Managing Volunteer and Combination Emergency Service Organizations

Tips for the Fire Department CEO

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Tips for the Fire Department, CEO

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Preface

This project is your project. It was done at your request. It was done by your peers. It was done to help you.

After participating in untold training sessions, conventions and conferences, one thing was consistent. Today's fire officers need management assistance in a variety of business and managerial tasks and processes that were not being offered at conferences or in training classes.

In addition it is clear there is a regular turnover of emergency service organization Chairmen, Presidents, Trustees and Chiefs: those responsible for administrative functions of the fire department.

In my 30-plus years in this profession, I have seen very few, if any, classes taught at fire academies, on buying and selling property, basic supervisory techniques, budgeting and auditing, etc. - the core of this project.

This initiative has brought together emergency service organization (ESO) experts with various Chief Executive Officer (CEO) experiences. We thank them for sharing their knowledge, skills and experience to enhance the level of CEO performance in the fire service.

In addition, our authors come from around the country and bring a "flavor" of freshness to ESO management with their suggestions and content. Literally hundreds of years of ESO leadership expertise are reflected in their work.

While there are many whom I could thank for proposing this idea, it was Bill Troop of the USFA who brought the issue to the forefront and suggested VFIS take on this endeavor.

In the end, it is you, America's fire and emergency medical service that will benefit from this project as we keep the volunteer and combination system alive and well. It has indeed been a pleasure serving as the editor of this project and bringing a needed tool to the emergency services.

 Dr. William F. Jenaway, CFOD, CFPS, MIFE - Editor

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's put this as simply as we can – "You can't run the volunteer fire department (VFC) the way you used to!" Today's emergency service organization (ESO) is simply not an emergency response agency. As much as we would like to believe this and rationalize it, it doesn't exist. Today's ESO is a quasi-business, recognized as responsible to the citizenry, influenced, if not governed, by political fathers and mothers, and subject to scrutiny for mistakes, instead of being heralded as heroes even in defeat. The times have changed from responding when the alarm sounds and returning home until the next alarm to an agency of assessing risk, planning to deal with the risks, and educating the public to protect themselves in time of emergency. In essence, ESOs have changed from their original mission of response to an emergency to one of identifying potential problems, preparing the community in the event of an emergency, and responding to manage the problem that exists.

In recent years, VFIS has done extensive research on the changing nature of volunteer and combination fire departments. They are, after all, why we exist and it is important to not only know how they are functioning and changing, but how to assist them during times of change. As you may have read in *Fire Chief*, people, equipment, organizational design, and service delivery system issues are changing the way fire departments operate. This results in required changes in the nature of business and management practices being used in the organizations.

The research conducted by VFIS has broken down these management practices into eighteen major elements we see as volunteer fire department management involving the key aspects of business operation—planning, leading, organizing, and controlling. These issues were corroborated by the recent report of the IAFC'S Volunteer-Combination Officer's Section, "Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service" where the value of good management and quality leadership were cited as critical issues facing the level of success volunteer fire departments can achieve

Finally, the December 2002 study "A Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service", published as a cooperative study by FEMA/NFPA as authorized by U.S. Public Law 106-398; identified a number of management practices needed by volunteer organizations, particularly regarding financing, personnel issues, and planning. In addition, the fact that volunteer emergency service organizations have a number of leadership positions to divide work load and provide for more focus in those positions, it is more challenging by the top officers to manage all of the tasks, projects, and routine "business" activities being conducted. Add to this a number of needs that may exist for which you have no one person in the organization with the needed skill or knowledge sets, and suddenly challenges can occur to the ESO.

Necessary Management Practices for Today's VFC

Just like a business (which most volunteer fire companies legally are structured as) the volunteer fire company needs management leadership. Not just a chief to lead them into emergency response situations, but to manage the business aspects of the organization. The Volunteer Chief Executive Officer may be the Fire Chief, the President, the Chairman of the Fire Commission, or any one of a number of other positions, depending on the organizational design of the agency or corporation that manages the organization ultimately responsible for the delivery of the emergency services. Regardless of the title, the operations Chief has to understand the impacts on his or her responsibility of service delivery of each of these aspects, whether or not the Fire Chief is directly responsible for that function.

These aspects are diverse and in some cases complicated, which means more challenges for a volunteer fire chief, already saddled with expanding administrative, operational, and regulatory duties.

The research conducted by VFIS has identified the following eighteen specific topics of importance to the Chief Executive Officer of the fire department.

1. Organizational Design: Bylaws, Charters, Statutes, and Laws

The organizational design is typically defined in either bylaws, articles of incorporation, municipal statute, or some similar type of enabling legislation. Whether a non-profit corporation, commission, authority, or some other type of agency, the organizational design is typically established for you, possibly over 100 years ago. In addition, your actions are generally governed by federal, state, or local regulations; NFPA guidelines, accreditation, or state certification processes, as well as Tax Requirements (such as 501(c)3-501(c)4 status) and meeting management. The organizational status, impact, and value must be reviewed periodically to assure that it is appropriate for your particular organization and change as necessary, just like a business.

2. Your Role

Similar to the organizational design, the role of the Fire Department CEO is defined via bylaws, Articles of Corporation, standard operating guidelines, actual duties, and organizational expectation. Again, the organizational status, impact, and value of the role must be reviewed periodically to assure that it is appropriate for your particular organization and change as necessary, just like a business.

3. Decision-Making

The Fire Department CEO is a senior manager, just like in a business, and as such, must be knowledgeable in and have the right skill sets for planning, leading, organizing,

controlling, and communicating. The CEO must continue to seek educational opportunities to stay in touch with industry standards and applications.

4. Managing Fire Department Finances

Next to managing people, the most significant management responsibility is that of managing the finances of the fire department. While the CEO does not need to know particulars of accounting, understanding the budget process, requirements for auditing, the need for multiple income streams, when and how to manage spending patterns, and, most importantly, cash flow management, these are control points that the CEO is responsible for implementing in the fire department – just like a business.

5. Risk Management

Twenty years ago, managing risk was almost completely handled by insurance. Today, risk management is a combination of risk control (safety techniques) or risk financing (expensing losses, managing deductibles, and buying insurance – among others). The ability to understand these issues and gain competent counsel is critically important to the operational and financial health of the organization.

6. Marketing Management

Everything the fire department is related to has some aspect of marketing related. Job performance, uniforms, apparatus, and our public appearance all market us to the community. This must be a positive effort not only to provide the service, but to gain community and financial support.

7. Human Resource Management

People, the most valuable ESO resource, must be managed effectively, including the processes of recruitment, retention, personnel management, sexual (and all types of) harassment, discipline, hiring and firing (termination), interviewing, and benefit programs.

8. Customer Service

As with any business, the customer is number one. Focus on identifying the customer, understanding their needs and expectations, and developing a responsive organization to deal with those expectations is a basic management practice.

9. Leadership/Conflict Resolution

Every organization has conflicts that develop. The ability to identify them before they occur, and manage the conflict prior to occurrence or soon thereafter, is an important aspect of overall ESO management. The incorporation of appropriate language in guiding documents is an important component of managing conflict resolution and works hand in hand with human resource issues.

10. Training Techniques and Professional Development

In most cases, the Chief Operations Officer is responsible for the professional development of the ESO personnel, assuring they meet both regulatory and operational training needs. Many times the operational officers limit supervisory and management training to emergency scene management. Professional development of all officers in their general management responsibilities is directed by the CEO.

11. Information Management

Information management is not restricted to the information in emergency run reports. Municipal data, budget information, public opinion, political input, and other written or automated data all play a role in the strategic planning for the organization and need to be coordinated, reviewed, and managed to assure the effective use of information in managing the organization.

12. Management Liability and Employment Practices Liability

Discrimination, sexual harassment, and wrongful termination are three of the more identifiable management and employment practices liability issues which have transitioned into emergency services in recent years. As these issues become more prevalent, prevention and management techniques must be understood and implemented.

13. Understanding the Legislative Process

Politics play a major role in any ESO. Understanding how the political leadership thinks, what their priorities are, and how you are perceived all play a role in your success. Whether the political issue is municipal/local, regional, or national, appearance is everything. Remember, politics is not being partisan, it is about making the personal, social, and business interfaces effective.

14. Quality Management

Today's successful ESOs recognize the importance of implementing and assuring service quality to their customers. Quality efforts are driven by certification and accreditation processes as well as the intent by the ESO to deliver professional, effective, efficient services, while assuring community support and confidence.

15. Public Information Management

Personal and social interface, providing effective information to the public, can make or break the ESO's perception in the mind of customers and local community leaders. Effective planning and implementation of public information is the most reliable way to assure that public information works for you.

16. Using Legal Counsel

Most ESOs have had to use legal counsel at one time or another. Knowing when and why to use an attorney (e.g. Mutual Aid agreements, facilities agreements, equipment agreements, contracts, deeds, loans, etc.) is a critical management knowledge component.

17. Strategic Planning

The best is saved for last. No business is successful without some type of strategic planning – making sure that the business will survive. The ESO is no different, and volunteer ESOs require planning even more so, due to the limited funding and resources available to make the organization successful. Strategic Plans in business (and ESOs) lay the ground work for effective organizational management and performance.

18. Avoiding Trouble

Polices, procedures, supervision, and enforcement are critical to assuring that the organization is effectively managed.

In the End …

The Fire Department CEO in a volunteer or combination department is the critical leadership position to assure the overall organization functions properly. You may identify a number of qualities a fire department CEO should have, however, starting with the eighteen items identified by VFIS will enable your organization to be more effective in basic operations. All of the pre-defined components are part of a management system that must be defined, managed, and orchestrated - JUST LIKE A BUSINESS.

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Chapter 1

Organizational Design: Bylaws, Charters, Statutes, and Laws

By Dr. Vincent McNally

The Organizational Design is typically defined in either bylaws, articles of incorporation, municipal statute or some similar type of enabling legislation. Whether a non-profit corporation, commission, authority, or some other type of agency, the organizational design is typically established for you, possibly over 100 years ago. In addition, your actions are generally governed by federal, state, or local regulations; NFPA guidelines, accreditation or state certification processes, as well as Tax Requirements (such as 501(c)3-501(c)4 status) and meeting management. The organizational status, impact, and value must be reviewed periodically to assure that it is appropriate for your particular organization and changed as necessary, just like a business.

Organizational Design: Bylaws, Charters, Statutes, and Laws

One of the more unusual managerial aspects of the volunteer fire company is the organizational status. Unlike the municipal fire department, volunteer fire companies are separate from local government and have been chartered by their state. These fire companies combine a management structure similar to a private corporation with a level of democratic participation and control by the general membership. This rather unique, hybrid management provides some excellent opportunities for interactive and creative management, but also can cause some obvious potential for conflicts. For example, while the Fire Chief is in complete charge at the scene of an emergency, his actions and decisions can later be reviewed and questioned by a Board of Directors, many of whom may be firefighters under his control at the actual incident. While some in the fire service may not like this arrangement, it is a fact of life in many volunteer fire companies.

This chapter will examine some of the basic elements of the organizational structure and functioning of the typical volunteer fire company. It will review some of the major factors that influence decision and policy making and evaluate the skills that volunteer fire officials need from an administrative perspective to do the job effectively and efficiently.

Charters and Bylaws

The charter of a fire company is literally its "birth certificate." It is a document from the state government that essentially gives a fire company the right to exist as a voluntary, public service organization entitled to all of the legal rights and privileges attached to that status. Two of the most important powers are the right to solicit contributions from the public and tax exempt status for both donations and purchases. Charters also provide protection for the fire company from arbitrary disbandment and other judicial safeguards necessary for organizational survival.

If the charter gives life, the bylaws sustain life and allow the fire company to evolve and grow. These bylaws are the basic laws of the fire company that spell out how it will be organized and managed in very broad and basic terms.

Subjects spelled out in the bylaws or constitution of the fire company would include the following topics:

- A statement of the basic mission of the fire company, i.e., to protect lives, property, and the physical environment.
- A statement of goals, i.e., to prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.
- General qualifications for membership such as age or residency requirement.
- Types of memberships and accompanying rights, responsibilities, and privileges of each category.

- Descriptions of official positions in the fire company such as chief, assistant chief, Board of Directors, president, treasurer, as well as selection processes, terms of office, qualifications and general duties.
- Descriptions of major standing committees of the organization such as maintenance, finance, or planning.
- Requirements and procedures involving certain administrative elements such as date of annual meetings, bidding processes, disciplinary processes, ways to call special meetings, or how to amend bylaws.
- Other miscellaneous issues such as voting procedures or voter eligibility may also be included.

Other specific issues may also be covered in bylaws, but the following point needs to be understood. Bylaws spell out the basic structures, positions and functions of the fire company and its officers and members (Figure 1). However, bylaws should not be so specific or detailed that they interfere with day-to-day operations or have to be changed too often. Many issues or problems should be handled by policies made by the fire company officers or membership which allow for more flexibility. Like the U.S. Constitution, bylaws should be difficult to amend and not changed lightly or often. Many fire companies require a 2/3 vote of a quorum of the general membership to approve any alteration.

> **Figure 1: Typical Topics Covered in Volunteer Fire Company Bylaws**
> 1. Name
> 2. Purpose
> 3. Membership
>   - a) age
>   - b) residency requirements (i.e. citizen, state, county, etc.)
>   - c) types of membership
>   - d) application procedure
>   - e) annual dues
>   - f) disciplinary/expulsion procedures
> 4. Nomination and Election Procedures
> 5. Officers and Position Descriptions
>   - a) Board of Managers/Directors
>   - b) President
>   - c) Vice President
>   - d) Secretary
>   - e) Treasurer
>   - f) Committees
>   - g) Fire Chief
>   - h) Deputy Chief
>   - i) Assistant Chiefs
>   - j) Captains, Lieutenants
>   - k) Firefighters (qualifications, regulations)
> 6. Annual and Special Meetings (quorums, procedures, etc.)
> 7. Amendment Procedures
>
> *Source: "Bylaws" – Merion Fire Company of Ardmore, PA, Lower Merion Township Revised 1994.*

Changing the Bylaws

As stated previously, the bylaws should establish how they can be amended. Typically, a certain number of members or a majority vote of a Board of Directors can propose changes. These changes are then sent in writing to all members for review, along with a notice of when a vote will be taken. Finally, a vote is taken following official procedures such as written ballots and counting requirements.

While bylaws should not be changed often, they are also not "written in stone" and should be reviewed periodically (i.e. every 3–5 years) to keep pace with changing circumstances. A committee of five to seven members should be appointed for this purpose. Any proposed changes should be reviewed in the context of the whole document to ensure consistency. One amendment can affect several different bylaws. Where possible, it is also a good idea to have at least major revisions reviewed by an attorney to avoid any potential legal problems.

Types of Members

Membership classifications should be spelled out in the bylaws. There may be some variation among fire companies but the following types of membership are representative.
1. Firefighters—those members who meet the basic qualifications for this classification. Bylaws will usually establish minimum age requirements and voting privileges such as that only active firefighters may vote for line fire officers.
2. Life/Honorary Members—Firefighters or other classifications who have met length of service or other requirements (i.e. 20–25 years/500 fires attended).
3. Social Members—Members who pay annual dues and have access to recreational activities and/or events. These members may also have voting privilege for administrative officers. They, in many cases, will also be eligible to serve on administrative committees or the Board of Directors. They are often interested people from the community who can be a very valuable asset to the fire company even though they do not fight fires.
4. Junior Firefighters—Members under the age of 18 who can perform certain limited duties spelled out both by law and fire company policy. In many cases they will not have voting privileges, to keep them out of fire company politics.

Finally, as previously described, the bylaws are the foundation and the basic laws of the fire company. They define the purposes, roles, structures and processes that help the organization run smoothly, handle problems and manage conflict (manage, not eliminate). They impose limits and establish order. They should be treated with respect and followed. But, bylaws are also a tool that should help the fire company grow, develop, and adapt to change. If they are written properly and amended judiciously, they will help achieve the basic mission and help, not hinder, the functioning of organization.

Administrative Structures and Roles

Board of Directors and Managers

This top level administrative body will have two basic responsibilities: 1) policy and decision making involving broad or long range issues; and 2) oversight and control of operations of the fire company and functioning of committees and individuals, administration, or fire officers. The Board will usually meet on a monthly basis or when called into special session by the President, a majority of the Board or a specified group of members (procedures for calling special meetings will often be spelled out in the bylaws.)

The Board of Directors or Managers consists of an odd number of representatives to avoid tie votes. They are elected by the specified membership to fixed terms either at the same time or sequentially (i.e. three year terms, three or five members elected each year). Certain members of the Board will also serve as the Chairpersons of various functional committees. Members of the Board are usually more active and longer term members of the fire company who often have served in a variety of positions during their service.

There are offices of leadership of the company which generally include:

1. President—presides over meetings of Board, represents the fire company in the community and serves as a liaison with various outside agencies such as local government, the media, and community groups such as the Rotary Club. These outreach functions will be often shared with the Fire Chief and other officers.
2. Vice President—assumes presidential roll in absence of President.
3. Secretary—keeps Board and committee meeting minutes, keeps records, and handles correspondence.
4. Treasurer—keeps financial records, pays bills, and oversees financial affairs.

Committees—A variety of committees both standing or permanent and special will be established to handle fire company affairs in various functional areas on a routine basis. Chairpersons will hold monthly and special meetings and make reports of activities to the Board of Directors. The following are examples of some of the functional committees in a volunteer fire company.

1. Fire/Emergency Policy
2. Building Maintenance
3. Apparatus/Equipment
    a.Maintenance
4. Personnel/Membership
5. Media/Public Relations
6. Emergency Medical Services
7. Social/Activities
8. Training
9. Research and Planning
10. Financial Affairs/Fundraising
11. Fire Prevention

Committee names and responsibilities will vary among fire companies. Some may combine some of the above listed functional areas. There also may be overlap and interaction in some of the functional areas with fire officers who often will serve on these committees.

Depending on the organizational design and bylaws, the officers' roles and responsibilities will be specifically designed (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Typical Organizational Structure of a Volunteer Fire Company Board of Directors or Managers
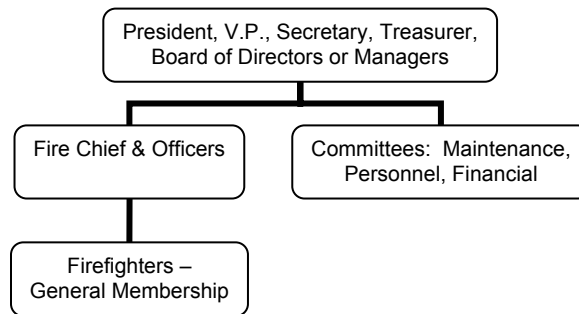
Districts, Municipalities and Other Structures

Committee names and responsibilities will vary among fire companies. Some may combine some of the above listed functional areas. There also may be overlap and interaction in some of the functional areas with fire officers who often will serve on these committees.

Fire districts, municipal fire departments, fire authorities, regional fire departments, and any other organizational design has similar challenges to those described for volunteer fire companies, but may have different structures and mandates.

Typically based on statutory requirements, these organizational designs may define different leadership and organizational systems than volunteer fire companies and may define a chief or a board/commission/trustee, commissioner as its "head". Through the years, these have become prevalent as organizations consolidate, merge, regionalize, and grow to near city proportions, or need organizational/financial support. In many cases, their designs are based on specific organizational needs.

Regardless of how the organization is structured, it is bounded by defined leadership and specific rules that must be followed.

Basic Management Functions

The Board of Managers, committees, and administrative and fire officers will all be involved in a continuous process of management which will involve performing the four basic functions of planning, organizing, controlling, and directing.

Planning is a road map that shows fire service officials where they want to go and how they are going to get there. It involves the following steps:

Make a Forecast Predict what conditions will be like at some future date. For example: in two years, half of the 50 firefighters will be over 40 years old and at least 15 will no longer be active.

Set Objectives Based on Forecast The fire company will need to offset this loss of personnel.

Evaluate Resources What you have, such as an active recruitment program versus run-in. What you need, such as more mutual aid or first alarm response.

Develop Alternatives Such as new mutual aid agreements, dormitory facilities to attract college students, add paid personnel.

Evaluate Alternatives vs. Resources Involving resource investment/ payroll evaluation.

Choose Alternatives Such as recruit/train four career firefighters in one year.

Set Up Implementation Schedule Schedule testing and training within three months.

There are several basic problems with planning. Forecasts can be wrong and circumstances can change. Information or data can be wrong. Political problems can include a lack of commitment to the plan, resistance of membership, and impatience with a tendency to want quick payoffs.

Successful planning above all requires good judgment based on good information, realistic analysis and goals and experience. It also requires teamwork and participation. Both of which exist in volunteer fire companies, but like any other asset must be developed.

Organizing There are four basic responsibilities associated with the organizing function. The **first step** is establishing roles, structures, and operating procedures. This is often done by the bylaws and policies. The **next step** is actually picking the individuals who will do the jobs. This staffing function is accomplished by election or appointment. The **third** task is establishing working relationships among individuals and units. There must be continuous communication and interaction. A new truck committee cannot be planning on a $600,000 piece of apparatus if the financial committee can only afford to spend $400,000. **Finally**, organizing involves delegation, giving the necessary authority and responsibility to meet objectives and setting clear task limits and performance standards.

Controlling This function involves developing performance standards and methods or procedures of evaluation. An example would be that all firefighters must make 25% of alarms. The method of evaluation would be a review every six months, a warning letter to those who fail to meet the standard, and dismissal if performance does not

improve by the next scheduled review. Any good control system will try to combine continuing controls which monitor and warning controls that trigger corrective action.

The basic problems of controlling involve measures that can be difficult to develop and apply. Just because a firefighter makes all the alarms does not measure the quality of his performance. Controlling also has political problems. Do you hold the 25 year veteran to the same standard as the three year firefighter?

Directing The final function is completely focused on the people involved. It involves leadership through the actions of communication, education, and motivation of personnel. It emphasizes the interpersonal and interactive skills of each individual to be effective.

The Management Challenge: Issues and Problems

As the American Fire Service enters the 21st century, the one universal fact of life for all fire departments is that the scope, range, and complexity of providing quality service has increased dramatically. To traditional fire protection services have been added the challenges of emerging medical services, hazardous materials, disaster response, and terrorism. Costs of apparatus, equipment, insurance, energy, and fuel have escalated while revenues have remained the same or decreased. Volunteer firefighters have aged and replacements are harder to find.

As the problems have grown in size and diversity, the demands on the time, effort and energy of volunteer fire officials has become even greater. There is a greater need for specialization and division of labor between both individuals and committees which must be balanced by greater efforts of communication, cooperation, and coordination within the organization. We must learn to be better firefighters and better managers.

Personal and Personnel Issues

Like all organizations, volunteer fire companies face two basic challenges related to their members. They must try to mold a group of very different individuals who have a variety of other commitments into a functioning organization that provides a number of basic services to the community. People vary in skills, background values, personality and likes or dislikes. The diversity is a benefit in that the volunteer fire company can draw upon a variety of people with the attributes that can help get the job done. The challenge is molding all of these different people into a working team.

Part of the problem for volunteer fire officials is to match people to jobs according to their skills and personalities. Training officers and fire prevention officers must not only know their subjects but also be able to interest and educate others. The other part of the problem is motivation. Unfortunately, different things motivate different people. What motivates people often exists beyond the control of the fire department such as family or other interests. Finally, motivations for the same person change over time. What motivates the 18-year-old rookie firefighter will not be the same ten years later. Both of these problems point to the need for leadership – getting people to do what

needs to be done because they want to and feel it is the right thing to do. It is not easy. It requires knowledge, understanding, and above all, commitment. So, it is as much a motivational problem for the fire service administrator who must develop in these areas as it is for the people he is trying to motivate. All managers manage things (hoses, ladders, money, computers) and people (politicians, rookie firefighters, school children) and both present significant challenges.

Selection/Election Issues: Board and Committees

- The basic reasoning behind the Board of Directors or Managers System is that a group of very interested members will be selected or elected to this body to deliberate issues, develop policies, and oversee fire company operations. It assumes that the Board will bring the knowledge, skills, and different perspectives to their jobs that will ultimately produce the best decisions. It is democracy at its best, at least in theory.

Any elective system has its benefits in that the general membership gets to pick the people they want in leadership positions presumably based on ability. Unfortunately, elections can deteriorate into popularity contests that do not select the most qualified people, therefore hampering effective and efficient management.

The basic question becomes who should serve on the Board? What skills, backgrounds, experience, and values will best serve fire company interest? A fairly common issue seems to involve the balance of firefighters on the Board versus non-firefighters who might be more objective (i.e. social members, contributing members, or community representatives). Another issue involves choosing people who have administrative skills such as experience running a business or handling financial affairs. This may necessitate going into the community to actively recruit outsiders or nonmembers with such skills. Getting outsiders elected or re-elected may present further problems. There are pros and cons with each of these issues and the simplest answer is that the Board should be balanced, with the goal of obtaining a person with the skills that will be best to manage the organization.

Some of the selection issues also involve committee assignment. Skills and experience in different functional areas such as public relations or building maintenance can be invaluable. Committee appointments also can help to involve more members in fire company business. It is also a way to interest, reward, and train future leaders. Fire company officers should try to appoint at least some newer, younger members to committee positions.

A final note of caution is also appropriate. There will be a tendency to put the most enthusiastic members in a variety of positions and get them to multi-task. It is only natural to want to have the most active people where they can be productive. However, there is also the danger of burning these people out and losing their services altogether. You cannot give too few people too much work. Again, good management requires a balanced approach that avoids extremes.

Authority and Communication

Effective leadership in any position requires knowing how to use the management tools of authority and communication. To work, both need to be accepted by the targeted recipients. Authority must be accepted by subordinates. Communications must be understood by those getting the information.

There are two basic issues surrounding the use of authority. You must know what orders to give and how to give an order. This can be particularly important in a volunteer fire company where participation is voluntary and personal motivation a critical factor. However, members must also realize that once they volunteer to help provide emergency services, they do assume certain obligations including submitting to legitimate demands that serve the basic goals of the organization.

Understanding authority involves knowing the basic reasons as to why people obey. Essentially, four factors determine an individual's willingness to comply.

General Willingness to Cooperate To exercise authority, a manager must have a group of subordinates who are generally willing to obey or comply. They must at least be somewhat positively disposed to submit to directions.

Formal Position The organization must give the manager or leader the formal authority and responsibility to get the job done. The Fire Prevention Officer must be able to assign apparatus and personnel to fire prevention activities. The Public Relations or Information Officer must have the authority to talk to the media.

Personal Expertise The manager must demonstrate competence. He or she must show that they know what they are doing. They must establish credibility in order to maintain legitimacy.

Personal Rapport This is the psychological dimension related to management style and personality. Behavior and language influences people positively or negatively. Management style can turn people on or turn people off. The fire officer who continually gets excited and yells and screams will get, at best, grudging compliance and can also cause subordinates to make mistakes.

To work, the authority relationship must have all four of the aforementioned factors present. Good authority is tied to experience and confidence. A good manager demonstrates his ability and therefore subordinates are willing to follow his lead.

Communication is tied to authority and is another essential management tool. It is a critical part of the directing function that provides information, education, and motivation to other people. Good communication facilitates goal achievement, the use of resources, and avoids mistakes. Lack of clear communications causes confusion. Managers must also be able and willing to listen. Hearing is just as important as telling.

Fire company officials must also identify their audience and tailor the presentation of information to the level of understanding and circumstances involved in the

communications process. For example, talking to a town council is different from talking to an elementary school class about fire prevention. Other common communications problems include:

- Overload: Too much information.
- Bias: Communication that distorts facts with emotions.
- Political: Communication information designed to make someone look or feel good but is a dangerous basis for decisions.
- Laundering: Information that is either cleaned up or watered down as it moves through the organization.

Getting solid information is just as important as giving it. Good managers should seek multiple sources of information. Good judgment is also critical. Communication and accurate information is just as important in administrative situations such as disciplinary procedures or bidding process as it is in fireground size up.

