Social Media as a tool for BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

LT. JONATHAN BAXTER
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER, SFFD
FIRST, A LITTLE ABOUT THE
SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT...

1780 Firefighters, of whom about 300 are female.

47 Engines
FACTS...

22 Ladder Trucks
47 Stations, including 3 at San Francisco International Airport
FACTS...

54 Ambulances
FACTS...

2 fast-response rescue boats.

3 fireboats.
NOW, A LITTLE ABOUT ME...

- 1989 Entered public service, working for Sonoma County Fire
- 2000 Joined the SFFD
- 2000 – 2006 Worked in stations all over SF as a Firefighter/Paramedic and Rescue Swimmer
- 2006 – 2016 Volunteered for assignment to Station 1, one of the Nation’s busiest stations
- 2008 – 2016 Temporary Lieutenant on Fire Suppression Apparatus
- Appointed by then Chief Hayes-White as Department PIO
- May 2016 Promoted to Lieutenant
DEVELOPING OUR AGENCIES VOICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In the constantly-changing landscape of social media, a few reliable stalwarts have remained over the years. We have relied heavily on these platforms and, in some cases, have developed collaborative relationships.
HOW DID WE CREATE A FOLLOWING?

- Understanding what the community expects
- Making information available quickly, conveniently, and for free
- Providing (non-emergent) information to generate interest
- Honesty while delivering difficult news
- Allowing the community to see themselves and interact on our social media platforms
COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES

How do we take complex incidents, conditions, events and:

- Make the details digestible to the pertinent members of our diverse community?
- Create concern without creating worry, or – worse – panic?
- Stay transparent while respecting privacy?
- Get the info out fast?
- Not "overshare"?
HOW DO I EXPLAIN THIS??

GEARY STREET GAS LINE EXPLOSION
6 FEBRUARY 2019
"What the BLEEP does all that jargon mean?"

- Take agency lingo and translate it into widely-accessible language.

  ***That does not mean “dumbing it down…”***

- Repeat important messaging for emphasis and absorption

- Use anticipated clarifiers: “What I mean by that is…”

- Get the **Right** information to the **Right** people at the **Right** time.
BE HONEST: the balance between saying too much and saying too little

Anticipate the “need-to-knows”

Be willing to admit that an incident is dynamic, developing and that frequent updates will come as we learn more
Getting the **RIGHT** information to the **RIGHT** people at the **RIGHT** time.

- “Does this pertain to me?”
- “This sounds serious. Should I leave/stay/pull my kids out of school?”
- “What part of town is this in?”
- Example: Tsunami alert will mean different things to residents living on the Great Highway VS Bernal Heights
ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUR AGENCY

- Why do we need a PIO, anyway?
- Wouldn’t this money be better spent hiring more staff?
- How many is too many?
- Is it feasible for PIO responsibilities be adjunct to my full-time job function?
- How many languages does our PIO speak?
- The public thinks we just ride around in new Explorers. How do we let our community know how complex and important our work is?
WHAT WORKED?  WHAT DIDN’T WORK?

Challenges often arise among a wide array of community members, city agencies, media, political entities, and special interests.

How have we worked with all the players to develop a messaging system to rapidly deploy information when it’s needed most?
CHALLENGES WITH CONSTANT MEDIA INFORMATION REQUESTS
KEEPING THEM HONEST: THE BODY CAMERA

Accountability. Yours, mine, OURS.

Prevent false reporting. “Umm…That’s not what I said…”

Transparency: “Don’t take my word for it. Check out this footage.”

EDUCATION.

Posterity: creating an archive of our work, events, valuable footage, etc.
HOW DO WE GET THE TOOLS WE NEED?

CREATIVITY
Making a dollar out of 15 cents: where does the money come from?!

CREATING A TEAM
More ears, more eyes, more coverage = more information to share with the public.
A satisfied public sells the program for you. It’s easier to ask for what resources we need from our agencies when our communities are asking as well…
QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION?
On behalf of the San Francisco Fire Department, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet and discuss ways to help keep you, your families, and your colleagues informed, in touch, and safe in the event of an emergency or disaster.

Community is our best resource, and I am honored to serve this community.