

# Firehouse.com WEEKLY DRILL

## DRILL # 50: ETHICS

### Introduction

Here is a hot topic for the fire industry! *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1980) defines ethics as:

1. A principle of right or good conduct, or a body of such principles.
2. The study of the general nature of morals and of specific moral choice.
3. The rules of standard governing the conduct of the members of a profession.
4. Any set of moral principles of value.

This leads me to think about morals and how they relate to ethics. The two go hand in hand and are the basics by which we should all live by. Morals are defined as:

1. Of, pertaining to, or concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong; ethical: moral attitudes.
2. Expressing or conveying truths or counsel as to right conduct.
3. Capable of conforming to the rules of right conduct: a moral being.
4. Morals, principles or habits with respect to right or wrong conduct.

If we have not learned from the past, we should have because “we are under the watchful eyes of the public all the time.” The last thing we want to see is an article in the paper reporting one of our members has acted in such a way that it puts tarnish on our department.

So the question is should we teach ethics to our members? Many municipalities have some type of codes or standards that they expect from their employees. I know the city I work for has a “Code of Ethics” by which employees are held accountable.

What are some areas that we might find in the fire service that relate to ethics? Decision-making is part of our job where we should be thinking about ethics.



In general, we all have depicted an image of how we should act both on the incident scene and in the fire station, however, we probably don't always act the way we should for one reason or another. Let's look at ourselves from the standpoint of the community we serve; is the image they see the same as ours?

The question then is how do we identify ethics and handle our affairs in the most ethical manner possible? The best way is to examine the judgments or actions we are undertaking and see if they have the potential to harm someone or something. Another way is to decipher if what we are doing has the possibility to violate what we consider to be right or good.

Basically, what we are doing is forcing ourselves to think about what other “ethical” people in our society think about what we are doing. Remember the moral aspect within the definition.

So when we really break it down, we should be doing the right thing all the time. We need to ask ourselves: “Is what I'm doing the right thing to do” and “If it's the right thing, then how should I be acting?” We need to apply these acts each time we respond to an incident, so we not only look the part, but also act the part of the professionals that we are.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick