

My Way Or The Highway!

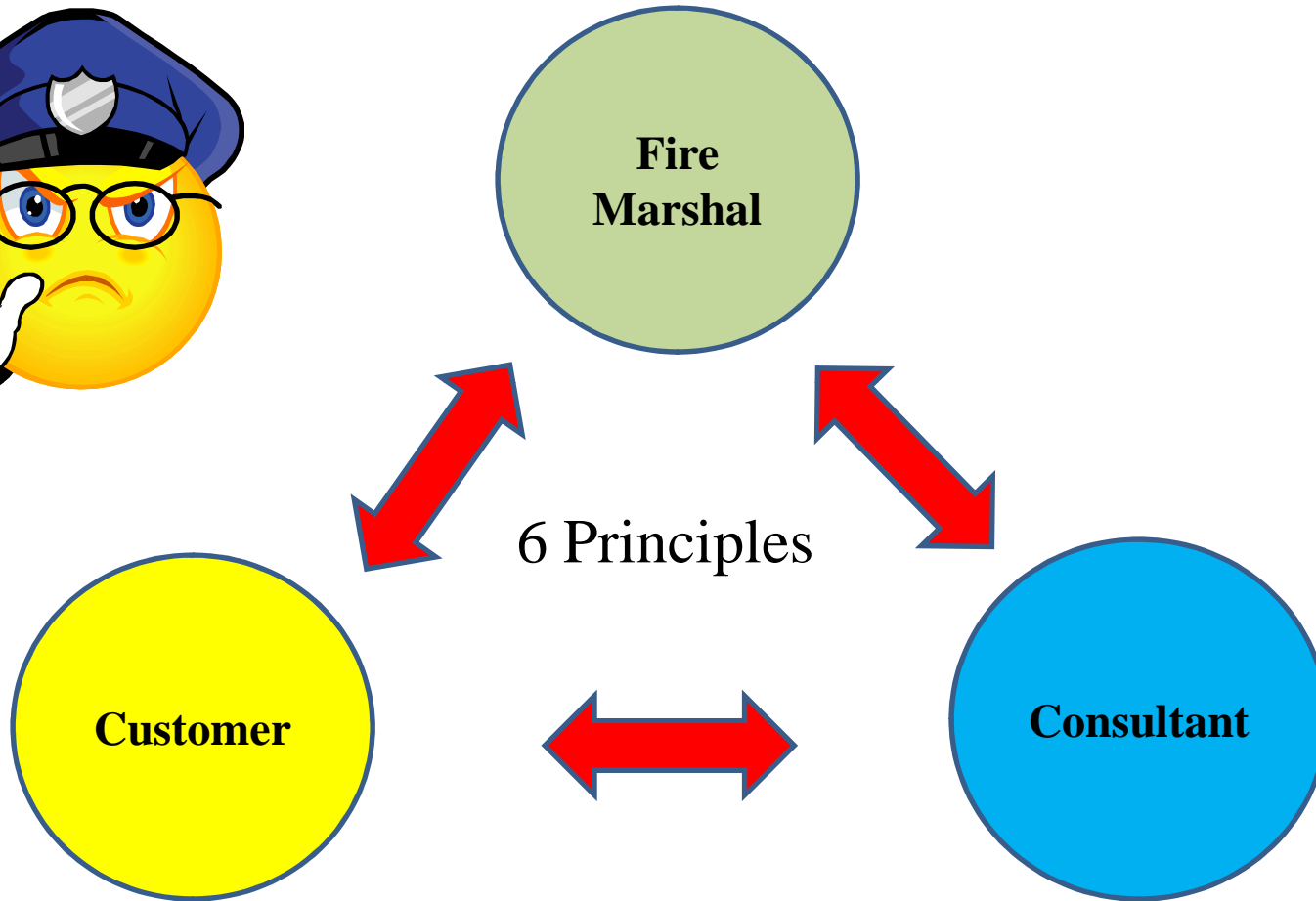
*How to Enforce The Code without Pissing
Everybody Off in the Process!*

State Fire Marshal's Association
Austin, Texas
October 2009



Kevin Baum

But Code Enforcement is Different!



My Way or the Highway!

Who Cares About Customer Service Anyway?

- Since 2002, public confidence in government decision-making has dropped from 59% to a dismal 26% (and is still going down)
- Fully 81% of the public considers ‘government’ to be responsible for the current economic crisis and its attendant consequences
- In general, people’s trust of institutions of authority (government *and* industry) is dropping at an alarming rate

So What is Good Customer Service?

Particularly as it relates to Code Enforcement?

