**Two More Chains**

Summer 2016 ▲ Vol. 6 Issue 2 ▲ Produced and distributed quarterly by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center

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**Issue Overview: See If Your Perspective Might Shift a Bit**
By Brit Rosso, Lessons Learned Center Director

Let’s start this Two More Chains issue off by defining “bias.” The Oxford Dictionary defines this term as “prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.” So when I read that definition, it sure seems like being biased is being “unfair” to others.

Now there are all kinds of bias, right? Think about our line of work in the fire service. What kinds of biases might we have? Let’s start with the “bias for action.” Do you have a bias for action? I sure do, that’s what attracted me to this job. We get to lean forward and go to where the action is. It’s hard for me to see our bias for action in the fire service as “unfair.” But sometimes I wonder if our bias for action can cloud our judgement and decision making when we get to the fire. When we arrive on scene, we have to do something, right?

At the Lessons Learned Center we talk about all kinds of bias: hindsight bias, outcome bias, confirmation bias, sunk-cost bias, etc. I believe that some of our bias—especially cognitive bias—is built-in or hard-wired. It’s part of being human. I also feel that many biases are learned over time. Regardless, as humans we all have biases, some of which are helpful, and many of which are harmful. So now the question is, what do we do about harmful, unfair bias? We could just ignore it and continue to be unfair to others, consciously or unconsciously. Or we could acknowledge it and think about how our biases may affect ourselves and others around us.

In this issue, we provide an opportunity for two firefighters to share their real life experiences and express their opinions about another kind of bias. As you read this issue, try to put yourself in their boots. See if your perspective might shift a bit after viewing our fire service through the lens of these two firefighters.

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**Gender and Leadership in Wildland Fire**
By Rachel Reimer

So what’s the deal with gender, anyways? Why does this matter to us, when we are experiencing our largest fires and longest fire seasons? When there are so many other factors to consider as we step onto the line?

It matters because gender isn’t something that you can turn off. It’s not something you pick up at a safety briefing and then put down again at the end of the day. It’s part of who we are, and it affects how we fight fire, who we choose to work beside when we’re facing down the flames, and who we debrief with over drinks at the end of the day. Let me explain.

**Gender involves identity, but also power.**

By “gender” I mean the ways that we identify ourselves and each other through a flow of creating meaning based on how we position ourselves in relation to each other. Gender involves identity, but also power. You can see gender when you begin to recognize the hidden assumptions we make about ourselves and others. For me this becomes really clear at times when I am considering how to assign tasks on the fireline.

My strongest assumptions come out when there are tasks that require a large...

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**Rachel Reimer is in her fourth season leading an Initial Attack Crew with the British Columbia Wildfire Service. In addition to fighting fire, she rock climbs, backcountry skis, and pursues mountain adventures both in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Her career path before fire included an undergraduate degree in International Development Studies and a research internship with the United Nations in Lebanon. She has lived, worked, studied, or adventured in central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.**

Rachel is currently completing her M.A. in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University, Victoria, British Columbia. The research on her thesis “The Fire Within: Gender and Leadership in Wildland Fire” has been awarded the Canadian federal government’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council grant for graduate scholars. This council’s grant committee also nominated Rachel for the “Nelson Mandela Award” based on her research topic that embodies this man’s values and legacy.

In addition, she has recently united her interests in helping people and adventure by co-founding the non-profit “Open Mountains Project” to facilitate barrier-free access to the mountain backcountry environment for youth at risk.
My Daughter

She’s only two, but everyone can tell she’s “tough.” She constantly climbs and runs and falls down, just like any toddler. It’s a rare occasion for her to be scabbless. People often comment on her “physicality.” “She’s so brave!” “She’s so agile.” Eventually, someone says: “A little firefighter in training!” And my heart sinks.

I understand that in relation to profession, children often follow in the footsteps of their parents. I don’t want my daughter anywhere near this profession. My hesitation has nothing to do with the risk of physical injury or death.

It’s because she won’t get a fair shake.

