

Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



Turn the Ship Around! by L. David Marquet

Why Read *Turn the Ship Around!*?

“The leader-leader structure is fundamentally different from the leader-follower structure. At its core is the belief that we can all be leaders, and in fact it’s best when we all are leaders. Leadership is not some mystical quality that some possess and others do not. As humans, we all have what it takes, and we all need to use our leadership abilities in every aspect of our work life.”

“Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves.”

Good leaders know how, when, and most importantly why to empower followers. In *Turn the Ship Around!* L. David Marquet explores how he empowered his followers to be leaders at all levels in the high-stress operating environment of a modern nuclear submarine. By empowering the followers in his organization to take responsibility for actions within the scope of their duties, he allowed those followers to take ownership in those duties, and as a result, morale and performance skyrocketed. Not only did the organization improve under the leader-leader model, but the individuals working within it also became more skilled, knowledgeable, and efficient critical thinkers capable of making excellent and correct decisions with minimal supervisory input.

Everyone in wildland fire management is a follower to some degree or another, even the leaders at the top of the org charts. To a degree we already operate in a leadership system that resembles this leader-leader method of operating, and it’s been shown to work well with highly complex, dynamic systems like wildland fire management. Engine bosses don’t typically consult FMOs on the day-to-day operations of their engines, and IC’s don’t typically consult with duty officers about every decision made on an initial attack fire. This book provides ideas about the leader-leader model that can be applied in any fire organization, at any level.

There are several videos on the book available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Inno-Versity Presents: “Greatness” By David Marquet (10 minutes):**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqmdLcyES_Q
- **How Great Leaders Serve Others: David Marquet at TEDxScottAFB (20 minutes):**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLRH5J_93LQ

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

Blog: <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

Professional Reading Program: <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

Main WFLDP page: <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

Turn the Ship Around! Discussion Questions

Part One: Starting Over

In the run up to his XO position, the author started preparing for his position by reading up on leadership, management, communication, etc, and reflected on what he'd read. This wasn't because it was required, but because he wanted to. What actions have you taken outside of what was required of you, to learn more about leadership or your job? Have you explored ideas/topics/subjects outside of your normal area of knowledge and expertise, outside of your comfort zone?

The author points out that in a "do what they tell me" leadership environment, people stop using their own instincts, skills, brains, and the group as a whole suffers. Have you ever worked in a "do what I tell you" or "shut up and dig, I'm not paying you to think" organization? If so, how did you feel about it? Are times when this method of leading is appropriate, and perhaps even desired? What situations are there in wildland fire where a "shut up and do what I tell you" (leader-follower) method might be the best? What situations are there where a leader-leader method might work better?

Part Two: Control

What do you think about pushing control and responsibility down the org chart? Giving people ownership by making them accountable and in control? Do you ever see leaders that run themselves ragged because they take on too many tasks that they could allow others to do? Do you ever find yourself doing that?

How do you feel about "thinking out loud" when performing complex tasks? Are there downsides? How does your organization view inspections and audits? As learning opportunities, or a test to be passed? Why or why not?

Part Three: Competence

Do we use "deliberate action" in wildland fire operations? One example of deliberate action in wildland fire is aerial ignition operations using a plastic sphere dispenser (PSD or "ping-pong" machine). What are some other tasks where deliberate action could it improve safety and/or efficiency? How do you ensure that control is given to competent individuals?

What parts of the Santa Fe creed could apply to fire organizations?

How do briefings in your organization compare to those on the Santa Fe? Do you brief, or certify?

Part Four: Clarity

How could the author's idea of "clarity" benefit a fire organization? How is the clarity of your group? How does taking care of your people build clarity? How can you shift yourself and others to actively taking care of your people? How can taking care of your people make it easier to take (and give) healthy constructive criticism?

How does your organization view legacy? What are your organizations "guiding principles?" Are they part of the "organizational fabric," as the author puts it, or do they hang on a wall collecting dust? Why or why not? Are there ways that you can create guiding principles for small groups (crews, modules, etc) within the larger organizations (agencies, departments, etc)?

In the second-to-last chapter, the author describes a situation where the leader-leader model succeeded and the leader-follower model would likely have failed. How does that example compare to situations you've seen in wildland fire? Does it remind you of anything you've seen or done? Why or why not? Do wildland fire organizations use the leader-leader model at times? Could it be used more often?