Policy and Decision Making

The most important thing that all fire company officers will do is reach decisions and make policies in response to the challenges and problems associated with the complete responsibilities of providing emergency services. There is no magic formula that guarantees that administrators will always make the right decision. Circumstances can change. Human beings can be wrong. But good judgment and reasonable analysis can help minimize errors and mistakes.

Factors Influencing Issues

Several environmental factors will affect and dictate the problems, capabilities, and perceptions surrounding the fire service and its performance. Decision/policy makers can use these factors to help to analyze the different interrelated aspects of problems and issues in any substantive area.

1. *Physical* The physical factors that influence fire company management include such things as the types of buildings in a fire district, infrastructure (streets, gas lines, bridges, railroads, etc.), fire stations, apparatus, weather conditions.
2. *Demographics* The characteristics of the population such as age, gender, occupation, family status, working mothers with children, and ethnic composition that can all have an impact on emergency services.
3. *Technology* Technology influences problems faced by emergency services such as bio-terrorism threats or radiation sources, and equipment to help deal with these problems such as thermal imaging cameras and computers.
4. *Economic* Obviously, revenue sources and costs of such things as equipment, insurance, and fuel are major concerns.

5. ***Legal*** A variety of laws such as those barring sexual harassment and local ordinances, such as sprinkler related statutes, have an impact.
6. ***Political*** Political factors include local issues and relationships between groups, such as career and volunteer staff.
7. ***Socio-Cultural*** Problems such as drug use or the fact that fire companies are no longer social centers in many communities are issues that affect management.
8. ***Organizational*** A variety of outside organizations such as the NFPA, FEMA, insurance companies, and apparatus manufacturers are directly involved in performance and policy areas.

All problems and policies can be analyzed using these variables. Not all issues will be affected by all eight variables, but this can be used as a basic analytical framework to help identify relevant influences.

The Decision Policy Making Process

The second major way to look at decisions and policy is to look at the process and examine some of the factors that can influence outcomes.

1. ***Problem Awareness*** The initial stage of any decision on policy making process is to admit there is a problem. There is a tendency in both individuals and organizations to ignore, deny, or wish away problems hoping they will disappear or solve themselves. Some do just that. But sometimes, these problems either develop into major crises or continue to seethe under the surface like a sore that never heals. Not all issues need to be dealt with officially, but managers must look at the problems and decide if they need to be confronted officially. This is the rational approach.

2. ***Problem Identification or Definition*** Once it is determined that there is a problem, the next step is to analyze what possible causes and effects it will have on the organization. At this stage, decision makers have to avoid several possible errors such as treating symptoms rather than the real disease. There is also a tendency to come up with overly simplistic explanations that do not recognize the complexity of the problem. For example, managers often equate quality with cost and assume that problems can be solved by spending money. Finally, problem identification often aims simply at finding someone to blame. While determining who is responsible or what role various people play in a problem is important, just blaming someone is not enough. The object is to correct the situation.
An example of these problems may be poor attendance at meetings or training sessions. A manager might decide it's because members do not care. This is a simplistic answer that blames someone else, that looks only at a symptom of

poor attendance. The real reason might be that meetings or drills are poorly planned, disorganized, and boring.

3. ***Development of Alternative Solutions*** The third stage of the decision making process involves using creativity and innovation to come up with a variety of solutions. This requires research, discussion, and analysis of costs and benefits. The human nature problems here are that managers tend to be limited by what they are familiar with and what will be most politically acceptable. The key to success here is to be realistic but also not be afraid to use some imagination.

4. ***Choice of Solutions*** Ultimately deciding what to do requires guts. Decision making is difficult and choices can be wrong. Managers must accept this fact and be willing to live with the consequences of their decisions.

5. ***Implementation of Choice/Decision/Policy*** The major issue at this stage is that decision makers must have a clear idea of what will determine the success or failure of a policy and how long it will be given to work. Further, decision makers must be willing to admit if a particular policy is not working and make the appropriate changes. Two common problems here are to stick with a bad decision for too long or, at the opposite extreme, not give a policy sufficient time to work. A balance between these two strategies is necessary.

Managing Conflict and Fire Company Politics

One of the major and more difficult management problems for fire officers and administrative officials is trying to control conflicts of interest and fire company politics. The challenge can be summarized as follows:

Politics	= conflict or controversy
Management	= method of conflict resolution – judge/umpire
Tool	= decision or policy making
Preference + Intensity	= Activity

Each individual will have a position on any given issue. This opinion will be associated with a level of intensity, how strongly the individual feels about an issue. These will combine to produce what actions that individual will take such as informal complaints to other members, speaking out at meetings, voting for or against a candidate or quitting the fire company. Conflicts can occur between individuals, groups (i.e. old vs. young members), functional areas or units (i.e. fire suppression vs. EMS) or committees. Conflicts can also occur with outside entities, such as local government agencies (policy, building department, local councils), businesses, suppliers or the press. The job for the manager is obviously to settle disputes as quickly and amicably as possible – something that is a lot easier to state than do. Internal and external conflicts revolve around goals, use of resources, and simple difference of opinion.

Fire company managers must accept certain basic facts of life about conflict and politics.

- Conflicts usually involve two or more valid, legitimate, but opposing points of view—all of which have elements of right and truth in them.
- On the other hand, conflicts are usually partially based on perceptions, interpretations, and emotions. Facts get filtered through opinions to which people are emotionally attached. Feelings get involved and sometimes hurt.
- In democratic, voluntary associations like volunteer fire companies that also perform a basic local public service, members and outsiders have a right, privilege, and even responsibility to express their opinions.
- The fact is that as much as many fire service personnel complain about politics, it keeps people interested and involved.

Politics can tear an organization apart but a more sure cause of death will be apathy. Politics and conflict are natural by-products of human variability and interaction. The job of the manager is to allow the disputes to play out without destroying the fire company.

The administrator faces difficult choices because of the nature of the volunteer public service being performed by the fire company. Managers must be responsible for effective and efficient performance and responsive to the demands of various internal and external groups. The management positions and policies of the fire company are also supposed to be representative of a cross section of the membership. These are all legitimate but sometimes difficult to reconcile goals.

Suggestions for Dealing with Conflict

Dealing with conflict involves some of the same techniques as any decision making process. Some practical suggestions for the fire company managers would include:
- Get the facts.
- Be sympathetic to all sides—be a good listener.
- Let people have their say. Even if they do not win, there is value in letting people speak their minds.
- Decide on a strategy to resolve the conflict.

There are several possible strategies or solutions. The first decision is, should formal channels be used? Some conflicts will just go away over time and should be left to die a natural death. In other cases formal authority or rules can be used to settle disputes (i.e., a hearing before a committee or the Board). Compromise and creative or innovative approaches may also be needed. Above all, an atmosphere of calmness, fairness, and conciliation will help keep conflicts from getting worse.

From a broader perspective, it is important to remember that conflicts will happen. But an organization that maintains a positive, open, and continuous channel of communication will keep conflicts from developing into crises.

Tips on Running Meetings

Any fire department official who is going to become a good manager must attend and try to have productive meetings. Following are a few suggestions to improve both the substance and process of meetings and also win your arguments.

1. Before the meeting
   - Prepare a written agenda.
   - Do some research, get the facts.
   - Talk to people with a variety of opinions.
   - Anticipate your opponents' views and try to prepare a response.
2. During the meeting
   - Stay on the subject.
   - Let people have their say. Encourage people to participate by calling on them individually.
   - Have a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* handy but do not abuse it.
   - Know the fire company bylaws.
   - Stay calm, don't let egos or personalities take control.
   - Keep a sense of humor. Do not be afraid to break the tension with a laugh.
   - Do not over-use the gavel.
   - A political point – if you have a particularly controversial topic, bring it up at the end of the meeting.
   - If the meeting runs long, take a five minute break every 50–60 minutes,
   - Remember, we're all volunteers and trying to do the right thing. It is a democratic organization and everybody has the right to speak and to voice their opinion.

Above all, remember that poorly run meetings waste time, the most precious commodity that a volunteer has to give. It's not the quantity of time spent on an issue but the quality of time that counts. If you, as the manager, waste their time because you failed to plan, organize, control, or direct properly, you are not doing your job.

Conclusion: Management in Perspective

This chapter has focused on the structural, functional, and personal factors that influence the management of a typical volunteer fire company. Managing requires a blend of technical, analytical, conceptual, human relations, and budgeting skills. Managers must be concerned with consistency and open to change at the same time. They must be calm in the face of crisis and organized in the midst of chaos. They need

to maintain balance and perspective and also a sense of humor. Above all, fire service managers need understanding and commitment that come from knowing that the mission of protecting lives, property, and the physical environment is worth the effort involved in doing it well.

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Organizational Design: Bylaws, Charters, Statutes and Laws

Things for you to do …

☐ 1. Review the bylaws, charter, statutes, and laws that affect your organization and ask questions for issues you do not understand or appear to be conflicts.

☐ 2. Have an attorney review your bylaws periodically to assure conformity with changing laws, e.g., discrimination practices.

☐ 3. Develop an understanding of what position/role is responsible as the developer of policy, the chief executive officer, the chief operations officer, and the chief financial officer of your corporation/organization.

☐ 4. Determine if there are administrative positions that can be served by non-emergency responders to lighten the workload of those who provide emergency services.

☐ 5. Develop and incorporate problem solving and conflict resolution practices into your management processes.

Chapter 2

Your Role

By Chief Ted Lowden

Similar to the organizational design, the Role of the Fire Department CEO is defined via Bylaws, Articles of Corporation, standard operating guidelines, actual duties, and organizational expectation. Again, the organizational status, impact, and value of the role must be reviewed periodically to assure that it is appropriate for your particular organization and changed as necessary, just like a business.

Your Role

As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) you will play the most significant role of all human components within your organization. But as such you will not specifically deliver any tangible services to either your internal or external customer base. Yet through the efforts of the CEO, all of the emergency organization's service delivery outputs are orchestrated. Interestingly, even the most active of all of the service providers within your own organization will be hard pressed to identify what it is that you do, much less be able to relate it to the successful delivery of emergency services. This section will explain, how you do what you need to do; for and with people who most probably will not understand what it is that you do anyway. Sure, that sounds funny, but it will be explained in the balance of this section.

The CEO is responsible for **all** aspects of the organization. As president Harry Truman was known for saying "the Buck Stops Here." While other members are responsible for their pieces of the organization over which they have been given authority, the CEO retains all responsibility. So when fielding concerns whether from the public or your membership concerning the business transactions of the organization, emergency services delivery issues, the appearance of your facilities and apparatus, the enforcement of the local fire code, or the demeanor of an EMT on an ambulance run, the CEO is the responsible party. If you are your organization's CEO this means you.

In addition to being responsible for the daily things that are important to your organization's success, you will also be held responsible for the future of your organization. As a CEO, you must be closely focused on the future of your organization. Through daily analysis of your community and those issues that are impacting it, you will need to identify how your community is changing and how your organization needs to change with it. That is a pretty tall order but to complicate it even more, the CEO must attempt to lead an organization so that the changes to it are completed reasonably close to when and to what extent the community changes. While the organization's changes do not have to exactly coincide with those of the community, the closer the organization and the community arrive at the new change, the better.

One method of determining what the challenges to your organization's future are and developing a road map to deal with them is through environmental scanning. Scanning your environment can take many forms, including paying close attention to what is going on in your entire community, not just those aspects of it that impact emergency services. This can be done by the CEO's active involvement in community groups, including service and charity organizations, and by keeping a finger on the pulse of your town through the media. The use of daily and weekly periodicals reporting on your community should not be overlooked.

A considerable amount of your time will be spent making sure that things are going according to the organization's plan. This is done by assuring that obstacles are removed to allow the organization to run smoothly and supplying the resources to keep service delivery effective and supporting quality delivery in the future.

Defined via Bylaws/Articles of Corporation

There will be several places where you will be able to find your duties defined in writing. These locations will include state statutes which may have your responsibilities broadly outlined within the confines of legislation (some antiquated) that cover your duties as they apply to your position as a municipal official, the daily operations for executives of non-profit corporations, or even as the CEO of a fire company specifically depending on your type of organization. There may also be state regulations specifically crafted by regulatory agencies empowered by your state's constitution that have crafted regulations that have the weight of law to provide guidance and limitations to your authority as well. It is not a big leap to see that as a fire organization, it's possible to be made up of more than one of these organization types. Of interest and as a word of caution, do not make the assumption that you will turn to any one source and find it all. Additionally, do not fall victim to looking once and having it down cold. The laws and regulations having applicability to both your responsibilities and authorities are changing everyday, particularly in light of the high degree of scrutiny to which public officials are held to today.

In the preceding information, we discussed the places where the weight of law or regulation will impact your authority and responsibility. If you are a non-profit corporation or more simply put, the CEO of a more traditional fire company, your authorities and responsibilities may also be defined within the corporate constitution and bylaws. These documents are usually readily at hand and much easier to become versed with than the plethora of regulations and statutes that may be applicable to your position, yet difficult to track down. A thorough knowledge of such corporate law is necessary as you will need to work closely in a fire company setting where either individuals or a defined group of members, known as an executive board, will be part and parcel to the decision making process. Such executive board members are usually elected and will change from time to time. As the CEO, your tenure will generally be longer than theirs and you will need to provide them with the leadership necessary to facilitate execution of their duties in support of yours. Additionally, such groups will generally turn to the constitution and by-laws to challenge the CEO when decision-making becomes contentious and we all know that such an occasion will occur with the passage of time.

The CEO needs to have a thorough knowledge of all of the statutory and corporate legal limitations as they apply to their positions. A failure to have advanced knowledge of this important material is not an excuse that will be accepted by either the public or your membership. In addition to the immediate consequences, actions outside of your scope or responsibilities not acted upon within your scope can have a significant impact on your CEO's ability to lead the organization in both the present and future. In fact, in some cases such lapses in judgment can have the impact of becoming a negative stigma for the balance of your career.

Actual Duties

Regardless of the size of your organization, a major duty of the CEO will require you to be a continuous symbol of your organization. Typically, we think of symbolism as visual, but in the sense of the CEO, we try to convey that the CEO's demeanor, actions, and even personal appearance transmits a constant message to all about the overall quality of the organization. This does not mean that a shirt and tie image needs to be the norm, but it does mean that a CEO needs to be squared away whenever conducting department business. Do you think a CEO in desperate need of a haircut, with wrinkled clothes, and arriving late for an appointment is going to send a message to the public, or his own members for that matter, that he is representing a professional, well-run organization? The answer is an obvious of course not. Further, the larger the organization, the more important it is for this image to be polished.

The author has been known to quote many times "my office is where reality and politics come crashing together." This means as my organization's CEO it is my duty to fully support our organization in achieving its mission through supporting the efforts of our members as they strive to achieve that mission. Such support for our members can only be provided to that level to which the policy makers are willing to use resources, and typically this means funding. That place—right smack in the middle of those two positions is where the CEO stands—everyday.

So how do you diminish the stresses on yourself as CEO and upon the organization? The answer is well known and frequently talked about, yet is just as frequently ignored. It also happens to be the key duty of the CEO. The answer is planning. A CEO who spends a lot of time talking about today is a CEO that is not spending his time wisely. Good CEOs spend their time and most of their efforts talking about tomorrow and beyond. Good planning will reduce organizational stresses by reducing ambiguity, avoiding well-intentioned yet needless effort, and formulating a team effort, as everyone will know what the plan is and everyone will know their place in the plan.

Frequently, such planning instruments can be comprehensive master plans that can cover a decade or more; or shorter-term strategic plans that might cover from three to five years. While master plans can serve an organization well from an executive or policy-making standpoint, they are frequently not of much value to the rank and file, including middle managers. This is because such plans are so conceptual and cover such large spans of time that they become irrelevant and cannot be related to easily by those working on immediate tasks. Strategic plans on the other hand are shorter term and are easier to relate to for those that you supervise. Such documents can serve as annual work plans and as a blueprint of how one project links to another over a few years; and clearly articulates to both your citizens and your members, your priorities and your schedule for implementing them.

At this point you can now make the link between the CEO developing organizational goals and objectives into visible plans that include scheduled objectives, which result in organizational success through more efficient and effective service. Resources fuel the

entire planning process in the form of people and money. Both items are precious and require close management and effective matching to the organization's goals and objectives. Overuse of either is wasteful and must be carefully guarded against.

The point of this section is to provide a quick overview of your typical duties as CEO. Boiled down, your duties fall into these basic items:

- Represent your organization
- Compliance of the organization with laws and regulations as they apply to your entire organization
- Control resources to a select few, articulate, review, and revise the direction (strategic plan) of your organization to accomplish your organization's goals and objectives

With regard to the last item, even five-year plans, and for that matter your annual plan (budget), may need to be tweaked from time to time. Impacts from unpredicted events can change organizational priorities overnight and can be generated from either external or internal aspects of the organization. The CEO needs to scout the impacts of such unforeseen occurrences and make the necessary adjustments to the organization's plan and then communicate those changes clearly.

Expectations

The CEO can expect to work long hours and have their patience tried to the very last minute. The long hours will coincide with the enormity of the job and the ever present need to meet deadlines in order to avoid causing delays for your subordinates. All of this will yield enormous job satisfaction in the long run.

On a daily basis your patience will be tried, as you continually need to reinforce what your organization's current plans are and justify changes you have made to the plans. This will cause frequent stress between you and your staff as you attempt to communicate the changes and support those changes with a rationale of thought that is beyond the information available to them at their level in the organization. The effort is necessary and will pay off in long term rewards.

You can also expect to be challenged on a personal level, from subordinates who are disappointed in the direction of the organization or do not understand a particular position. They will attempt to make the issue a personal one in lieu of a professional one. This is where a thorough knowledge of the legislation that governs your position, will come into play. You will always need to be on firm legal ground with your actions and you will always need to be equally grounded from an ethical perspective. The ethical perspective is easily linked to the image issue discussed earlier in this section.

Standard Operating Procedures

We have already discussed how various laws, regulations, standards and organizational rules (bylaws) can guide and limit your responsibilities and authorities as a CEO. While these are all external to your direct involvement, one form of legislation or rule making process that you will be directly involved in is Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) development and implementation. These are organization specific laws or rules and in some circles are known as Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs)

Standard operating procedures or guidelines are written documents that are prepared and sanctioned by the organization. They are approved by the CEO to deal with given administrative or emergency situations. In the administrative realm they can deal with things such as emergency warning light permit applications, promotions, and filing leave requests. On the emergency side, they can deal with hose line sizes, triage methods, high rise fire attack, or incident command. Whether a guideline or a procedure, these approved written actions to take when confronted with a given situation as approved by the organization, both can be deviated from at the discretion of the person in any particular situation.

Standard operating procedures or guidelines can be proactive but more than likely are usually created in a reactive environment. Reactive procedures are developed after the organization receives the proverbial bloody nose through a complaint against the organization, a nasty emergency response, an injury, or a lawsuit. They can also be reactive when a nearby jurisdiction has similar experiences and you decide it is time to avoid that same issue in your organization. Though you might say this is a proactive stance, the writer is electing to classify it as reactive, due to the fact that you are not taking action of your own, but instead are reacting to external, yet local influences. Standard operating procedures or guidelines that are crafted in a proactive mode are those that are developed as the organization has seen the future need to address issues in a consistent fashion for a variety of reasons, including safety, operational efficiency, or due to newly enacted laws or regulations.

While the CEO is generally responsible for development of SOPs or SOGs, he or she may not always be the final approval authority. In many organizations, a Board of Fire Commissioners, an executive committee or, in cases of some fire companies, the entire membership may be needed to adopt a given procedure. In all cases the final recommending authority and for sure the final enforcement authority rests with the CEO. In order to achieve the cooperation from your constituents (internal client base) it is necessary for the CEO to involve this group. This will be necessary to assure that support is there when needed for approval but more importantly also spreads out the understanding of why a given procedure is being developed and a thorough understanding by some of the members that will be directly impacted.

A single individual can do standard operating procedure or guideline development and sometimes needs to, particularly in those areas where laws or regulations are being adhered to or when a specific safety hazard exists. Overall, the best method is to utilize carefully managed work groups. In most cases these are referred to as committees. The

writer prefers to refer to them as work groups as they are convened for a carefully defined purpose to execute a given task. At the conclusion of that work, the group is then dissolved. Committees always seem to have a perpetual and even an entitlement flavor to them, with members expecting their appointment to go on forever, usually long after the task, and therefore their usefulness has passed.

One method that works well is to develop a group of individuals to work on a given procedure. The group needs to be given the parameters for the topic, a timeline for completion, and a format to structure their outputs. A consistent format should be developed early in your formulation of the procedures manual with little deviation to that format throughout each of your individual procedures. Then allow the group to develop the contents of the procedure. While it is sometimes unavoidable, SOPs and SOGs should be no longer than two typewritten pages in length. Remember they are designed to provide guidance not specificity for every version of every emergency or situation that your organization might encounter.

Upon completion of the development process, the CEO should review the document carefully and edit it to resemble the balance of the procedures already in place. Careful attention is also required to avoid conflicts with other procedures and to avoid editorializing on the part of the work group. Once carefully edited, the procedure should be rewritten and submitted for final approvals.

The final step to good SOP and SOG development is communication. It's no good to have a procedure that no one knows about. Therefore, the procedure needs to be made an integral part of your organization's training program. This way the bulk of your organization's members will be exposed to the content and will all be trained in the same fashion. This can occur through carefully prepared postings or during routine training sessions or meetings. Regardless of how you do it, this is a critical part of SOP implementation. You cannot expect your organization to perform as anticipated, unless the organization is informed of your expectations. After initial implementation, frequent review is necessary and may be folded into routine training programs.

It goes without saying that SOPs and SOGs need to be memorialized. Once reduced to writing they can be installed in binders in each station, individual copies issued to each member, or with today's technology, even posted to an internal website. Such distribution allows the members to reference the procedures to stay sharp and allows officers to readily reference them for use in reinforcement training or for use in substantiating disciplinary matters.

On a final note about SOPs and SOGs, they are never completed. Procedures that have been developed and implemented need to be reviewed, updated, and communicated routinely. Sometimes technological issues, sometimes experience, and other times legislation or regulations will drive the review and revision process. This requires the CEO to constantly scan the environment where his or her organization is operating to determine what changes are impacting the organization.

Closing

In the good old days, about five years ago, heads of fire organizations were referred to us as fire chiefs. Today while that title is still used, the real term that in many cases describes the position is Chief Executive Officer. The change in thinking has been driven mostly due to the parallel track the fire chief shares with our private sector counterparts. Just like those in the private service sector, we produce a service as a product of our organization and are dependent upon the support from our clients for survival. Additionally, it has finally been accepted that the major portion of a fire chief's job is no longer putting out fires. Instead the position now requires huge amounts of time to be used specifically towards those activities frequently associated with private sector CEOs. Things like coalition building, financial management, market positioning, and human resource engineering are all now part of the fire chief's everyday activities, more so than stretching lines, calculating friction loss or determining what is the best cervical collar for a patient. Remember, however, that bylaws or organizational design may actually have the fire chief as the chief operating officer (COO) with a president or commission board head or CEO.

The job of CEO of a fire department is a job that is impossible to be totally successful. First off, you're the boss. You will have detractors of your position just because you are the boss. Secondly, you will be dealing with the whole organization. This includes the seen and the unseen. Therefore, you will frequently make decisions on certain things that some, if not most, of your members will not have as much of the information as you have. This will, of course, lead to conflict, regardless of your best efforts. Most members will simply view the issue from their parochial perspective and innocently uninformed perspective.

The job of CEO is one, however, that has many rewards. Through your position you will be able to contribute to your organization as well as your community. In some cases you will aid the nation's emergency services community as a whole. You will also get the opportunity to help many people develop to their full potential and beyond through opportunity engineering a method in which progressively more challenging assignments are entrusted to an individual so that as experience is gained, so is confidence and capability. The proactive use of opportunity engineering is a valuable one, both for your organization and for the individual. But the single best part of the CEO's job is that you will have the ability to guide your organization to a place that no one else has been before—the future.

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Your Role

Things for you to do …

☐ 1. As Chief Executive Officer, you are the emergency service organization's image and ethical symbol to the community. Can you improve on that current image?

☐ 2. Your duties as CEO are defined in writing in more than one document. Consolidate all of your duties dictated by various documents.

☐ 3. Compare your job description to the items noted above. Modify the document as necessary for approval by your superior(s).

☐ 4. A major component of your role is the development, maintenance and enforcement of SOPs and SOGs. Review your plan for effectiveness (or develop a plan if none is in place) to manage the process.

☐ 5. A good bit of your time will be spent maintaining your organization's goals, objectives, and plans. Are yours current? If not, what should you do?

Chapter 3

Decision Making

By Chief John Buckman

The Fire Department CEO is a senior manager, just like in a business, and as such, must be knowledgeable in and have the right skill sets in planning, leading, organizing, controlling, and communicating. The CEO must continue to seek educational opportunities to stay in touch with industry standards and applications.

Decision Making

President Harry S. Truman had a sign on his desk in the White House that read "The Buck Stops Here!" That statement is very appropriate to open the discussion on decision making.

You get out of life exactly what you expect out of it. To get what you expect you must become extremely good at making decisions. Making decisions is one of the critical functions of a leader. Making decisions quickly is important as well. The most important aspect of decision-making though, is making the decision in a timely manner.

Decision-making is a critical aspect of teamwork and leadership development. Today the emphasis on leadership theory is about participative management. It has been proven over and over again that people like to collaborate with each other toward identifiable goals and they perform best when they have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Collaboration is a critical aspect of how to manage people in today's world.

The volunteer fire service has been very good at collaborative organizational management. We have business meetings where we sit around and discuss what equipment to purchase, where to buy our insurance, and other matters of importance to the fire department. That method of managing a volunteer fire department in many cases is not a very good example of decision-making. There is a significant waste of valuable time as well as a waste of personnel in management by committee. The monthly fire department business meeting is a holdover of the club atmosphere around which the volunteer fire department was organized. Today, in a fast- paced world where stable and competent leadership decisions must be made on a regular basis, the old way of holding all decisions until a business meeting will get us in trouble. Imagine a local corporation having to get all of the stockholders together on a monthly basis to make decisions that impact the future of the corporation. We can imagine that corporation described above will be out of business in a very short period of time. It is time to do away with the club organizational model and streamline it into a business organizational model. Doing this does not do away with a firefighter's ability to influence their organization, but it does reduce or eliminate a firefighter or a group of firefighters from holding the department, and ultimately the community, hostage over one issue.

In order to be effective in leading within a volunteer (VFD)/combination fire department today, decisions must be made at the lowest level possible in the chain of command. Today the organizational structure of a VFD/combination department must include the ability to make decisions by command level personnel. In the history of the VFD/combination department, most decisions were made at the monthly business meeting. The roots of the monthly business meeting are in the club or social aspect of our history. Today, due to growth in our communities, our VFD/combination departments have grown as well, and it must be assured that the decision-making authority h`s grown with it.

Sharing in decision-making usually comes when the leaders feel pretty good about themselves, are trusting of others, tend not to be defensive, and communicate easily

and openly. Such leaders are seen as persons, not roles. They do not usually need to invoke their titles to get things done. People want to work with them because it's fun. Their positive attitudes set up self-fulfilling prophecies that result in excellent performance by themselves and their team.

One of the things about making decisions that is critical is that you can not wait until you have 100% of the information to make a decision. If you waited until 100% of the information was available, then you would not need to be involved. You can have too many facts and waiting until that time supports the theory that the decision can make itself.

When making decisions it is OK to say NO! The best time saver can be to say no. People have a hard time doing this even when it is the obvious response. They are afraid that they may offend someone, they may be hedging their bets, or they may simply not want to make a decision at that particular moment.

