

PAYING IT FORWARD

Leading With Purpose

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After 40 years in the fire service, Chief Randy Bruegman founded The Leadership Crucible Foundation to reshape future leadership with a focus on fostering courage, empathy, and humility in leadership positions.

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From Position to Purpose

Redefining Success Through Service and Significance

Over the course of my career, I've had the privilege of working with a wide range of professionals, elected officials, department heads, and community leaders. Watching their influence unfold over time taught me an important truth: *leadership is never about the position you hold, it's about the influence you create for others.*

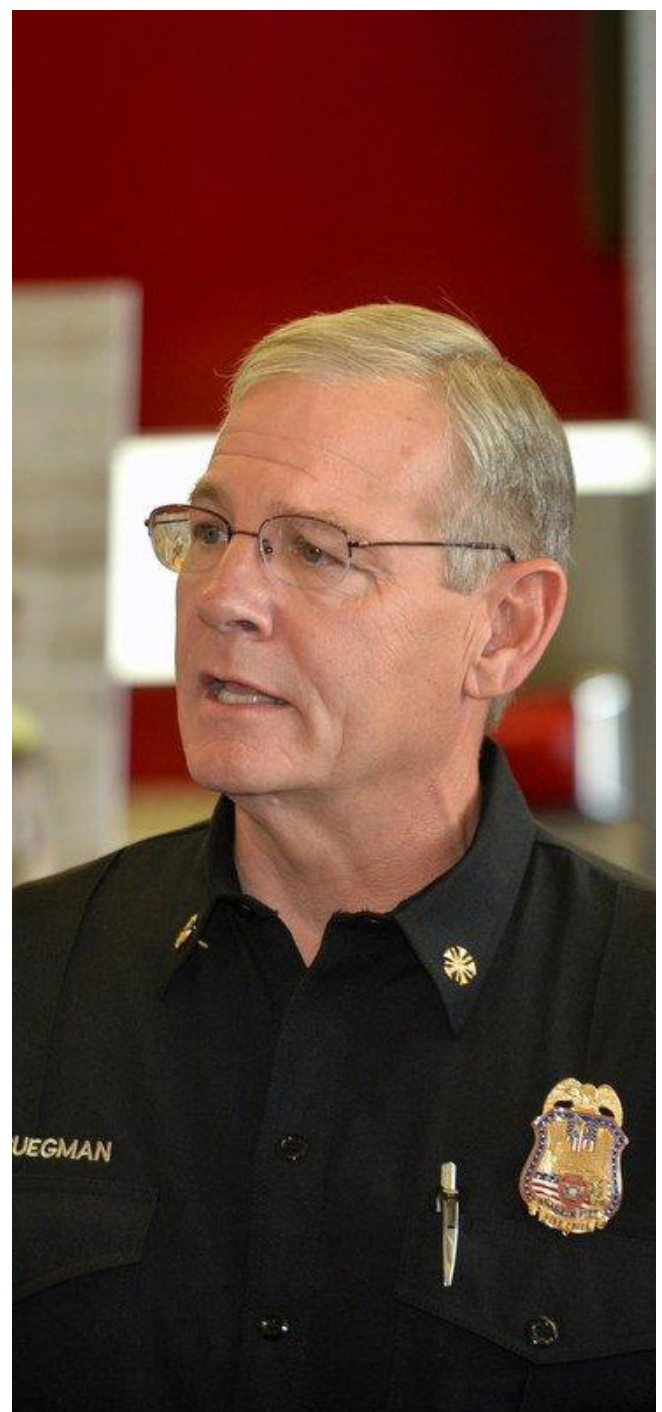
I still remember the day I was promoted to lieutenant. Standing at the badge pinning ceremony, I told everyone in the room that this was just the next step toward my ultimate goal, to become a Fire Chief and lead a major department. Looking back, it was a bold statement for a young firefighter to make. But at that point in my career, it captured exactly where I was. I had a game plan. I knew the steps I wanted to take, and I saw each promotion as another rung on the ladder. In those early years, it was all about the pursuit of the goal, about achievement and proving myself successful.

