

Do You Have His Back?

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

On Sunday, October 23rd, the Arizona Cardinals played the Seattle Seahawks in a riveting game that ended in a disappointing 6-6 tie. As I read a recap article about this game, the author sparked the idea for this article. This game was officially the lowest-scoring NFL game that ever went into overtime, and during all this playtime both teams missed what would have been game-winning field goals.

Though Chandler Catanzaro of Arizona had already scored two field goals – one from 40 yards and one from 45 yards – he missed a 24-yard field goal with only 3:26 left in overtime. Then, Stephen Hauschka of Seattle missed a 28-yard field goal. Both teams stood, shocked. Both coaches were obviously disappointed.

During their post-game interviews the teams' coaches had distinctly different responses to their kickers' shortcomings:

Cardinals head coach Bruce Arians shook his head, stating, "Make it. This is professional, this ain't high school, baby. You get paid to make it." Meanwhile, Seattle head coach Pete Carroll responded, "[Stephen Hauschka] made his kicks to give us a chance and unfortunately he didn't make the last one. He's been making kicks for years around here ... but he's going to hit a lot of winners as we go down the road here. I love him and he's our guy."

It's obvious which team players would rather be a part of. One coach threw his player under the bus. One coach had his player's back.

Brotherhood in the Fire Service

As with sports, the fire service is filled with high-pressure situations. But, in the fire service, a misstep in a high-pressure situation can mean the difference between life and death. And sometimes, the wrong combination of information, equipment, people, and timing can make a mistake inevitable.

Think back to a mistake you made. Remember how you felt and how you wished you could make it right. Your peers can relate. They've been there. Experience puts firefighters in a unique position to help their peers recover from mistakes. That's why they call it the "brotherhood."



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Getting back to the brotherhood starts with your word choice. When a peer makes a mistake, how you respond can make the difference between him feeling safe to talk about it and him feeling ashamed enough to bury the feelings. Use words to encourage and build him up rather than tear him down. This is your team! You want him to win.

The brotherhood is broader than just one department. It spans the entire fire service. Peer support exists to bring back the brotherhood. Even if your department doesn't have your back, peer supporters do.

Like Coach Carroll, we should be asking, "Do I have his back?" Rather than throwing your peer under the bus with a sideways joke or comment, consider how you can encourage him. Try to point out where he did succeed. Share your personal experience with something similar. Remind him that everyone has bad days. Keep him focused on the long-term game. Speak positively about his mistake to others. The job of a fire fighter is hard enough without peers tearing you down. Do you have his back?