

## In My Opinion...

Dean Says:



Challine Kieber

### **“The Tyranny of the Urgent: An Antidote”**

“How’s business?” We often ask each other this question to gauge the other’s take on the current business climate. We also ask it to provide a self-check on whether what we experience each day matches up with our peers. And, we ask it to judge whether others have the same kinds of trials and tribulations that we do. One dear friend of mine always replies, “Any more work and I would need a clone!”

This friend operates a medium size fire alarm and security installation business. He has focused very narrowly and purposefully on industrial clients. He rarely takes on what most would consider ordinary commercial business. And, he almost never installs a system in a residence, unless it happens to belong to the CEO of one of his industrial clients. He has specialized in providing very carefully crafted solutions to his industrial clients. He has found an antidote to the tyranny of the urgent.

One of the characteristics that sets this man apart from many of his peers: he has decided to learn as much about fire protection as he can. Not content to only have knowledge about fire

alarm and security alarm systems, he has made a significant effort to learn as much as he can about the other aspects of fire protection. He claims that he has done this in response to hearing one of my lectures, many years ago, about holistic fire protection. In that lecture I suggested that those fire alarm installers who will become the real champions of the industry will be the ones who develop an appreciation for the fact that fire alarm systems only serve as one part of a much larger, integrated, interlocking, and interdependent system of protection for a facility. One can overcome the tyranny of the urgent by taking a holistic approach.

The dictionary defines the word “holistic” as “an approach to systems built on the philosophy that the interacting whole of any system represents more than the mere sum of the system’s elementary parts.” In nature, holism suggests that any living creature consists of more than the mere sum of a creature’s individual parts. In fire protection, holism suggests that the overall system of fire protection for a building consists of more than the mere sum of the parts of that system.

Taking a holistic approach to fire protection, when you supply one of the parts, requires you to learn about and understand the functions of the other parts. Once you gain that knowledge, you can begin to appreciate more fully how your part interacts with the other parts to form a dynamic system of protection for the facility. While the tyranny of the urgent may push you to focus only on your part, the holistic approach broadens your understanding and increases your ability to truly succeed.

By taking a holistic approach, my friend continues to experience overwhelming business opportunities. His plate remains full of new clients. He has many new projects in the works. He has built a solid client base of repeat industrial customers. He has expanded his business in a very thoughtful and careful way. He has built a legacy that will soon pass into the hands of a son. That son has, himself, developed a holistic approach to fire alarm and security systems installation. The resulting profitable business will very likely continue to grow even larger in the days to come. The holistic approach works very well! It actually overcomes the tyranny of the urgent. Here’s another example of how a holistic approach reaps rewards.

Recently the Automatic Fire Alarm Association gave a signal honor, a Lifetime Achievement Award, to Bruce Fraser of SimplexGrinnell LP. I can think of no one more deserving of this honor than Bruce. Throughout his career Bruce has exhibited many sterling qualities that serve as benchmarks to which others in the fire alarm industry should aspire.

I have always particularly appreciated the fact that Bruce has devoted himself to understanding fire protection in the broadest possible sense. While he has always labored in the fire alarm industry, Bruce has always perceived the necessity to become familiar with, develop a knowledge of, an understanding for, and an appreciation of the other systems in fire protection. And, he has exhibited many, many times how that familiarity, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation have made his efforts to design, install, and support fire alarm systems so much more effective.

Bruce Fraser has made his mark on his chosen field. He has also garnered a very great deal of respect from those in the other fields of fire protection. Because he did not limit himself to merely learning about fire alarm systems, Bruce has become a valuable resource to his company, to his associates, and to his customers. Bruce has used a holistic approach to help preserve him from the

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### Dean Says...

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tyranny of the urgent.

The fire protection community, itself, has greatly benefited from Bruce's contributions to the industry. His willingness to share his knowledge with his peers, his friendly manner, his helpful spirit, and his consummate professionalism have all endeared him to everyone who has crossed his path.

Bruce's commitment to taking a holistic approach has earned him a just reward. □

### Wayne Says...

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As a contrast to this company owner, another acquaintance operating a similar business, albeit much larger, requires his salespeople to both work in the field with a journeyman technician and become NICET certified. Working with an experienced technician helps the salesperson to understand the essentials of good workmanship and design practices. It also helps them understand how to apply those techniques necessary to ensure a competent installation. The owner requires each salesperson to achieve a minimum of a NICET Level II, and encourages them to seek a Level III. Maybe the reason his business does so well results from the fact that he didn't forget to train his salespeople?

So is it harder to do a good job today? It is if you don't commit to constant training of your entire workforce. Training is like a fire. If you don't keep adding fuel, the fire will go out. Require all of your employees to receive proper and continuous training. Your employees will feel better about themselves, your retention rates will improve, and your business will be a success. □

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