



ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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LEADING AFTER TRAGEDY

ESF regularly hosts thought leadership events to grow the collective wisdom and strength of the sector in relation to mental health and wellbeing. This one focused on [losing a team member and lessons learned from leading in the aftermath of such tragedy](#).

Sometimes being yourself becomes harder as you gain responsibility as a leader. But there is no way to tell a personal story without being yourself and that is what Lex de Man and Chris Hardman did so well in sharing their experience of leading in the aftermath of tragedy. The main learnings they articulated so well through their stories included:

- ❖ Be as prepared as you can by having systems and processes in place ready to support people in a crisis
- ❖ Be authentic always - when in command and control mode and in day to day operations mode
- ❖ Lead by example - reach out for support – it will give licence to others to do the same
- ❖ Notice changes in behaviour of colleagues – they will alert you when people are struggling. Be aware some will welcome you stepping in to support and sometimes you need to step away.
- ❖ Sharing 'war stories' is a way of coping with trauma – facilitate the opportunity for colleagues to grieve together
 - ❖ People just want the truth - be a visible and transparent leader by having honest and forthright conversations
 - ❖ Support is needed long term, with regular check ins - not just immediately after the event



better together

Jennifer Fry, Director WorkWell WorkSafe Victoria reflected, "I think this is relevant not only for emergency services, but for so many workplaces who deal with trauma in its many forms. I was touched how respectfully you honoured the lives of your colleagues who have died." As was wisely said, "Keep human wellbeing at the forefront of your mind in everything you do."

REACTIONS

This was a thought-provoking presentation from two very experienced individuals. Having been through the devastation of losing a team member as an operational leader I know how valuable it is to be able to hear and benefit from the experiences of others. Thanks to Lex and Chris for their willingness to open themselves up and put a human face to the issue of leadership at these difficult times.

**Tony Pearce, Inspector General
Emergency Management Victoria**



**Chris Hardman, Chief Officer Forest
Fire Management DELWP**

What an important session with two great examples of authentic leaders! We were reminded of the very real challenges leaders in emergency services face. The session gave great insight into the importance of leading from the front, setting the scene for self-care for your team and how critical it is to have support mechanism in place. So many takeaways and such important learnings to share. Thank you.

**Emma Atkins, GM People Life Saving
Victoria**



Lex deMan, CEO Police Legacy