

What's in your "tool box?"

By: R.B. Weaver

You've done it. You've signed on with your local volunteer fire company. Dreams of riding that engine, putting on that gear, going into that fire are quickly becoming a reality. But now that you've joined, you need to ask yourself: "Do I have the necessary tools to do my job safely and effectively?"

Today's firefighters handle more than just extinguishing fires. We are called to mitigate all sorts of incidents: hazardous materials, swift water rescue, trench rescue, vehicle entrapment, cardiac arrest, and so on. Your fire company's weekly or monthly drills just aren't enough anymore. You need to get out there, take classes and get certified! You need to fill your "tool box" with all sorts of knowledge and training. Because without it, you're just an empty box on a rolling chassis without direction; unsafe and uncertain. Your lack of knowledge becomes a liability to your fellow firefighters and the citizens you've wanted to protect. Let's take a look at this from a different perspective.

Let's imagine that you needed to go to the local emergency room in need of stitches. Upon your arrival, you discover that the doctor assigned to treat you just joined the staff. He's a nice guy and very eager to help. Yet he has no training or knowledge on how to handle your injury. However, he's assured you that he has watched a lot of television, seen many videos, and has hung around quite a few doctors. So he's pretty confident he can handle it. But as he begins to "care" for you, you soon realize that he is causing you great pain and is sloppy, almost careless in his work. Your confidence in him and the hospital quickly diminishes and you begin to worry.

After an hour in the ER, you're released. You hobble home furious over the poor care and hoping the wound will heal. However, a few days later your wound has become red, swollen, and painful. You need more medical treatment. But you are hesitant to return to the same hospital fearing that same "doctor" will be there.

What lessons can be learned from this story?

1. A good intentioned person is not always able to handle the situation.
2. Good intentions without proper training and credentials can lead to poor care, further aggravation, lack of trust, and maybe a day or two in court.
3. Those without proper training need to learn before they can act.
4. Those who act before learning are dangerous!

Don't be the "well intentioned doctor." Just because you have joined a fire department doesn't make you a firefighter. You have a lot of work ahead of you. Your good intentions should provide you with the motivation to go out and seek more knowledge, train hard, learn from the veteran firefighter, and get certified! Classes and certifications will only help you to better serve your community and make you safer; not to mention, you become much more defensible if taken to court.

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