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A DIFFERENT KIND OF LEAD



Photo by NEMA

There is a different kind of lead occurring in emergency management. One that looks to encourage women to take the reins. There is no question in whether these leaders should be in their position, the question is how we encourage more colleagues to step up; to get into the game and not worry about making mistakes. To take the initiative to do it 'my way' by becoming a leader in emergency management. NEMA wanted to celebrate and recognize this shift as we embarked on an all-time high in the number of female directors in our membership. And thus, chose to gather this league of her own to explore more on encouraging others now that this prestigious lead is developed and recognized.

“Don’t be afraid to set lofty goals, but realize you must then work diligently

One way to encourage is to find out what aspirations one would have to be a leader in emergency management. It’s an ever-changing, challenging environment. The mission of public service, to be present

to reach those goals.”

- Joyce Flinn

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The mission of public service, to be present for those who are surviving disasters and recovering from mayhems they thought they would never encounter, is a mantra woven into a lifestyle as opposed to a goal in a strategic plan. Having a seat at the table, not to take notes, but to utilize her experiences and knowledge to help assist when a state/region/jurisdiction either is or may be impacted to an incident captivates the attention to lead. To encourage a well-rounded working environment of inclusion of hardworking professionals with one goal to make a difference is what aspiring leaders thrive on and keeps them motivated as they lead their teams.

When asked, “If you could credit your success to one thing, what would it be?” These leaders were unanimous in discussing the support they had surrounding them in their current roles as well as throughout their entire career.

“Surround yourself with people from all backgrounds – they will have strengths you do not have.” - Tina Titze

Whether it comes from their family members, men and women who have mentored and motivated them (some within NEMA!), or their own team back in their respective agencies; their success is due to those who encourage and inspire them. And just like the true leaders that they are, they don’t allow the success to end at their own desks, they too are mentoring, encouraging, and challenging future leaders to be the best versions of themselves they can be!

“Be confident. This is especially crucial in making decisions, right or wrong. If you are not confident in your decision no one else will be either. As a leader in emergency management decisions have to be made and sometimes, they are not easy ones. Being confident in your decisions gives your team confidence to move forward and carry out those decisions with you.” - Erin Rowe

Another challenge was towards NEMA. When asked, “What do you want to see more coming from NEMA?” A list was quickly developed: Looking beyond the horizon to see what will be important for emergency management, for example setting a national strategy that could impact the next 10-20 years. Continue and provide more leadership training opportunities for directors and key staff engagement and support. Provide a comprehensive workforce assessment. Include more diverse panels in forum workshops and committee meetings, just like the ones that were hosted during the most recent Annual Forum in Coeur

d'Alene, Idaho. It's to no surprise that the underlining challenge is to walk the walk if you are going to talk the talk.

Where there may not be an exact recipe on what attributes one must obtain to be a successful leader in emergency management, a common link between these leads is that they are not afraid to provide advice when asked.

“Failure is acceptable – learn from everything you do.” - Ellen Gordon

Hard work and dedication are a must, but flexibility and adaptability are key factors in great leadership. Always demonstrate commitment and maintain a positive outlook. Don't ever be afraid to fail because that is where you find the best lessons. Keep learning, especially in professional development and growth. Be sure to surround yourself with a diverse team that comprises of different backgrounds, age, education, and experiences – especially for those who have strengths that may balance your own limitations. Go to where your heart takes you – it is not about the money but about the motivation and inner ambition that allows you to strive. And most of all, **“Speak up.” - Erica Borneman**

“Be passionate, but never lose sight of the real reason behind what we do in our profession. I work every day hoping to make a difference and leave the department a better place than when I started. To quote lyrics from the Old Dominion song “No Such Thing as a Broken Heart,”: ‘cry when it hurts, laugh when it’s funny, chase after the dream, don’t chase after the money’. Don’t get me wrong, money is great, but if you hate what you’re doing, the money won’t fill the gap.” - Joyce Flinn

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