

## Memo To Fire Departments: Why Your Firefighter's Healthy Marriage Is Important To Your Success

We know the pressures firefighters are under on the job. PTSD and suicide are very real issues. Do you know what trigger often pushes them "over the edge"? It's not the one bad call. It's home life.

If the home life is stable, they have a safe place to rest and recover from the stress of the fire service. When it's in turmoil, suddenly everything is too much.

While there are no official statistics regarding divorce in the fire service, the evidence is around you. Count the members of your crew who are separated, divorced or on a second or third marriage. Even the marriages that survive have many scars along the way.

Home life can in fact be the healer and difference maker in a successful fire service career simply because of the support and stability they receive allowing them to endure the difficult runs, long hours and often politically charged environment.

Supporting this are research findings that share how marriage makes you healthier, happier and believe it or not, wealthier:

- Married women are about 30 percent more likely to rate their health excellent or very good than the same-aged single women were. Married men showed similar advantages over unmarried men. Married men and women are also less likely than singles to suffer from long-term chronic illness or disabilities.<sup>1</sup>
- Married men and women report less depression, less anxiety and lower levels of other types of psychological distress than do those who are single, divorced or widowed.<sup>2</sup>
- Researchers have found that the act of getting married actually makes people happier and healthier; conversely, getting a divorce reverses these gains - even when we take into account prior measures of mental and emotional health.<sup>3</sup>
- The cost of divorce is high. Even if the income is divided fairly between the former spouses, the standard of living of the family drops by about 25 percent. No amount of child support can change the basic math: It costs more to live separately than together, and the money must come from somewhere

While it may not feel professional to involve your personal life with your job, it is practical for employers to provide resources as preventive measures to support their best asset - their employees.. When the home life balance tilts into an unhealthy space, your firefighter is no longer as focused on the job and at risk for injury, accident or worse.

It's an easy fix to make resources available to your fire department and that is the mission of 24-7 COMMITMENT<sup>4</sup>: ***To Honor, Strengthen and Encourage First Responder Marriages and Families with resources, events and community support for both the firefighter and their spouse.***

Please share the attached resources with your department and consider providing more support tools to your firefighters. This is not a topic you need to add to your busy training agenda. It simply needs awareness and visibility and your encouragement as a leader who cares for their people, in all aspects of their life.

*Sincerely,* Dan & Lori Mercer, Founders of 24-7 COMMITMENT

Committed Firefighter, Husband and Father / Wife and Mother refusing to be another statistic

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Murphy, Karen Glaser, and Emily Grundy, "Marital Status and Long-term Illness in Great Britain" Journal of Marriage and the Family 59 (1997) 156-164.

<sup>2</sup> John Mirowsky and Catherine E. Ross, Social Causes of Psychological Distress (New York: Aldine De Gruyter 1989), 90-92

<sup>3</sup> Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, "Marital Status Continuity and Change among Young and Midlife Adults: Longitudinal Effects on Psychological Well-being", Journal of Family Issues 19 (1998) 652-686

<sup>4</sup> About 24-7 COMMITMENT: We are a federally approved 501(c)3 non-profit organization funded primarily by individual donors and supporters.