My daughter will face sexism. My daughter will have to deal with gender bias. I will have to watch her struggle with these issues no matter what path she chooses in life. If she chooses to be a construction worker or an engineer, at least I won’t know all the gory details of how she will be judged and mistreated—all the things I know intimately about the fire service.

Ashamed of Our Culture

I don’t want my daughter to become a wildland firefighter because I am ashamed of our culture regarding women in our ranks.

Wildland fire is filled with amazing women and they have to put up with a ridiculous amount of B.S. They are second-guessed, passed over, mistreated, and talked down to on a regular basis. I want my daughter to be evaluated by her peers on the basis of her performance and her contributions alone.

I don’t want her to be denied an opportunity for no other reason than her gender. I also realize that what I want matters little, for the world is a patriarchy and I’m part of it. But I can still take a swing at it.

The things I hear:

“I don’t hire women.”

“They’re just more trouble than they’re worth.”

“If girls can do it, it’s not tough.”

We are the Problem

Who says those things? Men, that’s who. Face it fellas, WE are the problem. I thought about all this stuff before, but the minute I had a daughter it became personal—and that’s pathetic. The very fact that it took a daughter to reveal my veiled view just goes to show how ignorant most of us are to the existence of our unearned advantage, as well as our active role in maintaining it.

Who am I kidding? I’m trying to connect with a bunch of blindly privileged whiners who vie for victim status every time a female is hired.

Even if the “think about your daughter” tactic did work, we can’t wait around for all the males in the fire service to have daughters so they can half-way empathize with the injustice faced by the women in our workforce. It’s a bad strategy and it’s not going to happen.

We need all men, whether they have daughters or not, to feel this.

Be Better

Believe me boys, you aren’t the only ones who are tough; and tough isn’t the only attribute we want anyway. We want anyone who can swing a tool all day long and still make good decisions when it counts the most. Women can do that every bit as good as men can—arguably better.

Think about your perspective on this subject. Take stock of the words you use and how you interact with the people around you. Women aren’t the only ones we isolate, exclude, and minimize.

Test your behavior against our core values of Duty, Respect and Integrity. Chances are you fall short on this subject. If you fail, study up and test again—growth is painful.

Be the change, Tool-Swingers.
“Most of my crewmembers believed that if a woman could hold her ground on the fireline, if she could hike and crawl and eat smoke just as well as the next guy, then she was welcome.”

Matt Desmond, author

On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters

[Continued from Page 1] amount of physical strength or a more significant skillset, like running a power saw, conducting a burn off operation, or being IC on a new fire.

I notice that I categorize people I interact with based on gender—and that I make assumptions about abilities based on perceptions of toughness or “manliness,” which I simplistically equate with strength. If I need a challenging task accomplished, my first instinct is to ask a male person on my crew to do it.

Last season when I noticed that my first instinct was to do this, I would take a step back and ask myself why my brain is connecting perceived “manliness” with competence.

I began to question my own assumptions. Am I actually making good decisions based on instincts? Is there any real reason why a 6-foot-tall male with a dip in his lower lip and a beard would fall trees better than a 5-foot 6-inch female with blonde braids?

I recognized that in my decision-making there were hidden traces of bias that were based on how I had been socialized growing up, and how wildfire culture had aligned with these biases.

Gendered Division of Labor

As a kid, my dad was the one who had the power saw, the carpentry tools, and the tractor. It was my mom who baked the cookies, prepared lunch, and worked in the gardens around the house.

As a child, I internalized this gendered division of labor but couldn’t deny my wild side. I was 13 when my dad first put a saw in my hands and had me bucking firewood rounds, my chaps folded over and held on with a string because the waist belt didn’t go that small. When I began fighting fire, I considered myself “one of the boys.”

Matt Desmond, author of On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters, wrote about his experiences during four seasons, 1999-2003, on a northern Arizona U.S. Forest Service fire crew. Desmond identified how the rural ways of life, including gendered divisions of labor like the house I grew up in, fit smoothly into the wildland fire culture. Something just feels right when you’re out on the line and your assumptions about who should do what, and what strong looks like, all line up. It’s unsettling to discover that things are different than you thought they were, or think they still should be.

