



Snowblower vs. Pedestrian.

Ahhhhh... damn it...OUCH!!!!...worthless piece of crap...you have GOT to be kidding me...&h!t, &h!t, &H!T!!! The colorful rant went on for quite some time – a different kind of morning serenade coming from the tool shed, punctuated by the occasional bashing of metal on metal – but one we have all heard before. Predictably, by the end of the day the snowblower was safely returned to the tool shed (mostly in one piece) and the driveway sported beautiful parallel lines and meticulous edges after yet another beautiful early morning snow fall.

Machinery of all sorts can create endless projects to engage, distract, challenge, and defy the most persistent of the pack, all while giving a focus that (theoretically) has a beginning, middle, and an end – something that rarely if ever happens in the world of emergency services. I cannot tell you the number of responders I know that will take apart their car, motorcycle, lawnmower, dishwasher, garbage disposal, *whatever* just because they can. The fact that they have an engaging activity that has a predictable, logical, cause-and-effect outcome gives them a great sense of accomplishment and control. Something that they can rant at without the fear of a civilian complaint, administrative action, threatened lawsuit, or career-ending tweak in their back or out-of-context YouTube posting. Something that can be destroyed and/or created by their own hands that nevertheless does not have a life-and-death urgency (unless it happens to be located in *your* yard, kitchen, garage, tool shed, etc.).

Sometimes it is tough to know when to step in and offer help. Let me rephrase that – unlike when a meltdown is occurring in the field, there is rarely if ever a right time to step in and/or offer help when a meltdown is occurring in the tool shed... These powerful little rants are all part of the integration process. People do silly things. People get hurt. People hurt each other. People expect public safety personnel to drop down from the sky with smiles on their faces, and fix all of the hurts. Nevertheless, people die, and ranting in the moment is simply inappropriate. Similarly, snowblowers break. But unlike people, snowblowers can be kicked, raged at, ignored, ripped apart, organized, fixed, put back together, and put away all better – almost every single time.

The trick is recognizing the importance of these integrative “beginning-middle-end” projects, hobbies, and activities. Even better is deliberately creating opportunities for challenge and success within benign, controlled situations in order to “undo” or at least mitigate the pervasive sense of frustration and helplessness that front line personnel can often experience in the field. We all need a sense of accomplishment and success from time to time – and snowblowers don’t take it personally.

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