

# THE SECOND ALARM

BRINGING VALUABLE RESOURCES & NEWS  
ONE ALARM AT A TIME

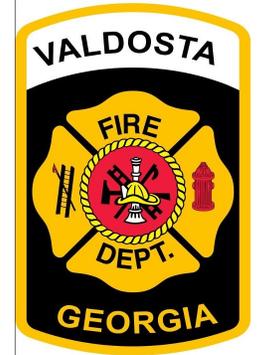
NOVEMBER 2014

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 6



VALDOSTA FIRE  
DEPARTMENT

## A Department Without Limits



### BIRTHDAYS:

LT JOHN HERPIN	11/10
FF JIMMIE BACON	11/11
FF CHRIS SCOTT	11/13
LT JUSTIN WARREN	11/15
FF TREY COTHRON	11/22
LT MICHAEL CRUMP	11/28

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- Submissions to the newsletter should occur before the 20th of each month
- Feel free to submit photos with your submissions
- Have a strong opinion about a topic of concern to our fire department? Feel free to submit a piece for review and possible publication in the newsletter

### CHIEF'S TOPIC OF THE MONTH

This month I was asked to talk about positive energy. I experienced my first Winnerville Classic last Friday. I felt the energy walking to the stadium and as the game continued it was more electrifying. When Valdosta High kicked the winning field goal with 10 seconds remaining, I witnessed fans cheering, shouting, and crying. I witnessed a display of energy from Sergeants Wright, Briggs, Phillips and Firefighter Cummings that was unexplainable. By the end of the night, I was so energized that I too felt like I was an alumnus of Valdosta High. Positive energy is essential in our department. We have to build a nucleus of energy that empowers our department, city and communities. I read an article on [www.calmdownmind.com](http://www.calmdownmind.com), which said "Every moment

you have a choice – to be at peace or to be in resistance. When you are at peace you attract positive energy and when you resist you create negative vibes that reflect back on your being. It's a simple choice and yet most people unconsciously choose to live in negativity. It's not your boss, colleagues, parents, ex or the traffic, but your own perception that creates stress and negative energy. Circumstances are neutral. You will generate positive vibes when your inner state is one of alignment and congruence, instead of being resistive." Although, the Winnerville Classic is over, there is no reason we still can't find ways to energize each other with positive energy and vibes. I owe it to you and you owe it to yourself and the department to



Freddie D. Broome, Fire Chief

find that inner peace to attract positive energy. Will you join me? Thank you for all the support and hard work.

### EVENTS—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON

31Oct—Winnerville Game and Trick-or-Treat activities in some communities

01Nov—Halloween Trick or Treating Activities in Valdosta and some communities

01-02Nov—Daylight Saving Time Ends, Clocks move back one hour Saturday night

04Nov—Election Day, exercise your constitutional right

04Nov—last day to get tickets for Employee Luncheon

07Nov—First Friday, Downtown Valdosta

11Nov—Veteran's Day, honor those who have served in our country's military

14Nov—1130-1330, City of Valdosta Thanksgiving Luncheon at James H. Rainwater Conference Center

21Nov—6:30pm Art After Dark, Downtown Valdosta

27Nov—Happy Thanksgiving

Tell us about the events your organization is having.

## ATTA BOY—DONE DID GOOD

Jessica Culpepper attended our 9/11 ceremony and is thankful for us and those that have given their lives in the service of others.

The Horizon Academy thanks the Valdosta Fire Department for participating in their Career Day.

Peter D. Smith, an administrator at Open Bible Christian School, thanks the City of Valdosta Fire Department for speaking to their students about fire safety and for bringing out the Fire Safety House. The students and the teachers especially appreciated the handouts and the enthusiasm.

Laura Walton of Lowndes County 4-H, sends her thanks for coming out and supporting the annual Kids Dig It event. She states that the kids “enjoyed explor-

ing and learning about the equipment.” She also appreciates us for what we do “everyday for our community.”

Brian Geary and Bobby Flowers, participants in the Citizens Fire Academy, both expressed their gratitude at the chance to learn what it is we do in the Valdosta Fire Department and both look forward to continuing in the Citizens Fire Academy. Brian says that he is “more and more impressed with the job of firefighting” while Bobby feels that the Citizens Fire Academy has “gone way beyond any of [his] expectations”.

The MDA thanks the Valdosta Fire Department and Lt. Derek Willis, the MDA Fill the Boot Coordinator, for all of our hard work and dedication. We raised over \$10k which is enough to send 13 kids to MDA Summer Camp.



Kudos go to Najee Harris, age 14, for evacuating his two elderly neighbors from their burning house. Chief Broome honored Najee with a commemorative challenge coin for his heroics and had him promise not to go into anymore structure fires... unless, of course, he becomes a firefighter.