Sense of Privilege Becomes Invisible

When one group of people is the majority in the larger group, their ways of being begin to grow in power. That sense of naturalness, of being right, grows. This is privilege.

When everyone agrees and no one talks about it, that privilege becomes invisible. It is hard for us to see how a certain group of people in wildland fire are enjoying a more natural sense of fitting in, of personal power, feelings of competence, and access to opportunities. It’s like the trail slopes slightly downhill all the time, the saw feels lighter, and the snap of chew in the tin has that much of a sharper ring to it.

Why does this matter? If we all agree and we like the way things are, then why ask hard questions? Maybe the assumptions should stay blindly hidden in the core of our decisions.

Questioning Assumptions

I have begun to question my assumptions because I’m noticing that they don’t fit. I’m still learning my trade, but there have been times when I’ve censored myself in leadership roles because I assume that a taller, stronger-looking, more self-assured male peer would do better at the role than I would. [Continued on Page 4]
“My wife and daughters...they’d rather see me die on top of my white horse than watch me fall off. You say you want us to be vulnerable and real, but c’mon. You can’t stand it. It makes you sick to see us like that.”

Male respondent to female author
Brene Brown, “shame” researcher, in *Daring Greatly*

I’ve watched and learned and recognized that had I been courageous enough to step into the challenge, perhaps I may have excelled.

I’ve also arrived at new fires, gotten out of the truck with my notebook in hand to talk to another fire agency or a rancher, only to have had my tallest male crewmember addressed as if he was the crew leader. There have been many awkward moments on ranches, by the sides of highways or rail lines, even in restaurants when we are away from our home base and I’m footing the bill on the government card. No, that tall dude is not the boss. Yes, I’m the crew leader. The blonde one. A woman.

Fitting into Leadership Roles: Not Easy

These interactions have caused me to feel uncomfortable. Like by simply being me, I am somehow challenging a status quo that I didn’t realize existed. I wonder about my female crewmembers and I hope that they feel inspired to step into leadership roles when and if they are ready. I hope they don’t notice the moments when my courage wilts and my belief in my belonging is shaky at the knees. Those times when I wonder if I can measure up to my male peers in competence, confidence, and cultural ease. If only fitting in were easy. For me, the saw feels ten pounds heavier, the path slopes slightly uphill, and the chew’s run out.

Plenty of Shame Out There

Do you think that because we work in wildland fire, surrounded by mostly men, we would tread gently around things like inadequacy and shame,

*Continued from Page 3*

*There have been times when I’ve censored myself in leadership roles because I assume that a taller, stronger-looking, more self-assured male peer would do better at the role than I would.*

*No, that dude is not the boss.*
*Yes, I’m the crew leader.*
*The blonde one. A woman.*

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What is shame doing to us? And how is it affecting our ability to lead on the fireline?

[Continued from Page 4] Since this is likely a soft spot for most of us? Nope. In fact, it’s the opposite. Recent research on gender and wildland fire has shown that our culture is hyper masculinized—and there is plenty of shame out there. (See C. Eriksen’s Gender and Wildfire: Landscapes of Uncertainty; and S. Pacholok’s Into the Fire: Disaster and the Remaking of Gender.)

But if we think about it for a minute, we don’t need research to tell us this. We know ourselves and we know our own culture. The one thing that no wildland firefighter ever wants to be is weak. I almost don’t even have to say it. We fear being weak more than anything. Why? What is shame doing to us? And how is it affecting our ability to lead on the fireline?

The more shame we feel, the less connected we are to others and to our own feeling of strength. Our ability to connect, to feel empathy, to be a part of a highly-functioning team, are all compromised. If we feel like we have to perform in order to be accepted, we will also force others to perform. This affects how willing we are to take risks, how much we think we can handle on the fireline, whether we will ask for help when we need it, and potentially, whether our crews come home safe at the end of the day.

Crewmember Admits Feelings of Anxiety

At times, as a woman leader, I feel like I have to work twice as hard to prove my worth. I had a new crewmember transfer in last year. Our first fire as a crew blew up before our boots even hit the ground. We evacuated a small First Nations’ community that didn’t have road access (the ferry was down due to high water) and we worked through the night. We fought a backing fire that burned hose. Winds were so squirrely that any aircraft support was ineffective. Both rotary wing and fixed wing resources were pulled off. We were on our own on the south flank for hours, holding it by sheer determination.

