

# THE SECOND ALARM

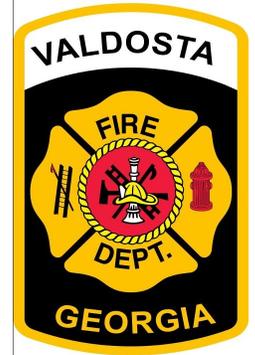
BRINGING VALUABLE RESOURCES & NEWS  
ONE ALARM AT A TIME

SEPTEMBER 2014

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4



VALDOSTA FIRE  
DEPARTMENT



## A Department Without Limits

### BIRTHDAYS:

SGT MICHAEL NIEHANKE 9/11

SGT ISAAC HARRIS 9/13

FF TRAVARUS SANDERS 9/27

FF BRANDON BUSH 9/28

BC FRANK MCMILLAN 9/29

### CHIEF'S TOPIC OF THE MONTH

This month I decided to choose Attitude as the Chief's Topic of the Month. While reading one of my daily inspirational blogs, I read the following quote by Charles Swindoll. The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have

a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.—Charles Swindoll. After reading that, there is nothing else I can add to this month's topic. We have made great progress as a team but we



Freddie D. Broome, Fire Chief

are still a work in progress. Thank for all you do and your continuous support.

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- Submissions to the newsletter should occur before the 20th of each month
- Feel free to submit photos with your submissions
- Interested in helping with the newsletter—contact Sgt. Shelley Miller, Editor
- 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

### WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

Sgt. Keith Neihanke and Melonie Whiddon were married on Saturday, August 30th. We officially welcome Melonie into the Valdosta Fire Department Family and congratulate both of you on your union.



Chief Freddie Broome proposed to Candice Johnson back on July 27th in North Carolina. No date has been set for the wedding. Please join me in welcoming Candice into the Valdosta Fire Department

## ATTA BOY—DONE DID GOOD

FF Brandon Bush was selected the City of Valdosta Employee of the Month for August 2014.

Meg H. Giddings with the VSU Center for eLearning sends her thanks to Chief Broome and the Valdosta Fire Department for “allowing Capt. Skrine to be a part of our (VSU’s) new online orientation.” She goes on to write that the “(video) footage obtained during our time at the station is wonderful” and that “it was excellent to have Capt. Skrine and his team be a part of this!” She also looks forward to other partnerships with the Valdosta Fire Department.

Rebecca Williams of Valdosta’s Utilities Department thanks the Valdosta Fire Department “for taking the initiative to reach out to our teens” about the dangerous ‘challenges’ on social media.

A huge thanks from Gail Green of Miller Hardware and Claire Bowen of the American Red Cross for the Valdosta Fire Department’s participation in the Guns and Hoses: Badge v Badge Blood Drive. A total of 91 units was collected, the most ever for a county/city blood drive. Unfortunately the Valdosta Police Department edged out the Valdosta Fire Department by 3 units. The trophy goes to the VPD while the car washing went to the VFD.



Capt. Rowan, FF McBride, Lt. Huffmaster, Sgt. Wright, and Lt. Willis stand by as Chief Broome poses with the lost Guns and Hoses: Badge v Badge Blood Drive Trophy (along with Chief Childress of the Valdosta Police Department).

## OP-ED: ON THE DEPARTURE OF CAPT WISENBAKER

With the retirement of Capt. Wisenbaker, the Valdosta Fire Department has lost over forty years of institutional knowledge. We no longer have an active member of our department who remembers how the department changed from the mid-1970s through late 1980s. From what I recall in conversation with some of our retirees, that time frame includes the addition of a paid, staffed fire department as part of the city charter.

Capt. Wisenbaker worked as a firefighter through the evolution of firefighting itself. He was working as a fire fighter when SCBAs were introduced. He was working as a firefighter when riding on the tailboard was still allowed. He was working as a firefighter when fire truck design began including the firefighters inside the trucks instead of braving the elements from the exterior jump seats. He was working as a firefighter when the horses were retired and sent to pasture. I’m just kidding about that last one but you get my drift.

