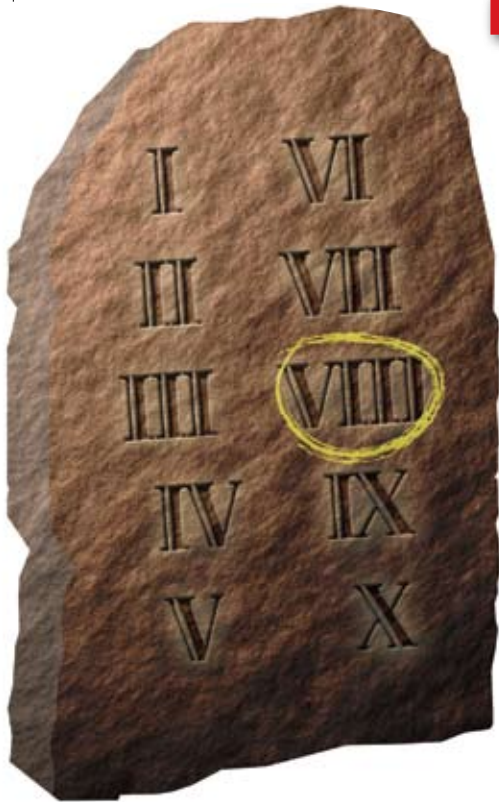


By MARK EMERY



The Ten Comma

Command-ment VIII: Thou Shall Ensure That Eight Assignments Are Made Early

In the March 2007 issue of *Firehouse*®, Command-ment I identified the responsibilities of command and the management of strategy, resources and risk. This month, Command-ment VIII will establish a strategic framework for managing strategy, resources and risk.

Command-ment VIII is not about strategy and tactics; Command-ment VIII is about using a structured, systematic process for establishing a baseline standard of care for your firefighters. This baseline standard of care will help you manage strategy, resources and risk.

The strategic framework is comprised of eight assignments:

1. Base or park (a place for apparatus)
2. Staging (a place for personnel)
3. Standby Team (two-out, until a RIT is deployed)
4. Rapid intervention team (more fireground life insurance)
5. Backup team (fireground life insurance)
6. Division (span of control)
7. Safety officer (still more fireground life insurance)
8. Rehabilitation (fireground “wellness” program)

Consider these eight assignments as *strategic frontloading* for an intelligent and safe fireground operation. Not only will this strategic frontloading help you manage strategy, resources, and risk, Command-ment VIII will establish a baseline standard of care for taking care of the most valuable “thing” on the fireground: your firefighters.

Never forget the most important of my Command Caveats: “If you need it and it’s not there and available, it’s too late.”

Not to worry – Command-ment VIII is easy to obey. Let’s start with the first assignment.

1. Base or park apparatus. Base is not a new building fire resource management concept. Every fire department in North America *bases* apparatus in the street and *stages* personnel two floors below the fire during a high-rise operation. Because fire apparatus make a mess on expensive Italian terrazzo floors, not to mention they won’t fit in the elevators, this high-rise resource management model

cannot be changed. Resource management at all other building fires *can* be changed; thus, *base* apparatus and have personnel report to *staging*, even if the staging area is in a parking lot, the front yard across the street or temporarily at the command post. Doing so makes resource management at square-foot firegrounds consistent, not to mention that it works.

Used proactively, the concept of base and park will prevent *apparatus* freelancing;

Establishing a Strategic Framework for Managing Strategy, Resources and Risk

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Eight Assignments Early

1. Base (or Park)	5. Backup
2. Staging	6. Division/Group
3. Standby	7. Safety Officer
4. Rapid Intervention	8. Rehabilitation

Basic framework for managing Strategy, Resources, and Risk!

nd-ments

Of Intelligent & Safe Fireground Operations

used proactively, staging will prevent *personnel* freelancing. By assigning base (or park) in tandem with staging, you will quickly get your arms around *all* apparatus and personnel – *everybody* has been given an assignment. You have to admit, it is a simple yet powerful resource management model.

“Park” is a general, non-specific location for apparatus to park when they arrive. When directed to “park,” each company officer on each apparatus decides where to park. The essential caveats of “park” are:

a. All company officers will ensure that they park as close to the incident as possible.

b. An access lane will be maintained so that a ladder truck, medic unit or water tender can get in and can get out.

c. Your department has specified (before the incident) which apparatus will ignore park and continue to the scene.