It actually is very easy to say no without being impolite. The bigger problem is a reluctance to be final, a feeling that there is a chance, however remote, that one may be missing an opportunity. There have been many times when each of us has found ourselves in this situation and has been forced to say no even when it hurt. By far the biggest problem people have with saying no is that they convince themselves that by buying time they are actually saving time. If you are feeling overwhelmed or harassed it is much easier to say. "Let me think about it," or "Let me get back to you," then it is to deal with it and get it out of the way. This is particularly tempting when you already know the answer is going to be a negative one. Obviously these situations do not just go away, and by not taking five minutes to deal with it at the moment, you invariably end up spending a lot more time with it in the future. Remember that most people prefer an instant negative response to an excessively long drawn out maybe. Usually these end up wasting our time and come to the same conclusion anyway. A no is often better for everyone. It saves time on both sides, and it will give you a sense of satisfaction. The realization that you will not have to deal with it again can make you feel like you have really accomplished something.

The leaders respected most are those that can make instant decisions. They do not need to know every fact first. They accept a certain amount of risk when confronted with a situation. They accept that they are going to make their share of wrong decisions and are self-confident enough to know that most of the time they are going to make the right one.   A reputation as a good decision maker is usually based as much on how quickly and definitely that person decides as it is on the results.

Some leaders, when asked very simple questions, respond with a standard response/non-answer: "I think we have some data on that."

Decision-making is more an intuitive process than an analytical one, and no number of market studies, focus groups, or research reports is going to change that fact. The danger is that the more data people have to chew upon, the more likely they are to underestimate the importance of intuition—the seat of the pants factor. Good timing or correct timing is often a matter of converting sensory perception into conscious action. Decision-making is exactly the same process, only the flow is reversed.   It is taking

analytical data, facts, and figures, and converting them into sensory perceptions. If you eliminate the need to feel a decision, you will not make a very good decision or you will not make a decision at all.

Facts are a decision maker's tools, but (1) they will not take the place of intuition, (2) they will not make the decision for you, and (3) they are only as useful as your ability to interpret them.

Some people ignore the facts altogether, but a far greater number use them to justify convenient or already established positions rather than the one the facts actually support. It is obviously difficult to make good decisions based on self-assuring, self-justifying, or self-serving bad conclusions. The best use of facts is not their literal interpretation, but what they may indicate. A stop sign tells you to stop, but what it indicates is conflicting traffic patterns and certain consequences if you ignore it.

The most useful decision-making information may lie beyond the facts. Do not be bound only by what you already know. Sound decision making is a constant process of staying current, of perceiving how new information can alter old decisions, and of anticipating the future.

You have probably heard the story of how the circus trains elephants to not run away. When they are born their legs are chained to a stake that is driven into the ground. When they pull on the chain the chain hurts their leg. When they are grown the same chain is used with the same small stake, but the animal remembers that when they were younger that they would have pain if they moved around when the chain was wrapped around their leg. The elephant remembers the pain and is too dumb to use the new set of facts—how circumstances have changed. The tiny stake keeps a two-ton elephant at bay just as effectively as it did the baby.

Many leaders are too dependent on old facts, on outmoded conventions, or are still basing decisions on what worked twenty years ago. This is the elephantine decision making process. Many of these always go with first impressions, but you may want to let them settle in for a period of time. Decisions are, and should be, partly emotional, but it is helpful to keep your options open until the cold harsh light of day has had a chance to shine on them: are there any obvious considerations that have not been considered? If none occurs in the first twenty-four hours, this means they probably will never occur to me—or by the time they do it will be too late anyway.

If you immediately start to second guess a decision you have made, it will most likely prove to be a bad decision, not because it was the wrong decision, but because you have undermined its chance for success. A lot of questionable decisions have worked because the people who made them were determined to make them work. A number of good decisions have failed because the people who made them never got over their doubts.

There are two crucial things you need to know in order to become an effective decision maker. First, you need to know how someone would make a decision in the ideal world. Second, you have to appreciate that in this world, there are very few situations where you can actually do that. Thus you need to know how to make decisions in circumstances where you do not have, and cannot get, all of the

information you would like to have, or where you could not process that information even if you had it. You will make most of your interesting and important decisions in a context of uncertainty.   How you handle uncertainty is the best predictor of your success.

All decisions have three parts: (1) you identify your goal; (2) you identify your options; and (3) you choose from among your options. Even the most trivial decision you make fits this pattern. Think of decisions as investments. You put time, energy, and sometimes money into them. The more you invest in making a decision, the more likely it is that you will make the best possible decision. But sometimes the difference between the best and worst possible decisions is not very great, or the stakes are not very high. The nine steps to effective decision making are designed to help you make good decisions no matter what your investment might be. They are practical guidelines to help you navigate the three phases of any decision-making problem; identifying goals; identifying options; and choosing from among your options.

1. **Identify your objective.**
   All decisions are goal-oriented.   Whenever you make a decision there is something specific that you wish to achieve. If there is not something you want or need to achieve, then why are you messing with this issue? But while knowing your objective is absolutely necessary, for all but the simplest decisions, it is not enough.   Your decisions generally affect more than one thing you care about. The more important your decision, the more care you need to take in identifying the stakes.

2. **Do a preliminary survey of your options.**
   When examining the facts, make sure that you give yourself options. Examining options before making a decision actually improves the eventual decision. Determine whether there are any other options available because there may be vital implications important to your decision.

3. **Identify the implicated values.**
   In easy or unimportant decisions, you normally do not need to ask yourself why you have any particular objective. Some decisions, however, affect things you care about only slightly, or do so only briefly.

4. **Assess the importance of the decisions.**
   You need to assess the importance of a decision in order to determine how much effort to invest. You do not want to spend a lot of time and energy making trivial choices; you do not want to make life-altering decisions blithely. You judge the importance of a decision by examining the implicated values. A decision that could profoundly affect your life prospects and your future decisions is an important one. A decision that only briefly or marginally affects things you care about is an unimportant one. To assess the importance of a decision, you may have to put it into context. What may be a minor decision in most contexts may,

in fact, be an extremely important one for you. You should also be aware that there is no necessary correlation between the importance of a decision and its difficulty. Important decisions can be very easy; unimportant decisions can be hard. Generally speaking, you should take more care making more important decisions, but you should be able to make easy decisions quickly regardless of their importance.

5. **Budget your time and energy.**
   Budget more time and energy for important decisions; strictly limit your investment of time for unimportant ones. One method of facilitating this is to allow decisions to be made at the appropriate level. Some Chiefs, especially in volunteer fire departments, hold all of the decision-making power at their level. It will develop your subordinates and give them experience in decision making when you are not around if you push decisions down to the appropriate level. For example, a training question should be directed to the training officer, a personnel question should be directed to the personnel officer.

6. **Choose a decision-making strategy.**
   The time and energy you can devote to making a decision will affect the strategy you choose. A strategy is a plan of action, a scheme for getting-where-you-want-to-go or getting-what-you-want-to-get. While we are not always conscious of it, we always do use strategy when making a decision. Some strategies are good and some are bad. Some are good in one context and some are bad in another. All things considered, it is generally better to choose a strategy consciously, and to tailor the strategy to the choice that you have to make. Because the strategy you choose can have such a profound effect on the decision you make, you want to be very careful not to choose an inappropriate one. Your choice of strategy is part of the decision you make, even before you make it. Decision-making has elements of art. It cannot be reduced totally to a simple technical exercise. One thing we know for sure is that if we spend all of our time and energy thinking about designing our decision-making processes, we will never make decisions. One hardly needs to say that this is no recipe for satisfaction.

7. **Identify your alternatives.**
   Alternatives are important in decision-making. Most decisions do not have a right or wrong answer; they are clouded in multiple factors. Consider those multiple factors and alternatives when you assess your position and the importance of the decision you are about to make.   In reality, our alternatives change as we deliberate.   For example, completing a size-up, determining a strategy, and beginning to implement tactics when standing in front of a two-story wood frame residential structure fire with fire blowing out of two windows on the second floor. After about a minute into the fire you now have fire blowing out three windows and the hose line is not even to the front door.

8. **Evaluate your options.**

   When you choose a decision-making strategy, you also choose a way of evaluating your options. Now is the time to do that. The simplest evaluations require you to merely judge an option on one dimension. For example, which hydrant to layout from when confronting a working structure fire. Some strategies require you only to evaluate as many options as it takes to find an acceptable choice, some require you to wait until you have evaluated all of your options. A few strategies get you off the hook of having to evaluate options at all. The best example is the random toss of the coin.

9. **Make your choice—on time, and on budget.**

   As soon as you have finished the evaluation, strategy requires that you make your choice. Some people have difficulty making a choice, even when they have all of the necessary information. Often this is because they fear the consequences of choosing badly.

Emergency Operations

Most of the decisions the Fire Chief thinks about are those that deal with emergency operations. Critical decisions with a time requirement demand that you have a sound decision-making process and that you practice the process often. Imagine if a heart surgeon went to school and became extremely talented, but then never practiced and now you need her to operate on you.

Structural Fire Decision-Making

Strategy - must be selected before the tactics are applied.

Select one of two options: offensive or defensive. You can't mix the two. When you have picked the strategy it then provides you with tactical decision options to accomplish the strategy.

Tactics – operations require a significant commitment of resources. The application of tactics requires ongoing decision-making and an evaluation of the tactical objective being achieved in a safe manner.

1. Firefighter Safety—the number one priority during all emergency operations must be to ensure that firefighters are not placed at an unnecessary risk. This evaluation must be ongoing and includes a conscious decision by the IC to commit firefighters to risky positions.

2. Rescue of Civilians—how many, where are they located within the building, what is the likelihood that they are savable.

3. Water supply—do you have enough? If not, where do you obtain more? Order more water!

4. Resources—do you have enough pumping capacity and personnel to accomplish what you want simultaneously? If not, you must order more resources before committing firefighters.

5. Utility control—LP gas, natural gas, and electricity should be turned off during the initial phases of emergency operations

6. Exposures—there are interior and exterior exposures. There are additional exposures above the fire. If you do not protect the exposures before you attack the main fire, it will spread to the exposures and you will never catch up.

7. Locate—the seat of the fire. The seat of the fire is not necessarily where the fire is showing.

8. Confine—surround the fire. If you go where you see the fire it will quickly expose itself in another area. It is important to commit resources to areas where the fire is going to be first and then to where the fire is second.

9. Extinguish—in order to extinguish the fire, resources must be gathered quickly and in significant amounts to accomplish this task without undue risk to the firefighters.

10. Overhaul—decisions have to be made when conducting overhaul about the stability of the building as well as protecting evidence of the cause and origin of the fire.

11. Ventilation—natural, vertical, horizontal, positive, or negative pressure are some of the options available to the IC. Decisions have to be made as to when, where, how, and what resources are available and required to accomplish the ventilation tactical objective.

Conclusion

Decision making requires an understanding of which process to use to properly analyze the issue and make an appropriate decision at the emergency scene or in the station. If you design your decision-making process well, you run the lowest possible risk of choosing badly, and any additional time and energy you spend fretting about your decision simply adds to its cost. There is no point in making decisions more expensive than they are worth. If you rigidly stick to your schedule and your budget, you will eventually tame the demon of regret. Rest assured, though, that you will still make lousy choices once in a while. This is inevitable no matter what you do, but don't fear it, just DO IT.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chief John M. Buckman III serves as Fire Chief of German Township Volunteer Fire Department in Evansville, Indiana. He is a Past President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. In 2001 he received designation as Chief Officer from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. Chief Buckman graduated from the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy in 1988. President George W. Bush appointed Chief Buckman to the Department of Homeland Security State, Tribal and Local Advisory Group. In 2000 he was appointed to the America Burning Revisited Commission by President William J. Clinton. He is the co-author of the 3rd Edition of Recruiting, Training, and Maintaining Volunteer Firefighters. Chief Buckman was selected by Fire Chief Magazine in 1985 as Fire Chief of the Year. He has authored over 80 articles and presented at a variety of conferences in all 50 states as well as all Canadian provinces. He is a Graduate member of the International Fire Engineers Association. The Indiana Fire Instructors Association selected Chief Buckman as Instructor of the Year in 1986. In 2002 Chief Buckman was presented with the Distinguished Hoosier designation from Indiana Governor Frank O'Bannon and was made a Sagamore of the Wabash—the State of Indiana's highest honor for a citizen. He has been a member of the fire service for 34 years and Fire Chief for 27 years. He is married to Leslie and they have four grown daughters and four grandchildren.

Decision Making

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Establish a standard decision-making process for your organization.

☐ 2. Conduct decision-making training for the entire membership.

☐ 3. Define what type decisions can be made at the lowest level.

☐ 4. Define what type decisions require supervisory level review or approval.

☐ 5. Review a recent decision made, compared to the process or level of decision making above.

Chapter 4

Managing Fire Company Finances

By Chief Daniel B.C. Gardiner, CFPS
and
Linda T. Gardiner

Next to managing people, the most significant management responsibility is that of managing the finances of the fire department. While the CEO does not have to know particulars of accounting, understanding the budget process, requirements for auditing, the need for multiple income streams, when and how to manage spending patterns, and most importantly cash flow management, are control points that the CEO is responsible for assuring are implemented in the fire department—just like a business.

Managing Fire Company Finances

The term budget is derived from the Middle English word "bouget", which means bag or wallet. In England during the middle ages, the "bouget" was a leather bag in which the King's finance minister carried documents explaining the country's needs to Parliament. Today we do not submit our budget requests in a leather bag, but we do need to prepare requests for the resources required to run the fire company. Budgeting occurs on a regular basis, usually once a year, establishing the foundation for fiscally managing your fire company.

Budget Concept

Why do we need budgets? A budget communicates our need for resources to the administrative or legislative bodies that have the power to provide the funds for these resources. Budgets also provide a blueprint for the expenditure of these funds. In essence, a budget is established in conjunction with the business plan of an organization, be it a fire department, emergency medical service agency, or a corporation. They take time to develop effectively and may well be the most important activity conducted by the officers, in conjunction with local government. The budget income and spending must be consistent with the business plan of the organization and consistent with the short and long term spending and operational plans.

Budgets may be required by state mandate, city or town charter, or by past practice. In any of these situations, budgets anticipate needed expenditures from one time period to another. There are many types of budgets but the most commonly used are the Operating Budget and the Capital Budget.

Most operating budgets cover a one-year period, called a fiscal year. The start and end of a fiscal year need to be 12-months apart, however the start and end can be anytime during the calendar year. Some fire companies choose July 1 to June 30th as their fiscal year, others use a calendar year approach. It makes no difference from a financial standpoint when your fiscal year begins, however these dates may be another issue determined by state statute, city charter, or by past practice.

A capital budget generally refers to items purchased of a larger dollar value, possibly with a loan or mortgage and are depreciated over time. These may be characterized as being of "x" dollars with over a "y" year lifespan. An example of the concept of the budget process is provided in Figure 1.

Figure #1. Budget Preparation Flow Chart
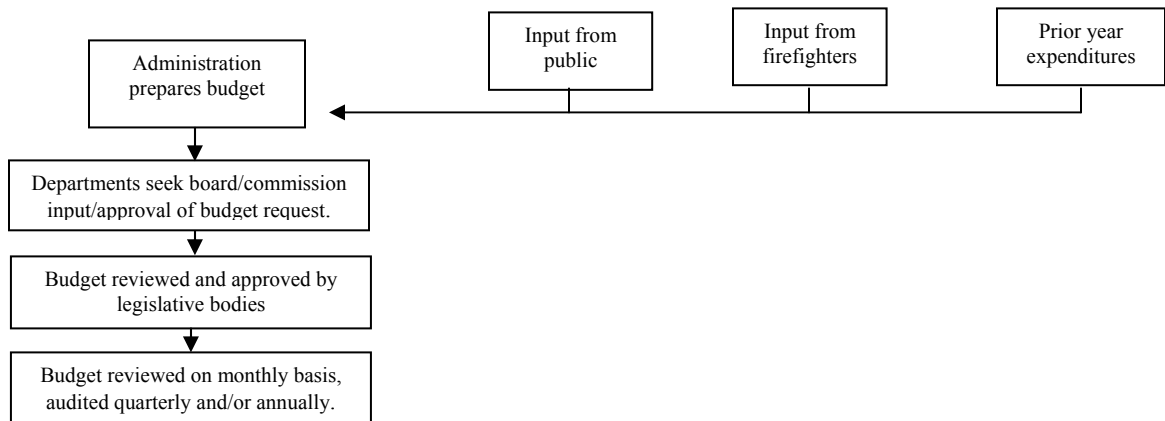
Chart of Accounts

The most commonly used operating budget format is the line item budget. Line item budgets use a chart of accounts. The chart of accounts is simply a listing of line items for both INCOME (such as donations, tax revenues, and fees) and EXPENSE (such as utilities, rent, and motor vehicle fuel).

Listed below are common line items which may comprise your chart of accounts.

Income

Municipal Allocation/ Tax Revenue Any funds received from either municipal contribution/allocation and/or tax based income.

Insurance Premium Allocation/Fire Insurance Premium Tax Tax revenues (technically insurance premium taxes) received from insurers who write business within the state and are obligated by law to provide a percentage of insurance premiums to local fire departments.

Dues Fees charged to the members of the organization*.*

Fund Raising Activities Income from events designed to create a profit from which the income offsets organizational expenses.

Subscription Donations/Fund Drive Funds received from the public for either services rendered or in anticipation of possible service needs, or in response to a request from the organization for a donation of financial support.

Interest Income received from interest on funds in interest bearing accounts

Rental Income Income received from the rental of owned facilities and/or equipment.

Service Contracts Funds received from various entities in exchange for specific services to be delivered.

Organization Donations Donations received by other segments of your organization, e.g., social club donations, auxiliary donations.

Grants Grants from corporations, government, or similar entities to offset specific expenditures or support the funding process for the organization.

Billings Charges based upon the delivery of services.

Fees Income received based on the charge for specific services, e.g., inspections, impact fees, etc.

Miscellaneous Donations Unsolicited financial donations to the organization

Miscellaneous Incidental income received, not able to be classified in any of the previously mentioned categories.

Revenues

Municipal Allocation/Tax Revenue	**$120, 045**
Insurance Premium Allocation	50,000
Dues	5,000
Fund Raising Activities	10,000
Subscription Donations/Fund Drive	75,000
Interest	4,000
Rental Income	7,000
Service Contracts	43,000
Organization Donations	0
Grants	40,000
Billings	6,255
Fees	2,000
Miscellaneous Donations	5,000
Miscellaneous	500
Total Revenues	**$367,800**
Municipal Funds/Taxes	32.6%
Relief Association	13.6%
Dues, Fundraising & Donations	52.1%
Billing	1.7%

Expense

Salaries and Benefits Salaries and wages paid to permanent employees and officials of the fire company who are employed on a full-time basis or who are employed a minimum of 20 hours per week and receive the benefits of full-time employees. Salaries and wages paid to permanent employees and officials of the fire company who are employed 19.5 hours or less per week and who are not entitled to benefits such as vacations and holidays, are considered part-time and may warrant a separate category.

Overtime Earnings Payments to full-time employees for hours worked in excess of their normally scheduled work week*.*

Health Insurance Fire company's share of premiums paid toward employee's insured health plan.

Life Insurance Fire company's share of premiums paid toward employee's group life insurance policy.

Social Security Fire company's share of employees' social security and major medical costs as prescribed by the federal government.

Claims Handling Service Payments to outside vendor for administering and handling workers compensation, heart, and hypertension claims, or similar claims.

Fees and Professional Services Payments for services of a professional nature which may not be subject to bidding requirements. Services include, but are not limited to, employment testing, auditing, appraisal, engineering, architectural, credit rating, collection, medical exams, employment physicals, legal, stenographic, and clerical services. A fire company should budget funds here for hiring outside instructors and persons that perform unique services not identified elsewhere.

Contracted Property Services Services rendered under contract by private companies that include, but are not limited to, lawn mowing, leaf collection, and trash removal.

Utilities Payments for water, gas (natural and propane) and electric service.

Maintenance and Repair of Equipment Time and material payments and service contract premiums paid to private companies for the upkeep and repair of equipment. This includes SCBA, fire extinguishers, any portable equipment carried on fire apparatus, and tools carried by firefighters that are sent out for repair or maintenance. This category includes radio and non-portable SCBA filling equipment, but excludes automotive equipment.

Maintenance and Repair of Fire Station(s) and Grounds Time and material payments and service contract premiums to private companies for the upkeep and repair of fire company buildings and grounds.

Automotive Maintenance and Repair Materials, including, but not limited to, engine parts, tires, batteries, electrical, and mechanical accessories used in the routine maintenance and repair of automotive equipment. Inhouse mechanics would use this account to purchase parts they use in their repair and maintenance of fire apparatus. This account includes SCBA filling equipment that is permanently mounted on fire apparatus. An outside maintenance facility that maintains and repairs your fire apparatus would also be paid from this account.

Rental and Storage Rental of land, buildings, right of ways, storage facilities, post office boxes, safety deposit boxes, office equipment, and construction equipment.

Property Insurance Insured coverage of real property and personal property including all risk, earthquake, and flood coverage subject to policy conditions and exclusions. Insured coverage of boiler and machinery including production machinery.

General Liability Insurance Payments for general liability insurance that covers claims made against the fire company.

Communications/Telephone Payments for telephone and FAX service, call boxes, alarm systems, and radio communications.

Advertising Publication in newspapers and periodicals of public notices, legal notices, bid invitations, personnel recruitment, and promotional items. Annual fire safety messages and public education announcement such as change your clock-change your battery, are all paid from this account.

Printing, Binding, Photo Payments for printing, binding, copying, microfilming, film development, and graphic arts services for the production of books, codes and ordinances, manuals, reports, newsletters, blueprints, maps, and other publications.

Laundry, Linen, and Dry Cleaning Rental and regular cleaning and replacement of towels and uniforms.

Travel and Meeting Costs incurred to attend local and out-of-town meetings (other than training/conferences). This cost includes transportation, lodging, meals, and mileage reimbursement for use of privately owned vehicles used to conduct fire company business.

Office Supplies Expendable items, small office equipment, and supplies including, but not limited to, envelopes, stationary, duplicating supplies, forms, wastebaskets, maps, pencil sharpeners, calculators, and drafting supplies.

Clothing and Dry Goods Protective clothing, uniforms, and outerwear. The entire protective clothing including helmet, coat, boots, pants, shirts, hood, gloves, hearing protection, eye protection worn by a firefighter and dress and station uniforms are paid for out of this account.

Cleaning and Janitorial Supplies Supplies used in the cleaning of fire company facilities including, but not limited to, soap, disinfectants, floor wax, brooms, mops, toilet paper, paper towels, paper cups, and wiping cloths.

Special Department Supplies Supplies purchased by a department which are unique to that department. Supplies include, but are not limited to, foam and haz-mat supplies, EMS supplies, shovels, hammers, screwdrivers and other hand tools. Computer hardware and software that are too small to be classified as a capital item, may be purchased from this account.

Postage Payments for postage, metered mail, parcel post, and transportation of materials, and equipment shipped or moved by the fire company.

Maintenance and Repair Materials Materials used in the routine maintenance and repair of fire company owned buildings and other fire company property. This account is used to pay the bills at stores such as hardware, home improvement, and lumber yards, where the labor is supplied by the firefighters and the materials are used at the fire station or other department facility.

Motor Vehicle Fuel and Lubricant Gasoline, diesel fuel, motor oil, and lubricant for automotive and portable equipment.

Education and Memberships Payments for professional association memberships, professional licenses, training, and education. This is where the dues for national, regional, and local fire service organizations are paid from. Registration fees for outside training and training materials used inhouse are also paid for with this account.

Liability Claims and Damages Payment of claims for injuries and damages for which the fire company is liable.

Firefighting Equipment Non-capitalized equipment required to perform operational firefighting duties.

EMS Equipment Non-capitalized equipment required to perform operational emergency medical service duties.

Rescue Equipment Non-capitalized equipment required to perform operational rescue duties.

Personal Protective Equipment Non-capitalized personal protective equipment costs such as gloves, helmets, boots, masks, and respiratory protection equipment. It may be appropriate to subdivide these even further, depending on the amount of detail and clarity you desire in your budget.

Hydrant Maintenance Costs associated with maintaining operational performance of fire hydrants. Usually a fee charged per hydrant by the entity providing water supply to the community.

Certification Fees Cost to test and certify aerial ladder, fire pump, fire hose and ladders condition and performance.

Contracts Costs incurred as a result of contracts entered into by the fire company.

Subscriptions Fees incurred for procurement of Fire/EMS magazine or periodicals.

Computer Computer equipment and computer supplies cost.

Billing/Collection Costs Costs incurred with the billing for services and/or collection of unpaid invoices for service.

Training Registrations Costs incurred for training program registrations.

Training Travel, Meals, and Lodging Costs incurred for meals, lodging, and incidental expenses, to attend training programs.

Textbooks Costs of textbooks and related materials associated with training.

Audio-Visual Cost of audio visual materials (videos, etc.) and any non-capitalized audio visual equipment purchased.

Loans Payments made as a matter of loan agreements for capitalized items. Can be further detailed by loan/project.

Donations to Others This caption includes donations to other organizations, fire companies, etc.

Good and Welfare This caption includes expenses incurred as a result of providing for the good and welfare of members, individuals, or groups, e.g. fruit baskets, baby gifts, flowers.

Banquets/Awards Costs incurred for awards and recognition of members and others during events and banquets.

Social Function Supplies Costs incurred for social events sponsored by the organization.

Incentives Funds assigned for recruitment, retention, or performance incentives. This category may be further detailed by the type of incentive (e.g. clothing, food, cash, gifts) if appropriate.

Taxes Any taxes paid by the organization should be included here and categorized as separate sub-expenses if appropriate.

Fire Prevention Non-capitalized expenses associated with fire prevention, fire safety education, public relations, injury prevention programs, etc. It may be appropriate to further detail this section by the types of programs offered, if they have sufficient costs associated with them.

Miscellaneous Use this caption for all other expenses not captured elsewhere.

Expenditures	
Salaries and Benefits	2,500
Overtime Earnings	0
Health Insurance	0
Life Insurance	5,000
Social Security	430
Claim Handling Services	0
Fees and Professional Services	2,500
Contracted Property Services	0
Utilities – Water	720
Gas	4,500
Electric	8,000
Maintenance and Repair of Equipment	4,500
Maintenance and Repair of Buildings and Grounds	12,000

Automotive Maintenance and Repair	35,000
Rental and Storage	0
Property Insurance	7,000
General Liability Insurance	5,000
Communications/Telephone	6,000
Advertising	0
Printing, Binding, Photo	750
Laundry, Linen, and Dry Cleaning	250
Travel and Meetings (non-training)	1,750
Office Supplies	5,000
Clothing and Dry Goods	0
Cleaning and Janitorial Supplies	1,500
Special Department Supplies	0
Postage	450
Maintenance and Repair Materials	4,000
Motor Vehicle Fuel and Lubricants	12,000
Education and Memberships	1,250
Liability Claims and Damages	0
Firefighting Equipment	14,000
EMS Equipment	15,000
Rescue Equipment	7,000
Personal Protective Gear	20,000
Hydrant Maintenance	1,200
Subscriptions	750
Computer Hardware	1,200
Computer Software and supplies	900
Billing/Collection Costs	2,000
Training Registrations	850
Training Travel, Meals and Lodging	3,000
Textbooks	500
Audio Visual Materials	500
Audio Visual Equipment	1,000
Loans	119,000
Donations	1,000
Good and Welfare	2,000
Banquet/Awards	10,000
Social Function Supplies	3,000
Incentives	23,000
Taxes	2,500
Fire Prevention	6,000
Miscellaneous	10,000
Total Expenditures	**$367,800**

Budget Preparation

In order to prepare a budget, you must know where your money is going. Start by identifying all of the different costs incurred in the running of your fire company in prior years. Look at the line items listed to help you identify and categorize these costs.

The next step is to project the items and number of units you might need in any given line item category. A simple way to predict future needs is to look at your prior needs. For instance, you might project the same level of first aid supplies if Emergency Medical calls remain constant. However, you may project increased usage in diesel fuel if you are adding a vehicle to your fleet. You may want to project an inflationary adjustment if you know unit prices of these items will increase over the next year.