- Qualities of Good Customer Service:

- They listened to me
- They solved my problem
- They went overboard to help me
- They communicated freely & honestly with me
- They smiled, laughed and were human & approachable
- They called me back & followed up with me
- They admitted it when they were wrong...
- They were fair



- Nobody seems to be able to define it, but we all know *bad* customer service when we see it...

Kevin's 6 Principles to Enforce the Codes without *Pissing Everybody Off* in the Process

- 1) Pay Attention to Intention!
- 2) Play Fair!
- 3) Beware Familiarity!
- 4) Explain Yourself!
- 5) Don't Blame the Chief!
- 6) Stand For Something!



My Way or the Highway Pal!

Pay Attention to Intention!





Pay Attention to Intention!

- A single-minded focus on adherence to a set of RULES (or the letter of the code) robs you of your ability to become flexible...to compromise...and to work with your customers to fulfill INTENT!
- Nothing is worse than ridiculous adherence to a set of rules that do not apply to a particular situation! (*Because I said so!*)
- Rules mongering feels and looks a whole lot like mindless bureaucratic control...
- A Pedant is somebody with a fixated obsession with rules:
READ: A ***BUREAUCRAT!***

Attention to Intention!

- To determine Intent ask yourself two simple questions:
 - What is the **Why** behind the Rule?
 - Can the **Why** be satisfied with a compromise or alternate solution?
 - If the answers are **Yes**, then be flexible!
- Avoid the temptation to get wrapped up in your authority, especially if the customer is getting agitated (*“Are you talkin’ to me?”*)

Pay Attention to Intention

Repeat after Me...

Unnecessary Adherence to a Set of Rules...

Stinks!





Pay Attention to Intention!

Principle Number 1: Pedantic adherence to a set of rules in the absence of INTENT only serves to frustrate, confuse and generally piss-off your customers, which leads to BLOWBACK!



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Play Fair!





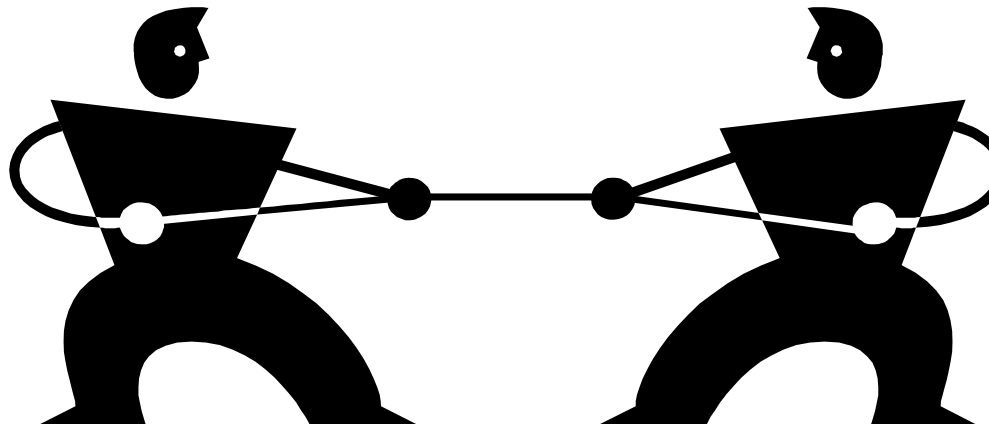
Play Fair!

- Inconsistent application of the codes is the *single most frequent complaint* by customers of code enforcement
- Inconsistency stems from:
 - Lack of knowledge of the codes and their INTENT
 - Lack of training and education of staff
 - Favoritism & ‘Got ya’s’ (Blowback)
 - Variance in application of codes & standards between inspectors and code officials
 - Variance in quality of inspection / code enforcement
 - Absence of oversight function to regulate consistency
 - People like Kevin telling you to Be Flexible!



Play Fair!

Principle Number 2: Inconsistent application of the codes does and will lead to public challenges of incompetence and favoritism; also, you will not get into trouble for being flexible, you will get into trouble for being inconsistent in your flexibility.



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Beware Familiarity!





