

Leadership Standards

Leadership within the OCFA

The success of the Orange County Fire Authority depends on our leaders. Leadership can come in two different forms: formal and informal. Members deserve a leadership team that is strong and consistent across the organization. For that reason, we have developed this document to provide clarity and guidance about what is expected from leaders at every level at the OCFA.

This document is a vision of *what right looks like* for our leaders, regardless of rank or profession. This document is not a training manual about **being** a good leader, nor does it describe a leaders supervisory responsibilities and duties. Instead, this document describes the organization's expectations of all its leaders.

OCFA recognizes that leadership is a responsibility for all of its members and will continually be a work in progress. We will all make mistakes, but we constantly work to become even better leaders tomorrow.

Our organization wants leaders to act with integrity and be aligned with the correct values. Therefore, it is up to us to learn the skills and hone our temperament to become the quality leaders the organization expects, and our members deserve.

At the OCFA, leaders are held accountable for their effectiveness and willingness to improve according to these standards.

"*The OCFA Way*" lists "Depth of Character" as one of the personal values of all members. It discusses "using a moral and ethical compass that communicates to others that you are here for the right reasons." As leaders, we strive to show that we have an enduring internal compass that leads our members in the right direction.

Leaders Influence Through Credibility

Standard: Demonstrates trustworthiness and integrity to build credibility

The leader takes tangible steps to build credibility by acting with integrity and authenticity.

The OCFA relies on us to be steadfast. The organization bestows our rank, but the credibility that underpins the position is up to the leader to develop and strengthen.

How others perceive us, in considerable measure, determines our effectiveness and the reach of our influence. We expand our ability to influence others when we consistently demonstrate that we are trustworthy and ethical.

Our day-to-day words and actions can either build or damage our credibility, depending on how our people and community perceive us. When we act with integrity and authenticity, our credibility is enhanced. Conversely, if our actions and words conflict or if others perceive us as self-serving, our credibility suffers.

Our values set an example for others to follow. As a result, we maintain a steady focus—doing what is best for the community, our people, and the organization. This consistency demonstrates to our team that we are willing to do what it takes to be a leader worth following.

Leaders Command Presence

Standard: Projects a command presence with others

The leader models calmness, levelheadedness, and focus when providing direction and guidance.

The leader generates a stable and predictable environment for the team.

The combination of calmness and focus creates our unique brand of command presence. Professionalism, competence, and poise all contribute to the desired image of our leaders.

A composed command presence serves to build confidence in those who follow us. In doing so, we gain our people's trust and respect. In addition, when we project a strong command presence, we enable our team members to focus more fully on the mission.

Leaders Demonstrate Competence

Standard: Demonstrates competence

The leader demonstrates competence and understanding that provides meaningful assistance to their subordinates.

Leaders must consistently strive to master competence. Team members look up to their leaders and rely on them to guide their work, especially in difficult times. In addition, leaders are consistently learning and growing from their own experiences to demonstrate best practices and provide sound advice for everyone to benefit from.

Leadership competence is also essential because it enables us to appropriately demonstrate and oversee the work. Leaders need to know what “right” looks like to be able to delegate and supervise effectively. Further, our experience and proficiency enable us to recognize emerging risks or take advantage of windows of opportunity. We can anticipate the team’s needs and hold members accountable for their performance.

Leaders Know Their People

Standard: Demonstrates team awareness and knowledge

The leader knows their team well, including their capabilities, goals, relationships, and general personal circumstance.

We begin building trust by knowing our team. By training, supporting, and guiding our team, we foster one-on-one relationships with each team member so that we know them as individuals. We seek insight into their strengths and weaknesses, capabilities and potential, and long-range goals and aspirations.

We support our people for their capabilities, balancing the risk and benefits of prospective assignments. We also provide clear intent as necessary, articulating the purpose, task, desired end state, and constraints as needed for the situation. We strive to set our members up for success.

