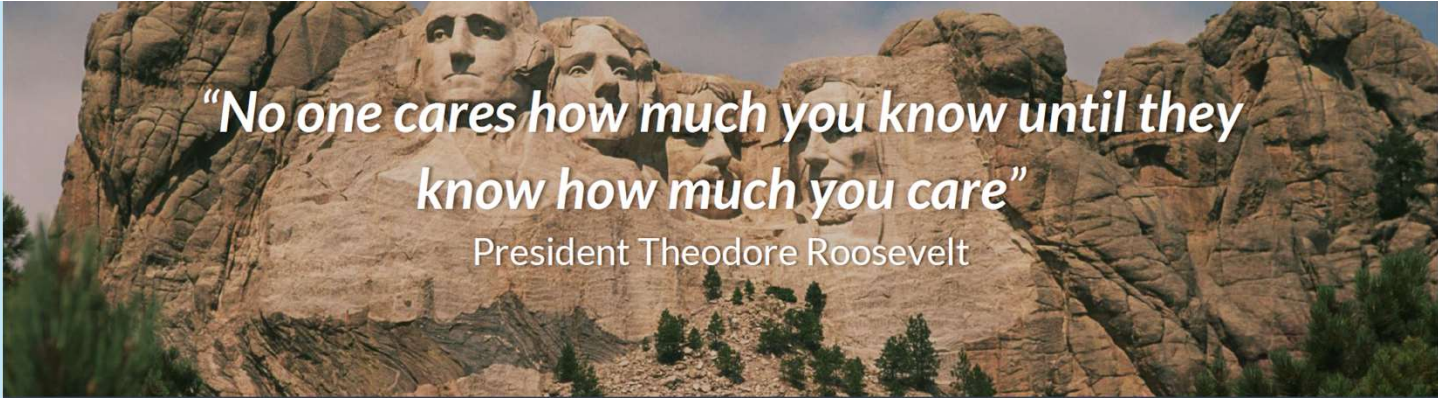


A photograph of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the background. The faces of the four presidents are visible, carved into the granite. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The foreground shows some green trees and shrubs.

***“No one cares how much you know until they
know how much you care”***

President Theodore Roosevelt

Introduction to the Chaplaincy

Chaplain Chris Groh, Joliet (Illinois) Fire & Police, once stated, “*sometimes we are just there to stir the soup.*” His point was, a chaplain is not always there to counsel; sometimes they are simply support when the firefighters are busy with their mission of saving lives and protecting property. “*When they leave for a call, it is very helpful for someone to “stir the soup” so they can eat when they get back and be ready for the next call to service.*” This is what many chaplains refer to as “a ministry of presence.”

A chaplain is a critical component in the organization. The chaplain leads people into the healing phase after their incident, often while they are still standing in the front yard watching their house burn. The chaplain makes sure the families have connection to the fire department to get answers, guidance, etc. Remember, most families have not been through tragedy and have no experience; the chaplain can guide them toward recovery. You, as the chief, and your command staff have a lot going on during an incident and after. A chaplain is that perfect liaison between command staff and the citizen.

In late 2021, the Volunteer and Combination Officer Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs reissued an updated version of the Yellow Ribbon Report. The report, “*Best Practices in Behavioral Wellness for Emergency First Responders*” lists eleven best practices for behavioral health within a fire department. Best practice #1 states,

DEATH NOTIFICATION

- *Objectives of todays class:*
- *Identify four steps in the Notification Process*
- *Prepare for a variety of situations*
- *Conduct trauma notifications by using best practices*

DEATH NOTIFICATION

After a traumatic event, it is necessary to make a death notification

This is the MOST DIFFICULT task in the fire service

A proper notification has a great bearing on a difficult journey for the next of kind and the fire department

We are going to look at what is involved in a proper death notification?

DEATH NOTIFICATION

- TRAUMA

An event or circumstance, resulting in:

Physical, Emotional and/or Life-threatening harm

There are many elements involved within the Death Notification

It is helpful to break it down into several components

FOUR STEPS TO A NOTIFICATION

PLANNING

PREPARATION

DELIVERY

FOLLOW-UP

PLANNING

Identify the decedent

Team selection

Who is the Next of Kin (NOK)

What are the Details of death

PREPARATION

Know your departments SOP/SOG's

Research N.O.K.