A month or so after that fire, we had another new start threaten another community, but were more successful. In the After Action Review, our new crewmember disclosed that he had started to feel anxiety enroute to fires. I listened, and thanked him for his courage. We decided as a crew that we would take a minute to be quiet before tactically engaging on fires, to take a deep breath. I wondered later how my own internal pressure to perform, to prove myself as a leader, might have caused me to push my crewmembers beyond their comfortable limits? I wonder how challenging it must have been for this crewmember to be honest about his own feelings. And I am proud of how my entire crew responded in support of this person. I am grateful for this learning opportunity as a leader, to be able to create a shame-free environment on my crew, even as I am learning how to deal with my own issues around the fear of being weak.

The Courage to Question Our Assumptions

I believe that as leaders in wildland fire we can have the courage to question our own assumptions about what “weak” and “strong” look like.

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I encourage us all to begin to be curious about this during the season. Maybe things will start to look and feel a bit different on the fireline. Here’s to the day that the path has its ups and downs but we’re on it together, when the saw isn’t light or heavy but feels just right, and there’s enough chew to go around.

“WTREX”
Women in Prescribed Fire Training
October 17-28, 2016

“A prescribed fire training exchange that recognizes and reinforces the critical role of women’s leadership and perspective in fire management.”

The fourth annual Prescribed Fire Training (TREX) event hosted by the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council slated for this October in northwest California will focus on women in fire. This intensive two-week training exchange will recognize and reinforce the importance of the female perspective and leadership in fire management.

“In planning this training exchange, which we’re calling the ‘WTREX,’” explains Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Director of the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council, “we assembled a high-powered team of leaders to craft a shared vision around this inherently complex and sensitive topic.”

Quinn-Davidson continues, “While most of us are women, we come from very different backgrounds.” She informs that in addition to the seasoned wildland fire professionals involved in planning this event, they also have municipal fire staff, fire ecologists, extension personnel, media and outreach specialists, and others. “So to me,” Quinn-Davidson says, “the most interesting thing in the planning process has hardly been the event itself—rather, it’s been the conversations that our group has been having as we’ve worked to articulate the mission and goals of the WTREX.”

She explains that both women and men are invited to this event to explore the growing role of women in fire management.

“We believe that women have important talents and perspectives,” says Quinn-Davidson, “and that they can play a critical role in advancing fire problem-solving together with men.”

“In approaching the WTREX, our team is interested in creating a space where women and men can discuss and understand current issues and work together to build a more inclusive, supportive culture in fire. We feel that today’s fire problems are so complex that we need to elevate diversity in intellect, talent and perspective in order to solve them—and that approach will necessarily involve leadership from women.”

This is a “hands on” prescribed fire event. The training will be organized as an incident, using the Incident Command System. Participants will serve in qualified and trainee firefighting positions on a burn team and will assist with preparing, scouting, briefing, igniting, holding, mop-up, and patrol on numerous controlled burns. Participants will also complete pre- and post-fire monitoring, train with equipment, practice fireline leadership skills, and learn about local fire ecology and fire management.

For more information, contact Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Council Director, at nwcapfc@gmail.com.
One of Our Own

Sara Brown

Insights on ‘Bias’ and ‘Diversity’

By Alex Viktora and Paul Keller

As a high school junior in a small town snuggled up in the west side of the central Oregon Cascades, Sara Brown got her first taste of wildland fire.

That summer she was working on a Youth Conservation Corps trail crew that ended up helping with fire suppression efforts. “So I got access to a bunch of firefighters,” Sara recalls. “I thought that would be a really cool job. I decided to see if I could compete for a job in fire.” Part of her rationale for pursuing wildland firefighting was that she knew this work would help provide money for her upcoming college career.

As you will see, formal schooling and wildland fire will become key pursuits for this woman as she treks down her life’s trail.