Supporting our people in these ways increases individual satisfaction and reinforces cohesion by promoting camaraderie and a sense of belonging within the team.

Leaders Promote Open Communication

Standard: Fosters open communication

The leader actively seeks input from others and listens well to feedback when it is offered.

We encourage team members to bring up questions, concerns, and ideas. When they do, we listen and address what comes up. We have a duty to treat team members with respect in all situations, and we first show respect by listening to what they say.

Open communication is critical to our situational awareness as leaders. In addition, it prepares our people to better adapt to change.

Leaders Treat Their People Ethically, Fairly, and Respectfully

Standard: Conducts self in an ethical, fair, and respectful manner

The leader models good moral leadership and behaves openly, fairly, and ethically.

The leader provides a fair and equitable standard and environment for their subordinates' development, opportunities, correction, and discipline.

The leader respectfully corrects team members who take actions that are unethical or unfair to others.

If our people believe we are acting *unfairly*, it endangers cohesion and trust within our team.

We address performance deficiencies through the same lens of equality. Overlooking deficiencies seeds discontent and implies that the standards may not matter. For these reasons, we make every effort to be even-handed.

As leaders, we also have the authority and a duty to call out and correct behavior that is unfair to others. Regardless of its basis (gender, race, cliques) or its form (bullying, harassment, favoritism, exclusion), we are responsible for dealing with these issues with courage, acting swiftly and professionally to solve problems early before they grow.

Fostering Initiative

Standard: Fostering initiative in members and the team

The leader actively provides opportunities to build judgment and critical thinking skills to strengthen decision-making and initiative.

The leader encourages initiative taken by members and provides appropriate performance feedback.

Our operating philosophy calls for team members to act with disciplined initiative when needed. Taking initiative requires opportunities for people to push their critical thinking and innovation skills. For our members to succeed in these situations, we must provide support through mentoring and give feedback. In this way, we build resilience and ensure we have capable people when needed.

For our people to take this initiative, they must trust that we will support them when they need to make decisions in unfamiliar areas. To this end, we will understand honest mistakes made in a good-faith effort. When team members show they did

their best to fulfill the leaders intent, we regard mistakes as opportunities to learn and improve.

Leaders Strive to be Better in All We Do

Standard: Promotes a team culture that is focused on consistent learning and constant improvement

Our leaders model the values and attitudes that promote feedback and self-examination for all.

Our leaders hold themselves and our people accountable at all times.

The OCFA faces an environment that continues to evolve, growing more complex daily. These challenges call for us to raise our performance, service, and adaptability level to meet the future demands of our profession and those we serve. In addition, our members will look to our behaviors and how we demonstrate our daily continuous improvement actions as a model for their actions.

Our actions, attitude, and behavior will reflect a willingness to examine our strengths and weaknesses and those around us. Our ability to consistently improve our leadership and operational skills will be critical to our success in the future.

In addition, we must commit to providing feedback to individuals and our team as a key responsibility for all. Finally, we must mentor and develop our people so that they deepen their technical, communication, and decision-making skills.

Our people are tomorrow's leaders; we must provide the right environment, guidance, and support to develop all aspects of their abilities, including leadership, command abilities, and continuous learning.

Moving Forward

Leadership is a journey, not a destination. Therefore, we must continuously strive to develop ourselves and our people as leaders, firefighters, and people. Leadership is action! At the OCFA, we need all our people to lead.

This handbook is not an all-encompassing guide but a starting point for our people and organization. Being a leader requires a lot of knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, not all leaders will be the same, each with a unique style.

Everyone can lead in some way. You can lead yourself and your peers. You can lead those above and below you, but no matter what you do, we need all our people to start being leaders now. As you go through your career, situations and opportunities will require you to lead. When that opportunity presents itself, the leadership traits described here will serve you as individuals, as teams, and as part of OCFA.

Do not let rank or position determine your leadership ability and growth. Instead, let your leadership capabilities and development propel you to higher positions and greater leadership opportunities.