

## Intuition vs. Communication

by Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC

Firefighters from Carol Stream, Wheaton, Winfield, West Chicago, Bloomingdale, and Roselle gather regularly for trainings and simulations, as a part of the West Suburban Fire/Rescue Alliance. Since its inception in 2012, the Alliance has remained committed to the idea of partnering neighboring fire departments for faster, safer emergency responses. About a year ago, I had the honor of attending one of the Alliance's cooperative training sessions in which they, together, tackled a commercial fire.

Battalion Chief Hugh Stott of the West Chicago Fire Department invited me to step inside the building and see, firsthand, what a firefighter experiences in a standard commercial fire. Since commercial fires are more dangerous than residential fires, training sessions like this are invaluable for sharpening a firefighters' ability to navigate large spaces, use the most effective tools and tactics, and communicate, especially with members of other departments.

Upon entering the building, the crew first checked the cameras. Cameras weren't part of the fire service until about 10 years ago, but their use has revolutionized the fire service, just as the widespread adoption of radios improved the fire service in the 1980s. Cameras can help the crew discover the origin of the fire, and watching the heat flow can reveal the safest ways to navigate the fire. Most importantly, cameras can show if there civilians in the building, who are in need of help.



As I watched these firefighters make their way through the building, I noticed that they used a variety of techniques to orient themselves to their surroundings since visibility was limited. Because it is easy to become disoriented in a large commercial building, the team members were careful to stay together to avoid losing anyone. They carried a rope with evenly-spaced knots, indicating how far into the building they were. As they moved forward, these firefighters tapped the floor to make sure the floor wasn't hollow. As a standard safety measure, they kept the hose to the right of every room, close to the wall, so they could easily find the exit route. Meanwhile, the RIT team stood by, prepared to rescue if an emergency arose.

After the team cleared the building, they debriefed the training and pinpointed errors in order to eliminate potentially life-threatening mistakes in future fires. Surprisingly, firefighters felt like it took forever to get around the building, but the "Plans Chief," who was in charge of timing the mission, pointed out that it took the crew only eight seconds! They were precise and methodical, moving slowly to move smoothly, which ended up being quicker than they expected.



**Jada Hudson** is owner of Hudson Clinical Counseling and an LCPC and CADC serving women, children and firefighters. She creates a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere where first responders can find and employ strategies for healing. Contact Jada at **630.815.3735** or **hudsonclinicalcounseling.com**.

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This precision is exactly why the West Suburban Fire/Rescue Alliance performs these joint trainings. When fighting a fire, there is no room for error. One wrong move can cost a life, so these firefighters must use their tools, instincts, and familiarity with firefighters within the Alliance to navigate as safely as possible.

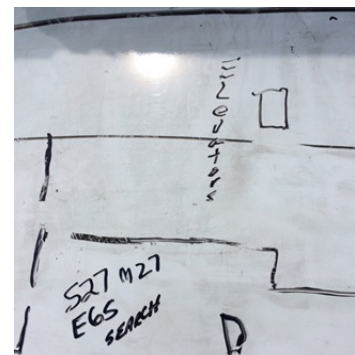
### Senses and Equipment

As I observed the firefighters at work within the building, Wheaton Fire Chief, William Schultz, explained what was happening and made sure I didn't fall. I noticed how stressful it was being inside. Completely unable to see, firefighters had to rely entirely on other senses and equipment.



Throughout this exercise, I watched and saw that each firefighter's senses collaborated with his equipment. For example, firefighters could tell how big a room was by spraying water and counting how many seconds it took to hit the opposite wall. The seamless integration of senses and equipment made firefighting look like art. Battalion Chief Hugh Stott explained, "I look at our job like a trade. I think there is science and cognitive skills, but there is also a sense and a feeling for what's going on based on experience and prior mistakes."

Firefighters have to have practice, strength, cognitive thought, ability, and innovation during every fire. There is no room for a bad day! Firefighters have to be entirely present, putting aside any personal stress for the sake of the mission. Always bringing their "A-game," they behave like professionals – intuitive, intelligent, resilient, and determined. In the fire service, intuition reigns and communication is short, direct, and effective.



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### Communication in Fires and Communication at Home

But, fighting fires is not like normal life. Transitioning from fighting fires back to home life can be abrupt because of how different the two worlds are. In a fire, stress, adrenaline, setting aside of personal feelings, and command communication drive every movement. In normal life, life and death are not at stake. Normal life is less about intuition and senses. Normal life involves feelings and communication with words, especially at home.

Skills like intuition, which are used and valued in the fire service, may not necessarily be an asset in a marriage. Two people coming from two perspectives grow closer by talking. So, assuming your spouse is on the same page as you may simply create conflict. The intuition of the fire service is admirable and strong, but the communication and openness of healthy relationships is equally admirable and strong. Cultivating both is the goal.



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