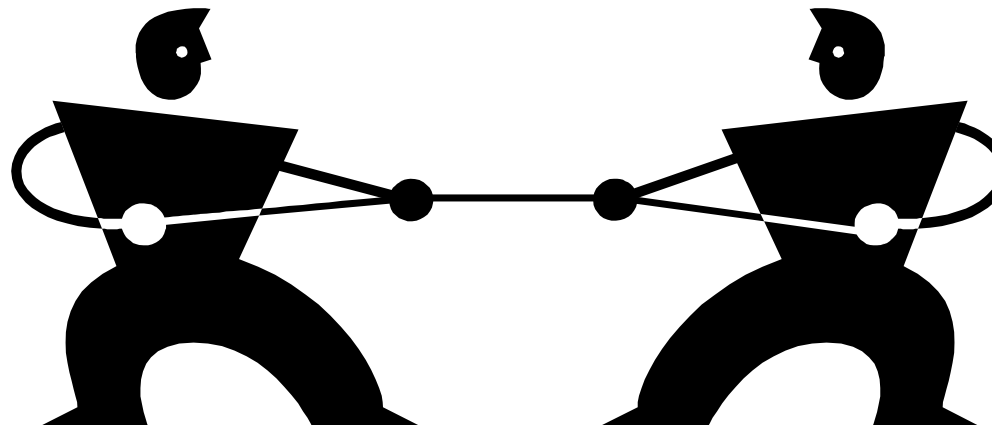
Beware Familiarity!

- Familiarity doesn't necessarily breed contempt, but it does make it hard to do your job
 - Remember the Maxim: *Never* do business with a friend or family member...
- Familiarity opens the door to claims of conflict of interest
- Familiarity opens the door to favoritism, which leads to inconsistency (and we know where that goes...)
 - George Washington...
- Familiarity leads to push-back and challenge, which undermines your genuine authority



Beware Familiarity!

Principle Number 3: Becoming too chummy with the customers you serve will lead to claims of conflict of interest, inconsistency in application of the codes, and inevitably to conflict between you and your customer.



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Explain Yourself!



Explain Yourself!



- Take the time to explain the intent of the codes (your actions) and how it is designed to help the customer: Remember to explain the *Why* behind the *Do*
- Open communication prevents misunderstandings between you and the customer, and eventual conflict/blowback
- Remember that email is NOT a good form of communicating with your customers (especially if understanding is critical), nor is the cell phone...

Explain Yourself!

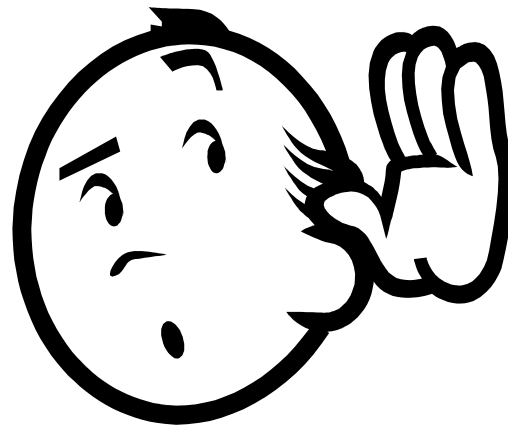
- Remember the Four Key Objectives of Communication
 - 1) To be understood (willingness)
 - 2) To be accepted (trust)
 - 3) To get something done (action)
 - 4) To understand others (empathy)
- Listening is a part of communicating!





Explain Yourself!

Principle Number 4: In the absence of clear, consistent, honest, and open communication on what you are requesting and WHY, your customer will write their own script of your intentions, and it will almost always be wrong (if not hostile).



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Don't Blame the Chief!





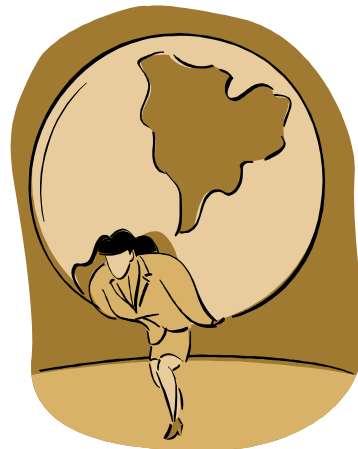
Don't Blame The Chief!

- The quickest way to destroy your credibility is to hide behind somebody else's authority
- The quickest way to destroy trust between colleagues is to ascribe 'blame' to somebody else for your actions
- Don't blame the 'codes' for your actions, rather explain the *Intent* behind them and why the customer should care
- If you say "I'm just the messenger" then you reinforce that bureaucratic rules run the show, and your customer will question the value of your service



Don't Blame The Chief!

Principle Number 5: If you do not take responsibility for your actions/efforts to enforce the codes, then somebody else will have to carry your weight, which will diminish your credibility, undermine the authority of the system, and confuse (read: piss off) the customer.



Kevin's 6 Principles to Enforce the Codes without *Pissing Everybody Off* in the Process

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Stand For Something!

