

GETTING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL WITH THE 3 VITAL QUESTIONS®

How 3VQ transformed a life and a living for Scott Richardson

THE CHALLENGE: STEP INTO BIGGER SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Scott Richardson is no stranger to people dynamics. As a combat medic in the Gulf War, a 36-year veteran of the Denver fire service, and a management consultant, his working life has always included being part of a team and has always been motivated by service to others. Back when he was working in a consulting firm, it didn't take long to notice that his colleagues were more riddled with drama than the clients they were trying to help. Scott decided to make a move. He co-founded EMPOWER2Evolve (E2E), an organizational development firm that helps companies eliminate barriers to reaching their potential.

As a consultant, he was looking for business development resources and came upon *The Power of TED** (*The Empowerment Dynamic). The book resonated and Scott began to apply the TED* principles to E2E's client work. At the same time, he began exploring ways to bring this approach into his work in the fire service, where he still served.

Scott had been an acting captain for just a few months when an opportunity for promotion came up. To move up in rank, firefighters are tested in a "promotional assessment center"—a lengthy and deep evaluation of their skills. It's not uncommon to take the assessment multiple times before getting promoted. While Scott did well for a first try, he did not get the promotion. It would have been easy to slip into Victim mode. Instead, because of the personal work he had done through reading TED*, he chose to reflect on why the outcome was not what he had hoped for.

Scott realized he had been focusing on his lack of experience in the job and all that could go wrong with the test, rather than the outcome he wanted to create as a leader. "I had been applying the TED* principles in parts of my life," he says. For example, TED* had helped him separate from toxic relationships and meet people where they were, instead of where he wanted them to be. "But I had not completely embraced it yet," he says. He had understood the TED* material with his head but not fully with his heart.

THE RESPONSE: 3 VITAL QUESTIONS

A couple years later, Scott learned about a workshop TED* principal facilitators David Emerald and Donna Zajonc were planning, to introduce their new work, *The 3 Vital Questions® (3VQ)*. "When I saw the opportunity to take TED* to the next level," Scott says, "I had to seize it!"

By the end of the workshop, Vital Question 1 ("Where are you putting your focus?") had become a driving force for him. It seemed 3VQ was the perfect pathway for his evolution as a leader in the fire service.

When another chance for promotion came around—for battalion chief—Scott grabbed it. This time, he had a game plan ready, one that used the 3VQ framework to structure his preparation. First, he carefully considered the outcome he

desired. Unlike before, he put his focus on the extraordinary leader he wanted be. In fact, he envisioned himself already in the role. “My thinking moved from ‘what makes a successful battalion chief?’ to ‘I am a successful battalion chief.’” This led to Vital Question 2 (“How are you relating?”).

Thinking like a battalion chief allowed Scott to recognize the leadership skills he already possessed and walk through how he would use them to lead firefighting teams through real incidents by applying Vital Question 3 (“What actions are you taking?”). Scott papered his spare room windows with giant post it notes. For each facet of fire service operations, he wrote out a detailed plan. “I had a response to any potential question the assessment could throw at me,” he says.

Scott went into the assessment confident in his preparation. He came out as a newly minted battalion chief—with the highest score of all applicants!

■ THE RESULTS: PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION, PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, AND A WIDE RIPPLE EFFECT ■

“TED* started out as a personal journey,” Scott says. “With the addition of 3VQ, it became an invaluable tool in my work.” Just as they had in his assessment prep, the 3 Vital Questions guide Scott on the scene of incidents he commands. In these life-threatening situations, it’s imperative to focus on the outcome of saving lives and his teams’ skills and training, rather than the multiple problems that could come up. “The way I relate is to keep my perspective as a leader,” he says, “to assess needs in the moment and beyond, and deploy our resources for the best outcome. My job is to orchestrate. The appropriate procedures implemented one by one are the action steps.

On the management side, a significant shift Scott has seen in himself is in conversation. He now listens with more empathy, chooses his words more carefully, and responds more from a place of curiosity than a place of persecution. He recently completed the 3VQ Trainer Certification. This deeper work is helping him become a better leader and coach for his team.

As a battalion chief, Scott is responsible for six fire stations. The 3 Vital Questions are deeply integrated into his approach to team dynamics, individual performance, and the intense challenges faced by firefighters every day. When issues crop up, he doesn’t single out the struggling individual or station. Rather, he presents the relevant TED* and 3VQ material to everyone. “I put the seeds out there,” he says, “and later I see company officers working on the material with their people. It has a ripple effect.”

Scott is applying the 3VQ framework to interpersonal dynamics in his battalion and also to the post-traumatic stress that often comes with the territory for firefighters. A recent heartbreaking call for a teenage suicide left one of his teams bereft. Scott used the 3VQ material to process their trauma while the firefighters were still at the hospital. This work could not be more important—tragically, more first responders kill themselves every year than die in the line of duty.

“I’ve been in the fire service for 36 years now,” says Scott. “I always thought of my legacy in terms of things like starting an honor guard, being on the pipes and drums, running a technical rescue team, running the busiest fire station we had. The 3VQ work has inspired me to focus my legacy on how my leadership helps people become healthy first responders, not only for their careers, but for life.”