

The Philosophy and Principles for Professional, Honorable and Respectful Labor-Management Relations in the Arizona Fire Service



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On February 15, 2008, Arizona Fire Service leadership from the Arizona Fire Chief's Association (AFCA) and the Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona (PFFA) met to discuss Fire Service Labor-Management relations in Arizona. The leadership unanimously agreed that productive Labor-Management relations are crucial for a progressive and effective Arizona Fire Service and that a team approach to solutions is the best way to diminish various forms of strife and unrest and ensure acumen of focus on strong service delivery. All parties agreed to work together on this White Paper to illustrate our philosophies.

This White Paper is a culmination of this work and offers a common vision, defines important terms, outlines modes for effective relationships, frames components of ethical behavior and provides methodologies to respond to variations and problem solving.

The information in this paper draws on decades of experience from Management and Labor to provide guidelines on how various forms of strife and unproductive situations can be avoided. Moreover it provides direction on how to create an environment where responders and managers can work together to be mutually beneficial for our citizens.

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Table of Contents

	Page
⌘ Preamble.....	4
⌘ Introduction	5
⌘ Chapter 1. Common Vision.....	8
⌘ Chapter 2. Defining Important Terms.....	10
⌘ Chapter 3. Ethical Behavior.....	12
⌘ Chapter 4. Relationships and Communications.....	16
⌘ Chapter 5. Establishing a Culture of Cooperation and Inclusion.....	18
⌘ Chapter 6. Passing the Philosophy and Principles Along to Generations.	19
⌘ Summary.....	21
⌘ Contact.....	22



Photo Courtesy of Sierra Vista Firefighter and Local 4492 State Vice President Joshua Meeker

"You can stand tall without standing on someone. You can be a victor without having any victims."

Harriet Woods

Preamble

History has shown that negative Labor-Management relations are a significant distraction to our mission and erode the foundations we have built for a high level of service delivery, which our public has come to expect of us and respect us for. The President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona and the President of the Arizona Fire Chief's Association have brought together this group of Arizona Fire Service leaders to develop this document, which outlines consensus principles and philosophies of effective Labor-Management relations for the Arizona Fire Service.

Introduction

On February 15, 2008, Arizona Fire Service leadership from the Arizona Fire Chief’s Association (AFCA) and the Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona (PFFA) met to discuss Fire Service Labor-Management relations in Arizona. Chief Dennis Compton facilitated the discussion. A common vision was articulated and six (6) key issues were discussed and developed.

The Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona has been in existence since October 16, 1967. The Arizona Fire Chief’s Association has been in existence since 1966. Working together, our organizations have been instrumental in numerous Arizona Fire Service advancements such as:

- (Establishment of the Arizona Fire Service Institute
- (Development of the Arizona State-wide mutual aid plan
- (Establishment of the Public Safety Communications Commission
- (Establishment of the Arizona Department of Homeland Security and the Regional Coordinating Councils
- (Revamping of the State Fire Marshalls Office and the establishment of the Department of Fire, Building and Life Safety
- (Re-instituted the state Fire Safety Committee
- (Established haz-mat as a focus of the Arizona Sonoran Border Commission
- (Development of the State-wide Response Plan, including heavy and medium rescue plans
- (Defeat of “Axe the Tax” initiative
- (Repeated protection of Urban shared revenue
- (Defeat of fire district secondary tax cuts

(Supporting a multitude of community causes such as: The Muscular Dystrophy Association, Foundation for Burns and Trauma, Habitat for Humanity

Fire Service Labor-Management relations in Arizona hold a unique and varied history. Arizona is a right to work State, which allows for an environment where, in some areas, union activity has not always been welcomed and a smooth path to relations has not always existed. In some cases, this environment has created tension; however, we have learned that turmoil is sometimes an impetus for progress and that challenges often breed creativity.

Arizona was once the battlefield between public and privatized fire departments. The union eventually played a pivotal role in diminishing the public/private debates and respective turmoil.

Over the last five decades, Fire Fighters in Arizona have become more active in collective unionism, community involvement, and political involvement. The Fire Fighters have partnered with Fire Chiefs, elected officials and the community to work on public safety challenges. In some Arizona communities, this activity has resulted in some of the most positive and progressive advances in employee relations and service delivery of anywhere in the nation. Several communities in Arizona are frequently featured and studied by outside organizations for our highly successful approaches. These communities' successful processes are relationship-based and interest-based rather than positional.

While it is true that many Fire Departments and their respective Towns, Cities and Districts are operating with effective Labor-Management relations, many are not. The challenge facing us today is a situation where, in some communities, relations are contentious or are simply non-existent.