I think that one of the most enjoyable things that I have ever done as a firefighter was be around Capt. Wisenbaker when both he and I had no pressing commitments. At that point I could usually talk him into regaling me with a tale from the past. Some of his stories were personal and had me laughing so hard that I couldn’t believe that he wasn’t rolling on the floor himself. I guess it’s different when you’ve lived



through it. Some of his other stories really clued me in to what it means to work with people who depend on you to keep them safe and who you depend on to keep you safe. Most of Capt. Wisenbaker’s stories reinforced the idea that the fire department is family and the fire service is a fellowship.

Any personnel working around Capt. Wisenbaker usually found him to be in a good mood, quick to smile, and always ready with a positive word of support. It turns out that his positivity was a choice. I came to find out that Capt. Wisenbaker resolved many years ago to be a positive influence on the Valdosta Fire Department and that it was his choice not to mope around and be negative. His reasoning was along the lines of why be miserable when you don’t have to.

Capt. Wisenbaker has lived through the growth and change of the City of Valdosta and the Valdosta Fire Department. In his opinion, most of the change has been for the better. And it’s true that we no longer have anyone working with us who can recall how things used to be when Capt. Wisenbaker first joined the fire service. But we still have an opportunity to learn a little something from those who have served before us. Capt. Wisenbaker promised he would be active among the retirees, encouraging them to attend our functions like the Christmas Dinner. When the retirees show up at our functions, they do so not only to fellowship amongst themselves, but also to fellowship with us. Take the time to introduce yourselves and coax a story or two from them. You shouldn’t be surprised that you are actually able to learn a thing or two from them.

**EMPOWERING BUGLES—NOTES ON LEADERSHIP**

**8 Tips for Avoiding Your Leadership Blindspots**

Leaders are faced with two conflicting needs. The first is to act with a deep confidence in their abilities and the strategies they are implementing. This allows them to pursue audacious goals and persevere when faced with adversity. The second is to be aware of their vulnerabilities and the need for a healthy dose of self-doubt. This allows them to see themselves and their situations accurately — avoiding, in particular, the hazards of over-confidence and excessive optimism. Those who fail to do so run the risk of having blindspots — which are the unrecognized weaknesses or threats that have the potential to harm a leader and his or her company.

Savvy leaders understand that blindspots, while they vary in severity and are different for each individual, are not the exception — instead, they “come with the territory.” The question then becomes: How do I surface and address the blindspots that matter? One way is to ask the right questions in the right way. Here are some guidelines for identifying blindspots:

“How do I surface and address the blindspots that matter?”

**1. Avoid yes-or-no questions.** *Closed-end* questions (those that can answered yes or no) are efficient, but don’t surface information that may be critical to understanding a potential weakness or threat. Questions are called *open-ended* when they allow for a variety of responses and provoke a fuller discussion. For example, a closed-end question might be, “Are you going to deliver your business plan this year?” while an open-ended question is, “Tell me about the

risks you face in delivering your plan and the actions you are taking to mitigate them?”

**2. Don’t lead the witness.** Hard-charging leaders often push to confirm their own assumptions about what is occurring in a given situation and often want to move quickly to a plan of action. This can result in questions that are really statements, such as, “Doesn’t this mean that we don’t have a problem with compliance in this area and can move forward as planned?” These types of questions, particularly when posed by those in positions of power, often prevent contrary points of view and necessary data from surfacing.

**3. Beware of evasive answers.** In some cases, people avoid giving direct answers to direct questions. Instead, they give a partial answer or answer a different question than the one being asked. They do this in order to appear smart or in control of a situation. Leaders need to keep coming back with focused follow-up probes until they get a straightforward answer. This should not be done in a manner that is threatening or suggests distrust — but, instead, done so in a manner that signals the importance of getting key issues and facts on the table in order to make informed decisions.

**4. Ask for supporting data and examples.** Leaders need to ask questions that clarify which answers are based on fact and which are based on speculation or opinion. They should encourage people to clarify what they know based on data and what they believe based on their judgment. Not all decisions can be based on data but the leader needs to know the basis on which a decision or recommendation is being made.

