

Cheers to a Safe and Happy New Year!!

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If you are reading this article today, you have survived another year and are about to embark on a new one. January is a very special month – it is the first month of the New Year, it is one of seven Gregorian months that are 31 days in length, and it is named for the Roman God, Janus, the gate keeper for the gods. Now before I lose you completely, let me explain what this has to do with the fire service. Janus was a prominent figure in Roman times for beginnings and endings. He is depicted in statues with a face looking backward to see where he had been and a face looking forward to watch where he is going. This January, take a moment to reflect on where your department has been. Whether your department has celebrated its centennial anniversary or has just opened its doors, a path has been traveled. Now turn and face the future. The future does not just happen. The future is formed from the steps you choose to take - today. Whether you are Chief of the department or a newly sworn in Probie, the path for your department already exists. Where you go from here is up to you – where will you take your department in 2009?

Year after year, firefighters and emergency workers die in the Line of Duty. In fact, the number of line of duty deaths has not decreased significantly despite our best efforts to make firefighting (an inherently dangerous job) safer! We train more than we ever have, we wear the latest and greatest in PPE, we paint the stripes on our trucks at just the right angle and we have even changed the colors and order of the lights in our light bars, and yet, we still are attending the same number memorial services for the same number of fallen heroes this January as we did last January. Common sense tells us that this should not be the case, but yet the numbers do not lie. I can tell you with confidence that 2009 is going to bring many challenges to department administrations; hard times are upon all of us. The pressure of doing more with less is not new to the fire service and it will continue to hinder us now. Embrace your challenges whatever they may be - do not let difficult times deter you from your hopes for the future. You may have to alter your path in ways you did not foresee or progress more slowly than you planned, but the point is to still move forward. To quote Franklin D. Roosevelt, “We have to do the best we know how at the moment...If it doesn’t turn out right, we can modify it as we go along. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

Try something in 2009 no matter how small. Develop a new policy to better your department or revise an old one. Look at where your department has been and reflect on what worked AND what did not work AND learn from it! Share it with your brothers and sisters. Most importantly, keep trying to move forward in 2009. Be Safe!