Several situations have arisen in recent years, where significant breakdowns have occurred in some Fire Departments. What has come to light and is agreed on, by consensus of this group, is that there are stark disparities regarding Labor-Management relations among various Arizona Fire Departments. Moreover, it has become clear that the most concerning employer-employee problems happen in communities where the Union and Fire Department Management lack respect for one another's importance and roles, and where they are not employing any form of relational process to work collectively on challenges and to maintain open lines of communications.

Arizona is one of the fastest growing states in the United States. Many towns and cities throughout Arizona, which were once very small, are exploding with growth. With this growth have come changes in local Fire and EMS response. Our collective viewpoints conclude that laying some groundwork for employee relations in the Arizona Fire Service will help avoid strife and unrest along with the accompanying pitfalls.

The mutually agreed upon goal for this endeavour is to collaboratively promote positive Labor-Management relationships in Arizona Fire Departments based on trust, open communication and mutual respect. We respectfully submit this work to the Arizona Fire Service with the hope that it creates reflection and dialog, that will result in an environment of success.

Chapter 1. Common Vision

*"Managers know how. Leaders know why.
Managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing."*

Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus

One trait shared by all members of the Fire Service is a calling to serve the community in a very special way. Regardless of the role each one plays in a Fire and EMS agency, every member is driven by a purpose to make a significant difference in the lives of our citizens. Such purpose and devotion to our mission brings passion as well as differing ideas about how to achieve our goals. Creating opportunities to nurture and integrate differing ideas and views is the essence of this document. Our vision is to encourage Fire Departments to embrace open communication and cooperation in Labor-Management relations, viewing these differences as strength rather than a source of conflict.

Change will happen within our respective agencies, this we know to be certain. Experience shows that diverse views and thoughts help organizations drive and adapt to change. The only way to encourage varying thoughts and ideas is by bringing diverse people together in the work environment to discuss issues, solve problems, and develop plans for the future. As Labor and Management, we are committed to work together to develop positive change.

Diversity is a critical element of a successful organization. Diverse thoughts and views are healthy for an organization; however this is only so when there are conduits and processes to make these elements useful. Ideas and communications should be cultivated to respect all

members as stakeholders. We acknowledge that the Fire Service's "paramilitary" roots have not always served us well in developing progressive organizations.

The AFCA and PFFA are highly participative in a multitude of levels of education, advocacy, political engagement, and cross agency interactions. It is absolutely critical that we respect the contributions we all make to the Fire service and the legitimacy of the perspectives that emerge from this involvement. The AFCA and PFFA are in agreement that within every organization, it is important to establish a defined process for members and management to communicate openly, and foster an appreciation for the fact that every member of an organization is a stakeholder in that organization's success.

Gamesmanship, confrontation, and manoeuvring can diminish trust and strain relationships. Our vision is a Labor-Management process where direct, honest communications are the only way to be successful.

Fire service personnel are held to be some of the most trustworthy and respected members of our society. The public trusts our judgment and they fully expect that, internally, we will communicate and work effectively to avoid engaging in relations that result in impediments to providing the best service to our communities. It is an industry expectation that our service and communications should be driven by pragmatic solution strategies, not ideology. We are committed to this philosophy and we feel that this is the industry standard we all expect throughout the Arizona Fire Service. We should always look for opportunities to improve relations and should be forward-focused as we work. We strive for service-wide buy in to this common vision throughout the Arizona Fire Service.

Chapter 2. Defining Important Terms

To conduct an analysis of our state of affairs and to create common dialog, we agree to the following definitions of terms and roles, which form the foundation of our common vision. The following terms have been jointly defined and shall serve as a basis for our initiatives.

Term	Definition
Diversity	The principle that people’s abilities, beliefs, culture, race, sexual identity or other characteristics may differ from individual to individual and that these differences strengthen the organization.
Honor	We mutually agree that our interactions are characterized by strong ethical conduct. Our profession (with its historical significance) as well as our communities dictate that our actions reflect the highest character in our daily operations and interactions.
Labor	The basic role of Labor revolves around wages, hours, working conditions, and benefits. The Union President has the final decision-making capability for the union.
Labor/Management process	The formal or informal process by which Management and Labor interact to make the fire department a more effective organization. This process can range in level of sophistication and is often influenced by the size of the organization, local constraints, and any number of social, political, and financial factors. We mutually agree that the process, however it takes place, should be based upon positive relationships and ethical behavior. It is assumed that Management shares authority and Labor shares responsibility as a precursor to any successful Labor Management process. Parties must focus on commonalities instead of differences.
Management	The basic role of Management revolves around strategic business planning and effective operations. The Fire Chief has the final decision-making capability for Management decisions.
Professional behavior	Characterized by or conforming to the technical and ethical standards of a profession. This speaks less to the pay status of an individual and more to

	the conduct and performance to a published standard.
Respect	Respect is a concept of ethical character that we hold to be principle to our dealings with each other. We agree that respect characterizes our expectations of our own conduct as opposed to what we expect from others (i.e. we are respectful in our dealings even when the behaviour of others does not warrant respect).
Trust	The condition and resulting obligation of having confidence placed in oneself.