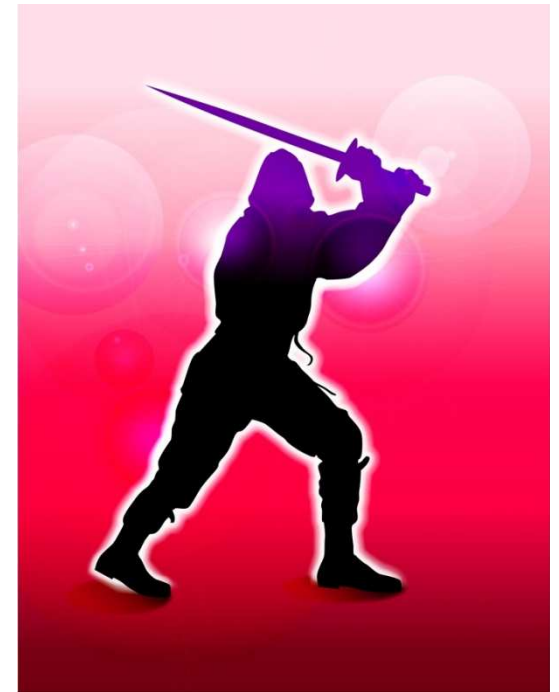


Stand For Something!

The greatest test of courage on the earth is to bear defeat without losing heart. -- R Ingersoll

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan, "Press On," has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

-- Calvin Coolidge



Stand for Something!
A Question for you to ponder....

*Who among you would
like to arrive safely at
your death?*



Stand for Something!

- There will come a point in time when you have to take a stand, even if it is unpopular and will be hard fought, when you do...
 - Make sure your decision is based on sound data, unshakable principles (life safety), and a clear set of achievable goals
 - Make sure you have clearly identified who is opposing you and *why...*
 - If there is middle-ground, find it and focus your efforts there
 - If there is not...determine if you are really willing to die on this hill...



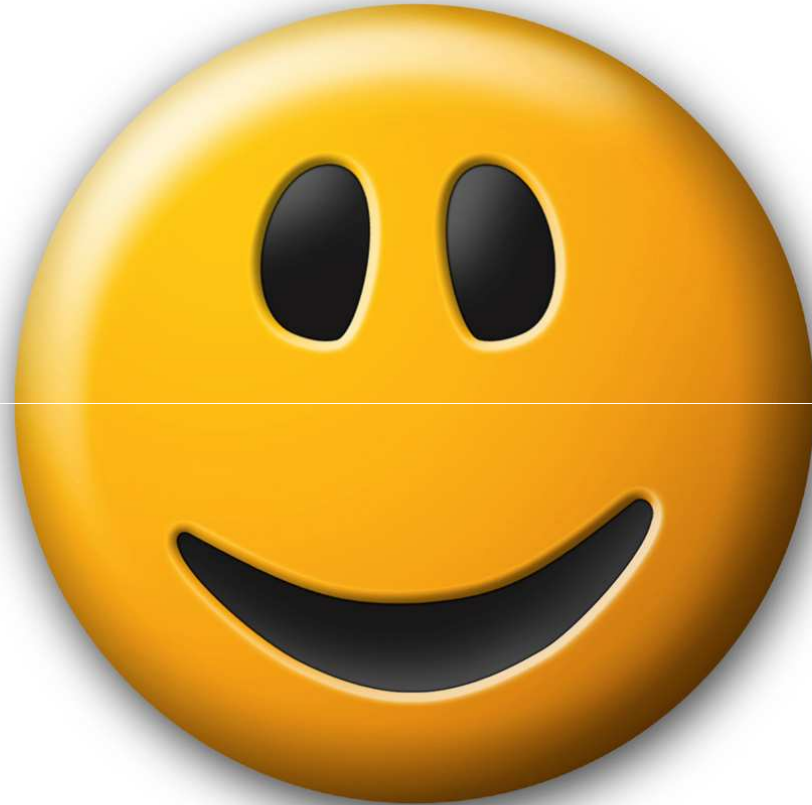
Stand For Something!

Principle Number 6: When you take a stand on unshakable principles, your customers may not agree with you...they may not like you...they may fight you tooth and nail, but they will respect you...



Kevin's 6 Principles to Enforce the Codes without *Pissing Everybody Off* in the Process

- 1) Be *flexible* and open to alternatives
- 2) Be *consistent* in your flexibility *and* your efforts
- 3) Remain *professionally detached*, yet friendly, talkative, compassionate, and approachable
- 4) Communicate, *communicate*, communicate, (never assume the customer understands your actions)
- 5) Take *responsibility* for your actions
- 6) Dare to *do what you think is right*, not what you think is safe



The End