

Chapter 6

Mindfulness

I have learned much from the study of "mindfulness" and how it is defined by Ellen J. Langer in *The Power of Mindful Learning* (1998). Langer says that "to have a mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective." (p. 4) Langer explains that the opposite, "mindlessness" is "characterized by an entrapment in old categories; by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective." (p. 4)

How this equates to us in the fire service is to develop and facilitate "mindful" learning environments. Langer (1998), describes how predictable it is to predestine how people will learn when given cues by their instructors about possibilities during instruction. She calls these "rigid mindsets" (Langer, 1998, p. 98) which can limit our abilities to see new paradigms for our learning.

I constantly encourage those firefighters whom I've had the privilege to facilitate learning with to envision the moment as new, and try to figure many ways for our subject (no matter what it is) to be used in our fire service job.

Langer's Mindful perspective focuses on the main goal for this guide; and that is to have whatever curriculums we develop, deliver, facilitate, evaluate, and update, to lead the learner to better problem solving skills. My hope is that each student who is taught from a more mindful perspective will have knowledge transfer in novel situations.

What do I mean by knowledge transfer in novel situations? An example would be for a fire company to consider how a seemingly simple tool might be utilized in a dozen

different ways while they learn. When they are called to perform in an actual emergency situation, there is a better possibility that their learning will transfer and be available to them during the emergency. Langer (1998) has performed many studies that have indicated this is a predictable outcome of "mindful learning" (p. 18).

For any instruction that we develop, the mindful approach needs to be reinforced from the beginning. For those whom we provide written curriculums, presentations, or facilitated learning environments, either as facilitators to instruct others or as students themselves, we can help them be more mindful by clearly empowering them as having the power over their own learning. This empowerment doesn't abdicate our responsibility as educators; it enhances it through collaboration with those doing the actual learning.