

Mile High Firefighters Conference 2025

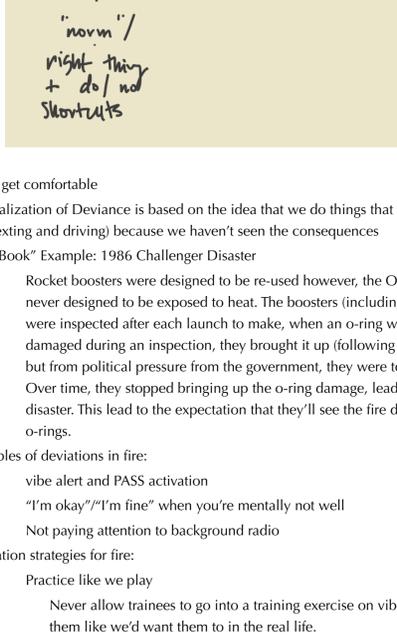
Oct 3 2025

Normalization of Deviance

Speaker: Grant Tinker (Battalion Chief at Colo Springs FD), grant.tinker@coloradosprings.gov

BLUF: Every time you deviate from what you should be doing, the easier it is to continue making that same shortcut (and more extreme shortcuts).

Key Points



- Don't get comfortable
- Normalization of Deviance is based on the idea that we do things that we shouldn't (i.e. texting and driving) because we haven't seen the consequences
- "Text Book" Example: 1986 Challenger Disaster
 - * Rocket boosters were designed to be re-used however, the O-rings were never designed to be exposed to heat. The boosters (including the o-rings) were inspected after each launch to make, when an o-ring was found to be damaged during an inspection, they brought it up (following the process) but from political pressure from the government, they were told to ignore. Over time, they stopped bringing up the o-ring damage, leading to the disaster. This lead to the expectation that they'll see the fire damage to the o-rings.
- Examples of deviations in fire:
 - * vibrate alert and PASS activation
 - * "I'm okay"/"I'm fine" when you're mentally not well
 - * Not paying attention to background radio
- Mitigation strategies for fire:
 - * Practice like we play
 - * Never allow trainees to go into a training exercise on vibrate alert. Train them like we'd want them to in the real life.
 - * Check in with team members (especially after difficult calls). Be a support. Don't overlook/ignore changes in behavior.
 - * Lead by example
 - * If policies need to be changed (because it's not increasing safety, success rates, etc. — it's really stupid), then change them
- Every time you take deviate from what you should, the easier and farther you get from "the right thing"
 - * shortcut reinforcement
 - * standardization of the deviation/shortcut
 - * anticipated consequences — "a predictable surprise". You know it'll happen but don't know when.
- Normalization of deviance occurs when expectations and tolerance for deviations decrease and the culture supports the shift
 - * "Old Boys" clubs (because the deviation is "something they've always done")
 - * When you see someone else doing unsafe behavior and either feeling like you can't speak up (fear of getting fired) or them making you feel like that's what you also need to do. This idea is geared around **psychological safety**.
 - * Lack of knowledge of the rules/processes/what you should be doing
 - * Peer pressure
 - * Time sensitive goals
 - * Rules considered stupid/unnecessary
- Difficult question: should you deviate to save a life? For example, not footing a ladder because you hear a victim near a window?

Additional Resources

- Mike Mulaine (Astronaut) on YouTube (3 part, 15 min/part)

Ventilation

Speakers: Bryan Lynch, Ian Bruzenak — CSFD, ironsandladdertraining@gmail.com

BLUF: vertical venting is most effective but most time sensitive and labor intensive. **Must know where the hose is before either ventilation strategies are executed.**

Decision Makers

Based on Fire/Building

- location of fire in building (i.e. vertical venting is likely not going to do much with a basement fire)
- pre/post fire control
 - * once fire is out, vent all the windows/doors
 - * consider risks if the fire is under control or not in control
- fire/smoke movement through out building, **need to understand how the fire should respond to ventilation to react if the venting strategy doesn't work as expected**
- where the civilians/firefighters are in the building

Based on Department

- how many companies are responding?
- what is the staffing on each rig? (3 or 4 fire fighters)?
- how long before more units arrive?
- what are the capabilities and limitations of the department?