Chapter 3. Ethical Behavior

The AFCA and PFFA mutually agree that ethical behavior is the foundation of our relationship. We expect that our relationship will be a model for the local Fire Chief and the local Union Official to emulate. The Six Pillars of Character as published by the Josephson Institute of Ethics serves as a model for our successful relationship.

Trustworthiness: *Honesty* is the hallmark of our work together. Candor requires that we work together in an open manner that discloses to all parties the information and perspective we each need to know. *Integrity* of our efforts and conduct preclude destructive behaviors such as self-interest, self-protection, self-deception and self-righteousness from entering our work together. Reliability is characterized by our making and keeping commitments to each other. So strongly do we hold this principle that any prospective commitment is carefully considered to protect our promises from being broken and thus our trust in each other from being diminished. Any inability to keep our promises becomes a priority issue for resolution to preserve our trusting relationship.

Respect: We mutually expect that our interactions be characterized by respect. Respect is offered not as a payment for respect received but rather for the expectation we have of our own conduct. We will be guided by principles such as the Golden Rule; “Do unto others as

you would have them do unto you”. Our individual behaviors are characterized by courtesy, non-violence, and tolerance.

Responsibility: We acknowledge that we each have a responsibility to carry out our individual roles. We will seek to understand each other’s roles to ensure we know what duty each is responsible to fulfil. We expect personal accountability of conduct, characterized by self-control and a constant pursuit of excellence.

Fairness: Our interactions will seek justice and equity in our dealings. We support that effective measures be taken to prevent and address violations of our common philosophy. We also acknowledge that open and visible dealings are necessary to conduct business that is perceived to be *and* is actually fair. We agree that advocacy, as a principle in local dealings, is an important part of fairness to the individual to ensure justice and due process for all.

Caring: We mutually commit that our concern for each other is a primary impetus for the formation of this document. Fire Chiefs and Fire Fighters care about the safety and well being of our members, as well as the welfare of the community and the excellence of departmental operations. The assumption that concerns are only based upon self-interest is not a part of the philosophy and principles described herein.

Citizenship: We feel that we should continuously endeavor to make the fire service better for our citizens, customers, and the professionals who participate in the delivery of our services.

There are several basic areas where we have agreed that the principles above must be adhered to in our daily operations:

Keeping Agreements: If an agreement cannot be kept, prior communication between the parties is essential. Leadership should support agreements and take responsibility for them.

Support for Advocacy and Appropriateness in Discipline Processes: We agree that any employee, regardless of rank or tenure, deserves the fundamental right to advocacy if they are being investigated and/or disciplined. Appropriate discipline must occur for just cause; it should be implemented via due process, and the discipline should be lawful, consistent, and appropriate to the incident. A progressive disciplinary process is critical to correcting negative behavior and performance, as well as returning the employee to a productive status.

Sensitive to Liability: Labor and Management are expected to act with cognizance of liability-both legal and moral.

Basic Rights & Treatment: The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona (PFFA) and all of the Local affiliates are actively engaged in activities to establish basic negotiating rights for all members. The Fire Unions see the right to negotiate as a basic human right, which is often suppressed and avoided by many Arizona governmental employers. We acknowledge that unionized employees, as well as employees attempting to organize, should not be harassed or experience any retribution as they pursue their rights to negotiate wages, hours, and working conditions. Employees should also be able to pursue this end within federal, state and local laws.

Uninterrupted Service: We recognize that in our profession, our service must be provided unconditionally. We all have a moral obligation to our citizenry. Pursuits of organizing,

establishment of, or expansion of, Labor rights and participation in the political process, must never interrupt emergency services or impede the organization's ability to respond.

Chapter 4. Relationships and Communications

We have concluded that the most concerning employee-employer problems happen in communities where Labor and Management do not respect or recognize each other's importance and roles; where they are not employing any form of relational process to work collectively on challenges, and where they do not work to maintain open lines of communications.

There are many methods for conducting Labor-Management forums and meetings. Relationships by Objectives, Open space, Interest-Based Forums, and others are used productively by Arizona Fire Departments. Regardless of the method, the purpose of the Labor-Management process should be to make the Fire Department more effective as an organization. The focus of our efforts should be total commitment to the quality of our services—internally and externally. The Labor-Management process assists in planning policy and procedures, as well as resolving a variety of problems or issues that arise.