Once you identify your line items you will have produced your chart of accounts. A simple spreadsheet should be developed in order to present a complete look at your budget, including the requests and the associated costs. The spreadsheet may be done using a personal computer or manually using a sheet of paper.

In summary, preparing a budget is not difficult.
- Identify the resource needs of your organization for one year.
- Categorize these items using the line items listed.
- Estimate the amount of money needed for these items.
- Be prepared to explain why you need the items requested.

Line Item	Prior Year 2 Expenditures	Prior Year 1 Expenditures	Prior Year Budget	Next Year Request
Insurance	$ 4,000	$ 6,000	$ 8,000	$10,000
Payroll	4,000	4,500	4,800	5,000
Heating Fuel	3,000	3,000	3,200	3,200
Electricity	3,600	3,600	3,600	3,600
Janitorial Supplies	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200
Motor Vehicle Fuel	1,500	1,800	2,000	2,100
Motor Vehicle Repair	1,000	2,500	1,500	2,000
EMS and Fire Supplies	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500
Uniforms and Fire Gear	4,000	5,000	5,000	6,000
Training and Education	2,000	2,000	3,000	3,000
TOTAL	$28,800	$34,100	$36,800	$40,600

Budget Format

The budget format for the Operating Budget should be as simple as possible but provide enough information for the public and legislative bodies to approve your budget. Prior year expenditures also provide a very valuable frame of reference for current year requests. You may want to provide one or two years of data on prior expenditures.

The sample budget presented shows the next year request is 6.7% over the prior year budget allocations. However, the historical data shows an 11% increase in current year expenditures over prior year expenditures. Perhaps in that year you experienced an increase in community activity therefore Motor Vehicle Fuel, Motor Vehicle

Maintenance, and Uniforms and fire gear increased at a larger rate than other line items. It would appear that the level of Fire and EMS responses are expected to level off in current year and future years. This data feeds into your justification for your budget request.

The level of service provided to the community dictates the amount of resources needed by the fire company. Few communities let the fire company know what level of service is expected. This must be overcome by soliciting public input.

You will never find enough money to fund all of the programs and activities you deem necessary. This goes for small rural community as well as large cities. Due to the limit of available financial resources, prioritizing your requests becomes an important element in your budget preparation.

Capital Budget

The Capital Budget differs from the Operating Budget in that the time horizon is longer than one year. The Capital Budget reflects the need for resources that have a useful life of greater than one year and are usually very costly. Capital items might include fire apparatus and buildings. These items are usually funded over a longer period than one year by the issuance of bonds, debt, or taxes. Although a Capital Budget is different than the Operating Budget, you need to include one year's worth of the bond payback within the Operating Budget. An easy way to accomplish this is to include the following line items in your Operating Budget's chart of accounts.

Capital Any equipment, furniture or fixtures with a useful life of more than one year but which will be financed totally in one year, minimum.

Redemption and Interest of Debt Amount of principle and interest due in one year to finance capital purchases such as equipment, furniture or fixtures with a useful life of more than one year.

Fire Protection Capital Budget	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Funded by Insurance Premium Fund					
Funded by Municipality					
Funded by Fire/EMS Companies					
Alpha-Numeric Pagers	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Radio System Replacement	425,000				
Fire Safety House				85,000	
Fire Training Tower					450,000
Self-Contained Breathing App.	32,500	32,500	32,500	32,500	32,500
Chief's Car	40,000				
Rescue		430,000			
Field Truck					150,000
Replace Ambulance 2			123,600		
Mortgage	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
LifePaks -		10,000		10,000	
Medical Equipment	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	
Facility Expansion and Furniture		102,500		2,500	
Laptops for field use	12,500	5,000	5,000	5,000	
Squad			400,000		
Total:	*$557,500*	*627,500*	*$608,600*	*$182,500*	*$677,500*

Once your budget of anticipated expenditures has been developed and is detailed on a spreadsheet format, it is necessary to justify the expenditures. This is the most critical part of creating a fire department budget. No one is going to approve thousands of dollars because we need it. Conversely, no one expects or wants you to develop an elaborate explanation for why you are going to purchase five dollars worth of pencils.

Justifying your budget request may seem daunting. Do not attempt to justify your budget requests or money requests. Instead, justify your need for the items requested. One means of justifying your budget is to start with a budget message. A budget message states the purpose or mission of your fire company and specifically, the services provided by your company, either to the public or to support other community departments. What you plan to do in the next fiscal year may also be part of the budget message. It may be useful to list the number, type, and severity of the responses your fire company had in the past year. This will give the reader a better understanding of what the fire company does, however demonstrated need is the best justification for any budget.

Sample of Fire Department's Budget Message

The XYZ past year. Those calls occurred throughout the entire X square miles of our community, at all times of the day and night, and in all weather conditions, XYZ Fire Company responded to over eight hundred (800+) calls for assistance during the storms and floods.

With a current strength of ___ certified firefighters, the XYZ Fire Company responds to more than just fires. Emergency medical calls ranging from cardiac arrest to childbirth are just a few of the medical emergencies we respond to. In addition to basic level care, XYZ firefighters also are trained to utilize defibrillators as well as administer medication for patients having allergic reactions. Many surrounding fire departments do not respond to emergency medical calls, they are handled by an outside service at an additional expense to the community.

Members of the XYZ Fire Company continually upgrade their skills attending the National Fire Academy and national and regional training sessions. When measured against any fire company, the XYZ Fire Company gets the most service out of their firefighters. Additionally, the services rendered by the XYZ Fire Company go well beyond emergency response. Armed with knowledge, equipment, and training, our firefighters are prepared to manage any reports of domestic terrorism. The XYZ Fire Company continues to prepare for such homeland defense missions. All of this was accomplished with the approved fire company budget.

In the upcoming year, the XYZ Fire Company plans to …

When producing your budget, it is best to avoid the pitfalls of budgeting. Do not over budget, which is to ask for more resources than you really need. If you do not use all the resources you requested, it might appear as if you did not carry out all of the tasks you had planned. You will be viewed as an ineffective officer. You will loose your credibility with the administrative body that approves your funding. Bottom line, next year will be tougher to get the funding you need because it will be assumed you over-budget.

To the contrary, do not under-budget in order to look good. You will need the resources anyway and if you spend more than your budget allows you will appear as a spendthrift without regard for the budget. In some towns and cities, the manager is held

personally responsible for funds expended over and above the approved budget. You do not want these expenditures coming out of your own pocket.

The budget presentation and approval process usually involves one or more administrative bodies with the authority to approve, change, or deny your requests. In a small rural volunteer fire company the entire budget may be developed, presented, and approved by a small number of people. As fire companies become larger and more complex, this process grows to outside approvals, more presentations, and input from the public.

You may not receive enough money to fund all of the programs and activities you deem necessary. This goes for small rural communities as well as large cities. Due to the limit of available financial resources, prioritizing your requests becomes an important element in your budget preparation.   Prioritization does not mean the inclusion of some requests to the exclusion of others. You may prioritize some of each request, in effect creating layers of importance. For example, you may request $2,000 for Training Seminars but will settle for half the amount which would train only junior members rather than all members of a fire company.

Once the budget has been approved it becomes the fire company plan of action, in concert with established goals and objectives. Efficient and effective management of the approved resources is the responsibility of every fire company member, and the chief fire administrator is the point person for this responsibility.

Small ESO Budgets

While this approach to budgeting may seem excessive if you are a small fire company with a $50,000 or less budget, it is the concepts that you must keep in mind. The process for a small emergency service organization is no different.

First, determine your fixed and variable expenses.

FIXED
- Vehicle payments
- Building payments
- Other large loan payments/debt/mortgages/etc.

VARIABLE
- Utilities
- Fuel
- Insurance
- Apparatus Maintenance
- Facility Maintenance
- Equipment Purchases
- Office Supplies
- Other expenses that may routinely or non-routinely occur

Your expenses will be received at certain time frames, many times monthly, sometimes quarterly. It is important to know when the expenses are to be paid and if there are spikes in expenses. Cash flow is critical to volunteer emergency service groups, and you want to assure the fact that you can maintain a positive cash flow throughout the year.

Next, determine your income and when it is received, for example

- Municipal Funds - received each year in June
- Fund Drive - received each year between June and August
- Fund Raising Activities - occur each month, averaging $__
- Donations - vary
- Grants - vary
- Billings - occur each month, averaging $__
- Other (e.g. service contracts, interest, fees, dues)

As you determine your annual spending projection, you also can determine your expected revenue. If there is a shortfall, clearly you will have to determine where you can get additional funding. In addition, this process helps you determine when it is most critical to have "money in the bank". For these two reasons, developing a budget, no matter how small your annual income/expense amounts are, makes sense.

Reporting and Auditing

Reporting and auditing are important control and reporting mechanisms for keeping your budget on target. Interim reporting to the public and the legislative bodies who monitor the budget provide accountability to those bodies. Interim reporting is best done on a monthly basis. Monthly reporting may consist of comparing budget to actual expenditures line by line. By monitoring expenditures monthly, you can modify expenditures so as not to exceed budget. You may also use this tool to view whether expenditures are being under-utilized. Sometimes expenditures are incurred seasonally or all at one time rather than evenly throughout the year.

For instance, your purchase of foam concentrate may take place once or twice a year, while your electricity bill is paid every month. Watch the one time purchases carefully because if you do not use it, you may lose it. Funding that is requested but not spent is usually seen as padding of budgets. You would not want funding withdrawn or cut in the next budget year simply because you did not spend it in the current year.

An annual audit should be performed to measure expenditures from year to year. Take a look at prior year's expenditures versus current year's expenditures and explain fluctuations in expenditures. Fluctuations may occur because of an increase or decrease in demand for services. Knowing why you spend certain amounts helps with budget justifications and approval. Audits simply explain why you spent a certain

amount and are not intended to be punitive in any way. Audits may be required by the organization's bylaws, grant providers, or by municipal mandate as an expectation as a result of providing funds. In either case, the audit should be done effectively and by a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) where necessary. The use of Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) may be an expectation of any such outside control group, further enhancing the need for a CPA to conduct the audit. If recommendations for enhancement of the financial process are provided by the audit team, they should be considered. Any audit and reporting activities must be

- timely
- relevant to the user
- understandable
- reliable
- enable the organization to take necessary steps to enhance its financial position.

Many times throughout the budget (fiscal) year, it is apparent that somewhere somehow, more funding may be needed in a specific area. Hopefully, this is because of an unforeseen element, rather than poor planning. When building a case for additional funds after the budget has been adopted the requestor should follow a number of important elements of budget request explanation.

A thorough background describing the history or other information on a request must be presented. Enough detail must be included so that an individual with no fire service knowledge will be able to grasp the budget request readily. Fire administrators must be concise, and not use buzzwords or technical jargon. A thorough explanation of what is to be accomplished and the purpose for the program or items must be presented. A chief must be able to provide a detailed description of the request showing all major components of the cost, including contingency amounts. It is recommended to attach descriptive material where appropriate. People who approve budgets want to know how major components were calculated, and by whom. A description or review of costs for reasonableness needs to be accomplished.

Fire administrators have to be up front if there are any additional long-range costs involved. They should describe any reasons for possible additional future expenditures that may result from the action under consideration. It might also involve increases in personnel, supplies, maintenance, or other costs. Give estimates of high/low dollar range of future additional costs if actual figures cannot be ascertained. Any request should be specific as to whether or not additional burdens will be placed upon existing facilities, service labor, etc., as a result of this request, and state whether the facilities are adequate to support them. Explain the alternatives that were considered to accomplish the same results as this request for funds, particularly any involving a lesser expenditure. Also, the fire administrator should briefly discuss the alternative of doing nothing. Explaining why alternatives were rejected could be the difference between success and failure. You should also outline the proposed means of financing any expenditure. Give details of how your authority having jurisdiction should fund your

proposal. Find out if any outside assistance is available, and state probability of actually receiving these outside funds.

Fidelity[1]

Unfortunately, some officers and managers are not always honest and may be tempted to divert money and other financial assets from your organization, for personal gain. This would be known as a Fidelity Claim. Fidelity is defined as the strict observance of promises, duties, etc., or adherence to fact or detail. Unfortunate as well is that Fidelity Claims are on the rise.

Directors, managers, chief officers, treasurers, financial secretaries and special event managers all could become a financial drain on any organization if they do not perform with fidelity. The real problem for an organization is that when these losses occur, they generally occur over relatively long periods of time. This may result in the losses being staggeringly high.

There are proven management and risk control methods for reducing the possibility of the conditions that make fidelity theft possible. The following are some controls to be considered in managing your organization.

For persons with purchasing, fund management, and check writing responsibilities:

- Checks should always require two signatures, signed only <u>after</u> they have been written in full. Never sign blank checks or allow the use of signature stamps, even for convenience.
- Have your organization's bank require signature cards to be kept on file. Your organization should keep these up to date.
- Bank statements should be received and reconciled by someone who <u>does not</u> have check writing authority.
- Have an independent third party audit your books annually.
- Whenever possible, do not permit persons with close personal ties (husband/wife; brother/sister; business partners) to have control over organizational check writing or reconciliation.
- Require purchase orders and invoices for all purchases of property or service. Have these compared to the written checks.
- Separate financial functions as much as practical.
- Conduct background checks on all new officers and members.
- Have all financial policies in writing.
- Review your organization's insurance policies to assure proper fidelity coverage's are in place.

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[1] VFIS, "Fidelity", York, PA, 2002, 2 pages

For persons who handle Fundraising or Special Events Cash:

- Conduct background checks on all new officers and members.
- Do not permit persons with close personal ties (husband/wife; brother/sister; business partners) to handle cash without a third party present.
- For large amounts of cash or for events occurring over a long period of time, have frequent pick-up and accounting of cash. Collected money should be bank deposited to limit the amount of on-hand cash.
- Have at least two people responsible for reconciliation and deposit of cash.
- Whenever possible, have some form of paper trail (ticket stubs, bill of sale, sign in sheet) so that a close estimate of the anticipated cash can be obtained and confirmed.
- Have all financial policies in writing.

These practical and cost effective controls go a long way to managing the potential for individuals to divert organizational funds.

Conclusion

Budgeting and financial management are not difficult. It is a time consuming process and requires the use of solid management practices to be effective. As stated earlier, the budget serves as a guiding document for the Emergency Service Organization and must be effected properly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel B.C. Gardiner is the retired Fire Chief of Fairfield, CT. and a past-president of the International Society of Fire Service Instructors and Fire Department Safety Officers Association. Prior to assuming the role of Fire Chief, he held the position of Captain and was the Budget Control Officer for the department (a combination fire department). Linda Gardiner is the Budget Director for the City of Fairfield, CT.

Managing Fire Company Finances

Things for you to do …

☐ 1. If you have already created a chart of accounts for revenue and expense, validate that the current account listing meets your needs and make appropriate changes. If you have not already created a ch`rt of accounts for revenue and expense, then create that listing.

☐ 2. Create a budget message that can be used to communicate your department's value, and budgetary needs to the community and/or elected officials.

☐ 3. How do you/would you conduct an audit of the financial process in your organization? If you already have a process, test the process against the ideas advanced in this chapter. If you do not have a process, develop one for your organization's executive board to review and implement.

☐ 4. Using YOUR chart of accounts created, see if any groupings can be made to consolidate the budget process to more global major categories of expense.

☐ 5. If you do not have a long term (over 5-year) plan for the replacement of major assets (stations and apparatus) develop one, determine this based on need, assign costs and determine its feasibility. If you can, project for at least 10 years, and preferably 20 years, what these expenses might be. From this determine where funding sources may be derived.

Chapter 5

Risk Management

By Chief William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFO, CFPS

Twenty years ago, managing risk was almost completely handled by insurance. Today risk management is a combination of risk control (safety techniques) or risk financing (expensing losses, managing deductibles, and buying insurance—among others). The ability to understand these issues and gain competent counsel becomes critically important to the operational and financial health of the organization.
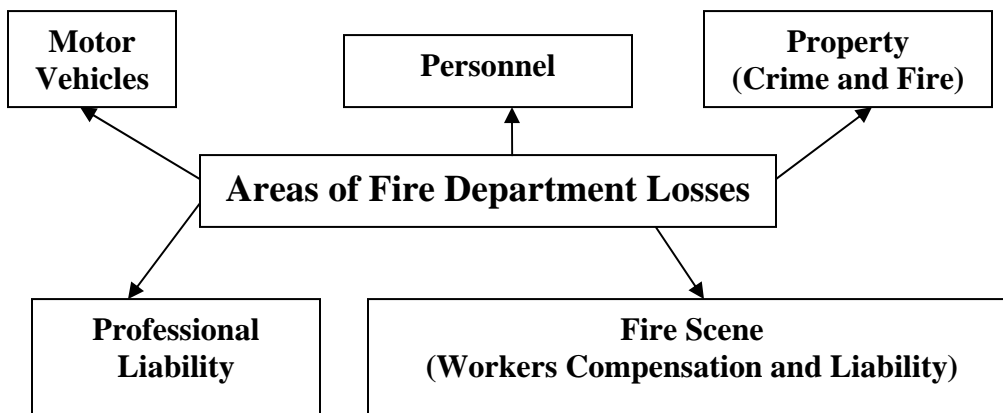
Risk Management

Fire service personnel are just starting to realize that there are internal and external risk management issues that impact fire department operations. All facets of emergency services must understand and prepare for both. Risk, is the probability and severity of adverse effects. The risk management process is designed to make and implement decisions that will minimize the adverse effects of accidental losses to an organization.
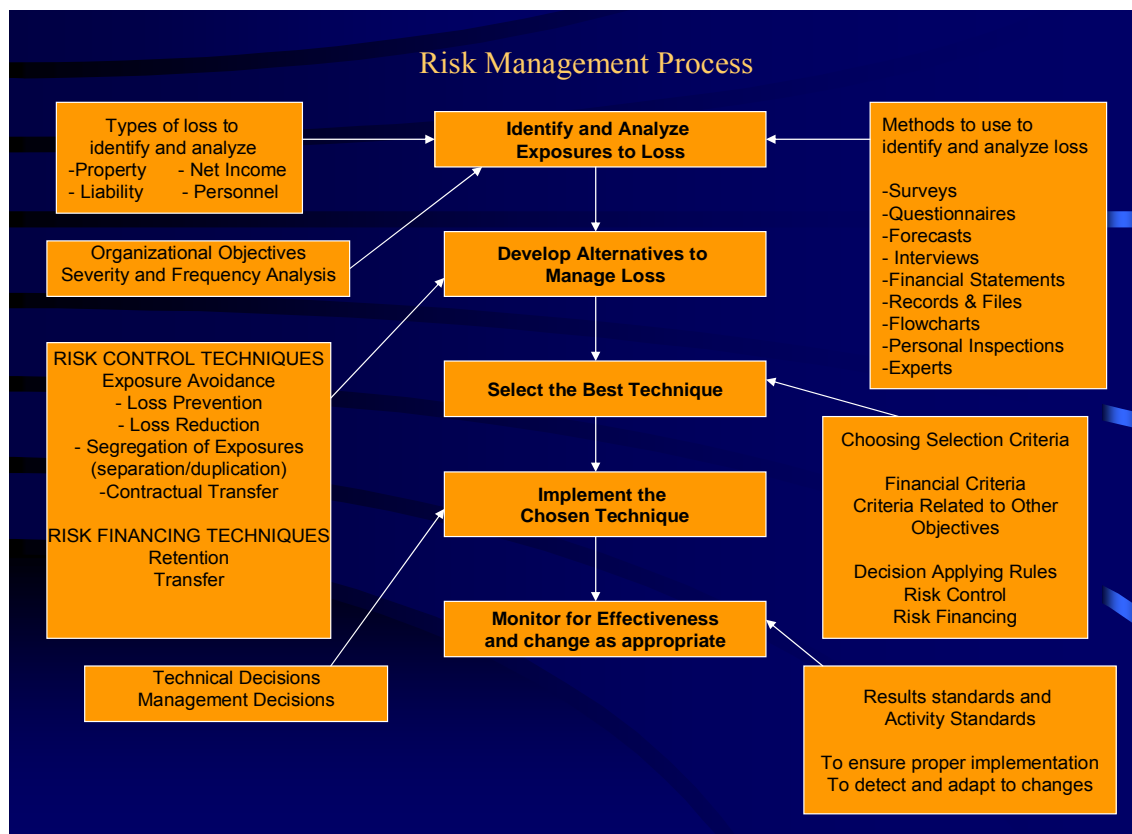
Risk management is a management responsibility. The safeguarding of assets is equally as important to emergency service organizations, as it is to business and industry or to a family. While the volunteer fire department protects the community from various risks, it must do the same with its own assets. Whether assessing risks that are posed within the community or within the department itself, the process of evaluating and dealing with the risks are the same, and utilize a fundamental decision-making process, that includes the following steps.

1. Identify and analyze exposures to loss
2. Develop alternatives to manage loss
3. Select the best technique
4. Implement the chosen technique
5. Monitor the implemented initiative for effectiveness and change if needed.

NFPA 1250, The Recommended Practice in Emergency Service Organization Risk Management establishes the basis for internal risk management practices. From a departmental standpoint, a risk management program should be documented in the organization's overall formal risk management plan. The responsibilities for risk management in an emergency service organization, are similar to the responsibilities for risk management in a business. The difference lies in the business operator seeking to preserve organizational assets and profits—staying in business. The emergency services risk manager focuses on protecting public assets of the fire department which generally include protection in the areas of loss illustrated in the accompanying diagram.

The risk management process, graphically portrayed, looks like this:

Risk Management Process

	Identify and Analyze Exposures to Loss	
Types of loss to identify and analyze -Property - Net Income - Liability - Personnel		Methods to use to identify and analyze loss -Surveys -Questionnaires -Forecasts - Interviews -Financial Statements -Records & Files -Flowcharts -Personal Inspections -Experts
Organizational Objectives Severity and Frequency Analysis	**Develop Alternatives to Manage Loss**	
RISK CONTROL TECHNIQUES Exposure Avoidance - Loss Prevention - Loss Reduction - Segregation of Exposures (separation/duplication) -Contractual Transfer RISK FINANCING TECHNIQUES Retention Transfer	**Select the Best Technique**	Choosing Selection Criteria Financial Criteria Criteria Related to Other Objectives Decision Applying Rules Risk Control Risk Financing
	Implement the Chosen Technique	
Technical Decisions Management Decisions	**Monitor for Effectiveness and change as appropriate**	Results standards and Activity Standards To ensure proper implementation To detect and adapt to changes

*courtesy Dr. William F. Jenaway, PSE 5705 Risk Analysis Course, St. Joseph's University

Each step in the process has its own subset of tasks and decision points.

Step 1—Risk Identification and Assessment

Risk assessment involves the identification and analysis of the risks to which the organization is exposed. As noted earlier, this chapter is devoted only to managing the risks to which the organization is exposed to internally. Therefore, risk assessment should include the types of problems which pose potential loss to the organization. These problems generally occur at the emergency scene and involve personnel, vehicles, property, and general liability. This step utilizes a series of methods to identify and analyze loss, such as surveys, questionnaires, forecasts, interviews, financial statements, records and files, flowcharts, personal inspections, and experts. Practices are used to identify and analyze potential and actual losses arising in property, net income, liability, and personnel situations.

The risk assessment should include an assessment of frequency (how often the situation may occur) and severity (how bad the incident may be). This means the individual or group conducting the assessment should now estimate the potential for each risk occurring. However, it is not that simple. Loss frequency and loss severity affect the rate paid for protection by the fire department either in expenses or insurance.

- If an employer furnishes a safer place to work, the rate may be lower than for a risk where hazardous activity exists, no loss control is provided, and injuries are plentiful.
- Similarly, an insurance rate is affected by such factors as protection and exposure.
- Severity is also measured by the number of exposure units.

Therefore, better protection, active loss control, and effective risk management can help control your resources.

Step 2—Develop Risk Management Alternatives

Internal emergency service organization risk management has two key components—risk control and risk financing.
- Risk Control involves one of five techniques to prevent or limit loss
    - exposure avoidance—do not undertake the task/risk
    - loss prevention—practice techniques to prevent the loss
    - loss reduction—determine that if a loss occurs, how it can be limited
    - segregation of exposures—do not put all assets at risk at once
    - contractual transfer—create a contract to share the risk with others
- Risk Financing is intended to pay for losses once they occur, such as
    - risk retention—keep the financing of risk (e.g. deductible)
    - risk transfer—give the risk to others (e.g. insurance)

Financial criteria, organizational loss objectives, and the results of the severity and frequency analysis all become key points of consideration in developing alternatives.

Step 3—Select the Best Technique

Once the risk is identified and assessed, the alternatives must be evaluated and one selected. For example the situation posing the risk is four firefighters are injured in a building collapse:

Risk Management Technique	Risk Management Application
Exposure Avoidance	Do not perform the service or task.
Loss Prevention	Do not subject individuals to the area where there is potential for a building collapse – use an exterior attack to fight the fire.
Loss Reduction	Limit the number of people exposed to the hazardous situation and provide protective equipment.
Segregation of Exposure	Modify the approach to limit the exposure, e.g. do not enter, divide staff appropriately, send trucks in different directions to get there.
Contractual Transfer	Not reasonably applicable, other than to agree by contract not to enter this building if subjected to fire.
Risk Retention	Provide for finances as a routine expense, if firefighters are hurt.
Risk Transfer	Provide insurance for the non-financed portion of the risk.

Step 4 – Implement the Chosen Technique

Both technical and management decisions are required to make an appropriate choice. Which of the options would you choose from the chart? What technical and managerial decisions would you apply? How would they drive you to the decision?

Step 5 – Monitor the Implemented Initiative for Effectiveness and Change if Needed

Monitoring is necessary to assure proper implementation and to detect and adapt to changes. Either activity standards (e.g. training programs to enhance safety) or results standards (e.g., two hours lost work time over 100,000 hours worked) can be utilized to measure, monitor and help you in the decision process.

For the most part, processes like this seem difficult to understand and implement, so let's take the process and apply it to both a risk to which the fire department must respond to, as well as a risk within the organization that creates an exposure. Consequently, you need to know the loss history of your department, the loss potential, and the impact these have on your resources. Then, you can begin to develop an effective loss control program by weighing accident prevention versus loss control management and determine risk financing approaches. The success of loss control efforts requires the full and earnest cooperation of each employee and administrator.

Risk Within the Community	Risk Management Component	Risk Within the Organization
A business uses several highly toxic materials in its routine operations, which pose potential firefighting problems.	**Identify and Analyze Exposures to Loss**	An accident occurred when a fire engine moving through an intersection was struck by a personal vehicle driven by a citizen
Information received by the LEPC and provided to the fire department identify the types of potential chemical exposures, justifying - new equipment needs - procedure changes - possible consideration of defensive positioning - modify training	**Develop Alternatives to Manage Loss**	Options include: - change policies regarding intersection movement - increase insurance coverage - install traffic pre-emption devices - implement supervisory controls and expectations - train drivers and officers in safe intersection movement as well as related state laws - implement loss reduction objectives
A combination of all four techniques noted above will be used.	**Select the Best Technique**	Modify the response procedure to assure all lanes are clear before moving into the intersection
Change operating procedures to require more information and take a defensive position	**Implement the Chosen Technique**	Implement a policy where no fire apparatus are to enter an intersection without assuring all lanes, in all directions are clear
Update the facility risk assessment on a periodic basis and assess if any changes in the emergency service organization plan are necessary	**Monitor the Implemented Initiative for Effectiveness and change if needed**	Review the accident logs, and any near misses or operational reports regarding driving practices in intersections and assess if any changes in the emergency service organization practices are necessary

Without question, when accidental damage or a personal injury occurs, you should conduct a thorough investigation. Find out if the cause of the accident could have been controlled. Experience shows that conditions that cause accidents also cause waste and inefficiency. Speeding, jackrabbit starts, and hard stops are unsafe and cause excessive wear on vehicle parts. This not only increases maintenance costs and accelerates depreciation on equipment but also can cause personal injuries. We can estimate the organizational drains, such as equipment replacement and personnel turnover, but accidental and equipment downs, cannot be estimated. Yet, they have a great impact on the financial management of a fire department. In today's inflationary climate, the money you waste on accidental losses not only can keep you from upgrading facilities and equipment, it can also keep you from getting the most out of what you have. Everyone should work toward preventing losses. Administrators and line officers must provide leadership and the knowledge to control losses. A comprehensive Risk Management Plan should be developed.