Next Stop:

After that YCC season, Sara got a job on a local Type 2 Fire Crew. She would work on this crew for the next four seasons.

From Helitack to Hotshots to Jumping

“I really enjoyed it,” Sara says. “And that job was able to fund most of my undergraduate college years.” After graduating with her undergraduate degree, the call of fire beckoned to Sara yet again. She ended up on the Helitack Crew in Zion National Park. The next season, she joined the Snake River Interagency Hotshot Crew. The following year, 2003, Sara became a Redmond Smokejumper and transferred to be a West Yellowstone Smokejumper the next season.

Sara jumped for five years. On her last jump, in 2007, she was severely injured. Sara broke her right femur and shattered her right tibia and fibula. Her right talus (a bone that acts as a pivot in the ankle) was shattered, as well as her right wrist. It became a career-ending jump. After a year and a half and nearly 20 restorative surgeries, Sara elected to amputate her right leg below the knee. Not to worry. During the off-season during her jump years, Sara had pursued—and pulled down—a Master’s Degree in Environmental Science and Regional Planning. So, after her injury, she decided to set her sights on a PhD in Ecology, with a focus on Fire Ecology, which she received in 2011.

Her career path then led her to New Mexico Highlands University where she taught for four years in the school’s forestry program. She became the lead course developer for the school’s wildland fire science program.

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Today, Sara is employed with the Rocky Mountain Research Station as a Human Dimensions Social Science Analyst. She works with 12 other folks on the “Human Performance and Innovation and Organizational Learning” team. “We focus on innovations and learning related to human performance,” Sara informs. “That includes all the things that we can bring either to the field or to our agency’s leadership.”

Considering where you’ve been and where you are now, what does “diversity” mean to you?

“Diversity” is one of those loaded terms which, in my opinion, really shouldn’t be loaded at all. Because diversity to me, if you dig down—and this might have sort of an academic flavor coming from the group I’ve been hanging out with recently—but diversity really has much less to do with race, color, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—or anything. It’s really all about the diversity of thought. From my perspective, I believe that diversity is just the simple differences between people taken from their life experience that lends a different lens to the way they look at the world.

To summarize, my definition of diversity would be: Different perspectives that come from different life experiences.

What about “ecological diversity”?

“The first thing that comes to mind when I hear ‘ecological diversity’ is that an ecosystem is most stable, or most resilient, when it has the highest diversity. Its resilience has to deal with its ability to remain functional to withstand some sort of disturbance. That means that if it’s perturbed in some way—be it fire, wind, water, drought, or increased carbon dioxide, or whatever—that increase in diversity allows it to better protect itself and remain functional in the face of one of those perturbations. That’s what I think of when I think of ecological diversity and the power of diversity.”

It’s really all about the diversity of thought.

How does this perspective apply to our social world?

“It’s the same thing. I see our social world as really just one big ecosystem. And I think about diversity in terms of species diversity. The same applies to the social world. If you have a diversity of thoughts and perspectives that are able to provide their natural roles, then the social system will be more resilient. It will be more able to handle difficulties, challenges, or anything we would think of as a type of a disturbance. I therefore believe that it’s one and the same. The definition holds true for both our social world and ecological systems.”

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What are the biases that we deal with in the world of wildland fire?

“That’s an interesting question. I think that biases are large and diverse. They are challenging to even identify, especially for people who have been inside the fire community. I think our initial bias as an organization is that we seem to unanimously always want to put the fire out. That is a bias that fire is bad. Now, I know that’s not 100 percent true because obviously there are fire use modules with their prescribed fire programs. But as a whole, I think one of our biases is: ‘Oh, my gosh, there is a fire in X, let’s send resources to it and put the fire out.’"

Another bias is that we actually have the ability to control fire. I know that can be argued back and forth. I have good examples of times I think that I did control fire. But I probably have even more examples where I think we thought we were controlling fire but ultimately we didn’t. Things greater than a little fire crew controlled the fire, like weather and rain. So the control and this idea that fire is bad would be two biases.