*Pictured above is Najee to the right of Chief Broome with Najee’s grandfather, Henry Harris, to the left.*

## OP-ED: FROM THE EDITOR

If you have other plans for the night of December 2nd, a Tuesday, and may miss the annual Valdosta Fire Department Christmas Dinner, then I recommend that you cancel those other plans. The Christmas Dinner is a chance to fellowship with the members of the fire department that you may not get to see as much, or at all, because you’re on separate shifts, you don’t have an opportunity to visit different stations on your days off, or you may be assigned to the nether regions of Siberia. From personal experience, I’ve encountered a couple of gentleman who work with the City of Valdosta Fire Department who, I can honestly say, I have-

not lain eyes upon since they’ve been with the department. So it would be nice to put some names to these faces and be able to have a more extensive conversation than, “So you work here, too?”

Also, there’s the opportunity to meet some of the retirees who many of our current members have not had a chance to meet. Here’s a chance to introduce yourselves and maybe get a little insight into how the fire department used to be in the past. So if you have other plans, you only have a month-or-so to change them.

## RUMOR MILL—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON?

**We are getting more radios. TRUE**—Thanks to an excellent working relationship with the Valdosta Police Department, the Valdosta Fire Department is getting an additional 35 new radios.

As you can see, there seems to be a shortage of rumors or questions for the Rumor Mill.

This kind of surprises me as there always seems to be some questions or rumors floating around out there in the aether that no one is quite sure about.

Originally, I had a policy of directing people to the suggestion box which Chief Broome had set up for their

questions, comments, and rumors. Now I will change that policy and I can be used as a conduit for anonymously submitting questions and rumors. So send your rumors and questions to me and I’ll submit them for you.

Editor, Sgt. S Miller



## EMPOWERING BUGLES—NOTES ON LEADERSHIP

**How to Get Your Employees to Speak Up** by Rebecca Knight | 9:00 AM October 10, 2014

Getting candid opinions from your direct reports can be difficult. After all, no one wants to upset the boss. But hearing messages from down the ranks — including input from your company's customers, feedback on your performance, and information from other departments or units — is critical to your organization's success. How can you encourage your team members to have honest conversations with you — and to speak up when it's important?

**What the Experts Say**

Cultivating an open environment is tough because people are wired to be conservative, according to James Detert, a professor at Cornell's Johnson Graduate School of Management who specializes in transparent communication in the workplace. "We have a deep set of defense mechanisms that make us careful around people in authority positions," he says. "That is why the information you're getting from people multiple levels below you in the organization is likely to be filtered." But you need those people to be straight with you. "They are better in touch with customers and stakeholders and they understand problems and possibilities, what works and what doesn't better than you," he says.

Getting an early handle on minor issues before they become big problems is the key, according to Joseph Grenny, the coauthor of *Crucial Conversations* and the cofounder of VitalSmarts, a corporate training company. "You can approximate the effectiveness of the team — or even an entire organization — by measuring the average lag time between when problems are identified and when problems are brought out in the open," he says. Here's how to minimize the gap.

**"We have a deep set of defense mechanisms that make us careful around people in authority positions..."**

**Zero in on the source of the silence**

"Silence usually means people are holding back," says Grenny. Whether people are clamming up in meetings or avoiding questions behind closed doors, it's up to you to understand why. Are they worried that if they speak up about a problem, they will lose out on a bonus? Or do they think it's futile since other suggestions haven't been implemented? To encourage openness in a group setting or in a one-on-one conversation, Grenny suggests "coming up with a code word that jars people into knowing they can be candid with you." In his corporate training work, Grenny advises managers to use the phrase: "crucial conversation." The phrase helps "frame the issue so that your team knows they have permission to be honest and open," he explains.

**Give people options**

You may want everyone on your team to feel free to discuss issues publicly but speaking up about problems in a group setting is uncomfortable for many people. Some might feel put on the spot; others worry they'll say something unpopular. Initiate more one-on-one, casual conversations so that your people have more ways to express their views. An open door policy is important, says Detert, but "stop waiting for people to come to you — go out and ask them yourself." Begin with your team's opinion leaders, advises Grenny. "Every smart manager knows who the opinion leaders are," he says. "Take them out to lunch individually and ask for feedback," he says. Pay close attention to the gaps between the issues they raise with you in a "safe, informal environment" versus the "issues that are discussed in team meetings," Grenny says. "Those are things that really may be bothering your team."

**"...cultivating a climate of candor requires a 'willingness to kill the sacred cows'..."**

**Model candor**

In every organization, there are things you just don't do — disagree with the big boss in public, for instance, or criticize a certain manager's pet project. But cultivating a climate of candor requires a "willingness to kill the sacred cows," says Grenny. Are there certain topics that you don't dare broach with your own manager? If so, you need to speak up — and make sure your team knows you have done so. "You lose moral credibility with your team if you're not taking risks with your boss," he adds. Your willingness to run issues up the food chain will make employees more apt to come to you in the first place. "People will realize that if they're willing to stick their neck out and tell you what's bothering them, you will try to get something done," says Detert.