Prepare your team for emotional and physical responses

DO NOT JUDGE

DELIVERY (in person)

Assemble your team

Confirm each member's function(s)

Confirm identity of NOK

Identify yourself and your team

Ask to enter the house and to sit down

DELIVERY (in person)

Briefly, provide an overview of the incident

Use one sentence delivery

Allow time for emotional and physical responses

Next Step ?

DELIVERY

(in person)

Sample script:

I'm afraid that I have some very bad news for you...*(pause a moment to allow the NOK to prepare)*.

Your husband/wife/son/daughter..*(name of decedent)* has died.

I'm very sorry that *(name of decedent)*, died and you are having to face this.

(Adding your condolence is very important because it expresses feelings rather than the facts, and invite them to express their own)

DELIVERY

(in person)

HELPFUL DELIVERY STATEMENTS

I am sorry...

This is harder than most people think...

Most people who have gone through this react similarly to you...

This may be one of the most difficult times in your life...

If there is silence, do not try to fill the silence...

DELIVERY

(in person)

DELIVERY PITFALL STATEMENTS:

The body...

I know how you are feeling...(*You don't*)

I understand...(*Do you really*)

Time heals all wounds...(*It doesn't*)

You need to be strong...(*they don't*)

He/she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time...

REMEMBER THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

"We will do no harm"

SUPPORT AFTER THE NOTIFICATION

Prepare for the Five Stages of Grief

DENIAL

ACCEPTANCE

ANGER

DEPRESSION

BARGAINING

REMOTE NOTIFICATION

Death notifications should not be made by telephone

Should be made by local fire department or law enforcement

If the remote team is not trained, provide a quick overview of your four-step process

Ask the remote team if you can be on the phone when the notification is made

FOLLOW UP

MEDIA

AUTOPSY

RESOURCES / FUNERAL

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

You are there to provide support; it is not our role to share faith, or ideology briefs at this time.

Ask if you or the department liaison can contact any other NOK

Provide the FD's liaison as well as your contact information

FOLLOW UP

Call and/or visit the NOK the following day

Aid the family with funeral plans, if they ask

Let the NOK know that they are a part of the fire family, and we are here to help and assist

Attend the funeral

Stay in touch with the family

POST NOTIFICATION RECAP

(WHY)

Discuss the net of kin's reactions...

Discuss your feelings as well as your teams'

Allows us to process the impact as notifiers

Is a large part of our SELF-CARE

Remember, the fire department personal and their families and that this is just the start of our journey

DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

Scenarios

Scene 1-

Jim Johnson, FF died at the scene when he fell through the floor. You have been asked by the fire chief to accompany him to notify the NOK. You meet the chief outside the residence and the chief tells you that he does not know much about FF Johnson since he recently joined the department and he asks you to take the lead, you do not know who will answer the door.

After knocking on the door Jane Smith, FF Johnsons girlfriend answer. You ask if she is FF Johnsons wife and if you can come in. She tells you take she is Johnsons his girlfriend and you cannot come in. Now what do you do?

DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

Scenarios

Scene 2

You are called at 2:00am by the Fire Chief and told me that FF Black had a heart attack while on a fire and he would like you to go with him to notify the NOK. You meet the chief at the station, and he asks you to take the lead since he has known FF Black since he was teenager. He also tells you that FF Black is married and has a 3 year of son. You and the chief travel together but the chief does not say anything while you travel.

You knock on the door and wake up Mrs. Black. Once she sees the chief, she starts crying and hollering no, no, no. You ask to come in, but she doesn't answer you. You do no know where the fire was, if CPR started, where the body is.

DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

Scenarios

Scene 3

You have met your department chief at the fire station and are gathering information before traveling to make a death notification. You know the name, age, and address of FF Logan, but nothing else. You, the chief and a friend of FF Logan travel together to the residence. Upon arriving, you notice a large family party in the rear yard. An older man come around the house and ask if he can help. You ask to see FF Logan's wife. The man asks why, and he starts to become defensive. Hearing the noise, FF Logan's wife comes around the house with several other people. Once she sees her husband's friend, she collapses to the ground.

Questions and Comments

Questions...

Comments...

Recommendations...

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE TO YOUR COMMUNITY