What I discovered, though, once I actually reached the position I had long envisioned, was something far more important. Titles and positions don't define leadership. They may open doors, but they don't guarantee impact. What truly defines a leader is how they serve others, the influence they have, the lives they touch, and the culture they help shape. That realization shifted everything for me. Leadership stopped being about the rank I carried and became about the responsibility I had. Success wasn't measured by the office I held but by whether I left people, organizations, and communities better than I found them.

And that's the lesson I carry forward today: goals are important, but service is essential. Leadership isn't about climbing the ladder—it's about lifting others as you climb.

That's when I began to understand the difference between being successful and being significant. Success is easy to measure, it shows up in titles, money, influence, or even the number of followers someone racks up on social media. And while those things may look impressive from the outside, they don't always translate into lasting impact. Significance, on the other hand, is harder to measure but far more meaningful. It's not about what you achieve for yourself, it's about the difference you make in the lives of others. It's the influence you carry in shaping people, organizations, and communities for the better. I've met plenty of people who the world would label as "successful," yet their leadership left little behind. And I've also known

people who never held a big title but whose lives and actions had profound, lasting impact. The contrast is stark, and it's a reminder that leadership is never about the rank you hold, but the legacy you build. True leadership isn't defined by personal success, it's defined by the significance you create for those you lead and influence along the way. That's the kind of leadership worth striving for because significance doesn't fade when the title is gone, it endures in the people whose lives you've touched.



“As you think about your own journey, ask yourself: am I chasing success, or am I striving for significance? The answer will help to shape not just your career, but the lives you impact along the way.”

As a leader, you're in a position to make decisions that can change lives. Sometimes it's the big things, starting and financially supporting degree and certification programs for your employees, funding an on-site childcare center, or ensuring affordable healthcare so your people can focus on their work without worrying about having no or poor health insurance. Other times, it's the quiet things behind the scenes, small acts that build trust, create loyalty, and open doors of opportunity for others to walk through. Over time, those choices shape a culture where people know their leader cares about them as much as the organization's bottom line.

It took me years, and honestly, not until my second fire chief's job, to fully grasp that distinction. But once I did, it changed everything. Leaders will always face tough calls, many of which upset the workforce and weigh heavily on a personal level. That's the reality of carrying the weight of responsibility. But when your focus shifts from your own success to the significance you create for others, the entire

landscape changes. Challenges that once seemed insurmountable begin to lose their edge, because people rally around a culture they believe in. They invest more time, more energy, and more heart, because they know their leader is invested in them.

And here's the truth: you don't have to hold a title to have that kind of influence. Significance isn't reserved for those in formal leadership roles. Each of us has daily opportunities, through how we show up, how we serve, and how we treat others, to leave people better than we found them. That's where real leadership begins, and that's what endures long after the title is gone.

For me, it's been a journey from chasing success to seeking significance. And I've learned that the measure of a life well-led isn't in what you achieve, it's in the lives you touch along the way. That realization led me to ask a deeper question: What does it really take to move from success to significance? The answer isn't found in titles, paychecks, or recognition, it's found in the qualities we choose to cultivate every day. These are the attributes that shape not just how we lead, but how we live. They're what turn influence into impact, and success into significance.



What does it really take to move from success to significance?

Attitude: The Great Separator

Denis Waitley once said, “The winner’s edge is in attitude, not aptitude.” Skills might open the door, but it’s attitude that determines how far you’ll go. Your attitude speaks before you do. It shows up in the way you lead meetings, how you respond when plans fall apart, and how you treat people when no one is watching. John Maxwell put it best: “attitude is the advance man of our true selves.” When it’s anchored in purpose, attitude becomes the driving force that propels you forward, even when the odds are stacked against you.

Life is a Team Sport

Leadership isn’t a solo act. It’s about lifting others, aligning people around a shared vision, and building trust that endures when times get tough. I’ve seen it firsthand, a mediocre team with great attitudes will outperform a talented team full of ego every single time. Leaders who understand this don’t just chase outcomes; they invest in people. They know that the strongest cultures are built when everyone feels valued, supported, and equipped to contribute. That’s how you move from managing success to multiplying significance.