**Create an ownership culture**

When it comes to speaking up, some employees think: "Why bother? It's not as though my perspective matters." This line of thinking, according to Detert, is dangerous "and is exactly why you need to create an ownership mentality in everybody on your team." Colleagues need to feel they have a stake in the success (or lack thereof) in the organization and that speaking up, admitting mistakes, "and addressing concerns is a collective

responsibility." This goes for you, the manager, as well. To embed this notion, Detert suggests offering regular updates on the financial picture of the organization to deepen their understanding of what's working and what's not — including examples of your own errors in judgment. "You want to make sure everyone's motivation to improve the place is sufficiently high."

**Make it routine**

You can get people in the habit of speaking up. In one-on-one meetings, set aside a few minutes at the end to ask if there are any issues you should be aware of. Dedicate part of the agenda in your regular team meetings to air out problems. Before each meeting, appoint someone whose job it is "to bring up any issues and concerns" and then "rotate that messenger role throughout the team" over the course of time, says Detert. "It's a good way to show that this process of putting things on the table is everybody's job. And everybody does it without consequence," he adds. "It creates a safe zone." Another approach is to schedule cer-

## EMPOWERING BUGLES—CONTINUED FROM PG. 3

tain meetings with the express purpose of bringing up problems. “Tell your team you want to hear everything that’s wrong with Project X,” says Grenny. “Then build consensus around those to help you figure out: How do we deal with these challenges together?”

### Do

- Try to get to the source of your colleagues’ concerns about speaking up: what precisely are they afraid of?
- Initiate one-on-one, informal conversations, which will help team members feel safer about broaching uncomfortable topics
- Create a culture where colleagues feel they have a stake in the future of the company and that speaking up about issues is everyone’s job

### Don’t

- Allow your organization’s cultural norms of “what not to say” get the best of you — be willing to speak the unspeakable
- Be a hypocrite. If you’re not bringing up tough topics with your manager, you can’t expect the same of your team
- Let your team get out of the habit of speaking up; before each group meeting, appoint someone whose job it is to bring up issues and concerns

### Case study #1 Build trust by communicating with colleagues one-on-one

About two years ago, Josh Green, the co-founder and CEO of Panjiva — which helps companies source manufacturers around the world — sensed turmoil on his team. “Things clearly weren’t working and morale was low,” he says. “Low morale is, in my experience, usually a precursor to bigger problems.”

Josh suspected that people were upset because of a decision he had made some months earlier to restructure the team. But during team meetings, colleagues were reticent. “I wasn’t getting the whole story,” he says. “I needed to talk with people one-on-one.”

He sought out three colleagues — people he’d worked with in the past and whose judgments he trusted, and met with them individually for a drink after work. He chose a site away from the office so they would feel more relaxed. “I said: ‘Put yourself in my shoes and describe what you would do if you were me,’” he recalls. “It was a challenge getting them to be candid because they weren’t sure I wanted to hear what they had to say.”

Once his colleagues felt confident that he was “genuinely looking for an honest assessment,” they were more forthcoming. His hunch was right: his team was unhappy with the restructuring. They presumed he wasn’t interested in their opinions because he had brushed off complaints and defended the decision for months.

“One-on-one conversations are vitally important,” Josh concluded. Based on the input from his team, he decided to reverse his decision. Morale improved immediately as did performance.

### Case study #2: Be vulnerable with your team and colleagues will follow your lead

Megha Desai — founder and CEO of MSD, the New York City-based branding strategy firm focused on social entrepreneurship — wants to cultivate an office environment in which “every person is—and feels — responsible” for the success of the business.

Megha shares all of the company’s financial information with her team, and provides them with weekly status updates on client revenue. Letting employees in on this level of detail has a positive effect on their willingness to be honest and upfront with her when issues arise. “I empower them so that they realize the need to step up and speak up,” she says.

But occasionally, there are bumps in the road. Earlier this year, for instance, she commissioned one of her team members to develop an internal website. “About halfway through the project, I could see that my colleague had reservations about the person (?) she had brought on board to design it. I chose not to say anything and it ended up being a teachable moment for me.”

By July, the site was woefully behind schedule and the design was awful. Megha asked her colleague: Why didn’t you speak up sooner about this problem? “She told me she was nervous to admit she had made a mistake. She said: ‘I thought it would look bad if I showed you self-doubt.’”

The lesson for Megha was that she needed to be more honest and open with her team about her own mistakes. “The notion that founders and leaders are infallible is false,” she says. “I make mistakes all the time — and when I do, now I share them with my team.”

### Rebecca Knight

Rebecca Knight is a freelance journalist in Boston. She has been published in The New York Times, USA Today, The Financial Times, and The Economist.

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“How do we deal with these challenges together?”