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have both established minimum expectations and criteria for emergency service organizations to follow to manage internal risk.

CFAI has identified programmatic elements involving:

- establishment of a specific person to be responsible for implementing a risk management program
- a system for identifying and evaluating workplace hazards
- procedures for correcting unsafe or unhealthy conditions
- a health and safety training program
- a method to communicate risk management, health and safety issues with personnel
- a management information system in place to investigate and document incidents

The latest edition of NFPA 1250, Recommended Practice in Emergency Service Organization Risk Management contains similar detail and serves as not only a basic primer on the concept of risk management, but provides extensive explanatory material which further your ability to understand and apply the principles. While other texts both within the fire service and the insurance industry should also be consulted, NFPA 1250, establishes the approach this discipline should use to apply risk management. Fire prevention is risk management. Safety programs are risk management. Hazard awareness is risk management. A fire department can't expect homes and business in their jurisdiction to have a risk management plan (which they should), when the fire department does not have one themselves. Now is the time to protect your organization's assets – create your risk management plan!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. William F. Jenaway is employed as Executive Vice President of VFIS Education and Training Services, the largest insurer of emergency service organizations in the US. He is Chair of the Fire and Rescue Services Board for Upper Merion Township. As Chief of the King of Prussia Volunteer Fire Company he was named "Volunteer Fire Chief of the Year" by Fire Chief magazine in 2001 and the King of Prussia Volunteer Fire Company became the first, and to this point only, Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services agency to become accredited by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. Dr. Jenaway is the author of seven texts, over 200 articles, and over 200 presentations in the fire and safety discipline. He is the President of the Congressional Fire Services Institute and Chairs the National Fire Protection Association's Committees on Emergency Service Risk Management and Fire Department Organization and Administration. As an adjunct faculty in the Graduate School of St. Joseph's University, in Philadelphia, he is a lecturer on Risk Analysis, Risk Management, and Disaster Planning. He also was a member of the "Gilmore Commission" which was authorized by the Presidents Clinton and Bush, to assess America's readiness to deal with terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction.

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Risk Management

Things for you to do …..

☐ 1. Establish a specific person to be responsible for implementing a risk management program.

☐ 2. Establish a system for identifying, evaluating and correcting work place hazards, unsafe, or unhealthy conditions.

☐ 3. Develop a method to communicate risk management, health, and safety issues with personnel.

☐ 4. Integrate a management information system to investigate and document incidents.

☐ 5. Create a risk management plan for your organization.

Chapter 6

Marketing Management

By Ben May

Everything the fire department does has some aspect of marketing related to it. How we perform our job, our uniforms, our apparatus, our public appearance, and non-emergency public exposure all market us to the community. This must be a positive effort not only to provide the service but to gain community and financial support.

Marketing Management

You may love the fact that you are a leader of your fire department. You may gain an inner satisfaction knowing that you work with some of the most intelligent, highly motivated, and caring people you have ever known. You may glow with an inner pride when firefighters in your department have returned from a successful knockdown. You may swell with satisfaction after your department rescues a trapped citizen who will forever remember your firefighters' professionalism and care. You may know that your public educators really made a difference after delivering a prevention message that really got through to a group of citizens or children. But, if you do not understand the importance of marketing as a discipline or how to use it as a tool every day, you may not have the privilege of continuing to be a leader in the fire service in the manner you have come to love. If the fire service is to thrive it must adopt a marketing perspective. Our existence is not completely dependent on our competency. Just because we do a good job does not necessarily mean we will stay in business in our present form, especially if nobody knows what we do, how we do it, or why we do it. This is true locally as well as nationally. We live more and more in a society that is transparent, demanding accountability from its public servants. In order to meet theses demands and maintain our service the public must know who we are, what we do, how we do it, and what the value is to them. If we are able to do this successfully, we will provide a necessary function for our customers. We will be able to inform them of our services to gain their support for the protection we provide. Most important, we will be able to do what we love: leading firefighters and protecting the community.

Within the last decade fire service leaders have begun to understand the need and benefit of marketing management. The critical focus of marketing is to support a department's efforts to effectively execute the fire and life safety mission while maintaining strong community and financial support. Marketing management as a formal activity has significant application to fire and emergency services. Virtually everything we do in public service has a marketing aspect to it—from our uniforms to our apparatus to how we fight fires. One of the most respected fire officers in this country, Chief Ron Coleman, noted in *Fire Chief Magazine* over twenty years ago that "if the fire service is to survive in the next century it must adopt a marketing strategy."

The result of effective marketing is that the community you serve views your fire department as one of the most trusted public service agencies in its geographic area. It means that the citizens in your community will do all they can to maintain the services that you provide. In a poll taken some years ago by *USA Today*, citizens rated their fire departments as the most trusted entity of all public services, second only to their immediate families. This should come as no surprise when one considers the motivation and passion that most firefighters display for their mission.

This perception comes from the fact that when a citizen dials 911 he or she usually receives immediate service. Given the citizen's state of mind in his or her own perceived emergency, it is little wonder that the rescuer has gained a kind of trust that is literally life-dependent. While many citizens may experience some kind of perceived

emergency once in their lives, an emergency is usually a rare occurrence. The frequency of emergencies depends on a number of socio-economic factors. Naturally, those areas of the community we define as *at risk* will experience more emergencies.

The fact remains that the fire service has the responsibility to itself and its constituencies to make certain that the public is aware it is fulfilling its mission. This is critical to maintaining financial support. The irony of this reality for the fire and emergency services is that the fire service is not more effective in getting its message across to the public; and not just about what it is as an organization, but what it does. The United States still has one of the worst records for loss and destruction from fire in the world. These losses, as we all know, occur locally. The fact that the fire problem is a local issue further emphasizes the need for marketing. With these two key challenges in mind—public awareness of the fire service's function and the fire problem itself—let's understand the history, definition, purpose, and uses of marketing or the issues each of our departments faces.

A Mini History of Marketing

Marketing is probably one of the most misunderstood words in public service conversations today. First, let's look at a bit of the history of marketing in the United States to gain a better perspective of the discipline. American business invented the modern marketing mechanism that has made this country the most prosperous in the history of the world. The *marketing concept,* as it is called, originated at the end of the Second World War. As a production-driven economy, our country developed the discipline of marketing management to sell the many products coming off the production lines to the millions of consumers who needed things to live comfortably and fulfill their vision of the American dream. People needed so many different basic products from houses to hairspray that marketing became more of a sales and distribution system than a communications and service mechanism. In other words, the goal was to get products into peoples' hands. The demand already existed. Those were heady days for American business and the products it made. Over the next thirty-five years the American economy changed from production-driven to market-driven, transforming the mechanism of marketing management into a sophisticated discipline. As communications became faster and information more readily available, the market became more sophisticated and aware of new and different needs. The new definition of the marketing concept became less linear and more comprehensive involving a wide array of tools to understand the consumer's needs, get the message across about how it could fulfill those needs and, eventually, sell product. In other words, rather than a company simply providing the product or service that it wanted the consumer to buy, the company had to understand what its potential customers might want first and then produce it according to those needs. Within the last ten years, the sophistication of the consumer has increased again, almost exponentially. Instantaneous communication and even wider availability of information now supports a predominantly service driven economy. This transformation has created the need for a sophisticated, integrated, and

comprehensive marketing mechanism serving smaller, more specialized markets. This has major implications for the marketing of public and emergency services in that the public service market is the entire market in any jurisdiction.

Differences between Public Service Marketing and Private Enterprise Marketing

Public and commercial marketing are worlds apart, yet on the surface they appear to be the same. It is critical to know the difference between the two because this is the point of confusion and misunderstanding in the fire and emergency services.

- Private enterprise finds needs to fill and seeks total market domination at a profit.
- Public service marketing finds needs and seeks service perpetuation and excellence.
- Public service marketing service is dispensed in proportion to need. More is not necessarily better.
- Public service marketing seeks to serve the public to protect and enhance the quality of life of its citizens.
- Private enterprise seeks to create and retain a customer for increased market share, increased volume and profit.

In public service marketing excellence, pride and care are always the motivating factors, not profit. We are not selling widgets. We are informing the public about our service as we protect our communities. When they become educated about what we do and the value of what we do, we grow and maintain our support. As we do this, we control our image. While the general use of marketing management as a tool is to inform the public about what we do, it also educates the public about what *they* should do to protect themselves. Safety is a two-way street, a team sport. This is a major difference between commercial and public service marketing. We communicate to educate. This is called social marketing and its main use is to change behavior.

Your Fire Department's Public Image: How We are Known

Public image of the fire service is critical. Every act that we perform in public is watched and evaluated. People make judgments about our abilities all of the time. They are sizing us up when we are in emergency situations and when we are not—which are most of the time. The best time to communicate to the public about who we are and what we do is when we are not at incidents. In emergencies they expect us to know what we are doing. Marketing brings our actions in line with what we say. Our public image and reputation is one of the most important qualities we possess. In marketing terms it is called BRAND EQUITY. The Maltese Cross is **"brand fire department."** Think about the opportunity and strength in that symbol. Everyone knows what it means. Our citizens are inculcated with it from the time they are babies. It is in every town in America. It is interwoven in the fabric of this country. And its growth is our

responsibility, especially at the local level in our departments. Always ask "how are we known?" and make sure the message is consistent and simple. Consistent positive awareness equals community support**.** Any act we perform, whether good or bad, reflects on the entire brand nationally. This is not true in private enterprise. If we have a bad experience with a particular car, we can always buy another brand. In emergency services we must make what we have consistently excellent to maintain our support. This is a different way of looking at our service. The point here is that we should not assume we have a monopoly on the service just because we are the only game in town.

The Fire and Emergency Service's Consistent Need for Marketing

Until recently fire and emergency service officials never even contemplated how the marketing concept could have any use for their needs. It was foreign to them, reserved only for commercial business.   It is just within the last ten years that we have begun to realize that the term does have significant application to all public services. But even now, the term can invite distrust and misunderstanding. That is why it is important to have a clear understanding of its true definition. Consider the development of fire protection in America even as late as thirty years ago. Now, compare it to the origins of a production-driven economy. Fire departments predominantly extinguished fires once they broke out. The fire service was basically a suppression business with very little emphasis on prevention and education until the publication of *America Burning* in 1974, detailing the scope of the national fire problem. We saw ourselves as a vital, one-dimensional service in every community, a virtual monopoly. As the needs of our citizens changed, we had to change. As we apply marketing principles to our services, we become customer-centered. The fire service now has many more functions and services that it offers to our citizens. However, there is nothing written in stone that we will continue to deliver our services if they are not seen as needed and vital for the market.

Effective Marketing Demands Knowing How to Do it Well

Public service professionals, whether volunteer, combination, or paid must become just as adept at marketing management as their private enterprise counterparts. The first reason for this is to stay in business. Just because the fire service has been a public paid and volunteer service, there is always the remote possibility that the situation could change if the public perceived that someone could do it better and cheaper. The country of Denmark has had a private fire and emergency service run by the Falk Company for the last 30 years. The reason why it will always be necessary for marketing in the fire and emergency services is because it is one of those services that the public assumes will always be there, but they may not understand why they need to support it financially. It is a difficult position for the fire service. Consider the public's view of the fire service since 9/11. Just after the terrorist attack, the national and local media were full of stories about firefighters. Four years later Disney's Touchstone

pictures released a film called *Ladder 49,* about firefighters in a Baltimore firehouse, to illustrate a down-to-earth story of the lives of firefighters. These national stories and a major motion picture may have raised the awareness level a notch or two, but after all of that, the fire service disappeared again. It is the daily job of each jurisdiction to maintain its awareness level within its own market to continue to have the kind of support it needs to maintain the service. Fire and emergency services marketing is a local game.

A Clear and Simple Definition of Marketing

Marketing is exchange for mutual gain. In the case of the fire service, the public gains protection, prevention and life safety support from the emergency services. The fire service gains tax donation or fee dollar/donations for delivery of the services. Fire and emergency services marketing ensures that all services are delivered at the right time, to the people who need them, in a way that meets the needs of each citizen and reduces the risk to the whole community. Critically, it places the community at the heart of the design and delivery processes.

A wise chief once said that when a working fire broke out, the fire prevention system had broken down. Selling the fire service is firefighting *after* the system has broken down. Keep in mind, however, that *there is a definite place for selling in the same way that there is a place for fire suppression.*

Remember there are now four critical aspects of our service:
1. Prevention
2. Public Education
3. Emergency response
4. Customer service

There is a place for each aspect in our system.

In the marketing system the critical aspects are customer-centered.   They are external (all citizens) and internal (all firefighters and officers). The components of the system involve:
1. Needs analysis
2. Perception
3. Need fulfillment
4. Execution
5. Feedback
6. Modification

We will return to each of these aspects later in the chapter. For now it's important simply to understand that marketing is the care, feeding and growth of the system itself. Successful marketing is inversely proportional to the need to sell. When you have to

push hard to sell your department, it is generally too late to worry about marketing. Marketing must commence when people are reasonably receptive to the message.

Marketing is involved with all of the aspects of fulfilling people's needs: a moving target at best. Our customers' needs involve all aspects of fire and life safety. At the basic delivery level, it is very much influenced by the changing operating environment and evolving citizen and firefighter expectations. At other levels, *how we perform the service has a strong influence on how the public perceives the value of the service*. This has major implications on our positioning in the eyes of the public and the public's support for the service. Positioning is a marketing term that refers to how consumers perceive a product or service. This applies to any contact at any level, whether a plans review, a major incident, or a budget presentation.

Marketing Management is the Process of Controlling our Marketing

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*Marketing management is the **process** of analysis, planning, and implementation of the total fire and life safety concept for its internal and external customers. It maintains the balance between service delivery and community support.* This process involves pricing, promotion, and distribution of all fire and life safety services to ensure the safety of all citizens, institutions, and organizations in the jurisdiction. The management of the system connotes control and execution of the entire marketing process.

Traditional Marketing Basics: Four Ps

Marketing basics teaches the Four Ps: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion.
- The product is safety
- The price is taxes
- The place is any point of contact between the fire service and its customers (an incident, the firehouse, a public forum, plans review discussion, public education, or budget review)
- Promotion is the safety message. The department's representative in the field: all organizational members

Marketing Begins in the Fire Station with the Department's Mission

Marketing defines the promises to our citizens, elected officials, businesses, institutions, local organizations, patients, ancillary departments such as police, highway patrol, utility, and water departments, the Red Cross, the media in particular, and other county, state, and federal agencies with which we work. Most significantly, marketing defines the promises we keep to each other, especially to our firefighters and officers. This is a vital part of the marketing equation. This is known as *internal marketing*. Marketing's effectiveness externally is dependent on the success of a department's internal marketing. If the firefighters sense that there is lack of trust and care for their

issues and concerns then any public service marketing plan will fail. This is a morale and loyalty issue, and it is as vital as the life and mission of the department. Simply stated, marketing maintains the balance between that mission and the needs of the citizens we serve. The goal of good fire and life safety marketing is to position the organization with a positive public perception. Successful marketing for the fire service organization harmonizes the needs of the market with the fire department's purpose, to fulfill its mission for the public while perpetuating its existence.

The Issues Each Department Faces

Today we are faced with issues as varied as each jurisdiction. But the basic challenges boil down to **lack of resources** (equipment, communications, apparatus, and housing) as well as **political support** at the national, state, and local levels; **retention of present firefighters, and recruitment of new firefighters**. Specifically we face increased competition for the same tax dollar as well as philanthropic support from other agencies and organizations. We face **increased service demands** as well as increased levels of necessary training. We see major demographic shifts: an aging population as well as growing cultural diversity. Add to this, **forces of change** from time constraints on the family to information proliferation and citizen sophistication.   With a dwindling pool of human resources for volunteers (790,000 volunteers according to VCOS' Blue Ribbon Report), it makes no difference how much we save the taxpayers ($37 billion annually) unless we can maintain the service we provide.

Specific Jurisdictional Challenges

Overall the following issues represent the formidable challenges each department must face today:

- Decreased resources
- Jurisdictional competition
- Competition for the same dollar within the same jurisdiction
- Fire and life safety alternatives
- Increased service demands
- Increased training standards
- Internal personnel challenges

Forces of Change

These ongoing issues become even more complicated when one considers the shifting landscape of socio-economic change that we see today.

- National and local security since 9/11
- Demographic shifts in age, socio-economic standards
- The influx of immigrant groups
- Urban and exurban development
- Technological changes
- The effect of local and national political attitudes

What Business are We Really In?

Over the last 35 years we have gone from fire suppression to over 15—20 different services and they just keep increasing. From HAZMAT to EMS to disaster preparedness to terrorism to public fire and safety education in the schools and businesses. People come to us because we are the first and last point of response. We bring safety, care, ingenuity, and strength—and we never give up. It's why we exist. It's our mission. We are in every single community in this country, all 30,000 fire departments in the US and we are answering 18M responses annually. 1.6M are fires (those that are reported). And, in case anyone asks, we still have a fire problem. We have much to do and we are proud to be doing it.

Many years ago the railroads were the driving force of commerce and industry in this country. Today, that business is but a shadow of its former glory. Executives in the great railroads saw themselves as being in the railroad business, but not the transportation business. In other words, they saw their function as one dimensional instead of comprehensive. Here is a list of the specific functions a fire department now performs.

- Fire suppression
- Fire prevention
- Public fire and safety education
- Plans review
- Business Recovery
- Inspection
- Arson investigation
- Pre-fire planning
- HAZMAT
- Terrorism
- Emergency Management for natural disasters
- EMS services: basic and advanced life support
- Special Operations and Rescue Services
- Preventive health activities
- Patient transportation

This list does not address the necessary time spent in training, internal organizational activities and dealing with citizens, businesses and ancillary agencies as well as public officials. A full service fire department today is really a fire and life safety agency. We are in the *fire and life safety* business protecting every citizen in our jurisdiction. We do not have the luxury of private enterprise, delivering different qualities of service to different economic levels. In other words, we do not segment or divide our markets so that specific markets receive different levels of service. We must provide the highest standards and quality of service to everyone in our jurisdiction all of the time.

The Marketing Environment for Fire Departments Today

According to the American Advertising Association citizens today are bombarded by over 4,000 messages daily. They are more informed than ever before because of information proliferation. It is also more difficult to penetrate the market to get our message across. With more knowledge they are more inquisitive. They want to know how their money is being spent and they are more cynical. With no visibility comes speculation. Technology and speed create the more with less mentality. This may mean the public perceives that it should take less people, organizations, and materials to get the job done more efficiently and *with higher expectations*. This is a consistent marketing issue. The growth of information creates knowledge. This, in turn, creates customer sophistication. When customers become more sophisticated, they are in a better position to compare services, determine what they think the value should be and demand accountability. This should not come as a shock. Organizations become better internally and externally when they are consistently sharpening their services and its delivery to their customers. Your fire department should welcome this kind of customer scrutiny because it will make your department better. In public service, virtually every aspect of life is under scrutiny and evaluation. This kind of microscopic, fishbowl situation provides daily challenges but that is only half of the story.

If our customers do not know about the service or product, however, why should they pay for it consistently? If they *must* have the service or product, how much should they pay for it? What measurement do they use to make that judgment? This fact justifies a need for the marketing function for emergency services but an effective one that is integrated and based on the needs of all of its constituencies—externally and *internally.*

Internal and External Marketing: A Moving Target

Constantly changing needs dictate that marketing be a dynamic system inside and outside the fire department. Before the Oklahoma City bombing, most fire departments were not concerned with terrorism. After 9/11 terrorism and homeland security have begun to define a significant part of our service capability. The astronomical growth of non-emergency care calls has brought up the question of the use of emergency vehicles for such needs. A few departments have established non-emergency care

teams to deal with these kinds of special needs. As the population ages, this kind of service may grow dramatically, freeing up emergency teams for critical incidents. The use of the ladder-tender is an example of a fulfillment of this need. This makes more economical sense than sending an aerial truck as a taxicab and heavy utility vehicle to a low-level incident.

The education and intelligence level of firefighters and officers continues to increase. With more education comes individual leadership and empowerment at all levels. This means less and less of the command and control style of leadership and more of the democratic, flat organizational approach. This kind of leadership does not apply to an emergency incident. It does apply to 98% of all other organizational activities. This means that the development of our most important resource—our firefighters—is crucial.

Consider the influx of immigrant groups just within the last five years, coupled with the aging of the baby boomers and the growth of small communities outside major metropolitan areas. These three environmental trends point to significant challenges and opportunities for your department.

Big Opportunities Lie in the Trends in Small Places

Technology has made it easier for people to live much farther away from their workplaces. Many people yearn for the simplicity and peace of living in smaller towns. This puts a strain on public services in those towns. It also gives fire departments in these locales the opportunity to grow and serve the various needs of these citizens. The town of Montverde, Florida just outside of Orlando in Lake County, has had a one-station volunteer fire department for over forty years. Within the last four years, the growth of Lake County has dictated the fire department embrace the need for an expanded service. There is no difference in this kind of growth and that of a small business. These kinds of opportunities are available throughout small communities in the United States. They represent the future of the volunteer fire service.

Demographic Trends are Creating Differing Needs

With an aging population comes varying sets of needs, especially the need for emergency health care. Additionally, statistics demonstrate that most fires occur among the very old as well as the very young. Immigrant populations mean that we will need to learn not only new languages and cultural ways, but how these immigrant cultures view and react to fire and health emergencies. Some years ago, the city of Bellevue, Washington had a rapid influx of Russian immigrants who did not understand the need or operating function of smoke detectors. After some detailed research, the public educators from the Bellevue Fire Department launched a campaign in the Russian language to deal with the problem.

Specific Uses of Marketing

Marketing is simply a tool a fire department can use to achieve its organizational goals. This tool can be used for the following objectives:

- Gaining loyalty for the department from the community
- Building and maintaining awareness
- Demonstrating return on investment to the community
- Informing the public about real time emergencies
- Educating the public about our services
- Educating the public to increase safety awareness
- Educating the public in how to protect itself in case of natural or man-made disasters.
- Demonstrating our services performed at actual emergencies
- Educating potential political advocates
- Explaining expenditures
- Maintaining budgets
- Recruiting firefighters
- Retaining firefighters
- Return on investment to the community and demonstrating value

The Marketing Plan

Keep it Simple and Just Do it.

There are four key elements that dictate the success or failure of effective marketing:

1. The demonstrated commitment of the chief and senior officers of the department in the use of a marketing plan as an integral part of the department's success.

2. The creation of a working marketing plan.

3. Implementation of that plan.

4. Accountability that the plan has achieved an objective beneficial to the department and the community.

A marketing plan is nothing more than a roadmap to assist the department to achieve its marketing goals. *The most effective plans are created in coordination with the department's strategic plan.* Used in such a manner the marketing plan is created as an action-plan based on specific goals from strategic plan. In this case the

marketing plan assists the department in achieving goals that are specifically community-oriented. These may be tackling a persistent problem such as abnormally high fire rates from a particular part of the city, or assisting the police with abnormally high rates of traffic accidents. In other cases there could be a perception problem. For example, the public may have a misperception of how emergency equipment is being used. Citizens in one community may not understand why so many pieces of apparatus were dispatched to a simple traffic accident or to good intent calls from a particular apartment complex. Still other examples might include changing elected officials' misperceptions about expenditures. Still another example may be questionable firefighter behavior on or off duty. *As public servants we are always on duty*. Sometimes these issues do not appear as marketing problems, but marketing can provide the solution. In a survey of fire metropolitan chiefs from the NFPA's Urban Fire Forum in 1998, 85% of the major problems were marketing problems. The point here is that the marketing plan and the departmental strategic plan are inextricably related.

Too much has been written about the creation of complex plans that are ineffective and not reality-based. Many plans can be created from one or two simple objectives that can have optimum impact in the department and the community. You can create a more complex plan from the results of these simple actions. The main point is to *do something*. If your department is very small and strapped for human resources, you may be able to enlist the support of a local community college's marketing department. In this way you leverage community resources that are focused on the marketing discipline to apply to the real world. This can be quite effective and demonstrates community involvement. The creation of the *Fire Corps* program provides another path to tap into the civilian resources of marketing expertise, perhaps from a marketing executive living in your community.

Creating the Plan

Your department can establish a specific committee to create the plan. Senior management can then assign roles to execute the plan with consistent input from the committee. The committee should include a public information officer (PIO), public education officer (PEO), as well as an operations battalion chief and the administrative deputy chief. You may wish to include an elected official and/or ancillary community leaders as well as a local health care official who understands your objectives. The committee should be small. The first meeting should include the chief of department with a clear mandate to establish the marketing mechanism and create and execute the plan. This means that the chief creates the expectation throughout the organization that the marketing initiative must be created and achieved. This may involve explaining and educating the department about the reasons why the department should launch a marketing initiative. He or she must then put a follow-up mechanism in place to monitor the progress and to overcome barriers to achieving the marketing goals. These barriers include such things as resource allocation, officer and line resistance.

Elements of the Marketing Plan

You can create strategic direction from senior management's guidance in combination with the view of the committee and other departmental and community needs.
- Review the strategic plan if one exists
- Create a mission statement
- Create a vision statement

Element 1 – A*nalysis*

The analysis process can provide you with the critical, rich information with which to develop and fine tune your objectives.
- Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis with an emphasis on marketing as well as departmental direction from a strategic plan. Where are your strengths and supporting organizations in the community such as the businesses, institutions, political support?
- What is your relationship with the media? Outline all media sources and points of contact. This is the single source for getting your message to the most people.
- Outline the codes and mandates for which you are responsible. Do you wish to lower your ISO rating or become accredited? Where do you stand in terms of number and quality of inspections?
- Any contact and relationship you can develop with businesses is significant and should be cultivated in that they represent some of your largest customers. Do you wish to conduct more pre-fire plans with these same businesses? What about business recovery after a disaster? Review inspection reports from businesses to assess critical educational needs. The time may come that you wish to form an alliance or sponsorship for supporting the department's potential needs for resources.
- Review citizen phone calls or inquiries as well customer satisfaction cards if you have them.
- Review call reports to determine areas of need in various part of the community. This will include analyzing runs and incidents by location and community demographics to determine any patterns.
- If possible, create and conduct a simple survey: internal departmental and external community. The survey should focus on the department's relationships with its members and its citizens in achieving accountability and satisfaction with the department's services. External surveys are best conducted by phone in the evening. It is more economical and the people are usually at home. Internal surveys should be confidential and conducted by an outside source.

- Review target hazards in your community as well as the threat of natural and man-made disasters
- Review financial, human and capital resources needs. Do you need a new station, training facilities, apparatus, or firefighters?
- Map out all key departmental relationships (note each customer segment such as businesses, schools, citizen groups, elected officials, neighborhoods, etc.) in the community according to quality and perception. In its simplest terms marketing is about managing relationships.

Element 2 - *Creating Objectives*

You create this part of the plan based on the combination of departmental goals and the critical needs of the community. The objectives must be qualified according to the following criteria: they must be Strategic, Measurable, Achievable and Consistent with departmental policy (SMAC). Most important, they should make a significant impact and difference in the community based on the department's mission. Finally, the objectives must be directly within the department's responsibility. For example, in Orlando, Florida, the city experienced a very high number of hit and run accidents. While the fire department can play a part in decreasing these incidents through a joint emergency services strategy, it cannot have the sole responsibility for achieving the result.

