

Ownership vs. A Virtual Tour

Can There be a Sense of Ownership without Personalization



In the fire service today, Chief's expect their firefighters and officers to take ownership and have pride in the department that they work for. And why shouldn't they, having pride and taking ownership of where you work and what you do should be a very basic element of a successful team. The problem is what are the firefighters and officers given to take ownership of? How can I take ownership and really be proud of something that I am not allowed to make my own? To me it seems like we have just been given the fire service virtual tour. Here are some very basic views of the things that you need to be a firefighter here; you can look at them and use them when it says so in the policies but you can't physically make them your own according to your personality. Here is your characterless red fire truck that looks like all the other fire trucks at this department, here is characterless gear that looks like everyone else's on the department, and here is your characterless fire station with it's all white brick walls and 40 year old artwork that no one cares about. For those of us that have been in the

home buying market in the recent past you have probably seen some virtual tours. They are a cool tool to use when figuring out which homes are good options or not without having to drive around looking at all of them. However, while you're looking at these virtual tours you can't help but think about all the different options that you must do to each perspective space to make it yours and make it fit your style. So now imagine if you were stuck in a that virtual tour forever, you have all these great ideas of what you can do to be more proud of your home but you are not allowed to change anything and stuck with the characterless environment that you were given.

Chances are that in your department no matter where that is that there are firefighters that are severely out of shape and maybe even to the point of being obese. What is so sad and infuriating at the same time is that most fire service administrations turn their head to this issue but if you want to personalize your helmet with some firefighter sticker voicing a passion of yours... HELL NO! "That isn't allowed per policy" is all the reasoning we get but what is really being said is that I can't trust my people to make decent choices and not put something stupid on there. To make things worse is that we get the lip service of them wanting us to have pride but really when it comes down to it, a firefighter that has pride or a crew that has pride is harder to control and intimidating to people who use positional power to manage their people. If you as an officer or even an informal leader sees someone put something inappropriate on a helmet or fire truck, it's your job to say no that's not appropriate and it needs to be taken off. If you don't do that and you allow it then you are the problem. Maybe we should focus on dealing with that problem instead of punishing an entire department like the fire service is so great at doing. DO YOUR JOB!!! If you are a formal leader of 100 people then lead those 100 people, set expectations and ground rules for those 100 people, and hold the 101 people (adding yourself to it) accountable for those rules and expectations. If you lead 2 people, then



the exact same rules apply and everywhere in between. I am constantly amaze at how good we have become at treating grown men and women like kids. Let your team members do what they are there to do and trust that they will do it because if they can't then that's on you.

Why can't we have duty shirts that have our station patch on them, why can't we have engines that have a station or district motto on them, and why can't we do some small things around the station to give it some character and not look like a dang white walled asylum? I have asked these questions and I have yet to receive an answer that wasn't total horse crap. If you want a crew, a team, a department or whatever to take ownership then you better start handing out some keys and allow for them to make things their own and personalize their little piece of the department.