**5. Paraphrase to surface next-level details.** One technique to surface necessary information is to paraphrase what you are hearing from others. For exam-

Continued pg. 4

**EVENTS—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON**

05Sep—First Friday, Downtown Valdosta

06Sep—9am-1pm, Downtown Valdosta Farm Days

06Sep—11am Firefighter Memorial, GPSTC, Forsyth Georgia

09Sep—1-4pm Career Expo, Station 1, Valdosta Fire De-

partment in partnership with the Georgia Department of Labor. Come out and support our inaugural event

11Sep—7-8:30am 2nd Annual Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, Rainwater Conference Center, this year’s theme is public safety, Chief Broome has a table with 10 spots, email

him to attend

19Sep—6:30pm Art After Dark, Downtown Valdosta

20Sep—9am-1pm Downtown Valdosta Farm Days

Please let the newsletter staff know of any upcoming events. This includes any-

thing that may be occurring with your church, your book club, your gardening club, your motorcycle club, or even a fund raising event of some sort for your child’s team or your child’s school. The only stipulation is that the information be given before the 20th of the previous month.

## EMPOWERING BUGLES—CONTINUED FROM PG. 3

ple, a leader might say, “Let me summarize your recommendation. You are suggesting that we go ahead with the product launch as planned despite the issues we are having with product supply. Is this correct?” While this can result in a yes or no response, summarizing what you are hearing can open up the dialogue. Some leaders go even further and deliberately misparaphrase what they are hearing in order to provoke a response that further clarifies the issue under debate.

**6. Ask for “out of the box” alternatives.** Another approach to surfacing important data is to overtly ask for an opposing point of view to that favored by a leader or the majority of his or her team. For instance, a leader may say, “We seem to be in agreement that we should go ahead with this acquisition. Now, I want to hear a rigorous proposal as to why we should not move forward.” A related line of questioning is to ask others to alter their assumptions. For example, a leader might say to a group requesting funding for a new product: “You are asking for \$10 million to grow this brand. What more could you do if we gave you \$25 million?”

**7. Manage the downside of deadlines.** Leaders, and their teams, can easily neglect important details when faced with a deadline to make a decision or implement a plan of action. Debates should not go on longer than needed and deadlines are clearly helpful in moving a group or company forward. That said, blindspots are more likely when a leader is so task focused that important questions are either not asked or treated superficially (when a more in-depth analysis is needed).

**8. Give an opening for contrarians.** Leaders also need to deliberately provide an opportunity for others to offer dissenting points of view. Often, the final mo-

ments of a discussion are the richest, as people will wait until that time to surface what is truly important to them. Savvy leaders will ask if there is anything left unsaid that should be heard before they end a meeting with a group or an individual. A leader might say, for instance, “I don’t want to hear later that you had concerns that we didn’t discuss. What else do we need to talk over?”

“Savvy leaders will ask if there is anything left unsaid...”

Learning to ask the right questions in the right way is a key technique for surfacing blindspots that can easily be overlooked. The best leaders know that the questions they ask are as important as the answers they provide.

- Robert Bruce Shaw, author of [\*Leadership Blindspots: How Successful Leaders Identify and Overcome the Weaknesses That Matter\*](#), works with senior executives on the management of strategic organizational change and leadership development. Robert holds a Ph.D. degree in organizational behavior from Yale University. Books that he has authored or coauthored include [\*Trust in the Balance\*](#), [\*Discontinuous Change\*](#), and [\*Organizational Architecture\*](#).

This article originally published on thoughtLEADERS, LLC (<http://www.thoughtleadersllc.com/2014/08/8-tips-for-avoiding-your-leadership-blindspots/>) 18Aug2014.

## RUMOR MILL—HAPPENINGS AND GOINGS-ON?

Believe it or not, there were no rumors submitted for the column this month. In some ways, this is good news in that maybe, just maybe, the dissemination of information has prevented wild speculation from running rampant and fomenting the spread of wild innuendo and supposition. –OR– it could be that

there is a feeling that there might be retribution or ridicule for asking what someone might consider a “silly” question. Well, there is no ridicule on our end because if it’s important enough to you to ask about, then it’s important enough to answer. Also, all submitted rumors will be treated as if they were

submitted anonymously. Use the Employee Suggestion Box set up by Chief Broome or send me an email ([smiller@valdostacity.com](mailto:smiller@valdostacity.com)). I ask for an email so that I can reference it when it comes time to submit rumors to Chief Broome and I want to make sure I get the question right.