Examples of simple SMAC objectives:
- Decrease fire loss by X% in the X area of our city by X date
- Increase department funding by X$ by X date
- Make certain smoke detectors are in X% of homes by X date
- Pass home sprinkler legislation for new construction in the next 36 months
- Ensure that the city supports and passes this year's annual budget

Element 3 - C*reating Strategies*

Providing a general road map, strategies are simply the means to achieve the objectives. For example, in the case of the fire loss problem, prevention will need to drill down to determine the cause(s) of the problem and determine the best approach to reduce it. Let's assume it is kitchen appliances left on the stove. The strategy might be as follows:
- Create a public awareness campaign in X area of the city to tell citizens not to be careless with their appliances.

Another example deals with the funding of the department. In this case the strategy might have a number of parts:
- Create a formal presentation for elected officials who can support the request for funding.

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- Utilize the good relationship between the fire chief, President, or Commissioner and elected officials to explain the situation and the reasons for the need in one-on-one meetings.
- Create a public awareness campaign through the media, institutions, and businesses noting the various services of the department and how they help the community.
- Create a philanthropic foundation for businesses to support the fire department such as *Fire Pal* in Phoenix, Arizona
- Submit grant request to the state and federal government as well as foundations and corporations for financial support.

Element 4 - *Creating Action Plans*

The action plan portion of the marketing plan defines the specific steps that the department takes to achieve the objectives.
An example of a part of an action plan might include the following as it relates to creating an awareness campaign for smoke alarms.

- Engine 12 will deliver 25 smoke alarms in the Glen Park neighborhood on December 12th and report specific alarm placement and any feedback from neighborhood citizens.
- Engine 14 will conduct ten inspections of homes and businesses within the next two weeks.
- Chief Smith will meet with the local government officials to explain the need for home sprinkler legislation.

Element 5 - *Reporting and Feedback*

The action portion of the marketing plan always requires a simple reporting and feedback loop for two reasons. First, with so many competing needs in any department it is important to make certain that the action is taken. Second, feedback and comments from citizens provide the DNA for modifying and improving the plan, making it more attuned to market needs. As we noted before, needs are always changing. This is really one of the primary returns on investment of any marketing plan. You may want to establish a report card for the community to assess the department's status of accountability based on overall strategic goals. Remember that the marketing goals should emanate from the overall strategic goals of the department. This is why a status report for the community will keep your department's accountability at the community's level of awareness.

Tools of the Trade

The Promotion Mix The promotion mix is the single most important part of the marketing plan aside from the strategy itself. It requires thought, preparation, and creativity, because in the end its results ensure the safety of the public while informing it of the benefits of the fire and emergency services.

The promotion mix is the complete communications program. It is the dynamic part of a department's marketing or communications plan. In private enterprise it consists of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and public relations. In the public sector it may involve most of these. Additionally, educating and informing are critical actions for the public sector so we may use speakers, the media, public forums, workshops, citizen seminars, meetings, public events, and publications.

Advertising Advertising is an impersonal form of communication about ideas, products, or services paid for by an identified sponsor. This may take many forms such as mass media, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, direct mail, billboards, cards, handbills, internet pop-ups, and ribbons. The pervasiveness of advertising is a growing problem. It has become so encroaching into the lives of people (the customer), that its effectiveness continues to diminish. This presents some possibilities for the fire service because our messages do not sell products and are seen more as real news we can use. Our advertising is a public service so it has the opportunity to gain interest and deliver a message for the good of the customer, not just to sell a widget the customer may or may not need. The question for advertising is whether or not it is effective. The answer to this question is usually found in market research to determine if the public took an action based on the ad. It is the most visible face of the promotional mix, usually the most expensive and delivered to reach mass audiences with a standardized message.

Personal Selling Personal selling is one of the more effective tools in the promotion mix. However, it is expensive and its reach is limited to the number of people one can efficiently reach with a message. In the public sector, personal selling involves every moment of face to face interaction when we have a message we wish to convey to another for an action in our favor. It is not as expensive as in the private sector because of our proximity to our customers in their neighborhoods and businesses, as well as by the nature and number of our calls. This is the personal approach to relationship management and, in my opinion, the best. It is difficult and requires a number of skills dealing with interpersonal communications. Any fire service person who wants to advance and make a significant impact on his or her department and community needs to understand the basics of personal selling. These skills involve understanding the prioritized needs of the department and public. It then involves demonstrating how those needs can be filled through the program or services your section or department offers. It is used during inspections, at the fire scene and in all EMS calls. It is especially crucial at the senior officer level during budget discussions

and gaining political support at the national level. Personal selling is the last frontier of economic growth in the private sector and it paves the way for innovation and progress in the public sector. If you want to understand marketing, learn personal selling first. Again, the details of how to achieve excellence in this area can fill volumes. In the fire and emergency services each of us is selling everyday in every encounter, even if we are not speaking. Our image and our actions sell who we are and what we do. In the realm of personal selling remember who you are and what you represent.

Public Affairs: the Enhanced Role of the PIO Let's use the term public affairs instead of public relations. In our profession we are always relating publicly. It's as plain as the badge on our chest. Public affairs is divided into two areas: *public information* and *media marketing.* Public information relates to the facts of an incident provided to the media. Media marketing relates to the placement of messages in the media in a coordinated effort for promotional purposes. The tools we use to get our message across are better than advertising because it is usually the daily news. This is why the position of PIO or Public Affairs Director is becoming so important in any department. It is becoming critical that a PIO have some background and even a professional track record in marketing. The PIO is the sector commander for marketing in general and for the promotion mix in particular. Public fire and safety officers contribute critical elements to the promotions mix and are probably among the best marketers in the safety services. Use them! Heed their advice. Ask for their participation.

Media Marketing Every element of the media can be used for our message. We can use radio, newspapers, internet, or TV. We can usually build our message around an incident such as a house fire, a hazardous materials spill, or major building fire. Media marketing is a powerful instrument when it is part of a comprehensive strategy. Articles relating to a particular safety problem or broad issue such as residential sprinklers can be very effective when written in an engaging style and offering a tangible benefit to the public. Most media outlets are searching for new stories or a series of articles dealing with important public issues. Safety is a continuing issue. It is up to you to provide the promotional content to gain the kind of attention you want. Media professionals are among your best customers and should be treated with the utmost respect. Managing the relationships with the media results in a very high return to the department. You will be the first on the list when they need a story. Ask them their priorities when producing a story for their TV network or newspaper. Make sure they can reach you 24 hours a day.

Public Forums and Seminars This is a growing area of the promotion mix, especially well suited for the fire and emergency services. The reason for this is because we usually attract a crowd with our equipment and our personnel in uniform. When we work with other agencies such as the Red Cross and police, and in partnership with private enterprise, we can usually bring in quite a few interested people. The number of people who attend is dependent on the effectiveness of the mini-promotional campaign.

Examples of these might be the initiation of a Citizens' Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, a disaster preparedness seminar, or a citizens or media academy.

The Internet One of the most promising mediums for promotion of public services is the internet. Some of the positive aspects of personal selling contribute to the potential success of this medium. Every marketer would like to have the ability to speak to his or her customers one by one in a manner that customizes the communication to the specific needs of each. This kind of promotion/communication is called one to one marketing. The advantage of this medium is the ability to focus on particular segments of the market and to receive consistent feedback. This is also called permission marketing. The best example of this kind of promotion can be found in the way Amazon.com markets to the public. Using the internet, departments can fashion promotional and educational programs for a target hazard segment of the public. It also has the ability to get the message out to many people at one time, immediately.

Promotional Promotional messages are directed to target audiences. The target determines or shapes the type of message. For example, a message about the benefits of residential sprinklers will go to a different market segment than those who have experienced a number of suspicious fires in a low income neighborhood. There are three basic kinds of messages with many variations. *Rational appeals* relate to the self interest of the target public. These messages are based on quality of life, performance, economy, or value. An example might be an appeal for clearing one's house located in an urban/wildlife interface. *Emotional appeals* attempt to activate feelings that motivate action. In years past, some departments used the burning baby message for budget increases. This is an example of an approach that might work once, but the long-term result is deterioration in credibility. I do not suggest it. A more thoughtful approach would demonstrate the benefits of a responsible department. An example that comes to mind is a fairly large ad that appeared in the *Denver Post* showing fresh water flowing from a faucet with the caption, "This fresh water brought to you by the Denver Fire Department." The point here was that the department took consideration of environmental concerns when dealing with runoff from fire calls or HAZMAT spills. Think of the different messages that one ad conveys: a responsible, professional fire department. This is an image building ad and very difficult to measure, especially for the public sector. Finally, there are *moral appeals*, many of which are used for fund raising for volunteer departments.

Customer Service is Relationship Management: the DNA of Marketing

Consider the number of overlapping relationships in our fire and life safety protection system. These relationships drive our ability to get any job done or to achieve any outcome. Such stakeholders include firefighters, officers, elected officials, collateral agencies, union groups, and regulatory agencies. How we manage these relationships is, in many ways, the single most important aspect of any marketing approach.

Customer service is more than a specific system, it is a mindset. As a system, it is the mechanism that grows the department's relationships with the community it protects. It is important to establish a specific departmental procedure for receiving communications from the public, organizations, institutions and businesses the department protects. Every complaint and inquiry must be handled professionally and with a consistent thought: "how can this communication add value to the community and the department?" What new opportunity to serve could this represent for our department?" These may be new, burgeoning elements of a marketing campaign. Some progressive departments are actually assigning personnel to customer care during an incident as part of the Incident Command System (ICS) procedure.

An Educated and Informed Public is our Most Important Asset

People are more likely to show political and financial support to the things they understand and value. If citizens do not see what we offer as a necessary value, they will question its need. This is especially true for a public service that receives its support from hard-earned tax dollars. It is our responsibility to make certain that we manage our customers' expectations of our service so that they understand the vital necessity and value it provides for the quality of their lives. The discipline of fire and emergency services marketing management is the central tool that can support any department's efforts to maintain and thrive in each of our communities. Some observers have portrayed the fire service as one which has been resistant to change or unenlightened when it comes to defining its own future. The argument contends that we must let go of the past so that we can embrace a new vision of our future. This is only partially true. The traditions, history, motivation, and systems of the present American fire service provide the very strengths and foundations for its future. Marketing has a significant contribution to make to that future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben May has over twenty years of experience in applying marketing management principles to fire and emergency services marketing at the local and national level. A former volunteer firefighter and fire commissioner, Ben developed the largest public fire education experience in the world with the Walt Disney Company at Epcot® in Orlando, Florida. Ben writes a column for Firehouse Magazine *called Marketing ICS. He is a speaker, writer and consultant on marketing issues for the fire and emergency services. He can be reached at* firecom1@aol.com. *All information in this publication is the copyright of Ben May, Fire and Emergency Services Marketing Consultant.*

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Marketing Management

Things to do …..

☐ 1. If you have an existing marketing plan, review it to determine if the plan includes the author's specific uses of marketing, described in this chapter. If you do not have an existing marketing plan, develop one.

☐ 2. Coordinate your marketing plan with your organization's strategic plan.

☐ 3. Identify the needed tools of the trade for your marketing plan and where you will access them.

☐ 4. Determine how you will measure the success of your marketing plan and when that measurement will occur.

☐ 5. Identify external skill sets you will need to be successful in your marketing, where you can access these types of skill sets and who in the Emergency Service Organization will coordinate the process.

Chapter 7

Human Resource Management

By Chief Gary Scott

People, the most valuable resource, must be managed effectively, including the processes of recruitment, personnel management, sexual (and other types of) harassment, discipline, hiring and firing (termination), interviewing, and benefit programs.

Human Resource Management

The volunteer fire service is full of tradition that captivates, enchants, and entices individuals to join this time-honored civic service. That mysticism encompasses a personal feeling of importance, value, and fulfillment of childhood dreams while making a difference in the well-being of a community. How we manage these strong emotions will make the difference in how long a person chooses to volunteer and are the same regardless of the volunteer or combination status of the department. The feeling of pride and the ambition to succeed is absorbed in the physical surroundings and the management's emphasis on success, be it all-volunteer or a combination system.

In all volunteer departments, a widely accepted volunteer officer election system, governed with term limits, has created a situation where most of the officer's time and energy is spent on training for and responding to calls. These restrictions most often cause a void in developing the critical infrastructure to support and manage human resources. Significant time and attention needs to be applied to improving human resources management in order to increase the national retention rate of four years[2] per volunteer and build healthy organizations. Likewise, volunteers can be mismanaged in combination systems when management does not understand or treat volunteers in the same fashion as career employees. Simply because an individual volunteers their time does not lessen the responsibility of the organization to manage their human resources.

Successful volunteer managers understand the importance of providing an environment that fosters enthusiasm and focuses on opportunities to improve personal and team skill levels. Those departments understand the necessity of ensuring that volunteering is hassle-free regarding controllable issues and structure their departments so that good service becomes the focus and mission of the organization.

A direct connection can be made between how we manage our human resources, the longevity of our personnel, the quality of services provided by our department and ultimately, the safety of our emergency providers while operating at the emergency. That connection is directly related to a manager's ability to minimize conflict within the department, distribute prompt and fair discipline, and provide the atmosphere that encourages and rewards substantive and positive improvements. Community protection and well-being depends on the experience, expertise, and tenure of local emergency providers, volunteer or career.

The commitment to human resource management provides the basis for the department's success. How we manage, motivate, mentor, design expectations, discipline, and record all of these actions soundly provides the basis for future individual and department success. What captivates and entices the volunteer is energy channeled toward a positive and productive outcome, ideally beneficial to all.

The position of Human Resource Manager is equally important to the chief officer positions on the fireground, regardless of the size of your department. While it is behind the scenes, this position manages all the human aspects of the department such as

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[2] Blue Ribbon Report; *Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service.* International Association of Fire Chiefs' March 2004.

recruiting, hiring and terminating volunteers, dealing with personnel complaints and investigations, discipline, medical issues, managing long-term personnel objectives like diversification and training plans, and record management. All these duties are done with specific knowledge of Federal laws and protection of the individual's rights under an assortment of Federal mandates and should not necessarily fall on the shoulders of the CEO. If someone in the organization does not have this kind of expertise then outside assistance and guidance may be needed. Perhaps personnel management might be better transferred to individuals in local government or individuals who can be encouraged to volunteer who are familiar in dealing with these kinds of job responsibilities.

Recruiting and Hiring Volunteers

The best recruitment program that a department can have is a high retention rate of existing volunteers. That does, of course, assume that the department has mandates for training and response activity levels and is not merely a closed social club or fraternal organization whose existence is more self-serving than community based. Organizations that have found the key to retaining their current volunteers generally attract new members based on their reputation and stability. They typically have a higher level of organizational maturity. Few people want to join stagnant organizations or groups who have very limited opportunities for self improvement or personal skill development.

Clearly, one of the biggest hurdles to overcome is the local government's view of the community *cost avoidance* created by the volunteer service. These are deferred costs resulting from the actuality of being a *volunteer* entity. In theory however, a portion of these savings should be invested in modern equipment, state-of-the-art protective gear, and acceptable facilities that encourage volunteer participation.

Volunteer firefighters account for less than 1/59 of the number of Americans that volunteer. The majority of Americans give approximately 52 hours per year mainly to youth or religious organizations with the greatest share of time supporting activities that involve family members.[3] The report assembled in 2002 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor; Volunteer Service Indicator, shows that there were more than 20 million Americans that gave more than 100 hours of volunteer service during the study period between September 2001 and September 2002. This survey simply indicates that there is a substantial pool of volunteers in our communities and we may have to change our recruitment philosophies to attract them to our departments. For recruiting to be effective, you have to understand the dynamics of your community and the reasons why people volunteer. Each department's approach and solution to recruitment and retention challenges needs to be customized to your community.

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[3] Blue Ribbon Report; *Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service.* International Association of Fire Chiefs' March 2004, page 14.

Traditionally, does your community depend on volunteer workers to provide various services? What is the level of community support for volunteers and how competitive is the volunteer market? Each community has specific needs based on demographics, population distribution, population age, and employer support. Some communities have particularly difficult challenges in providing daytime coverage when the populace travels to neighboring communities for employment. Once these factors are known, a recruitment campaign can be assembled. In order to market your department and seriously attract new members, you will have to be specific about their time commitment, training opportunities and your expectations for their involvement. Successful recruiting departments have a complete marketing division to attract new members. Some of those marketing ideas include attractive brochures for public distribution outlining their significant features along with their membership benefits and incentive programs. Other departments regularly advertise in local newspapers, television, internet links, movie theaters, and radio. Some departments retain marketing firms to manage volunteer recruitment with the expenditure more than justified by the amount of career salary savings. Other recruitment campaigns may be managed by a regional group of fire departments or by a state fire organization.

Volunteer recruitment campaign for the Campbell County Fire Department January 2005

Recruitment efforts need to be designed to attract individuals who have a solid sense of accomplishment and commitment and meet the internal and community needs of the department. You also have to be sensitive that your department does not project an *exclusive image* that will discourage or exclude particular individuals from volunteering. The connection with the community is that a volunteer organization will use the talents of all who choose to donate their time.

A Human Resource Manager can be a valuable addition to any organization who deals with volunteers. His or her fundamental understanding of why people volunteer can eliminate a lot of wasted time and energy recruiting individuals who may not be in a position to succeed.

While there are a number of reasons why people choose to volunteer, the overriding issue is the self-imposed need to belong to something that makes their community a better place. Few people join organizations to lower their social standing in the community, therefore a sense of achievement and increased responsibility is a strong incentive for people to participate. Most individuals excel in organizations that have realistic and meaningful goals that improve both the department and individual and allow the volunteer to balance their civic time with their personal life. That means that you have to be more creative in how you schedule your volunteer activities.

Before recruiting efforts can be effective, you have to ensure that the department is going to support the addition of new volunteer members. Does your selection process reinforce the values of your department, have you designed effective mentorship programs and are your benefit and incentive packages attractive?

The individual evaluation elements in the selection process should reflect your expectations of traits and skills you consider important for the individual to be an asset to your department.   The goal, ultimately, is to match these requirements to what the volunteer applicant can provide.

Membership Application

Applications used by your department should be consistent with other governmental agencies in your area. It should include a job description, necessary literacy skills, and physical ability demands, and should solicit information in compliance with Federal law. Simply because a person chooses to participate as a volunteer in your department does not mean they waive their civil rights and allow you to act outside the scope of the Federal law.

The easiest method of developing a compliant application is to use the same process as for other governmental jobs in your area.   Most human resource professionals employed within your local government will be happy to help you modify the application process to meet any specific needs of your department.

This process should clearly outline the expectations for the voluntary position and distinguish between the levels and types of services offered by the department. Each level should have a list of skills, knowledge, and abilities inherent to its specific needs. It is fundamentally important that you enumerate the physical attributes necessary to do the job. Obviously, there are different physical demands for the volunteer who offers to make meals for a significant wildland event and the volunteer assigned to the fire line.

Background Checks

Background checks are one way of ensuring that you make an honest effort to screen and eliminate individuals who should not be a part of your department because of past criminal conduct. The public expects that members of your organization are trustworthy and meet higher standards than the general public. Therefore, background checks become a tool to ensure that individuals meet internal values of your department. Some law enforcement agencies will fingerprint a potential candidate to assist with this process.

Obvious exclusions would be any individual who has a theft, narcotics or domestic violence conviction. While law enforcement may not be able to reveal what types of convictions an individual has, they can compare the background of an applicant to your policy of acceptable conduct and advise you if a candidate is compliant or unacceptable based on that policy. This process adds credibility to your staffing selections and elevates the candidate to a higher standard.

As part of the process, the applicant should provide you with a certified copy of their driving record which is then evaluated against the acceptable standards provided by your specific insurance carrier. An individual's past driving record may substantially affect their ability to volunteer and may disqualify them as a poor risk and possibly be uninsurable for this type of activity.

Physical Fitness Standards

Physical fitness of firefighters is one of the most pressing issues in the fire service today. Physical fitness standards are a necessary part of being a line firefighter because we ask new members to expose themselves to an immediate onset of strenuous physical activity, for sustained periods of time, with elevated mental and emotional demands. Each department should have some type of physical assessment for potential members to ensure that they are capable of this kind of activity. If it is not practical to do as an independent department then this could be provided in conjunction with law enforcement applications or as part of a larger fire system in your area.

Written Exams

Written exams in a volunteer system may or may not be used to eliminate or advance a candidate for membership. Since the make up of departments differs widely, one firefighter may have many diverse duties. Your written exam will most likely be used to determine the level of literacy of the applicant which impacts training styles when dealing with adult education. Also, if the position requires completion of reports, dealing with the media, department correspondence, or contributing to policies and procedures, the ability to compose narrative beyond a basic level is essential. When you understand how an individual learns, you can implement training opportunities that

are more valuable and comfortable to their learning style. This information is personal and should be guarded to eliminate any embarrassment for the volunteer.

A second type of written exam that is particularly useful is a personality profile. There are a number of profile tests on the market and some exploration within your community most likely would uncover a particular test that is currently being used in private industry or another governmental agency. The initial profile testing is usually conducted by a human resource specialist who has experience with this testing device. Included in the testing process is a formal class on how to use the information when the test is completed. The programs are fun and insightful, providing your membership with clues to others' personalities, how they receive and process information, and their preferred communication and learning styles.

Oral Interviews

Oral interviews can be a valuable tool allowing several established department members to participate in the process. Depending on the level of position offered, you may wish to open this panel to include representatives from other agencies in your community.   This reinforces the importance of good working relations with other emergency agencies and provides the candidate some assurance that the oral board is not stacked for a predetermined outcome.

Oral board questions need to be pre-determined and federally compliant. Even during this process there is information that you are not entitled to know and the questions need to be directed to the job as a volunteer. Specifically, questions that address age, race, nationality, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation are off limits. The questions need to be consistent for each member who applies and it is perfectly acceptable to rank the candidates based on their responses.

Following a tentative offer for membership, some type of physical should be offered to a potential new member. This should include a drug screen. Initially, you may consider it cost prohibitive to provide entry physicals but this action may prevent substantial future costs and identify physical impairments that would exclude a person from this activity. Options may include special arrangements with local hospitals or recruiting the voluntary services of a physician to assist in establishing the program.

Most importantly, validation of a new member should not be exclusively based on a membership vote. Few businesses, if any, and no other emergency service hires personnel based on popularity.   This type of action often leads to group discussions involving information that is protected and beyond the scope of need-to-know.

Discipline and Termination of Volunteers

One of the most sensitive jobs performed within a department involves discipline and investigating specific personnel complaints. The degree of professionalism in dealing with each of these issues will substantially impact the retention rate of your organization and define you as either a quality department or one managed by vigilante justice.

Everyone has the right to expect that any personnel issues will be dealt with in a fair and professional manner, regardless if the individual serves in a career or volunteer capacity. Therefore, attention to how you deal with disciplinary issues needs to be outlined in a policy and your personal actions need to be compliant with the options provided. The goal should always be to provide positive direction and action that will improve behavior, performance or both.

The most common disciplinary method within volunteer companies is *progressive discipline.* This method involves a three step process consisting of a verbal warning for an initial infraction, written warning with immediate corrective action for a second infraction involving the same issue and finally significant disciplinary action for a third violation of the same offense. Actions qualifying for this type of discipline are generally defined as those events involving less than criminal behavior or what you deem to be sacred values of the department.

Part of the progressive discipline policy needs to specifically address who has the authority to draft and issue each phase of the process. As an example, some departments may allow the station officer to issue verbal warnings and written reprimands. After the written reprimand, the issue and the reprimand are advanced to a chief officer for follow up. The station officer may or may not be involved in the follow up depending on the infraction and how close the officer is to the situation. Typically, termination is reserved as duty for the chief with an assistant chief having the maximum authority of suspension. Regardless of the process decided on by your department, the bottom line is that all officers need to know their line of responsibility and their maximum level of authority before they are compelled to advance the action, and that the system allows for a check and balance to protect the rights of the firefighter.

Disciplinary Process

The most common application for *progressive discipline* may be infractions of safety policies at the emergency scene or around the station, driving infractions, or interpersonal disputes between members. This system is not designed to deal with more serious allegations of inappropriate behavior or conduct or alleged criminal actions.

A verbal warning is the first attempt to provide a member with notification that their behavior or actions are not acceptable. This usually includes some direction to correct the action that prompted the conversation. Although this is verbal, it is imperative that the officer keep notes documenting the event and the conditions of the warning. Some departments actually create an *Employee Performance Action Plan* that acts as an official document for all personnel actions.

A written warning should be a formal document outlining the infraction and clearly denoting when the verbal warning was issued, by whom, and the corrective action stated. This document becomes much more formal with specific actions, definable action dates, and a time period for re-evaluation of the situation. This may involve more coaching efforts over a longer period of time and more officers helping to oversee the

requested improvement. This phase should clearly outline the immediate disciplinary actions that will follow if there are any future infractions. Actions may include restrictions, suspension, or termination.

The final phase is when you implement the action(s) you specified in the written warning. No questions asked, no more leniency, stand behind your decision.

Other personnel actions can categorically be defined as *allegations of improper conduct or inappropriate interpersonal behavior* that require assembling investigative facts prior to any disciplinary action. These kinds of events may require a suspension from duty while the investigation is completed. Included in this type of action are allegations of creating a hostile work environment or sexual harassment. Depending on how close you are to the situation and the individuals involved, you may choose to turn these issues over to a third party to ensure that the investigation and following actions are based on fact as opposed to emotion.

It is the responsibility of the chief/CEO, per organizational design/bylaws and governing body to ensure that they provide a work environment free from individual hostility and sexual harassment. Therefore, it is a must that fire departments implement a hostile work environment and sexual harassment policy with yearly staff training on the elements of the policy. Federal law in these areas applies to all departments regardless if they are volunteer, career, or combination. The policy should address the use of foul language, jokes, or conversations that make light of ethnic or religious values, sexually explicit printed materials and figurines. The policy also needs to address these kinds of jokes and materials that might be distributed through email. Your members have to know and be assured that any complaint of alleged improper conduct or inappropriate interpersonal behavior will receive immediate attention. Department officers also need to understand their responsibility, in compliance with the policy, to immediately advance any complaint and the consequences for failure to act. These policies are easily obtainable from your local governing entity or drafted with assistance from legal counsel.

Termination

At some point in time it will become necessary to terminate a volunteer. This action is more easily completed if you have followed your progressive discipline policy. The basis for impending termination will have been clearly outlined in response to the poor behavior or actions. This obviously would not apply to an individual who has committed a grievous action that requires immediate termination.

In most fire departments termination action responsibility is defined within bylaws, policy, or SOGs. Terminations need to be done in the presence of at least one other individual who can verify the context of the conversation (a good role for the Human Resource Manager) and should include a written document outlining the reason for the action. It may be necessary to suspend the individual until the investigation and termination documents can be drafted.

As a safeguard, your system should include a written policy allowing the volunteer to challenge the action and plead their position if they believe a wrongful termination has occurred. This is a strong argument for governing boards or trustees *not* to be involved in the daily management of a department.

Managing Medical Records and Related Issues

Federal mandates are specific regarding confidentiality of a volunteer's medical information. The most recent document to impact medical records is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. This Federal document is very clear about what medical information is public knowledge. It limits exclusion for preexisting medical conditions, meaning that you cannot discriminate against a volunteer or employee or their dependents based on their health status. This act also mandates internal controls for record management, including hardcopy and computerized information. Firefighter medical information can no longer be filed with a standard personnel file, but requires a separate filing system. Also protected is the medical information contained in your response reports. You are responsible to devise security measures eliminating these files from general browsing and implement information policies regarding what information can be contained in a response record database.

Any injuries should be documented in the individual's personnel file. When appropriate, workers compensation forms need to be completed and reporting should always be in compliance with state statutes or administrative regulations. Follow up is necessary on any treatable injury to ensure that the volunteer is following the specified medical instructions and that the individual does not return to duty until medical clearance is granted.

Retaining Volunteers

The retention rate of volunteers is directly related to the conflict level within the organization. This reinforces the notion that the single most important issue affecting retention is the lack of solid department leadership[4]. This lack is also a product of popular elections with no requirements for promotions and an absence of officer training to deal with personnel issues. Constant turmoil, a lack of discipline, improper management of personnel disputes, overly dramatic embellishments of the circumstances, and immature resolutions are often to blame for good volunteers leaving fire departments.

