

Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



Team of Teams by Stanley McChrystal

Why Read *Team of Teams*?

“Leading a team of teams is a formidable task – much of what a leader must be, and do, has fundamentally changed. The heroic ‘hands-on’ leader whose personal competence and force of will dominated battlefields and boardrooms for generations has been overwhelmed by accelerating speed, swelling complexity, and interdependence. ... We have to begin leading differently.”

“... We found that, alongside our new approach to management, we had to develop a new paradigm of personal leadership. The role of senior leader was no longer that of controlling puppet master, but rather that of an empathetic crafter of culture.”

Team of Teams is a book about a set of leadership principles learned, honed, and perfected by a Special Forces Joint Task Force in Iraq. It's a great book for leaders working with diverse groups in multiple locations, and anyone looking for ideas on how to foster better communication and collaboration among teams in a larger organization.

It's book for new and seasoned leaders, and a book for followers. It contains many keys for success that can be applied, no matter what level of leadership you're at today. You don't have to be a commanding general, fire management officer, or chief, you can still learn from the ideas that the author present on how to bring the advantages and skills of small teams to larger groups.

There are several videos on the book available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Stanley McChrystal - Listen, learn.... then lead (15 minutes):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmplMt95ndU>
- **The illusion of being connected – Gen. McChrystal | TEDxMidAtlantic (12 minutes):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVzcGhZ8Aeg>

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.nwccg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

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

Team of Teams Discussion Questions

Chapter One: Sons of Proteus

There's always talk of new technology or new tactics being the answer to most problems we face in wildland fire, but do we ever consider revamping how we are organized? Do we look at revamping our culture? Has our task (fire management) changed over the past 50 years? Have our organizations changed with it?

Chapter Two: Clockwork

What do you think about Taylor's approach to efficiency? Is there "one best way" to manage fire, and fire organizations? Are there aspects of managing a fire crew or program might benefit from scientific management? How about aspects where scientific management might not be a good way to approach the task?

Chapter Three: From Complicated to Complex

Early in the chapter, the author lays out some ideas about complexity and complication. Is wildland fire leadership complicated or complex? Do we sometimes use complicated solutions to complex problems? How can technology or "big data" help or hinder operations in complex environments?

Chapter Four: Doing the Right Thing

Is your organization "agile and resilient?" Why or why not? What could you do to make it more agile and resilient? What are your thoughts on the authors take on efficiency and effectiveness? How can this tie in with other efforts to create resiliency or "nimbleness" that your agency may be pursuing?

Chapter Five: From Command to Team

What's your take on the command versus team examples at the beginning of the chapter? What do you think about the examples in the "Get a Swim Buddy" section? Could you apply the CRM principles and training from the aviation world in your organization?

Chapter Six: Team of Teams

How does the author differentiate between a command of teams and a team of teams? How does your organization, unit, or crew compare? What can you do to get past that barrier of "everyone else sucks?"

Chapter Seven: Seeing the System

What do you think of the section on the "Need-to-Know" fallacy, including the soccer team example? How does your team approach "shared consciousness?" What did you think about the author's definition of the difference between "education" and "training?"

Chapter Eight: Brains Out of the Footlocker

How do you share information in your organization? How can information sharing be a powerful leadership tool? What do you think about the briefing model (short update followed by time for discussion) that the author describes?

Chapter Nine: Beating the Prisoners Dilemma

Do things like detailing or sending folks to work with other crew types build better relationships in your organization? What did you think of how the task force selected “LNOs” for their assignments? What leadership traits did Conway show in the “Chicken sandwiches and trash” example?

Chapter Ten: Hands Off

Has increased communication ability on the fireline – cell phones, text messages, better radios, and even real time video and images – changed how decisions are made in your organization? How does the idea of “discretionary power” factor in the wildland fire leadership setting? How can you empower leaders and followers in this environment? What did you think of the Ritz-Carlton example?

Chapter Eleven: Leading Like A Gardener

As a leader or follower at any level, how can you work to “craft culture?” At what point should a fire leader start to think about being a gardener instead of a chess master? What do you think of the author’s practice of “thinking out loud?”

Chapter Twelve: Symmetries

What do you think of the idea of “if it’s stupid and it works, it’s not stupid?” Can you think of any mental models in wildland fire that could use some change? How about in your immediate organization, unit, or crew?

Chapter Thirteen

The Thirtymile fire undoubtedly had an influence on many firefighters, and even changed how we do business in some ways. Have you done the staff ride or read the book by John Maclean? Does reading the author’s experience add to or change your understanding of what happened? Why is it important to review incidents like this, even 15 years after it happened?

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

What do you think about the author’s take on fuels in the urban interface, and the Yarnell fire? Have you ever felt pressured to take certain actions because of the values at risk? What lessons have you taken from the Yarnell fire?

Chapter Sixteen

How has technology changed since you started fighting fire? Do you carry any equipment now that was unheard of ten or twenty years ago? What tools do you think you’ll be using ten years from now? Is all technology good, or can it cause a distraction from the “basics” of the job? Can technology by itself make the job of fighting fire safer? Why or why not?

Chapter Seventeen

While this chapter is mainly talking about smokejumpers, many of the things the author mentions apply to all firefighters. We work long hours in difficult conditions, spend a lot of time traveling, have strong work ethics and sometimes have oversized personalities, and usually earn little recognition from the general public. What made you choose fire as a job or career? Is that reason any different than why you've stayed in the field? What challenges have you faced – physical, mental, relationships, etc. – during your career? How have you overcome the challenges that come with the job?