

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## *It Worked For Me* by Colin Powell

### Why Read *Make Your Bed*?

*"I have learned from most of the people I've met, and I have tried to inspire the people I have led. Life and leadership can't be about me. They have to be about us. They have to be about people."*

*"Obedience alone may get the job done, but it probably doesn't inspire commitment to the job. It doesn't necessarily inspire pride in the work or the product or a passion for excellence. These come when followers feel they are part of a well-led team. And this comes when they respect their leaders, and when they believe they are respected by their leaders. They have to know they are valued"*

*It Worked For Me* is a book that shares the leadership and life lessons, notes, observations, and insights that Colin Powell has acquired over a lifetime of experience in the military, the State Department, and his personal life. It's full of short stories and ideas about being a good person as well as a good leader. Most of the leadership lessons that Powell shares are drawn directly from his military and national security experience, but translate well into the wildland fire leadership environment.

This book is especially valuable because of how it's written. The points are made clearly, and usually demonstrated with a short story from the author's experience. Each chapter tackles a single point or idea, and reads more like a story shared between friends than a leadership document. While some of the chapters, especially toward the end, tend to drift into subjects that aren't particularly relevant, more often than not there is at least one good idea to be found in each chapter of the book. This really is a book with a large number of leadership tips and tricks around every turn of the page. There really is no single point or set of guidelines about leadership to be found; rather, the book is a collection of a lifetime's worth of lessons on leadership.

As you read through the book, take the time to reflect on the author's stories, and think of similar experiences you've had or heard about. Even if the settings of Powell's stories are more frequently an office setting than the field, the leadership and life principles are the same, and most can be applied in any setting, be it personal or professional. This is a book that should be on every fire leader's bookshelf, simply because it is full of good advice for anyone, at any stage of their career.

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

**Main WFLDP page:** <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

## *It Worked For Me* Discussion Questions

### **Part One: The Rules**

Most of the examples in the book are from the author's military and political experience in what could be called "upper management." How can these examples be translated and put to use on the fireline or other wildland fire leadership setting? Which of Powell's 13 Rules stood out to you? Why? Do you see any common ground with good leaders you know? How about in your leadership style/method?

### **Part Two: Know Yourself, be Yourself**

Oftentimes fire leaders discount kindness and empathy as soft words for weakness in a leader. What is Powell's attitude about kindness and leadership? Does it make for a weaker or stronger leader? Why? Chapters eight and nine talk about how the military can work to diversify an individual's experience and knowledge. How can you work to diversify your own knowledge and experience? The chapters also talk about "growing leaders." How can we in the wildland fire organization "grow" leaders? At what levels? How can a firefighter type 1 (FFT1) grow leaders compared to a fire management officer (FMO)?

### **Part Three: Take Care of the Troops**

How do you approach trust when entering a new leadership role (FFT1, ICT4, DIVS, etc) with people you may not know well or even at all? How do you earn respect as a leader? How does Powell talk about addressing differing personalities and leadership skill sets in his organization? How can you work with your group of differing personalities and skill sets? How are those differing skill sets needed within your fire organization?

### **Part Four: Fast Times in the Digital World**

Leadership often involves keeping up with technology. How should a leader look at technology as a part of leadership? How has technology changed how we in the fire environment do our jobs in the past 100 years? 50 years? 10 years? What are some potential downsides to keeping up with the latest and greatest advances? In chapter 20, Powell talks about speaking to different audiences during media interviews and briefings. While his examples are pretty specific to the political and military side of government, how does that idea of being aware of who your audience is apply to wildland fire leadership? For example, a fire leader could have an audience that consists of: 1) the people you talk to directly; 2) the people watching and listening to you talk with others; 3) other crews and groups within your organization. The thing to consider is that your words and actions will travel beyond your immediate circle... What audiences do you have in your leadership role? In your followership role? How can Powell's 15 points on how to deal with the press apply to fire leadership?

### **Part Five: Getting to 150 Percent**

What parts of the author's tips for his new aides stood out to you as being relevant in a wildland fire setting? How can "one team, one fight" apply in our interagency fire community? How can it apply within your own organization? What does the story of Pee

Wee Preston (chapter 23) tell us about training, especially for the unexpected? How does the Army AAR process described by the author compare to the AARs we do in wildland fire? Are they better or worse? What can Powell's ideas about indispensable leaders mean for us in fire organizations that see much less turnover in some key positions than the military organization he references?

### **Part Six: Reflections**

Much of the last section of the book is the author's personal reflections on his time as a Presidential advisor, but he talks about "taking charge" and "if you break it you own it." While the examples he gives are a bit far-fetched when compared to wildland firefighting, how can these principles apply in your leadership role? At the end of the book, Powell talks about leadership being about "us" rather than "me." How does that align with the leadership principles of your organization? How does that align with your leadership style?