As the chief officer it is your responsibility to minimize conflict and resolve interpersonal disputes. Keep in mind, most individuals join community service organizations to provide a service, make new friends, learn new skills, and have fun. At

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[4] Blue Ribbon Report; *Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service.* International Association of Fire Chiefs' March 2004, page 15.

some point, you may have to ask difficult people to leave your department before they cause irreversible damage by driving good volunteers out. The health of the organization has to prevail over the desires and ambitions of a single individual.

A major aggravation experienced by volunteers is their perceived waste of time to accomplish routine tasks. For example, when an entire day is spent replacing minor equipment because there are too many people involved in the process. One way to effectively minimize volunteer inconveniences is to strive for a one-stop approach to dealing with routine volunteer issues and visits to the station. While this takes a little more administrative time and organization, it clearly shows the volunteer that you value their commitment. The department can establish an appointment system so that you are aware of all the issues that need to be addressed when the volunteer arrives at the station.

Benefits and Incentives

Most departments do not understand the difference between benefits and incentives. Simply stated, benefits include the privileges and securities that are provided to you as a result of your membership and incentives are the rewards for improved performance.

Benefit programs should encourage long-term participation from the volunteer clearly showing the department's commitment to the safety and security of the individual and their family. Benefits should include workers compensation, health, accident, and life insurance, and coverage that will protect the livelihood of the individual and their employer. Every volunteer has the right to expect adequate financial compensation in the event they are injured in the line of duty. Every department has the responsibility to ensure that the volunteer and their family and employer are financially protected should such an injury occur.

Non-monetary benefits may include using the fire department maintenance facility for personal vehicle repairs, the use of an empty apparatus bay to clean your car, controlled access to the internet while providing station coverage, etc. A number of departments are finding substantial value in organizing activities that include the entire family. Picnics, special showcase drills designed to demonstrate the tasks they perform, or station fun nights are events that allow the families to interact.

Incentive programs should award individuals and team members because of their performance and commitment to the department and community. An annual awards banquet provides an excellent opportunity to recognize many achievements. Most of these programs are acceptable expenditures within governmental accounting systems. Awards can also be spread out over the course of the year and incorporated in other department activities. Following are some examples of awards that can be given as they occur and those that are best suited for annual events.

As They Occur (during monthly business or training meetings)

- Graduation ceremonies for those individuals completing the fire academy or obtaining their initial firefighter certification. This is the first big step for most volunteers and accordingly, should be a prominent ceremony that involves their family, the board or trustees, and chief and station officers.
- Recognition for those individuals who have accomplished a state certification training level.
- Certificate for response awards that are given for incremental increases. These increments can be as small as every 100 calls or the base figure can be larger depending on your response volume. These not only serve to promote call participation but also to acknowledge the individual for increased experience.
- Customer service awards encourage individuals to go *above and beyond* the call of duty when dealing with the public and duly serve as a basis for improved community relations.
- Life Saver awards for special actions at an emergency scene.

Annual Awards

- Emergency Provider of the Year
- Rookie of the Year
- Recognition of other emergency providers can be an effective way to improve interagency relations. Generally these kinds of awards include the Dispatcher, Law Enforcement Officer, and EMS Provider of the Year and are awarded in conjunction with a significant community event or if the individual has made a special effort to cooperate and improve relations with the fire department.
- Medal of Valor
- Years of Service Awards

All awards need to be defined in a policy clearly outlining the criteria for obtaining the recognition and what incentive is provided for that accomplishment. Those incentives may be in the form of plaques, gift certificates for special events or dinner on the department, jackets, caps, etc. A department should not be compelled to present an award simply because there is a category for that recognition. You want to make every effort to ensure that the award is meaningful and maintains the level of prestige for which it is intended.

Financial reimbursement for volunteer time is becoming a popular method for attracting new members and retaining older members. This is particularly effective when recruiting younger firefighters. Payment programs range from a year end bonus, monthly stipends, payment per call, to hourly compensation for responses and station standby.

Departments that are looking to implement some type of financial reimbursement program are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel and their regional IRS office

to have the program validated. Most departments who do have some financial payment programs should be prepared to withhold appropriate payroll taxes, social security, and Medicare payments. Those departments providing hourly payments for services are most likely not volunteer companies and may be in a position to extend payment for overtime hours and appropriate employee benefits.

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs recognize that simply issuing turnout gear does not make an individual a firefighter. These programs serve as firefighter baptism with a balance between practical experience and education opportunities. Well structured mentorship programs will give you a competitive advantage over other civic organizations by affording you an opportunity to smoothly indoctrinate new members. Mentorship should include an evaluation process to provide the new member with regular feedback during the probation period, reinforcing your commitment to their success. They need to know the good, bad, and the ugly aspects of their performance. By nature, we want to do the best that we can and when we venture out of personal comfort zones to volunteer, we expect honest, not brutal, feedback to improve our performance.

New members should be provided with a copy of their job description, an outline of duties they may be required to perform at the scene and around the station, and a copy of the rules that you expect them to follow, clearly stating any response or training attendance requirements.

Mentors, who are most typically station officers, should have a complete understanding of their role, authority, and responsibilities. The program has to be consistent from station to station, reinforcing the same values. They need to have good people skills, the ability to support the fundamental roles of mentorship programs; the ability and willingness to communicate with new members and share information. Mentors assist in identifying a new member's strengths and weaknesses.

Mentorship programs can perform a number of significant roles in the education and indoctrination of new members. This is a comprehensive effort to ensure that all new members arrive at emergency scenes and have someone available to explain to them what is going on and why. There are many *Micro Training Opportunities (MTO)* before, during, and after the responses to improve levels of understanding and define procedures performed at the scene. *MTOs* become a basis for developing skills to accomplish future task assignments. This is a critical step. New firefighters do not learn anything sitting in the station because they missed a truck. If they miss enough trucks, they will not show up at emergency scenes.

The length of time that a new volunteer will remain with the department will be determined in the first six months of their membership. Actions taken by the department to make a new member welcome, help them adjust, and minimize their discomfort will make the difference between a volunteer staying less than four years or twenty years. If they perceive your department as disorganized, dysfunctional, and offering little opportunity for self improvement, they will most likely leave.

Diversification Strategies

Diversification strategies are specifically designed to maximize the talent and skill of the individual; enhancing the overall efficiency, safety and effectiveness of the department while reducing the need for a single volunteer to respond to every incident. Diversification strategies openly support that a single individual cannot be an expert in all phases of department operations, and in fact, this kind of department expectation will lead to a premature loss of personnel.

The premise of diversification is to actually expand the number of volunteer positions and match their individual talents and skills to a specific task. Restricting their involvement to one or two tasks allows them to become a true specialist and reduces the amount of general training time. Introducing this principal should improve retention by reducing the dependence on a small group of individuals who have to respond to all types of responses, improve the general expertise of the department by developing service specific experts, and open recruiting opportunities to fill task specific functions.

The challenge is developing department training and participation standards outside of traditional membership requirements. This philosophy challenges the need for every member of your department to be a certified firefighter to maintain membership. As an example, an individual who is a professional truck driver wants to donate time with your department. They are not physically capable of functioning as a line firefighter but believe they could contribute as a tender operator during wildland fire season. Should this individual meet all the membership requirements that a line firefighter has to meet? In a number of departments the answer is emphatically yes. They effectively eliminate individuals from volunteering who could simply reduce the number of hours a line firefighter is expected to contribute by doing routine, noncritical tasks. You want to create an environment where these services are also valued and firefighters are concentrating on safety, training, and responses.

Developing diversification strategies involves identifying individual interests after the new firefighter has fulfilled their baseline training commitments. Typically, that involves completion of the Firefighter I certification. Training is then designed and monitored to allow the firefighter opportunities to expand their knowledge and experience in several different tactical operations. These may include, but are certainly not limited to, apparatus operations, aerial operator or company member, hazardous materials, technician rescue, wildland operations, etc.

This type of program can actually increase the vitality of any fire department that relies heavily on volunteers. It clearly delineates your understanding of the value of their time and the need to modify traditional systems to accommodate a wider variety of individual skills and more evenly distribute the workload.

Tactical Equality

One of the best ways to ensure that your system has parity and provides equal opportunities for all your members is to base training and promotional systems on tactical equality.

The fundamental element of tactical equality is devising training programs that lead to some type of state or national certification. Those certifications, combined with specific years of service, are the basis for promotion within the ranks of an engine company and eventually to the officer positions. Experienced-based training becomes a critical part of preparing an individual from firefighter to engineer or apparatus operator to engine company officer. In a volunteer department, it is difficult to know who will be showing up for a response, so the general rule is that the firefighter yields to another member if they are certified in that position.

Long term benefits of implementing a system that recognizes tactical equality are immeasurable. By developing standards for volunteers, you encourage them to be more active in training and provide an automatic incentive for personal improvement. This system forces trainers to make the most of the available training time and expand the number of training opportunities to cover more specialized areas. Requiring firefighters to be certified at the tactical level where they perform will ultimately force the entire system to select officers based on practical experience and an appropriate level of certification. Tactical equality motivates the entire organization into a proactive environment where firefighters appreciate the level of commitment to safety and solid job performance, improving the retention rate of the entire system.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chief Scott is the Fire Chief and Administrator for the Campbell County Fire Department in Gillette, WY. The organization is a combination fire department governed by a Joint Powers Board of Directors with 180 volunteers, supported by 20 career positions. Services are provided to 40,000 residents in a 5,000 square mile area.

Chief Scott serves as the Legislative Chair for the Volunteer and Combination Officers of the International Association of Fire Chiefs and is a member of the Homeland Security Emergency Response Senior Advisory Committee to Secretary Ridge.

CAMPBELL COUNTY FIRE - RESCUE
EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN

Employee: **Position:**

Supervisor: **Date:**

Issues

1.
           Concern:

2.
           Concern:

Expectations	Time Frame
1.	
2.	
3.	

I have read and understand the Employee Performance Action Plan. I am responsible for achieving the described expectations, within the Time Frame established.   I acknowledge that my supervisor may evaluate performance throughout the Time Frame of the Plan and take any additional actions deemed necessary. The language used in this Plan does not constitute a contract of employment, either expressed or implied. Failure to comply with the Plan will result in further action, up to and including termination.

Employee Comments:

Employee Signature:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Date:

Supervisor Comments:

Supervisor Signature:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Date:
Original to personnel file

Human Resource Management

Things to do …

☐ 1. If you have no Human Resource Manager, develop a list of tasks that this person could perform to help your organization. If you have an HR person already, develop a list of initiatives that will enhance the value of the position.

☐ 2. Review your current disciplinary process, and make necessary changes to enhance it.

☐ 3. Evaluate your mentorship program to determine its effectiveness and create a plan to improve it.

☐ 4. Poll your members to determine

- Why they volunteer
- What makes them stay or leave
- What benefits would entice them to stay short term and long term.

☐ 5. Develop a customized Retention and Benefits Plan for your organization based on the findings in Question 4.

Chapter 8

Customer Service

By Gene Carlson

As with any business, the customer is number one. Focus on identifying the customer, and understand their needs and expectations. Develop a responsive organization to deal with those expectations as a basic management practice.

Customer Service

There are many ideas about what customer service in the fire department means. For many years, the fire service has had the impression that responding to emergencies was the meaning of serving the customer. It is important to determine who the customers are and how your fire department defines customer service. Have you asked, what does our department do for its customers?

In reality, there are two customers for the fire department to serve. One is the external customer that has always been served; and the other is the internal customer within the fire department, the men and women who are the department. Customer service is not merely the fire, rescue, and special services that the fire department routinely supplies; but refers to all the activities that are provided to internal and external consumers. This can range from how a code enforcement inspection or an elementary school station visit is conducted to how tasks are assigned on a work night or disciplinary action is applied. A large percentage of and the most visible customer service will remain responding and the proper application of fire suppression techniques or medical resources. All fire departments must remember the words of Phoenix Fire Chief Alan Brunacini that for the people calling 911, "it is the worst day of their life." Thus, the fire department is in the worst day of their lives business and trying to make it a better day. However, all other day to day activities that affect people are customer service as well.

The fire department must focus on its customers and their needs keeping these as the foremost objectives. It must not forget who it is it serves and who supports it. Personal agendas must not impede service delivery to customers. Officers of the organization, administrative or line, should not become involved in favoritism, cliques, or empire building that detracts from the customer service objectives. The fire department is not a big club for the good fortune of a few members.

It is really necessary to take an in-depth look at who the customer is. To quote Chief Brunacini, the customer is, "Those who receive our service." "Mrs. Smith. She really is not new – actually she has been around as long as we have. It's just in the past we have never very effectively included her in our thoughts, planning, and operations in the special way that makes her our customer. She represents the regular, real live people who call us for help when something burns, something hurts, or something breaks. A lot of both her immediate and her long-term future depends on how we respond to her call for help, and how we treat her during our time together." After an incident, don't leave her sitting alone on the curb!

The basic concept that has been lacking in our relationship to the customers is keeping the service delivery centered on them. Again, this is clearly described by Chief Brunacini when he states, "Customer-centered means that customer's needs, perceptions, and feelings begin to design and drive how the service delivery system looks and behaves. We have always done the very best we could for our customers, but we haven't spent much time asking them what they really want, simply, we decided what we thought they really needed, delivered that service, and went home." Did you find Mrs. Smith's hearing aid for her and get it to her, or let her rummage around in the

cold, wet, unlit bedroom on her own? Perhaps the time has arrived to query our customers. The fire service talks about team problem solving, but have you put a customer on the team?

This is a drastic change for the fire service. Ask our customers what they want? We already know, to have the fire put out! Perhaps we have spent too long sitting in the station or at meetings giving our customers the services we think they need, but are not providing people what they expect. Does the fire department need to be more people oriented?   Consider the validity of the following statements:

When the heroes arrive, the fire goes out, the bleeding stops, and things get better, at least in most situations. Is this enough?

If the public needs firefighters in an emergency, we are there: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year—Mother's Day, Father's Day, July 4th, Christmas Day and even New Year's Eve.

Firefighters can be counted on, even at risk to their own lives. We sincerely think that is enough.

Any job, anywhere, anytime, the fire department may not have always made its customers feel good; but at least it stopped whatever harm was occurring to people, to property, or the environment. Firefighters like to come across as very macho, but our customers don't care about macho, they are concerned with their immediate problem and our solving it. Remember, it is the worst day of their life.

Now, the reality is that this is not enough for our customers. The fire service must be constantly reminded of what happens to organizations that fail to change with customer demand. Have you been to a Montgomery Wards lately or tried to buy a Stanley Steamer automobile? The fire service's customers are fickle and it needs to listen to them quickly and carefully. A good quote to remember comes from Bednarz who says, "A critical element to successfully managing a customer's expectations is to never over promise and always over perform. Sales people can only build credibility by never promising anything that either they or their company can't deliver." Why not let the customers use your cell phone to call their relatives? The fire department will not stop every fire in the early stages, therefore, it should start to think of overperforming by assisting with food, clothing, shelter, or reestablishing utilities. If a salesperson does deliver, what do individuals think, say, and most importantly, tell others? The fire service does not need this type of criticism, it needs positive support.

In setting customer service standards, the customer's needs, expectations, and perceptions must come first. When they call for service, they must be treated as the purpose of the fire department's existence. In fact, they are. Develop a post-fire pamphlet or program to help with customer concerns like how to deal with the insurance company.

In the Introduction to his book *Essentials of Fire Department Customer Service*, Chief Brunacini lists eight standards of customer service. They are quoted below for the reader's consideration.

1. "Our essential mission and number one priority is to deliver the best possible service to our customers.
2. Always be nice – treat everyone with respect, kindness, patience, and consideration.
3. Always attempt to execute a standard problem-solving outcome: quick/effective/skillful/safe/caring/managed.
4. Regard everyone as a customer.
5. Consider how you and what you are doing looks to others.
6. Don't disqualify the customer with your qualifications.
7. Basic organizational behavior must become customer-centered.
8. We must continually improve our customer service performance."

Taking care of our customers immediate needs by putting out the fire or bandaging their wounds is not enough. They need to be treated as people. For example, the fire department might have to transport them to friends or family after a fire leaves their home uninhabitable. If there are serious injuries or a death, the emergency service can summon a clergyman. Treating the customers well can be as simple as restricting firehouse comments on the scene, and gathering any important records they had in the apartment or home.

As Grainger states, "Achieving good customer service is simple and uncomplicated; it involves doing many small things." This can be as easy as retrieving items such as money, driver's license, credit cards, prescription drugs, or glasses from a burned out home or apartment. Grainger goes on, "It must be defined and provided realistically to be credible. It must be a way of life, a habit acted out with sincerity, otherwise it will fail." How much trouble is it to ungrudgingly put air in a child's bicycle tire?

Mr. Grainger also has a "Checklist to Ensure Customer Service" that can be used as the outline for planning a document to assist in changing the attitudes of the organization's members. Items in the Checklist include:

- ☐ Create a clear, focused and realistic mission statement.
- ☐ Define who are your customers.
- ☐ Present services with clarity and without ambiguity.
- ☐ Encourage good communications skills.
- ☐ Provide clear information about new or improved services and respond to queries promptly.
- ☐ Be approachable.
- ☐ Respond to customer's needs, ask them their requirements.
- ☐ Deliver what is promised.
- ☐ Maintain competence at all times.

☐ Define service standards.
☐ Empathize with customers.
☐ Give your customers peace of mind.
☐ Be courteous and friendly at all times.

Some examples of things that can be done to satisfy the Checklist would be:

- Explain why it was necessary for the fire department to cut a hole in the roof or break out the windows to achieve ventilation, and the benefits of doing this in fire attack and rescue operations.
- Encourage members to take instructor training classes and new or refresher classes to improve or maintain technical competencies and communications skills.
- Recruit a specific member to work with incident victims, perhaps a clergyman, social worker, or nurse.   Then, make our customers a motel reservation for the night. Have someone check on victims the next day. Contact their insurance agent.
- Provide information on what to do after a fire such as taking care of food, cleaning clothes or damaged furniture, and ridding the premises of odors. Suggest where they can get assistance like the Salvation Army or Red Cross.
- Ask the customers what level of service they desire, and refrain from names or terms that may be offensive when referring to victims; for example, drug users are not "pharmaceutically gifted." Emergency services members must provide the best possible service to their customers in a quick, skillful, caring, standard, professional, and resourceful manner; and provide the best possible support to each other.

To properly perform planning for customer service delivery, the customers themselves should be involved as they are the owners of the business. This can be done by conducting a survey, possibly included with the municipal utility bills. Some departments send surveys after an incident. There are several additional methods of seeking direct customer involvement including forming or joining coalitions, have members join or work with local civic organizations, increase public involvement by advisory groups, and work with planning groups on the changing demographics.

Customer service must place the customer first because they are the important party in the transaction, their needs come first, and their expectations must be met as much as possible. Customer needs can be satisfied without satisfying their expectations. For example, when there is a fire, customers call the fire department because it has the equipment to handle the situation—a need; but many firefighters do not know where to instruct customers to install fire detectors—an expectation.   This may lead to dissatisfaction and even hostility in some situations. Remember dissatisfied customers do not vote for bond issues or tax increases for the emergency service provider.

The needs of the customer come first!

When discussing customers, emergency service organizations must determine what they need and what they expect. Thus, one needs to define these terms. A need is an urgent requirement of something essential – a customer requirement. "My Carbon Monoxide monitor is going off and driving me crazy, come and shut the thing off." Needs are the nuts and bolts services the fire department provides. After a fire in cold temperatures, the department instructs customers to drain water lines, put antifreeze in toilet bowls, or provides or secures a heater to keep the premises from freezing. Thus, fulfilling a basic customer need to limit further damage. An expectation is what customers anticipate will happen. This may include a reduction in the loss or an improved quality of service. Remember the people being served today grew up watching "Emergency" on television. Satisfying expectations means doing the "nice things" that add value to the nuts and bolts services. To quote Chief John Eversole (retired Chicago Fire Department) "Customers expect five brain surgeon decathlon champions to show up in three minutes in a big red truck, not two kids in a pickup." A nice extra, for example, is contacting the customer's insurance agent. However, it is good to remember that as expectations are met, they tend to rise. From providing a checklist of what to do after a fire, expectations may rise to assisting with doing items or supplying contact's phone numbers.

The Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue Department distributes the following as "Consumer Expectations."

1. When help is needed, the right people will respond.
2. They will be familiar with their community, its makeup and environment.
3. Their arrival time will be within 3.5 to 5 minutes of your call for help.
4. They will be qualified and certified to mitigate the incident.
5. They will be a well-managed, trained team of professionals.
6. They will have an adequate number of people to initiate action.
7. They will have the appropriate apparatus, tools, equipment well maintained.
8. They will have knowledge and wisdom pertaining to natural or man-made disasters.
9. They will have a backup system for supplementing all needs.
10. Services will be based on quality with cost effective parameters.

The fire department is a monopoly. It has no competition for services. However, the fire department has to compete big time with other agencies for support dollars. Therefore, it is critical to provide superb customer service. Fire departments need to justify their value to their customers. A good example of how to compete can be gained from the business world. Look at Wal-Mart's customer service—from greeters to vests that say "How can I help you." If your department is having problems, recruit a

businessman to provide some direction and recommendations on how to market itself better.

A modern fire department is based on customer needs that vary greatly from the past. Today it is not only fire, but also natural disasters, emergency medical assistance, non-emergency medical assistance, technical rescue, and even terrorism. The fire department responds to all nonviolent calls for assistance. Our customers may be individuals, groups, or professional agencies like other emergency service providers. It is good to remember that all emergency response agencies are serving the same customers and must work together at incidents with the same goal—whatever is best for the local citizen.

How does the fire department deliver its services or how is it perceived to deliver them? Service delivery must always be in a professional manner. It cannot be brusque: the department arrived, sized up the situation, put the fire out, and returned to the station. In addition, service delivery must be kind and caring.

"Yes, ma'm the fire is out and we have saved as many of your belongings as possible.""Can we get you your purse, pills, and checkbook?" Remember the purse could have money, credit cards, and the driver's license—all considered important items at the time of an emergency. "We have found a place for you to stay and will check with you tomorrow to ensure that you are all right." Perhaps it would be good to take the customer on a tour of the building after the fire to explain why a ceiling was pulled or a wall opened. If you had a fire in your home, what would you want done for your wife and family?

Mr. Grainger provides a warning however, "Research focused only on existing customer need satisfaction can be very misleading, since this indicates that your customers are only satisfied with what they are currently receiving, and not what they could receive." A broad assessment is necessary to determine all customer needs and expectations before plans for future customer service can begin. Maybe the customers would like free blood pressure checks in the station. Without good customer input, fire departments may choose to put a booster line on the new pumper rather than use the money for a Class A foam system. Again quoting Mr. Grainger, "Customer needs and expectations often are not what the fire department perceives. Post-incident surveys of customers' satisfaction tell us how well the mission was accomplished for the services provided. They DO NOT discover *What Could Have Been Done.*" By learning and meeting the needs of the customers, organizations will help ensure that precious resources are being applied to the areas of greatest need. During a child abduction scare in one southeastern city, fire trucks were placed at school bus stops each morning. This was an easy way to provide caring customer service.

It may be time for the fire service to consider "customer value management." Customer value management is a method used to measure the success factors that are the basis on which the customer will evaluate the product or service. Factors to evaluate include service or product quality, costs of service or product acquisition and use, and image. Focusing on these issues rather than satisfying the customer can help

in bridging the gap between what the customers actually receive and what they really desire to receive.

Dedicating the resources of the fire service organization to learning and then meeting the needs of external customers, results in a high level of community equity. It can take an attitude change within the organization. Often, nonresponder members can be used to do customer service tasks like fire prevention, public fire education, life safety education, and customer service. By being a committed advocate for the needs of the external and internal customers, the fire chief will develop a critical element—the trust of those served.

The internal customer has not been discussed above, but customer service models also apply to the internal customers of the fire department—the men and women who make up and are the organization. By serving the internal customers, the fire department administration will improve the effectiveness of each individual and the overall organization. The importance of treating each other as customers must not be overlooked. Members should not refer to the HazMat Team as the "glow worms." One of the most important customer groups is the members of the fire department. They are customers also, and have needs and expectations that must be met. It is easy at times to think of these men and women as simply employees or the rank and file. However, they are the driving forces of the organization, and without them it would not be possible to deliver any programs or services to the citizens of the community. Without satisfied internal customers, the needs of the external customer—the citizens of the community—will not be satisfied. Thus, fire department leaders have two groups of customers. Internal customer satisfaction is extremely important to recruiting and retaining volunteer members. There are too many distractions for volunteers today to keep those who are unhappy in the fire department. Listen to the needs of the internal customers and see the fire department improve.

It is important to remember the business in which the fire department is—the PEOPLE business. Victims want a fire service that cares about them and their families. Don't hesitate to initiate a car child restraint installation or check program. They want firefighters who know them as people and not just another call. Once the fire department understands this, it can begin to TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS. Remember to believe and act as though people are your most important resource. They are! Relationship will drive and improve the department's effectiveness. Why not take a minute to be courteous when giving directions to an address? Think of the goodwill it builds today and tomorrow.

The bottom line must always be customer service. Reacting to those who receive the services of the fire service as a customer will be a major cultural change for many fire departments. Every interaction with the public is a chance to positively impact public perception. If an incident of poor customer service occurs, correct it immediately. If it is not handled, it can become accepted as an unwanted norm.

Keep this in mind as well, the customers pay for your services with taxes, donations, contributions at fundraisers, and in other ways. If your customer service is not performing adequately, why should they pay for it?

It must also be remembered that emergency services rely on our customers for financial support. This can take a variety of forms from property taxes to outright donations. No matter if it is subscription fees or supporting fundraisers by coming to a ham supper, the fiscal support is still based on our customers. Thus, how the financial supporters view the customer service they receive directly influences monetary support. If there is not good customer service, why should the public continue to support your organization? In these days of financial responsibility, the public is reluctant (and withholding funds) to support inadequate or poor service.

As Chief Brunacini says, "be nice, treat everyone as you would like to be treated, put customers first, they are the boss." Practice the Golden Rule learned in kindergarten. Perhaps it is time for the department to start a teddy bear program for the youngsters involved in an auto accident or fire. Firefighters have been trained to perform in stressful situations, not to empathize with victims in physical or emotional pain; and the effective management and control of emergencies is still the top priority. However, firefighters, both veterans and new recruits, must now put customer service into practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gene Carlson has over 40 years of fire service experience, having taught for the University of Illinois, University of Maryland, and the National Fire Academy. He has lectured across the United States and Canada, as well as on five other continents. He has served with Oklahoma State University at Fire Protection Publications, the publisher of the IFSTA training materials.

He has authored numerous articles and co-authored the text Hazardous Materials*.*

Gene has served as Chair of NFPA Technical Committee Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications Standard. Currently, he is a member of the NFPA Technical Committees on Fire Service Training, Fire Apparatus, and Hazardous Materials Response Personnel. He is also a member of the IAFC and CTIF Hazardous Materials Committees. He is the Vice-President of the US Branch of the Institution of Fire Engineers.

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Customer Service

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Determine the organizational culture on customer service (both internal and external).

☐ 2. Examine your, and the other decision makers' beliefs about customer service.

☐ 3. Establish a program that educates on developing a customer service culture.

☐ 4. Provide feedback, both positive and negative, on organizational, regional national experiences of customer service.

☐ 5. Determine how customer service interfaces with Marketing.

Chapter 9

Leadership/Conflict Resolution

By Assistant Chief Louis Klein

Every organization has conflicts that develop. The ability to identify when they are about to occur, and manage the conflict be fore it happens, or immediately thereafter, is an important aspect of overall ESO management. The incorporation of appropriate language in guiding documents is an important component of managing conflict resolution and works hand in hand with human resource issues.

