe quotient had gone up.

The day of the difficult conversation, I felt anxious as Shari came into my office. We shared a few pleasantries and then I began. I told her that I knew she wanted to run the leadership program at Ganta. I talked to her about the complexities and challenges of the leadership program and of Ganta in general. And I spoke with her about my frustrations with her recent performance. She asked me questions and I offered explanations and examples.

I did such a good job avoiding the cringe moment that, 30 minutes into the conversation, I still had not clearly communicated to Shari whether I was firing her or hiring her. My build-up was equally appropriate as context for either.

Finally, she did it for me. “So,” she asked, “Are you saying that you don’t want me to lead this program or you do?”

Now that I’m aware of it, I see my own behavior in leaders everywhere. Standing in front of the room, one senior VP slowly constructed a case to close a business. But he never got to his conclusion as people began debating unimportant details related to his argument before they even knew where he was headed.

In another case, a CEO sat in a meeting of department heads with the intention of telling them she was creating a new position to which they would all report. But she lost them as she spent the first 20 minutes giving context to a decision she hadn’t yet announced. As one person later told

“...because I had waited so long, the conversation promised to be even more awkward and uncomfortable.”

“...I see my own behaviors in leaders everywhere.”

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EVENTS—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON

31Jul—Battle of the Badges, City Hall Annex—Donate blood and make the cops wash a fire truck

August—School Starts, watch the traffic grow

01Aug—First Friday, Downtown Valdosta

02Aug—11am Poker Run for

FF Sapp—Contact Lt. Herpin (292-2433) or Doug Pearson (412-0191) for details

02Aug—10am-2pm Community Partners “Kids Are People Too Fair”, Pinevale Elementary School Gym

09Aug—9am-3pm Patch and Badge Trade Show, Georgia

Baptist Conference Center in Norman Park, hosted by the Norman Park Police Department

08Aug—Deadline for Citizens Fire Academy, a great opportunity to show the public what it takes to be a firefighter

15Aug—6:30pm Art After Dark, Downtown Valdosta

16Aug—9am Downtown Valdosta Farm Days, Downtown Valdosta

11Sep—7-8:30am 2nd Annual Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, Rainwater Conference Center, this year’s theme is pub-

EMPOWERING BUGLES—CONTINUED FROM PG. 3

me, “All of the context was lost on me as I was trying to guess what she was getting at. It was a complete waste of time.”

The intellectual reason we build a case, or give context, to a difficult decision before announcing it is because we want to convey that the decision is well-thought out, rational, and an inevitable conclusion to the facts. But since the listeners don’t know what decision is being made, they have no context for the context and it all feels meaningless.

The emotional reason we give such long introductions to hard decisions is because we are procrastinating. We’re delaying the cringe feeling.

But this delay is counterproductive; it only stretches and deepens the discomfort of everyone involved.

The solution is simple and straightforward: Lead with the punchline.

What should I have said to Shari? “Thanks for coming in, Shari. I am not going to have you run the leadership program with Ganta, and I’d like you to understand why . . .”

The senior VP should have started by saying, “I have come to the conclusion that we should close XXX business.”

And the CEO should have opened her meeting with the department heads by declaring “I have created a new Senior Vice President role, reporting to me, who will oversee this part of the business.”

“The emotional reason we give such long introductions... is because we are procrastinating.”

After those openings, people will be interested in hearing the rest. Or, they may surprise you with instant agreement and there may be little more to discuss.

Here’s what I’ve come to realize: I almost always overestimate how difficult it is for the other person to hear what I have to say. People are resilient. I’m usually more uncomfortable delivering a difficult message than the other person is receiving it.

“Get to the conclusion in the first sentence.”

Next time you have a conversation you’re dreading, lead with the part you’re dreading. Get to the conclusion in the first sentence. Cringe fast and cringe early. It’s a simple move that few of us make consistently because it requires emotional courage. At least the first time.

But the more you do it, the easier and more natural it becomes. Being direct and upfront does not mean being callous or unnecessarily harsh. In fact, it’s the opposite; done with care, being direct is far more considerate.

And it doesn’t just reduce angst, it saves time as well. Shari wasn’t happy about not running the program at Ganta, but she understood why and accepted the decision quickly. Much more quickly than it took me to introduce it to her.

Bibliography

Bregman, P. (2014, July 7). *Harvard Business Publishing*. Retrieved July 21, 2014, from Harvard Business Review: <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/07/how-to-start-a-conversation-youre-dreading/>

RUMOR MILL—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON?

Rumor—The department was awarded a grant for PPE. True - The city received the official word from Congressman Scott’s office. _____

Rumor— Chief Broome told a vendor he was leaving to go back to WSFD. False—

So please stop placing bets that he will be gone within the next 3 years.

Rumor—The department is getting new red chargers.

True— We budgeted for 2 red Chargers for the re-classification positions. In addition, we budgeted for

a red Tahoe to replace Unit 200’s vehicle and a F150 to replace one of the vehicles in training. Heard a rumor?

_____ Please send it in and see if it’s true.