For example, you may decide that when all apparatus are directed to “park,” the first two engines, the first-due ladder truck and the first-due command rig would continue directly to the scene; everybody else would park based on caveats “a” and “b.” Caveat “c” will be different for each fire department, the point being that you will normally need more people than apparatus on scene. Too many apparatus on scene get in the way and can prevent needed apparatus from getting in or out of the scene.

Once park is assigned, companies don’t simply announce “on scene” when they arrive; arriving companies announce that their assignments are complete: “Engine 1 at park.”

“Base” is a specific location where apparatus park. The incident commander decides and declares the location of base. When assigning apparatus to *base*, the word “base” is always followed with the word “at.” Examples: “All apparatus base at the corner of 5th and Main” or “All ap-

THE TEN COMMAND-MENTS

- I. Thou shall have ONE competent incident commander.
- II. Thou shall maintain teams of at least TWO personnel.
- III. Thou shall recognize THREE situations that kill firefighters.
- IV. Thou shall ensure that FOUR sides are seen and compared.
- V. Thou shall not exceed a span-of-control of FIVE.
- VI. Thou shall operate within one of SIX operational modes.
- VII. Thou shall perform the SEVEN-step action plan process.
- VIII. Thou shall make EIGHT assignments early.
- IX. Thou shall address three strategic priorities with NINE tactical objectives.
- X. Thou shall evaluate the situation, mode and plan every TEN minutes.

paratus base at the Safeway parking lot” (announced through a dispatcher so that the assignment is repeated). Depending on the neighborhood, you don’t necessarily need to assign somebody to babysit apparatus at base. As with park, the point is to prevent apparatus from descending upon and obstructing scene access.

Organizing resources is an essential component of competent incident management. If you don’t have a structured, systematic process for assigning and organizing apparatus in the street, how are you going to organize and assign firefighters on the fireground?

2. Stage personnel. Now that you have given an assignment to *all* responding apparatus, it’s time to give an assignment to *all* responding personnel. Using this model, you will never hear “Engine 12 approaching the scene. Where do you want us?” or “Ladder 1 on-scene. What’s our assignment?” or, worse yet, freelancing apparatus will arrive, obstruct access to the scene, and each team will jump off the rig, grab favorite tools and self-deploy (freelance). It is impossible to achieve, let alone maintain, tactical accountability should this be allowed to happen. If it is allowed to happen, what exactly would you be in command of?

As an alternative, take the pressure off yourself. Quickly get control of all apparatus and personnel with a few simple words. Even if you have nine alarms, the Vatican Swiss Guard and a brigade of the French Foreign Legion responding, base (or park) and staging will quickly get your arms around *all* apparatus and *all* personnel – *everybody* has been given an assign-

ment. As a bonus, you have created a few moments of command post discretionary time to ponder, plan and get organized.

Combined with base or park, the assignment of staging will sound something like this: “All apparatus park. Personnel report to temporary staging at the command post.” In one concise sentence, you’ve got your arms around every single responding resource. Think about that; as the incident commander, you have quickly achieved control of *all* resources. Achieving tactical accountability is now a reality.

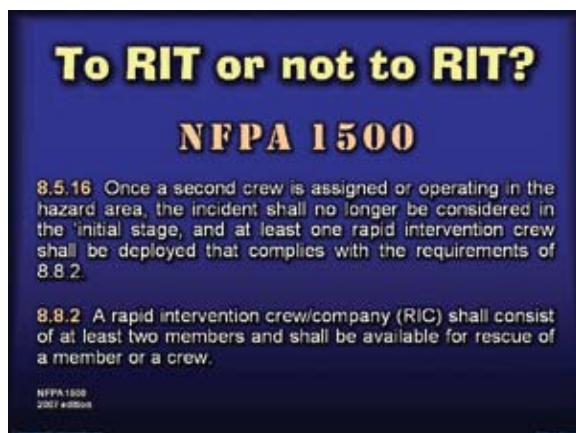
If you don’t need a full-blown staging area, including a staging area manager, retain staging responsibility – albeit *temporarily* – at the command post. This provides all sorts of strategic benefits. If you use passports for achieving tactical accountability, you have now established a systematic process for obtaining passports before they freelance into and around the hazard area.