Where there is a defined Labor-Management process for the fire agency, the Fire Chief and the Union President must be committed to requiring compliance with agreements made through the process as well as participation in the process. Management and Labor leadership must commit to participate (as opposed to co-manage) in planning and development. In doing so, Management shares authority and Labor shares responsibility, or the process will not work. There is equal representation in the Labor-Management process, but outside of that process, the participants carry out their own roles within the structure of the Department, i.e. as Firefighters, Engineers, Captains, ALS, BLS, Chiefs, Specialists, etc. Labor and Management must continually work on the issue of trust . . . trust in the process and fostering trust among the participants individually. Disagreement on certain issues is

expected; when this occurs, areas of agreement should be identified and built on. Meetings should be held on a regular basis and leaders should deal with each other directly. Problems that arise should be addressed when they are small. Parties are encouraged to communicate before a conflict is escalated. The relationship must be addressed along with the issues, taking care not to sacrifice the Labor-Management relationship for a single outcome. The most important strength we have for the future is the relationship that we have built with each other. The Fire Chief has the final decision-making capability for Management decisions, and that the Union President has the final decision-making capability for Labor decisions.

Chapter 5. Establishing a Culture of Cooperation and Inclusion

The Arizona Fire Chiefs' Association (AFCA) and the Professional Fire Fighters of Arizona (PFFA) are both dedicated to providing resources for mediation, review and problem-solving for any organization that solicits our assistance in identifying and addressing situations where breakdowns in relationships are occurring. In addition, both organizations are committed to providing resources for the development and implementation of Labor-Management systems for any Fire Department that requests such assistance. Both of our organizations are committed to establishing policies and education to encourage our respective members to meet the ethical and professional standards described herein. As has been said, there are a variety of methodologies to facilitate effective communications and working environments.

AFCA and PFFA Commitment to Philosophy and Principles.

The AFCA and PFFA will programmatically invest in a continuing dialogue, which advocates, mentors, and establishes as a standard, the tenets of this document. To properly instill these concepts into the definition of professional chief officers and professional union officers, the AFCA and PFFA must conduct its affairs in accordance with the principles described herein and compel its members to conduct themselves in their local environments to meet the same standard. To that end the AFCA and PFFA will:

- Participate in an ongoing dialogue with each other on issues within this document and joint interests relating to the advancement of the fire service. The AFCA and the PFFA must model the tenets for strong Labor-Management relations described herein, if we truly advocate for these principles at the local level.
- Develop dialogue, training, and support for strong Labor-Management relationships at the local level. The AFCA and PFFA will, by our efforts, provide capacity-building for our members in demonstrating professional behaviors and competencies, which are consistent with the principles described herein.

Chapter 6. Passing the Philosophy and Principles along to Generations

The AFCA and PFFA agree to embrace the tenets of this document and we will use our best endeavors to encourage others to do the same. The PFFA and AFCA have developed this document to move the Arizona Fire Service forward to a more unified and progressive relationship. We are confident that this document, like our relationship, will grow, improve, and will be constantly re-evaluated and considered by future generations of leaders.

To meet these goals, both organizations shall provide new Union Officers and Chief Officers with a copy of this collaborative White Paper in our respective organizations' official documents. We will also provide an on-site orientation or presentation to new members and integrate the material into presentations at our respective conferences, seminars, and speaking engagements, where applicable.

The AFCA and PFFA agree that we shall formally include this White Paper in our organizations' documents. The tenets of this paper will be reinforced regularly within our organization during membership renewal and/or conventions.

The AFCA and PFFA agree that we will present this document and its tenets at other presentations and conferences such as management and human resource conferences, leadership conferences, and other training seminars. We will also present this document to other groups and individuals such as other unions, various boards, managers, human resources personnel, elected officials, and others as opportunities present themselves.

The AFCA and PFFA are committed to a formal review process. It is our goal to bring new leaders to this review process and examine cases and innovations to expand and improve the work and goals of this endeavor between our organizations.

Summary

There are Fire Departments in the State of Arizona which are recognized nationally as examples of “best practice” in Labor–Management relations and personnel practices. However, there continue to be others which promote and instill less than effective employee relations practices. Positive and negative employee relations both impact the quality of service provided to the public...just at opposite ends of the scale.

What Labor and Management can accomplish together has few limits. Problem-solving, planning, working through difficult times, and guiding important changes within our organizations all become more effective when there is a Labor-Management relationship based upon open communications, mutual trust, and mutual respect.

Professional-Honorable-Respectful...these tenets are vital to the success of any group...and the lack of these can be the demise of any group. The PFFA and AFCA are jointly committed to the concepts, philosophies and guiding principles that have been identified and are being promoted in this document.

We encourage all Arizona Fire Departments to embrace these principles in order to develop positive Labor – Management relationships within their respective organizations.

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