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The Principles of Emergency Management

A practical application

The development of the *Principles of Emergency Management* in 2007 and their adoption by major emergency management professional organizations was a major step forward for our profession.

However, a set of principles must be more than just nice sounding words. It should provide a guide to how we conduct business on a day-to-day basis, both ethically and practically. If the *Principles of Emergency Management* are to be of any use to our profession, we must be able to translate them into concrete action. The question is how can we make practical use of the *Principles*?

Re-envisioning the Principles

In a paper presented at the 2009 FEMA Higher Education Conference, Dr. George Youngs offered a suggestion for using the *Principles* as to create a general theoretical framework for emergency management based on social psychological theory.

In his paper, *Constructing Theory for Emergency Managers: A Principles-Based Approach*, Dr. Youngs suggests

that changing perspective slightly is the answer. Although the *Principles* are intended to describe emergency managers, Youngs believes that the *Principles* are actually better applied to the relationships between emergency managers and stakeholders. Youngs uses the metaphor of an engineer switching focus from just studying the riverbank to actually designing the bridge.

Youngs recommends that the *Principles* be advanced in three ways:

1. Shift the focus from individual emergency managers to the relationships in which they are involved
2. Re-envision the *Principles* as key dimensions of relationship behavior. That is, instead of being professional, professionalism becomes an important dimension of our relationships; the more professional we are, the better the outcome of our relationships.
3. Recognize the *Principles* as contextualized examples of larger concepts or processes. If we can connect the *Principles* to more general behaviors outside the

context of emergency management, we can make use existing theories in social and behavioral science.

If we think for a moment about what Youngs is saying, it makes perfect sense. Emergency managers do not exist in a vacuum. It is not sufficient for us just to *be* something; creating relationships is at the core of what we do.

By viewing the *Principles of Emergency Management* in that light, we can now access a considerable body of social science research that can help us build better relationships. In essence, the *Principles* describe an expected outcome with social science research providing the detail on how that outcome can be achieved.

Six Strategies from Social Psychology

Youngs makes particular mention of the work of Dr. Robert Cialdini as an example of how people within interdependent relationships can influence each other. Cialdini, author of [Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion](#) identified six principles of influence:

1. *Reciprocity*. If you do favors for others, others are more likely to do favors for you.
2. *Commitment*. The more person becomes publicly committed to a position, the more likely that person is to stay committed to that position.
3. *Social proof*. The more people a person perceives to be engaged in a requested activity, the more likely that person is to accommodate the request.
4. *Likability*. The more a person likes the source of a request, the more likely that person is to comply with the request.
5. *Authority*. The more legitimate authority a person is perceived to have, the more likely it is that others will comply with that person.
6. *Scarcity*. The more scarce the desired option is perceived to be, the more likely a person is to seek it out.

While Cialdini's work is primarily in the area of marketing, his six principles can be adapted as strategies for use in influencing any relationship, including emergency management relationships.

Take for example the principle of commitment. Most of us apply this principle regularly when we ask stakeholders to formalize relationships in memorandums of understanding/agreement or to commit to specific tasks during multiagency planning meetings. Many of us have also made use of the authority of our office to gain cooperation from stakeholders.

If we can make deliberate rather than intuitive use of the principles of influence, we can significantly improve our effectiveness. This particularly true if we use the *Principles of Emergency Management* as the desired outcome of our relationships.

Viewing the *Principles of Emergency Management* as important dimensions of our relationships that can vary and thereby affect the outcomes of those relationships is consistent with the intent behind the creation of the *Principles*. Further, it offers a practical way to both apply the *Principles* to our daily work and provides us with the behavioral tools to create better relationships and be more effective in our jobs. 

Portions of this article have appeared in my blog [Managing Crisis](#) in a slightly different form.