Another benefit is that you don’t have the pressure of conveying tactical assignments using a radio: “Engine 42, on your arrival blah, blah, blah; Truck 31, when you get here, will you blah, blah, blah; Squad 51, when you arrive, I need you guys to blah, blah, blah.” Instead, tactical assignments are made face-to-face, initially at the command post. Thus tactical accountability – who, what and where – is easily facilitated and guaranteed. As a bonus, and at no extra charge, *freelancing* is *virtually eliminated*.

Sure, this process takes a few extra seconds, but when your firefighters represent the most value on the fireground, who cares? I will *never* lose sleep when

8.5.12.1. No one shall be permitted to serve as a standby member of the firefighting crew when the other activities in which the firefighter is engaged inhibit the firefighter's ability to assist in or perform rescue, if necessary, or are of such importance that they cannot be abandoned without placing other firefighters in danger.

Granted there are few, if any, documented cases where a standby team saved the life of a firefighter; however, I believe the real value of waiting for deployment of a two-out standby team – before transitioning to offensive – is *time*. Rather than the pressure to initiate a frenzied stampede to the fire, waiting for a standby team creates a moment of discretionary time for the first officer on-scene; this moment of discretionary time allows the fire officer to calm down, identify problems and develop an initial action plan. It frees the first fire officer on scene to function as a strategic



resource, not a task-level resource. Knowing what the problems are and drafting an initial action plan will definitely alter the entire strategic course of an incident and will undoubtedly help protect firefighters.

4. Rapid intervention team. Think of rapid intervention as fireground insurance. You wouldn't dream of driving your car without insurance; you wouldn't dream of owning a home without insurance. You hope you'll never use the insurance, but you'll always have your car and your home

covered by policies. Firefighters are exponentially more valuable than your car and your house combined; make sure your firefighters are covered by fireground "insurance."

Don't allow your rapid intervention team (or RIC, or FAST, or whatever you call it) to do nothing. Have a rapid intervention team stabilize utilities and use its hoseline to gross decontaminate firefighters as they withdraw from the hazard area.

5. Backup team. Backup refers to an offensively deployed backup team. A backup team has one responsibility: *protect egress*. The backup team protects egress with the following two caveats: a charged hoseline that is equal to or greater than the hoseline size of the team being backed-up; and the backup team chases (follows) but never quite catches (overtakes) the team it is backing-up.

Consider a basic house fire: Engine 1 is on floor 2 working to confine and extinguish fire in a bedroom; Engine 2, the backup team, is at the top of stairs watching their back. As the Engine 2 firefighters

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ascended the stairs, they made sure there was no evidence of fire on floor 1; at the top of the stairs, Engine 2 used a thermal imaging camera (or punched a ceiling hole) to diagnose attic conditions; finally, Engine 2 made sure the hallway was stable and there was no evidence of rapid fire growth behind Engine 1. Thus, Engine 2 has addressed each of “The Three That Kill” (Commandment Three, May 2007 *Firehouse*): fire above, fire below and a hostile smoke/fire

event such as a flashover.

I believe a backup team is more valuable than two-out or rapid intervention; a properly positioned and disciplined backup team can help ensure that a rapid intervention team was a waste of a perfectly good company. RIT is *reactive*; backup is *proactive*. Backup is not addressed by the NFPA.

A backup team provides additional insurance

for your offensively deployed firefighters: By combining assignments 3 (standby), 4 (rapid intervention) and 5 (backup), a fireground risk-management evolution emerges. This strategic evolution will provide an increased standard of care for your offensively deployed firefighters.