Vertical Venting

- "up and out"
- consider first if possible
- Used to create better conditions for search and hose operations, during overhaul, to slow the horizontal spread of smoke.

Horizontal Venting

- "out the side"
- most common, easy and efficient, hose team calls for additional vent points.

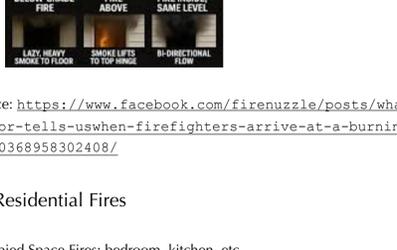
Anticipating the Fire's Reaction

Suggested size up approach: Read like a book (hold up your hand if you need to)

1. Start at upper third



2. Middle third

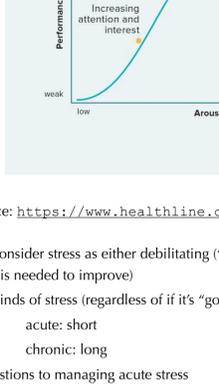


3. Bottom third



Img Reference: <https://www.fireengineering.com/firefighting/house-fire-101/>

Smoke Movement



Img Reference: <https://www.facebook.com/firenuzzle/posts/what-smoke-at-the-door-tells-uswhen-firefighters-arrive-at-a-burning-home-the-do/780368958302408/>

Types of Residential Fires

- Occupied Space Fires: bedroom, kitchen, etc.
- Unoccupied Space Fires: walls, attic, etc.
- Both

Consider what the burning material is for each (insulation vs. a couch)

Additional Material

- YouTube video they showed with the flashover

Building Better Firefighters

Speaker: Kevin Housley, ifcraftsmanship@gmail.com

BLUF: Building more resilient firefighters means adjusting the culture to manage stress and healing more proactively.

Key Ideas



Img Reference: <https://www.healthline.com/health/yerkes-dodson-law>

- Can consider stress as either debilitating ("destress") or enhancing (some level of stress is needed to improve)
- Two kinds of stress (regardless of if it's "good" or "bad" stress):
 - * acute: short
 - * chronic: long
- Suggestions to managing acute stress
 - * Explore breathing strategies
 - * Breathe in through nose, at the top of the breath, breathe a bit more, then exhale through either nose or mouth
 - * Breathe in for X seconds, breathe out for 2X seconds.
 - * Rest is important
 - * celebrate the wins
 - * turn off email notifications when not at work
 - * balance — you need to be able to function in 5th or 6th gear **at times, but not all the time**
 - * Analogy: Your daily driver rarely needs new tires but a race car needs them all the time.
- "self-determination", focusing on using stress to enhance skills, has three aspects
 - * autonomy: do you feel like you have control/say in what you do (ex. Reading a book because you want to not because you were told to)
 - * competence: can you do what is needed (i.e. on the fire grounds) — a lot of our training is based on this.
 - * relatedness: group dynamics, do you enjoy who you work with? do you trust them?
- "mental agility", self-regulation of stress
 - * physiology: breathing exercises
 - * thinking: what you think matters
 - * optimization:
 - * monitor/evaluate yourself
 - * written goals (not just individuals but organizations too) — doesn't need to be annual (new year resolutions), monthly or weekly are good frequencies to set as well
 - * feedback
 - * needs to be specific
 - * needs to aim to be helpful (criticism vs. feedback)
 - * a way to ask for help
- Implementation to Fire Training: Training needs to be
 - * purposeful: repetition, variation, representativeness
 - * deliberate: focus on specific goals and improvement, receive immediate feedback, get out of comfort zone (reminder: stress can be an enhancer, if you are scared to do something, do it more).

Additional Material

- Book: "Called to Greatness" by Alex Averbach
- Podcast: "Emergency Mindset" with Dr. Dan Dworkis