Humility

At its core, humility is the recognition that leadership is not about you, it’s about the people you serve. Humble leaders listen more than they speak, learn from every situation, and create space for others to shine. Humility doesn’t diminish a leader’s authority; it elevates their influence because people know their leader values them more than the spotlight.

Empathy

Empathy is the willingness to truly see, hear, and understand people. It goes beyond sympathy and requires walking alongside others in their struggles and victories. Leaders who practice empathy build trust that no title or position can command. They remind people that their lives and challenges matter, and without

that connection, significance can never take root.

Integrity

Integrity is the alignment between words and actions. It’s doing what you said you’d do, even when it’s inconvenient or costly. When leaders lead with honesty and consistency, they become a foundation others can stand on. Trust is the currency of leadership, and integrity is how you earn it, day in and day out.

Service Mindset

The shift from success to significance requires a mindset of service. It means asking not, “What can I gain?” but “How can I help others grow, thrive, and succeed?” A leader with a service mindset measures success by the progress of their people. When others rise because of your leadership, significance begins to multiply.

Courage

Courage is what separates those who talk about leadership from those who live it. It’s the strength to stand for what’s right, to make the tough calls, and to face criticism when you know your decisions serve a greater purpose. Some of the hardest moments in my career required courage not just to act, but to stay the course when the weight of responsibility pressed in. Courage turns conviction into reality. Without it, significance is just a concept. With it, leaders shape cultures where people feel safe, empowered, and willing to step up themselves.

Vision

Vision is the ability to see beyond yourself and articulate a future that others want to help build. It gives direction to the work and meaning to the sacrifices along the way. Vision transforms leadership from simply managing tasks to inspiring movement. When leaders cast vision with clarity and conviction, they invite others to step into something larger than themselves.

Legacy: The Dash That Matters

One day, our lives will be summarized in a single sentence. And that sentence won't list our titles or awards, it will reflect the impact we had on people. The real question is this: what will others say about the dash between the years that will be etched on your headstone? Did you leave people, organizations, and communities better than you found them? Or did you simply accumulate success for yourself? Legacy isn't created in one grand moment or a single achievement, it's built brick by brick, in the daily choices we make. Every decision, whether big or small, shapes the story we leave behind. Legacy is also found in the people we invest in, the time we spend mentoring, encouraging, and equipping others to rise higher than we did. And at the heart of it all are the values we

refuse to compromise, even when it would be easier to look the other way.

In the end, people won't remember us for the titles we held or the accolades we collected. They'll remember how we made them feel, what we stood for, and whether we left them better than we found them. That's the true substance of a legacy worth leaving.

That's the path from success to significance. It's not easy, and it doesn't happen overnight. But if we're willing to cultivate these attributes, attitude, teamwork, humility, empathy, integrity, service, courage, vision, and legacy, we'll leave behind something far more lasting than a title. We'll leave behind a life of significance, and along the way you will develop a servant's heart within yourself. That is priceless!

"In the end, no one will remember your title. But they'll never forget the difference you made in their lives. True leadership is significance, the kind that lives on in the lives you've touched." - Chief B.





Chief B's Key Leadership Truths

- Leadership isn't about the title, it's about the influence you create.
- Titles are temporary; influence is enduring.
- Success builds resumes; significance builds legacies.
- If it's all about you, it ends with you.
- Real leaders measure success by the success of others.
- Significance is a daily choice, not an accident.

Final Thought

In the end, leadership isn't measured by the badge on your chest, the title on your door, or the followers on your feed. It's measured by the lives you've touched and the difference you've made along the way. Success may get you noticed, but significance is what ensures you'll be remembered. Our true legacy is written not in what we achieved for ourselves, but in what we left behind for others.

Leaders Are Readers

Continuous learning is essential for good leadership. Reading has been proven to enhance intelligence and cultivate innovation and insight. As a result, I would like to recommend a few titles for your consideration.

From Success to Significance: When the Pursuit of Success Isn't Enough
John C. Maxwell

Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance
Bob Buford

Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't
Simon Sinek

The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership
James C. Hunter

Dare to Serve: How to Drive Superior Results by Serving Others
Cheryl Bachelder