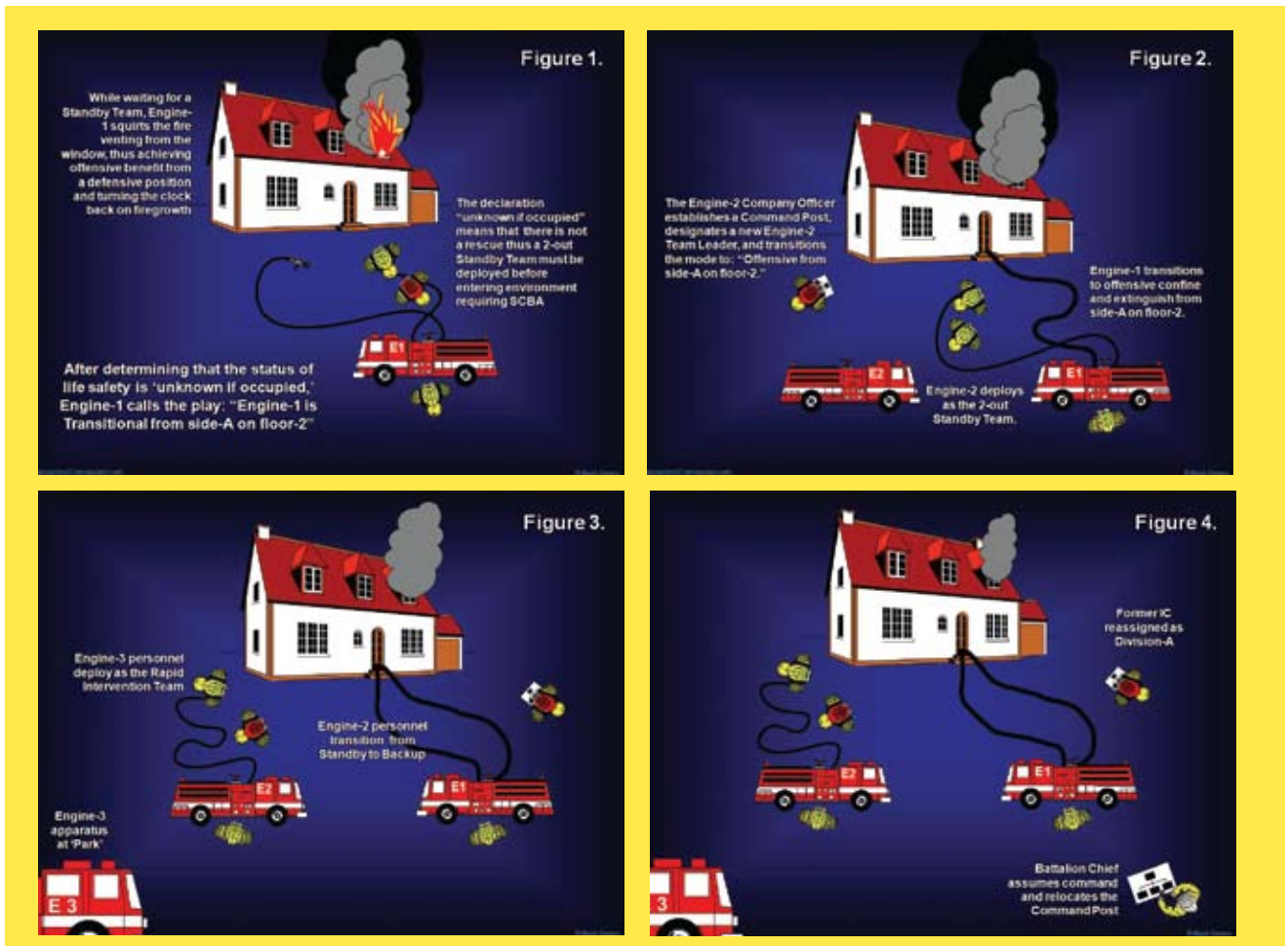
This strategic evolution can be depicted by the following fireground “formula”:

$$\text{RIT} = \text{SB} + \text{BU}$$

This shorthand represents the fol-

lowing fireground progression: Once the *rapid intervention team* is deployed (equipped and in position), the two-out *standby team* dons facepieces and enters the structure with a hoseline as the *backup team*. The net benefit of this risk-management evolution is that you end up with a *rapid intervention team* fulfilling two-out “standby” responsibility and a *backup team* protecting egress. So in one whack, RIT = SB + BU, you are addressing the OSHA two-in/two-out mandate, NFPA 1500 for Rapid Intervention, and you are providing a consistently high standard of care for your offensively deployed firefighters. As a risk-management model, RIT = SB + BU could ensure that your firefighters don’t have to perform ground-ladder carnival stunts to “save themselves” from a “with-out-warning” hostile fire event.

6. Division supervisor. As the incident commander, proactively managing tactical span of control is essential (see Commandment Five, June 2007 *Firehouse*). To proactively remove companies



and teams from the incident commander's plate, the assignment of a *division* is (usually) a smart assignment. At 99.99% of the square-foot firegrounds in North America, assigning "operations" (section chief) is incident management overkill and is a reliable indicator that the incident commander doesn't know how to use the system. There's a lot of unused ICS chart between operations section chief and Engine 1. Bottom line: Supervising a bunch of teams from the command post will quickly morph any *incident commander* into a *division supervisor*.