A third bias would be the types of people who have the opportunity to participate in our current wildfire culture. I think we have created a situation where the people that we typically think of as fire managers or who are in the fire program are younger than older, stronger than weaker, typically male, and almost always white. Whether that’s good or bad, that’s a bias that I have."

From your experience, what biases exist around gender and equality in the world of wildland fire?

“I would like my answer to be that we’ve made great strides since the 1960s. But I don’t know that we’ve set a target in front of us to even know if we’re successful or not.”

What are your thoughts on the fact that we have a lack of women Division Supervisors or women Burn Bosses, etcetera?

“For a woman, it’s a toss-up between having a family and operationally continuing your career in fire. Because it’s not a career that you can just take five years off and go and have a baby and come back, right? Your quals time out at three years, and then you are starting over from scratch. On top of that, you have to complete task books in relatively short periods of time. Sometimes you have assignments that are spread a season apart. There’s just no easy way to take maternity leave or take a year off to raise your family.

There are a lot of dual career folks in which both the male and the female partners are in fire together. That is another challenge. Who is more capable at going to work every day when somebody is pregnant or somebody has just given birth? The male, right? I don’t think it has anything to do with women being ‘capable’ or women not necessarily feeling supported to continue operationally in fire. I think there are plenty of women who, had the system been built differently, would have successfully navigated their way up to the top of Type 1 and Type 2 ICs. I believe that it’s just the way the system works right now. It’s really challenging to have a happy, healthy relationship and/or family.”

How do we strive to fix our current situation?

“I think that the solution to this problem—as well as many other problems—needs to come in the form of the interagency fire community banding together and working our way out of the job, which would look very much like creating a fire-resilient ecosystem where fire is no longer the enemy.

Fire would become something that we embrace and use as a tool rather than fight it. If I were King—look there, isn’t that ironic that I didn’t say ‘Queen’? If I were Queen, I would start with the Wildland-Urban Interface. I would use all of my relationship building and collaborative tools as well as educational tools—which includes a lot of fire ecology principles that have been out there for decades—to try to get a hold in creating a fire-resilient Wildland-Urban Interface. So that firefighters don’t have to go in and protect structures.

Firefighters would actually increase the footprint of fire and include areas within and adjacent to the Wildland-Urban Interface, such that we might not need a giant fleet of firefighters. And the term ‘firefighter’ would sort of fall away."

“I think we have created a situation where the people that we typically think of as fire managers or who are in the fire program are younger than older, stronger than weaker, typically male, and almost always white. Whether that’s good or bad, that’s a bias that I have.”
Continued from Page 9] and become something more along the lines of "fire users"—somebody who understands that fire is a natural process and a tool and is utilizing those natural starts in a risk-managed way. I think we have to work toward that.”

How do gender and equality tie together?

“If you think about gender and equality as a diversity of perspective that can come from a variety of life experiences; if we're able to truly diversify and actually seek diversity—which will probably bring conflict to our happy, little community—I think that we'll start to have tough discussions about where we need to go.

And this vision will slowly become clearer and clearer because we will have a diversity of opinion, a diversity of thought, a diversity of ideas about how we can get to wherever this place is that we're going in the future.

I personally hope it's a fire-resilient ecosystem on a broad scale where fires are just part of our day-to-day season—whatever that season looks like, and that season is obviously changing.

But I believe it's through a diversity of perspective that we're going to arrive at a way to get to that place. And I think that a community of people have to mutually agree and respect each other’s differences and have that painful conflict that comes with diversity. I think we can do that respectfully. We're going to have to accomplish this sooner than later because, for lots of reasons, we're getting to a place where it's not sustainable to continue doing things the way that we have been.

And so I think the role of, be it gender, if you want to think about gender, or diversity of perspective, is going to be one of the few ways that we have of getting there—to this desired future condition—the fastest.”

“I think that a community of people have to mutually agree and respect each other’s differences and have that painful conflict that comes with diversity.”

Stop. Think. Talk. Then Act:

More Resources for Exploring Bias and Gender Equality

Why Gender Equality is Good for Everyone – Men Included
http://bit.ly/GenderEqualityTEDtalk: The case for treating men and women equally in the workplace and at home. It’s not a zero-sum game, but a win-win that will result in more opportunity and more happiness for everybody.

