

NO-GOOD DUDES: BUILDING A FIREHOUSE CULTURE WHERE GOOD ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

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THE MYTH OF THE 'GOOD DUDE'

Everyone in the fire service knows a “good dude.” At first glance, that might sound like a compliment, but it’s not.

A “good dude” isn’t defined by competence, reliability, or professionalism. It is a description for a firefighter who has fallen into the “I got mine” mindset, the one who’s

fun to hang out with at the station but is not the person you trust when lives are on the line.

Good dudes come in many forms, from all ranks and experience levels. They might be likeable but unmotivated, out of shape, unwilling to train, or simply disconnected from the mission. They may look the part and talk a good game, but when the heat is high and visibility is low, they can't be counted on.

You've probably heard it before:

"That captain's radio traffic was embarrassing—good dude though."

"That firefighter can't throw a ladder or search properly after nine years—good dude though."

"That guy's so out of shape I can't believe he passed his physical—good dude though."

If that sounds familiar, your department likely has a few good dudes. But if you're still reading this, there's a good chance you're not one of them. You're a No-Good Dude.

THE RISE OF THE 'NO-GOOD DUDE'

No-Good Dudes are mission driven. They care more about performance and outcomes than popularity or likes. They learn continuously, aren't afraid to fail, and hold themselves accountable. They show up fit, physically, mentally, and professionally. They lead through work ethic, attitude, and conviction, regardless of rank or assignment.

Being mission driven means more than knowing what the mission is—it is about living it. Most fire department mission statements include saving lives and property. No-Good Dudes fulfill that mission because they believe their preparation, training, and actions will be the difference between life and death.

CORE TRAITS OF NO-GOOD DUDES

1. Mission Driven

No-Good Dudes show up ready to perform. They train with purpose, understand the "why" behind every skill, and measure success by outcomes, not comfort or convenience.

2. Team Oriented

They want their crew to succeed. They don't hoard information, tear others down, or act superior. They set high standards for themselves and their team, and they work every

day to exceed them. To No-Good Dudes, expectations are opportunities to perform at their best.

3. Lead by Example

Leadership isn't about rank, it's about action. No-Good Dudes never ask something of others they wouldn't do themselves. You wouldn't take fitness advice from someone who's out of shape, and you shouldn't take fireground direction from someone unwilling to work alongside you. Real leaders pull on their turnouts, pick up tools, and show others the way.

4. Vulnerable and Coachable

No-Good Dudes are willing to fail, learn, and grow. They aren't driven by ego or insecurity. Their openness to feedback sets the tone for those around them; it tells the crew that learning never stops. Not only will you see these firefighters seeking knowledge and training in their own organization, but you will see them hunting for knowledge and skill outside the boundaries of their fire department.

5. Trustworthy

Trust is dependability in action. The public expects the fire department to respond quickly, professionally, and effectively. No-Good Dudes don't cut corners. They don't cheat in training or at the kitchen table. They build trust by doing the right thing, every time for their customers, their crew, and their community.

CREATING A CULTURE OF NO-GOOD DUDES

The notion of "No-Good Dudes" isn't just about individuals, it's about [culture](#). Strong leaders set expectations and create an environment where accountability and training drive performance.

Early after the No-Good Dudes movement began at my firehouse, I took a vacation day from work. I woke up in the morning to a phone call from the captain who had filled in for me. He called to tell me that they had a tough house fire the night before and that the crew performed seamlessly. His words to me are the biggest compliment that I could receive. "Whatever you are doing with these guys, keep doing it, they were incredible" Creating a culture of training, performance and outcome is something that should live on no matter who is piloting the engine.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Company-level expectations help shape behavior through purpose and intent. In our house, every crew member signs our shared expectations board. It is posted where we all see it daily. These standards are measurable, objective, and agreed upon as a team.

One of ours reads: “Achieve a primary all clear on working structure fires in six minutes or less.”

That goal comes from data in the Firefighter Rescue Survey, which shows that victims removed within six minutes have the highest survival probability. We train and plan for that outcome long before the tones drop. We won't hit that mark every time as conditions and obstacles vary but the target keeps us focused and improving. That's how culture changes: by measuring what matters.

TRAINING WITH PURPOSE

Training is the foundation of trust. No-Good Dudes train constantly, through table talks, walk-throughs, hose pulls, search drills, ladder throws, and more. Training should be relevant, realistic, and yes, fun. It's never punishment—it's preparation.

If you see someone standing around in pants and a T-shirt barking instructions to firefighters in full gear, you've just spotted a good dude. No-Good Dudes put their gear on and train. They know every skill is perishable and that mastery of the basics is what saves lives.

In my department, new firefighters rotate stations every three months. Each time a new member joins my crew, we start the same way: coffee, a conversation about expectations, then everyone including the captain takes a hydrant for time. The slowest buys a soda for the crew. Some might ask why a senior firefighter or officer needs to do this. The answer is simple: No-Good Dudes lead by example. No one is above the basics, and no one asks for effort they are unwilling to give.

New England Patriots coach Mike Vrabel once said, “You can't win with a bunch of good dudes.” The fire service is no different. Our communities depend on firefighters with the character to learn, train, and perform when it matters most.

No-Good Dudes carry the fire service forward. They teach, lead, and uphold standards. They drive change from within not through titles or talk, but through action.

The sign at our firehouse says it all:

No-Good Dudes: because good is not good enough.



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