

## Chapter 8

### *Organizational Hierarchy*

#### *“Forging Committed Partnerships” (Kelleher, 1997)*

For the Learning Culture to be as effective as possible, we should seek to be in attunement with our organizational hierarchy. Borrowing from one of the more successful organizational models, Southwest Airlines, there are some basic organizational tenets that become clear, regarding employees training. If the management of an organization promotes learning as a cultural norm, "forging committed partnerships", as Herb Kelleher describes about Southwest Airlines (Kelleher, 1997), their employees are more productive and committed. Following this model, those responsible for fire service training should work to be in concert with all organizational levels, especially with those who have no direct control, but who may be directly impacted. They may expect less organizational friction, which can greatly hinder the development of a Learning Culture.

In fire service training organizations, the organizational hierarchy will most likely mimic the para-militaristic hierarchy, which will be staffed by lieutenants, captains, and or chiefs. In large fire service organizations the staff dedicated for training may be adequate, but in most small to medium sized departments they may be fortunate to have only a minimal staffing to plan, develop, deliver, and evaluate needed training programs.

Understanding and working to build trust between the organizational hierarchy and training personnel is essential for those who wish to promote the Learning Culture. It is by establishing relationships between instructors/facilitators and those who will be affected by their educational deliveries that will reap the synergy that a Learning Culture can produce.

For example, I left my on-line fire company in December, 2005, to take one of two training captain positions for Poudre Fire Authority (PFA). I immediately interviewed all three shift battalion chiefs (BC's) to introduce myself as their training captain. They had known me as a fire company captain, which was a much different dynamic than what I was promoting as their training captain. What I learned from them was their need to not have me dictate my, or the Training Division's, agenda onto them. Basically, in 2006, all planning and events were routed through these battalion chiefs prior to any fire companies receiving the plan. This way the BC's could make changes or suggestions to us prior to having to adjust 36 fire company schedules. This relationship has proven itself during the many PFA training division offerings in 2006. I believe this relationship will become more significant in 2007 as plan, develop, deliver, and evaluate many training programs (See Appendix A).

For the learning culture, the trust and collaboration established helps lessen organizational friction, especially if all involved operate in as transparent of process as possible.