Athena Doctrine: https://youtu.be/YxgTsyL4yOE
A survey of 64,000 people around the world shows that traditionally feminine leadership and values are now more popular than the macho paradigm of the past.

Implicit Bias Tests: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
The goal of this organization is to educate the public about hidden biases and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the Internet. Explore the hidden biases we all carry from a lifetime of exposure to cultural attitudes about age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, and nationality.
In Memoriam: Krstofer Evans

We have lost another firefighter way too early.

Former Plumas Hotshot Krstofer Evans was killed in a fire that destroyed his house, located near Corvallis, Ore., on June 30. He was 45.

When he was 31, in October 2001, while cutting line with his saw on an arson-caused fire on the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky, a 70-foot black locust snag suddenly fell from inside the fire onto Krs’ head, fracturing his spine, paralyzing him.

In a matter of seconds, this 6-foot 6-inch, 234-pound hotshot and professional World Cup-level snowboarder was suddenly facing an extremely challenging future in a wheelchair. Krs was featured as the “One of Our Own” in the Summer 2011 issue of Two More Chains, which basically told Krs’ story in his own words, sharing entries from his personal online diary.

Here’s an example of what Krs shared with us in his typical tell-it-like-it-is style:

“I have decided I don’t really like using handicapped spots. Sure, I’m a gimp, but I’m not ‘handicapped’ to the point I need to park right in front. I figure, save those spots for someone who needs it, and never use them. I’m trying to get over the years of feeling so sorry for myself. I’m willing to talk to anyone.”

Jody Prummer, Union IHC Superintendent

“Krs was an amazing man before his accident, but his life after showed his true character.”

His Snag Awareness Crusade

The wildland fire service was lucky to have Krs.

He had presented his popular and riveting “Don’t Be That Guy” snag and hazard tree awareness and prevention program presentation to hotshot crews and wildland firefighters across the west and southwest. “I’m willing to talk to anyone,” Krs explained. “I don’t care who you are. If you spend time in the woods you know things fall out there. You can be the most alert person there and still get whacked.”

Firefighters Rally to Buy Krs New Car

In the spring of 2012, Krs drove his aging, gas-hog, van up to northeast Oregon to present his “Don’t Be That Guy” training for the Union and La Grande Hotshots. “When we saw his old van it was obvious it was on its last legs,” Jody Prummer, Union IHC Superintendent, said at the time. “We heard that a car would better suit Krs’ needs with gas mileage and for servicing the vehicle.” Jody and his crew launched a campaign to raise funds—spreading the word through flyers and at morning briefings during the 2012 fire season—to help Krs buy a new car. In just six months, firefighters from across the country rallied to Krs’ cause and successfully raised the necessary money. That November they presented Krs with his new car. In learning of Krs’ passing, Jody said: “Krs was an amazing man before his accident, but his life after showed his true character.”

Inventing and Crafting Products for Firefighters

In a 2009 feature story in the Corvallis Gazette-Times newspaper, Krs explained his perspective on his situation: “I can either sit on my ass and watch TV all day and bitch about it, or I can get off my ass and do something about it.”

Besides his “snag awareness” presentations, Krs also continued to support the wildland firefighting effort by crafting and producing special adapters, rollers, clamps, nozzles—and even a clever cell phone charger invention that could be powered by a King radio clamshell battery in the field—that he advertised and sold online.

By 2011, Krs had purchased his house outside Corvallis and was attending Oregon State University, studying fermentation science with a chemistry and business double minor. He was also learning how to be a professional gemstone cutter. “Whenever I get the chance,” he informed in his “One of Our Own” interview, “I travel out to southeast Oregon to get sunstone. I’m trying to break into selling to the local jewelers.” Before joining the Plumas Hotshots in 2000, Krs had served as a TACP (Tactical Air Control Party), an elite special operations unit, in the U.S. Air Force.

“When a Tree Falls: Working Around Danger Trees”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9UzFS0jUiQ

Krs is interviewed in, and helped to make, this video. He was also active with the Wildland Firefighter Foundation.