Command-O-Quiz

Question: No matter what you're being called on the radio, and no matter what the letters on your colorful vest read, how can your true ICS position quickly be revealed?

Answer: Listen to the radio.

Discussion: It doesn't matter what you are being called on the radio, likewise it doesn't matter what the letters read on your colorful vest, your *true* ICS position can quickly be revealed by monitoring radio traffic. If you are the incident commander and you are talking to companies and teams, you are functioning as a *supervisor* – probably a division supervisor. (OK, for all you ICS purists out there, probably functioning as a task force leader. However, if there is not a "task force" on scene to lead, the next position up the ICS food chain that talks to companies and teams is a division/group supervisor.)

To focus on *strategy, resources* and *risk*, the competent incident commander delegates tactical responsibility as quickly as possible. As the incident commander, don't allow yourself to morph into a division or group supervisor. Systematic, proactive, square-foot fireground delegation will free you to function as the incident commander and retain operations section (and planning section, and logistics section) responsibility.

At most building fires, a division supervisor will be your routine assignment. Take, for example, "Division A"; during a routine house fire, three or four teams might be assigned and working on floors one and two, but they will be reporting to "Division A." This works well based on the following reality check:

a. At temporary staging (at the command post), teams are directed to report to "Division A for assignment." In this context, "Division A" is used as a geographic designator for where the team will report,

not necessarily where it will work. Once each team arrives at Division A, it surrenders its passport to the supervisor and receives, face-to-face, its "what and where" (objective and work location). Thus, the division supervisor uses the passport to identify who the team is and notes what it will be doing and where it will be work-

ing. If the supervisor is real sharp, on-air time of entry also can be noted.

b. Without the division supervisor the teams would be reporting to the command post, which means the incident commander is functioning as a division supervisor.

c. Think of the front yard of a house

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or the front of a strip mall as equivalent to the pressurized stairwell used during a high-rise operation. The division supervisor would be in the clean stairwell, not with teams operating in the hazard area. If a division or group supervisor is in the hazard area with the teams being supervised, you have a supervisor by name only. A super-

visor should never be part of a team; that role is reserved for team leaders.

7. Incident safety officer. Establishing an *incident safety officer* and providing for responder *rehabilitation* is not only good business, it demonstrates that you care about your firefighters. I'm not going to attempt to explain how to be a competent


safety officer, you can get that information from sources better than me, including books, manuals, training, and by achieving Fire Department Safety Officer Association (FDSOA) certification. However, I will offer that if you monitor "The Three That Kill," make sure rehab has been established and is being used and ensure that utilities are stabilized, you are making a difference.

8. Rehabilitation. *Rehabilitation*, or simply *rehab*, is the last of the eight assignments. Once again, I'm not going to attempt to explain how to provide rehabilitation for your firefighters. There are great resources available for this, including two publications that share the same title: *Emergency Incident Rehabilitation* (second edition) by Edward T. Dickinson, MD, NREMT-P, and Michael Wieder, MS, CFPS, and published by Fire Protection Publications; and *Emergency Incident Rehabilitation*, published in 1992 by the U.S. Fire Administration (www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/FA-114.pdf).

I will say that rehab should *always* be addressed early. Rehab, ideally co-located with staging, provides fluids, rest, medical evaluation, nutrition and sanitation. The late great Francis Brannigan once said, "Buildings are disposable, firefighters are not disposable." Professor Brannigan was talking about value.

Call to Action

Once you know what the problems are, have determined who and what has the most value, have drafted an action plan and have declared the operational mode, obeying Commandment VIII will establish a strategic framework on which you can execute an intelligent and safe fireground operation. By obeying Commandment VIII you will provide a minimum standard of care – fireground insurance – for your firefighters. Commandment VIII conjures a final Command Caveat: "Always take care of your people first."

A competent incident commander routinely uses a structured and systematic process for managing strategy, resources and risk. Although structured and systematic, the process must be flexible. However, by always starting with this structured, systematic process as your baseline, you'll discover that the baseline will serve you well most of the time. Structured and systematic Commandment VIII strategic frontloading will establish a consistent baseline standard of care for the most valuable "thing" on the fireground: your firefighters. 



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