

Resolutions

“Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man.”

— Benjamin Franklin



By Christopher Suprun

As a new year begins, I think now is the perfect time to reflect on where we have been this past year and where we are going. We saw the return of jihadi terrorism at

a level we have not seen since Sept. 11. We saw a domestic terror incident at one of our most hallowed and historic venues in South Carolina. The question is: are we ready?

When celebrating New Year's, we often make resolutions to lose weight, give up cigars or do better about some

weakness. For me, I think the public safety industry's biggest vice might be training.

I am lucky to speak across the country and meet a variety of public safety professionals. Often I see us going through the motions with our training. When I see organizations that are uncommitted to training, I will usually inquire and hear that “we do this every day.” Generally, I do not believe that to be the case, but I do believe that you may be asked to respond to a unique situation. Without preparation, you will find yourself ill equipped to slay the dragon we face.

In the latter's case I pray we do not play like we practice. It will lead to

innocent people being unnecessarily hurt or killed just as quickly as not practicing at all. While walk-throughs have their place, are you really practicing enough on vehicle placement, hose deployment, SCBA failures and cardiac arrest management? These are some of the scenarios where we find ourselves in trouble on the fire ground and in emergency medicine.

Training is tough. It requires us to move away from every day issues like checking apparatus, handling public relations requests and responding to calls. It forces us to recognize that this industry changes almost daily. We have to keep up with those changes or find ourselves unable to answer the call.

Training has to be a resolution we plan to keep in 2016. It makes all the difference in every day performance. Let me use my son as an example. He pitches with both arms like the major league baseball pitcher Pat Venditte. People are always amazed that he can throw strikes at a league par velocity with both arms. Other teams' coaches will come up to me and remark on his talent. They don't realize that his talent is not accidental. It is from training his body to throw with proper mechanics from both sides. His journey to throwing from both sides was not a eureka moment where the clouds parted and a voice arose which said, “Dodge, you will throw with both arms!” He just had a coach who would not allow him to play the infield as a left-hander other than first base. He wanted to play shortstop and thus began a journey where he taught himself to throw right-handed. He has to do double the training to keep up now. The point is that it wasn't a miracle. It was about training.

I challenge each of you to use the same mindset to become the responder you want to be. If you are a firefighter, are you practicing for an SCBA failure? The life you save may be your own. If you are a medic, are you working with the EMTs in your system to practice pit crew CPR to provide the best chance of survival for your patient? If you are an officer, are you keeping up with building trends so that you can ensure your crew's safety on firegrounds? Are you a stern father figure who requires your crew to be seat belted while making runs? Do you require each of your crewmembers to have their reflective vests on every call on a roadway?

These are the areas where our careless and inconsistent attitude toward training leads us down a dangerous path. Let's make 2016 a year where we follow America's first firefighter Ben Franklin and be at war with our own vices as they relate to training.

Mr. Franklin also wished for peace between neighbors. While he was a statesman and diplomat, I believe his comments related as much to your literal neighbors as far off foreign allies.

During my career I have found myself on several large incidents requiring incident command systems involving multiple jurisdictions. While this may have been the luck of the draw, I took an important lesson away. Partnership makes much more sense in public safety than in any other industry. We are not competing tax firms or big box stores, but a fraternity, responding when our neighbors need us. I have yet to be off duty and come upon an emergent situation where I was not immediately greeted as a friend when I identified myself as a firefighter/paramedic.

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Chris' son pitching left- and right-handed.



Despite this, in my travels I hear about how the other department down the street does it wrong. My question is do they do it wrong, or just different? Is there an opportunity to learn something new or perhaps even teach something new to them? I am often asked about differences in approach, but I believe in the responder community we are much more similar than we are different. My uncles and cousins in New Jersey would often take me to the fireman's parade in late summer to see the apparatus when I was a child. Engine companies, ladder companies, and rescues — they would parade near the beach. What I could never understand then was why were engines red and blue and green and honestly, ugly lime green. What I didn't know then, but I know now, is every one of those crewmembers wanted to help their community whether their company colors were red or blue or green. The color of their fire engine mattered less than the care in their heart. It took me awhile to overcome my own preconceived notions of what a fire engine should be and look like, but I realized it was how we responded to our neighbors that mattered.

In 2016, instead of bashing the fire company or rescue squad down the street, perhaps we could engage in some joint training. This will make us ready for the day we will need to know our strengths and weaknesses. Make 2016 a year in which we reach across borders to find out how we can help one another. If you need to show who is better, go have a charity softball game where proceeds support MDA or a

youth injury prevention program.

Finally, this is the year you make yourself better. There is no time like the present to examine your own skill set, training, and physical abilities and ask how you can do it better.

If you barely passed the ropes portion of your fire program, perhaps now is the time to work on that again. If you know you struggle with lung sounds, again, you can work on that so you are prepared instead of waiting for someone else to handle it.

If you need motivation think no further than our brothers with the fire department of New York 15 years ago this September. The radio crackled during the event and on it was "This is truck three and we're still going up." While they were literally climbing the stairs, we need to be going up too.

We need to train hard, because every day is training day. Heaven forbid we face another tragedy like 9/11, but a house fire is just as significant to the occupant. We will face natural disasters again, and saving our neighbors is what we do when we are called to serve.

We should reach out to our neighbors to find out we can help them, both our neighbors we respond to and those we respond with.

Finally, let 2016 be a year we look in the mirror and find ways to be better responders for our communities, our fraternity and ourselves.

Christopher Suprun is a 20-year firefighter/flight paramedic. In addition to his day job responding to calls, he currently serves as Director of Education and Outreach for the Never Forget Foundation.

TEMS

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reading journals such as the Journal of Special Operations Medicine, or training opportunities provided by the Department of Homeland Security. Protocols and products are always evolving as the military continues to research. When a TEMS medic gets complacent with education, they may find that the tools they utilized have been overtaken by something they are not proficient in or their tools are no longer supplied.

The final step a TEMS medic can make in training is to prepare and pass the Certified Tactical Paramedic (TP-C) exam by the Board of Critical Care Transport Paramedic Certification. The TP-C exam is a challenge, but maintained by those who are dedicated to providing the best medical care in tactical environments.

From the outside, it may be difficult to see all the things that a tactical medic

does on a call. These highly dedicated medics are involved in providing care during high stress and high threat environments. TEMS has evolved to meet the needs in training those professionals to perform their best under those challenges.

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