



LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY  
I/O Psychology

# Unmasking the Rescuer Personality

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# My History

- I started fighting fire in 1990 as a volunteer
- Hired by Texas City, TX in 1993 - 2002
- Taught Fire/EMS in AR 2002 – 2005
- Hired by Ruston, LA as Fire Chief in 2005
- Resigned in 2010, MA in I/O Psych
- Currently working on PhD in I/O Psych



# Does this look like fun?





Why does firefighting appeal to some people more than others?

Personality = Individual differences

If there is a difference, there must be a way to measure it.



If it can be measured,  
it can be predicted



If we can hire based on these  
predictions,  
we should increase job  
satisfaction.



Increased job satisfaction,  
should increase job tenure  
= less turnover cost



# Turn over cost to Fire Department

- Bunker Gear = \$ 1,500
- Academy Training = \$ 2,000
- Cost to Hire= \$ 1,000
- Personnel cost= \$ 10,000
- \$ 14,500

Conservative Estimate

Not including Paramedics that don't finish class





# Mitchell's Rescue Personality

- Emergency Services Stress: Guidelines for Preserving the Health and Careers of Emergency Services Personnel.  
(Mitchell & Bray, 1990)
- Concept of a rescue personality stressed that unique personalities needed treatment from someone that understood their job demands



# Mitchell's Rescue Personality

- Inner-directed
- Action-oriented
- Obsessed with high standards of performance
- Traditional
- Socially conservative
- Easily bored
- Highly dedicated
- Like control
- Enjoy being needed



# Critics found no empirical evidence to support

- Studies were done on all job incumbents
- Studies were done on job incumbents of firefighters, police, and EMS
- Do all police officers become cops for the desire to help people?



# My Rescuer Personality

- Desire to help people
- Desire to respond to more emergencies
- Extreme or active sports off duty
- Resilient or Hardy personality



# Sample of Firefighters

- 127 Firefighters completed the survey via a Facebook advertisement
- 9 females, 118 males
- 27 career, 79 Volunteer, 21 both (>1 Dept.)
- Tenure: 1-5 yr = 24%, >20 = 33%
- 44% do not drink, 61% do not use tobacco
- 49% exercise at least weekly
- 32% have been firefighters > 20 years



# Method

Respondents were asked questions about:

- Demographics
- Cardiac Related
- Parasympathetic Emotions
- Work History
- Hardiness
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



# Results – Rescue Personality

- Respondents that would be classified as having a Rescuer Personality indicated a high level of agreement with these statements :
  - I participate in extreme sports or dangerous activities when off-duty.
  - I consider myself an adrenaline junkie.
  - I would enjoy responding to more fires.



## Results - Hardiness

Rescue Personality – correlated with Hardiness

- Overall: Pearson .236,  $p < .01$
- Extreme Sports: Pearson .281,  $p < .01$
- Adrenaline Junkie: .184,  $p < .05$
- Enjoy More Fires was not significant





# Results – Parapathic Emotions

- Parapathic Emotions - are enjoying negative emotions
- Titanic?
- Rescue Personality correlated with parapathic emotions: Pearson .275,  $p < .01$ .
- Rescue Personality had a negative correlation with negative emotions.



# Limitations

- Respondents were recruited through Facebook, so this is probably not a representative sample of firefighters
- Basic Correlational Research



# Future Research

- This study needs to be expanded to find other aspects of a Rescuer Personality Profile to develop a tool to help identify firefighter applicants that should be a better fit for the job.



Questions or Comments?