Leadership/Conflict Resolution

A key element in successful leadership of any emergency service organization is one's ability to lead the individuals in your organization as well as resolve conflict as it arises. For one to better grasp the responsibility they have, there are certain underlying human behavioral needs (known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs) that have to be understood. Every one of us has to fulfill these needs in some way, shape, or form before we are able to build onto satisfaction of other higher needs. The most basic need every individual has is that of survival. Once they have competently and comfortably met this need, then the next gradual step, according to Maslow's theory, is security needs. Once a person becomes secure in their surroundings, they reach out to their social needs. After accomplishing this task, the individual's self-esteem needs are met, and then, finally, self-actualization needs are fulfilled. It is not unusual for a person having stumbled in one of these areas to regress back, re-secure themselves, then move forward again. Also in Maslow's theory, there is a theory of X and Y individuals. Under the theory X individual—a leader—believes that workers are basically lazy and must be coerced to work. They also believe that workers lack ambition and prefer to be bossed. Therefore, supervisors must provide direct control, rewards, and punishment to motivate and lead this type of individual. On the other hand, there is the theory Y individual. Under this theory, the leader believes that workers naturally like to work and will work without direction. They also believe that they will buy into department goals if they see the rewards and, furthermore, this type of worker typically seeks responsibilities. Therefore, supervisors can give responsibility and authority with a minimum of supervision. These are two extremes of individual makeup and the leader must analyze all the subordinates and find out where they fit into the scheme—are they an X, are they a Y, or are they somewhere in between, as are a majority of people.

Leadership comes in two basic forms. One is formal leadership, which we usually keep the concept that you **will** do this. And the other is informal leadership, which brings a connotation of "I need your help." Before you can determine what style of leadership you need, there are certain elements which have to exist. The first is that of the forces of the leader themselves. They have to have a value system that others will respect, honor, and recognize. They have to have an inclination to leadership. You must also consider having confidence in your subordinates. Also, you have to be able to demonstrate feelings of security in times of uncertainty. Now as we continue looking at the determining elements of what leadership style you will use, we have to look at the employee as well. Some of the key elements are the individual's psychological maturity and their job maturity. When we look at job maturity, we have to break it into four distinct groups.

1. Is this person unable and unwilling to work within the organization?
2. Is this person unable but willing?
3. Is this individual able but unwilling?
4. Is the person able and willing?

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You will find that most subordinates you deal with will fall into one of these classes. These are the challenges to become an effective leader—to identify these and also to blend them into the needs and goals of your organization. There are also outside forces in this situation that have to be considered. One is the nature of the problem. What type of situation are we in? Are we in an emergency situation or are we in a social situation? Are we in a routine situation? Quite obviously, time pressure has to be a consideration. You pull up to an accident scene or a working fire, time is of the essence, so it puts other forces into the situation. Third is the organizational climate. How is the organization? What is the structure of the individuals? Are they receptive to change? Are they receptive to discipline? Are they receptive to environmental issues? And lastly, we have to look at group effectiveness to work as a team. These are all determining elements that one has to look at prior to becoming an effective leader.

The emergency service organization is basically different people from different backgrounds brought together at the right time to accomplish the right things for the right reasons. You see a lot of different definitions of groups, but this seems to be an acceptable one describing most of our organizations. What makes people want to work together? Well, we are basically herd animals. The reasons we want to work in a group is for productivity issues and to meet our social issue need. As previously mentioned we have two types of fire service or ESO groups, the formal and informal. What makes good groups go bad is a question that resounds many times. Some of the key reasons we find groups do not work are egos of individuals, competitive spirits, hidden agendas of individuals or groups within our organization, the lack of commitment by some of our members, peer pressure of others who do not want something to work, and, of course, we have traditional stumbling blocks to group accomplishment. The most notable is that of poor organization, if the leader gives unclear goals, if there is a lack of time to accomplish a group project, and, most devastatingly, no follow-up once an assignment is given. These are a few of the key issues as to why good groups go bad.

Defining leadership is a very complex issue. Depending on the direction you are going and the resources you refer to, there are many different and varying definitions of leadership. For purposes of this text we will use three basic definitions of leadership. First is the process of influencing others toward the achievement of organizational goals. The next step would be the ability to inspire others to greater accomplishments than even they were aware was possible. And another approach would be blending the goals and desires of others with the goals and desires of the team. These are three very basic definitions of leadership that are all appropriate. Leadership is power. Where do we get our power? There are two primary sources of power for leaders in the emergency service community. The first is what we call ascribed powers, which is power provided by position. Secondly is achieved power, which is provided by followers. Looking at ascribed powers in a little more detail, we have direct power which is an ascribed power which is a superior number of bugles in the emergency service community or the ability to issue directives and set tasks or the authority to delegate. Another type of ascribed power is reward power. This is the power to provide incentives for compliance or accomplishment of tasks and they can be either a formal reward

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system or an informal reward system. The last type of ascribed power is that of coercive power. This is a disciplinary process. Informal coercion is another term used to describe this type of power—the power to force an individual or group of people to do something.

One type of achieved power is expert power. This power comes with tenure and with knowledge. It comes with a proven demonstration of skills and leadership experience. Another type of achieved power is referent power. This power is typically demonstrated by an individual who is admired and has commanded respect and impeccable trust from his peers. This leader also shares the visions and values with his subordinates. A word of caution, though, achieved and referent powers specifically must be earned, they cannot be claimed.

Now we look to pick the right tool for the right job. We can use either ascribed powers or achieved powers. Ascribed powers work better for dull, routine, and menial assignments and are appropriate for fire, ground and command positions. They are useful in immediate containment of discipline problems or conflicts. Ascribed powers tend to be overused by supervisors with low self-esteem. Moving on to achieved powers, they are best for creative conceptual tasks, appropriate for sophisticated capable subordinates, useful in long-term motivation, goal setting and coaching. The primary result of this type of power is building teamwork.
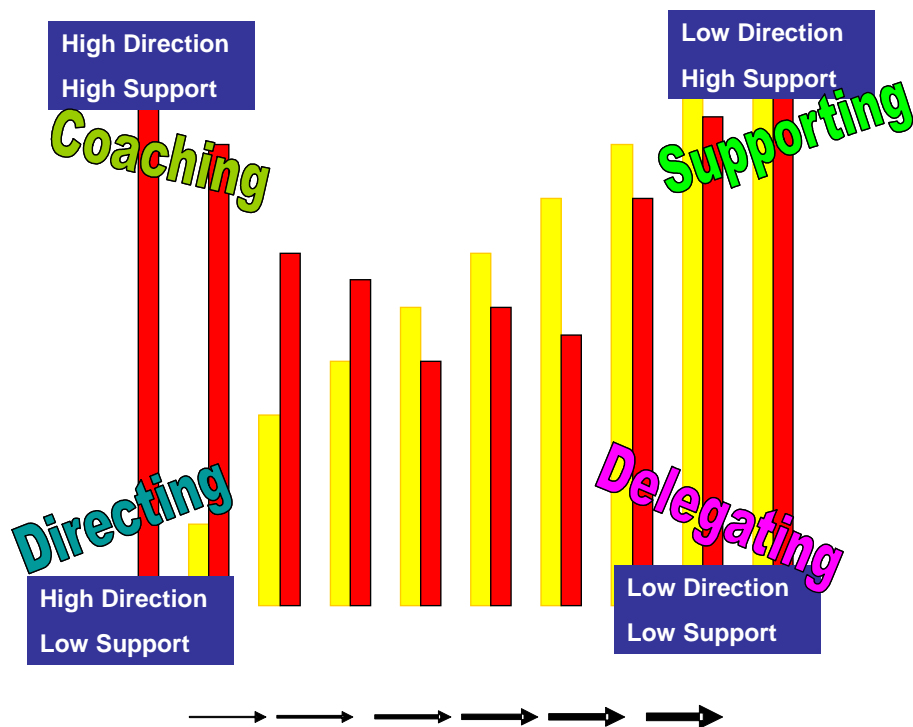
Situational leadership becomes the first challenge within our leadership skills usage and it is important to identify the correct style that meets the needs of the subordinate. There are four primary supervisory behaviors that we will be able to use as a leader. They are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. Two primary supervisory behaviors are directive and supportive. Directive requires precise supervision and will

have consistent feedback. Communication is primarily downward and it is very controlled and structured. Supportive, on the other hand, gives you facilitative supervision, which needs the explanation of goals and objectives, a considerable amount of listening on the part of our leader The communication is primarily upward and the rewards are typically encouragement and praise.

As previously mentioned, a successful leader will couple the abilities of the subordinates with one of these four styles.

The chart very clearly explains understanding the primary maturity behaviors of the individuals in your organization. Starting with those who need high direction and low support, to those who need high direction and high support, to those with who require low direction and high support to those who require low direction and low support. Looking at the matrix you will see the different style of leadership, which is more appropriate to this type of individual to achieve the goals of the organization. Also, a leader must look at situational maturity. Working in groups with older people in our organizations and working at emergency scene operations, the maturity of each individual has to be recognized by the leader. Some of the primary maturity behaviors we find are a person's competence and commitment. When we examine competence we have to take a very hard look at their knowledge, their proficiency, their experience, and the skill sets they bring to the organization. Under commitment we have to evaluate the individual's confidence, their motivation to work and act on behalf of the organization, their individual self-esteem and their acceptance of responsibility. So what we try to do is match the coaching technique with the primary maturity behaviors of each one of the individuals of our organization. This is the challenge to all leaders. While we may make this sound simplistic, it is something that needs to be studied and followed on a daily basis.

Coaching is probably the primary leadership style that we find ourselves using on a daily basis. Coaching is the face-to-face leadership that pulls together people with diverse backgrounds, talents, experiences, and interests. It encourages them to step up to responsibility and continued achievement that treats them as full-scale partners and contributors. It's sort of a concept, you go, we go, we do this together. If a subordinate on a team fails, the leader fails. If the subordinate on the team wins, the leader wins. The leader is a facilitator. The number one responsibility of the leader is the success of the entire company and each subordinate. Ignoring subordinates or failing to help them succeed is destructive leadership behavior.

Another key point for a leader is to be able to evaluate the self-esteem of each one of the individuals in the organization. Self-esteem, basically, is how a person views himself or herself and how they perform. You'll get what you expect. A person with high self-esteem coupled with those with lower self-esteem tends to be a win/win situation. We have also heard of the Pygmalion Effect, which is basically the power influence of one person's expectations on another person's performance. A key element of leadership is to focus on an individual's behaviors and not their personalities. You may have heard "I like him. He does an excellent job," or "He is a jerk and his work

is really bad." Keep the personalities out of it. Focus on behaviors to make change for the organization.

We mentioned earlier that coaching is probably one of the best techniques for an individual leader to use, but there are four primary activities that can be used in coaching. They are training, counseling, challenging, and mentoring. Training is a tool we use in coaching to correct poor behaviors or procedures. It is one that is most commonly used in improving skills of individuals. It is also relatively easy to provide feedback to the coach on how well individuals are doing. Training is probably one of the most common coaching techniques used in the emergency service community and is relatively one of the most successful.

Counseling is when we work together to solve a particular problem. Everybody in the group helps to identify the causes. They come up with solutions or the individual leader counsels the solutions and it typically includes a monitoring system to identify the progress that an individual makes. It is a very helpful tool for those with low self-esteem or those working with individual problems.

Challenging is another tool the leader has to utilize. You find that by challenging groups and individuals you tend to maximize their potential. You encourage the achievement of new heights, even heights that were not intended or expected to be achieved by this individual. A lot of times it is group peer pressure that assists in the challenging process. This provides opportunities for individuals to expand their horizons.

Lastly, we have mentoring. Mentoring is when you take someone under your arm. Perhaps you have seen potential in this individual to be a leader, to be successful, and you take them under your arm to identify similar goals that you have. You provide this individual exposure to groups, to individuals, to opportunities, and you also encourage career development. So mentoring is a tool that you have as a leader for long-term perpetuation of your key personnel.

With any group you will have challenges and opportunities that may necessitate the use of discipline. Discipline's basic definition is restoration of order through proper application of control mechanisms. Before discipline can be successfully administered, each individual organization must have effective rules and policies. The rules and policies in your organization and your guidelines have to be understandable. They have to be applicable to the situation you are dealing with. They have to be equally disseminated and equally applicable to all individuals within your organization. They must be written, so there is no misunderstanding. Last, and most important, they must be enforced by the whole management team. This is the key to successful discipline within an organization. Of course, leaders may have the opportunity to give negative discipline as well as positive discipline. Negative discipline typically brings no positive results and should be avoided. Most typically, negative discipline types are identified as being very harsh, reactionary to a situation, catching the subordinate by surprise, blindsiding them, you might say, with your discipline. It creates only a win/lose environment and it continues to reinforce an environment of resentment, not just for the

individual, but also individual members of the organization who witness this type of discipline.

Positive discipline, on the other hand, is an educational process. The leader wants to focus on undesirable behaviors and the primary focus of this positive discipline is to correct behavior that is unacceptable to the organization. This typically is the mildest approach that succeeds in change of an individual.

Another type of discipline that the leader has as a tool is progressive discipline. Progressive discipline is basically a reasonable punishment that fits the offense and becomes increasingly severe for repeated infractions. We will have individuals from time to time who will challenge us and we will need to continue our reinforcement of positive discipline, but a few times you will find an individual who goes over the bounds time after time. Each infraction has to have a little more severe punishment appropriate for the offense. That always brings to mind, what is reasonable? Is it appropriate for the violation? Is it likely to correct a subordinate's behavior? Does it model our appropriate organizational culture, which is prevention? These questions have to be utilized on a case-by-case basis when we are looking at progressive discipline. How do you prepare your case for discipline to correct unwanted behavior? Prior to any disciplinary presentation, you have to be prepared. You want to know all of the facts you have gathered. You must be aware of all the rules that apply to the particular situation. Research previous occurrences that may have focused on an infraction of the same rule being broken. Consider any extenuating circumstances with this individual.

The next key element for the leader is to state your case. Be direct with the individual. Be concise and avoid any personal expression that could taint the situation. You must then allow time for response. Build yourself a little fence—stick to the issue. Don't let the individual being disciplined redirect the focus onto other issues. It is key during this phase for the leader to maintain control, and, if necessary, refocus on the issues and allow the individual to respond as previously mentioned.

The next part of the disciplinary process is to describe your expectations. Explain what is acceptable and desirable for the benefit of the organization. Describe specifically with the individual their expected behavior. Try to obtain some sort of agreement for change from the individual.

The next issue is to explain action. You reinforce with the individual what had just happened—what we just talked about. The subordinate must leave knowing what happened. It is key to be specific, firm, and discuss an appeal procedure should they feel slighted or that they have not received satisfaction from the disciplinary process.

The most important skill for the leader on any disciplinary process is to end positively. We want to leave any discipline as a positive event. Provide encouragement to the subordinate. Offer assistance that might be available through coaching, mentoring, or other outside assistance. Express confidence in the individual that this was a temporary setback and things will be much better in the future. Lastly, the officer must completely document what happened. You must not only document everything that happened during the disciplinary process in your officer's journal, but also notes have to be entered into the individual's personnel file as well.

In summation, we can end up with any type of conflict management. The disciplinary process is probably the leader's key tool. We emphasized some of the key elements—Be prepared. State your case. Keep it simple. Keep it to the point. Allow limited response from the person being disciplined. Describe in detail the expected performance of not just this individual, but others within the organization. Explain what final action is going to happen to the individual. End on a positive note and make the representative documentations.

In conclusion, leadership and group dynamics go hand-in-hand. Leadership is a complex situation of necessary skills combined with the analysis and understanding of the fellow human beings we must deal with on a daily basis. Understanding the maturity and physical needs of these individuals is a key element in successful leadership. Applying the right type of coaching technique leadership style is extremely important. Understanding a proper disciplinary process is probably one of the most successful attributes of a leader in today's emergency service community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louis Klein retired as President of VFIS, a division of the Glatfelter Insurance Group, in 2000. He has also served in many other capacities within VFIS over the past 28 years as well. Lou has been associated with both career and volunteer emergency services for 44 years, having served as a chief officer with the Department of Fire and Rescue Services of York, Pennsylvania. Lou has a degree in fire science technology and has attended various schools and has taken specialized courses in many aspects of emergency services. He served as a local level instructor for the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy for over 25 years. He was also a part-time Instructor for Harrisburg Area Community College. He previously served on the Board of Directors for the International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI). Lou served as a advisor to the Congressional Fire Services Institute during its inception.

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Conflict Resolution

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Identify where potential conflicts in your ESO may occur.

☐ 2. Determine your leadership style – X or Y. Examine your personnel to understand their respective behavior.

☐ 3. Train subordinate officers on how leadership style affects conflict avoidance and resolution.

☐ 4. Develop a graduated disciplinary process to effectively handle conflict issues.

☐ 5. Lead by example. Train effectively, enforce policy, be firm, and provide solutions for issues.

Chapter 10

Training Techniques and Professional Development

By Richard Patrick

In most cases, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for the professional development of the ESO personnel, assuring they meet both regulatory and operational training needs. Many times the operational officers limit supervisory and management training to emergency scene management. Professional development of all officers in their general management responsibilities many times is directed by the CEO.

Training Techniques and Professional Development

Education and training coupled with professional development are essential for personal and professional growth. The emergency service organization (ESO) must assure that adequate and appropriate education is available to members. The activities performed by emergency service personnel may vary from service to service and by geography, but one thing remains a constant — the need for ongoing training. Training is core to the function of emergency services. Incident response volume alone should not dictate whether to train on any given topic. Volume of incidents alone is a relatively poor indicator when used as an excuse not to train on any given topic. How often have you heard "We handle these calls all the time, we know what to do." This type of mentality sets up an ESO for failure. Similar application is made to professional development. Volunteer versus career should not be an indicator of the need to develop personnel to serve as the future management and leadership of the ESO.

The only thing frequent calls of similar types of situations accomplishes, is to make personnel better at doing what they do, regardless of how they do it. Put another way, performing a given task incorrectly and then doing it over and over and over, only makes the provider better at doing the task incorrectly. Placing or electing someone to an official position, such as a board member, may only set them up for failure because they were not taught how to do the job. In essence, the electorate and person who appointed the individual actually failed. This is where the chief executive officer (CEO) must understand that quality training is key to the successful application of any skill. Education and training should be based on a risk assessment of the most likely and potential incidents a service may respond. Personal and professional development should occur for all levels of the organization and be intertwined into routine training and ESO culture.

Leaders are made, not born, thus the ESO must promote, guide, nurture, and support its personnel with development opportunities. These activities will mold our future leaders.

Education and Training Techniques

Objectives for this process include:

- Understand the philosophy of education and training

- Review techniques of quality education and training

- Identify types of learners

- Understand basic adult methodology of instruction

- Recognize the qualities of an instructor

- Provide an adequate learning environment

- Understand the value of instructional evaluation

- Understand how to use media devices effectively

Philosophy of Education and Training Services

> "Training and Education: Fire service managers must increase their professional standing in order to remain credible to community policy makers and the public. This professionalism should be grounded firmly in an integrated system of nationally recognized and/or certified education and training"
>
> Wingspread IV (1996)

Today's emergency service is faced with increasing public demands for services, as well as mandates that are costly and time consuming. If we do not progress, the 21st century will certainly be devastating to the integrity and mere existence of some providers and departments. Culture change is needed in the way ESOs view and address the subject of education and training. Not just emergency related training but all work related characteristics of business practices, habits, and skills.

It all starts with the ESO's commitment to a knowledgeable staff, safety, and the action oriented process of leading by example. Training is core to the emergency services and every application, function, and response presents the opportunity to train. The ESO must have training standards that encompass every component of the operations. The trainer or instructor must be capable of teaching to a broad base of lifestyles. Understanding types of learners, adult methodology, generational issues, learning environments, and the qualities of an instructor are essential to the success of any ESO. The CEO must have a clear understanding of these components and the related educational factors that will present challenges to the instructor and the ESO. Following is an exploration of these key components which will provide insight as to why personnel function the way they do.

Types of Learners

There are a variety of learners. As an instructor, you need to understand how the students in your class are going to learn. Your teaching style usually reflects your learning style. If your students do not have the same learning characteristics, they will not be able to learn as much. This also may reflect on your class evaluations.

Imaginative Learners—These learners perceive information concretely and process it reflectively. They are good listeners, but also like to share ideas. They enjoy personal involvement, commitment, and are interested in personal growth. In class they expect the instructor to produce authentic curricula, knowledge upon which to build, involvement and group work, and are willing to provide feedback. They care about

fellow class participants and the instructor. These students learn best in a facilitated class environment, where the class is very interactive and participative.

Analytic Learners—Analytic learners perceive information abstractly and process it reflectively. They are interested in theory and what the experts think, need details and data, and are uncomfortable with subjective material. They expect the class to enhance their knowledge and they occasionally place factual knowledge over creativity. This implies that assignments and projects be developed to enhance sequential activities based upon comprehension. These students like the lecture style class—give me the facts and what is important to me.

Common Sense Learners—These learners perceive information abstractly and process it actively. They are the pragmatists in the class. They learn by testing theories and applying common sense, are problem solvers, and skill oriented. In class they expect the instructor to teach the skills they need to be economically independent in life. They may not be flexible or good at teamwork situations. The hands-on or demonstration portions of the class are the most effective means of reaching this group.

Dynamic Learners—Dynamic learners perceive information concretely and process it actively. They learn by trial and error and believe in self-discovery. They like change and flexibility, are risk takers, and are at ease with people. They examine reality and try to add to it. They may occasionally be pushy and manipulative. In class they like assignments to do on their own and expect classes and curricula to be geared to their needs. They seek knowledge for the improvement of society and expect opportunity for experimentation without being penalized by grades. They respond to dynamic instructors who are constantly trying new things (McCarthy, 37-43). The majority of emergency service personnel tend to be categorized in this group. These are the students who jump right in to the practical evolutions. They are going to try new ways and seek alternative means to accomplishing the task at hand.

Adult Methodology of Learning

The adult learner has many traits inherent to their learning styles. Following is a general description of some of these styles.

- **Adult learners usually want to utilize the knowledge and skills soon after they have learned them.**

  It is important to allow the participant to have a hands-on session to apply the information they have just learned. An Emergency Vehicle Driver Training (EVDT) program is one program, which allows you to accomplish this. The competency course has always been a highlight of the program. It allows the

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participant to put the knowledge they gained during the classroom portion to practical use.

- **Adult learners are interested in learning new concepts and principles.**

  They enjoy situations that require problem solving, rather than simply learning facts. Many courses are designed for student interaction. Class participation allows everyone to gain more from the program. Not everyone will agree with everything the instructor says. The goal, as an instructor, is to have the participant begin to think, but not necessarily change, what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. Adults learn more if they are active participants, rather than passive listeners.

  Many courses are designed with a recommended time frame. As an instructor, you may lengthen the course to allow your participants more time. Avoid shortening any of the class times. Adults learn best if they are able to proceed at a reasonable pace. Keep in mind, each person learns at a different speed. You may need to keep a pace faster than some can keep up and slower than others would like. You can always work with those who had a difficult time keeping up after class. Try to keep a medium pace.

- **Motivation is increased when the content is relevant to the immediate interests and concerns of the students.**

  The ESO must understand that even though we are all emergency service providers, each part of the country is unique. Many courses are designed to allow the instructor some latitude in adapting the material for a specific region. This, by no means, allows you to change the intent of the course material to allow it to fit a personal bias. For example, if you are conducting a Patient Care Documentation class, use the patient care report for that agency.

- **Immediate feedback is essential to the adult learner.**

  They need to be kept informed of their progress. Positive reinforcement can be difficult to do if you are not accustomed to providing it. Place yourself in the participant's position. As the instructor, if you continuously send negative reinforcement, you are going to eventually turn students off and they will feel they are not capable of learning or doing what you expect of them. If an instructor stresses the positive of the subject being presented by continuous reinforcement of these aspects, their students are going to be positive about the class and actually learn more.

- **Slow learners**

  Occasionally a student will have trouble keeping up with the group or may not be able to grasp a certain part of the material. There are a variety of ways you can approach this obstacle. Allow input from other students. They may be able to explain it in a manner which the student may easily understand. Sometimes

hearing it said a different way might be enough for the student to comprehend the material.

There are times where you may have a student who is a slow learner and may not be getting the message. Do not allow the student to slow the entire class to a point where you are losing the rest of the group. A method you may consider is to give the class a break and talk with the student in a one-on-one session.

- **Difficult students**

    On occasion you may have a difficult student in your classroom. It is very easy to allow these individuals to distract you from the intent of the class. One way to handle the situation would be to speak with the individual in a private conference. Be gentle, but firm, and ask the disruptive student to squelch their behavior. If you are an officer conducting the class, you may find it easier to command the attention of a group. You can utilize these suggestions as a tactic to gain the control of the class. If there is an officer in the class you may gain their assistance in keeping the class under control.

An acronym that will help you deal with a difficult student is "**LEAST**."

L eave it alone

E ye contact

A ction steps

S top class

T erminate the individual's privileges.

Leave it alone. If you ignore it, it may just fix itself. The participant may be looking for attention and when you do not give it to them, they will cease their actions on their own.

Eye contact. The next step is to make direct eye contact with the participant who is creating the problem. By directing your disapproving eyes to the participant he/she may get the message and cease. Be careful not to be too condescending or overreacting when using this step.

Action steps. You may need to approach the student and present your materials with the participant in close proximity to you. By being in the general area as the participant, they understand their disruption and cease their actions.

Stop class. It may be a good time for a break. Stop the class, take a break, and speak with the participant about their disruptions in the classroom.

Terminate the individual's privileges. This is the last step and most drastic. If it reaches this level notify the ESO immediately.

Generational Issues

You have heard the terms "Baby Boomer," "Generation X," and others specific to the various generations. What does this mean to you, the instructor, when you are tasked with training the various generations? Which generation describes you, and how does this affect your teaching style? Answer these questions and gain understanding of each of the generations, their influences, traits, and values as you read this section.

In order to understand how to instruct your class you need to determine your own generation. The time frame for the generations is very loose around the start and stop times of each of the generations. Depending on the source you are referring to, various authorities even define the range of the generations differently. If your age is between two generations, how do you know which one is you? The answer to this question is that you will be referred to as being on the fringe or the cusp. You will probably feel fragmented and may feel that you have no identity. Being on the fringe is actually not that bad. According to Bridge Works, they have found that these individuals make some of the best managers, teachers and marketers. These individuals have the ability to innately understand both generations.

Let's first define the age ranges and categories for each generation. The chart below depicts the common terms and age ranges for each of the generations. Remember the age range varies according to the source you are referencing.

Era or Generation	Year Range	Age Range
Futuristic	Born after 2003	
Millennial, Millennium	1982–2003	0 – late teens
Generation X, 13ERs	1961/65–1975/81	Late teens, Early 20's – mid 30's
Hackers (cusp)	1955–1965	Mid 30's – mid 40's
Boomers, Baby Boomers	1935/43–1955/60	Mid to late 30's - early 50's
Silent, Traditionalists	1925/35–1942/45	Mid 50's – early 70's
Depression, Seniors, GI	1901–1924	Late 60's +

In order to realize the learning styles of each of these generations, we need to understand a little about their value and cultural system. As we grow older, how many times have you found yourself relating a story or event that the other individual had no clue what you were even talking about? Those of us who have been in emergency services for any length of time may refer to the Johnny and Roy days. As the newer generation enters into the emergency services, most of them have no clue what you are talking about. The television show *Emergency* was a milestone in ESO careers. Ask any Firefighter, EMT, or Paramedic who was around during the early 70s television series and the majority will tell you; it was *Emergency* that enticed them into the fire and EMS industry. Ask that same question to the new generation entering the business and unless they have seen the show on syndicated TV, you will get a blank stare and for the most part a disrespect which makes you cringe inside. Let's take a look at the various

generations and the various impacts that occurred during their lives. You need to keep in mind a generation's impression is created during their childhood, which instills a lifelong perception. You do not progress to the next generation by reaching that age category. You will always be in the generational category you were reared.

When it comes to training these groups, there are a variety of issues we need to take into account. First, we need to accept them. These individuals are our future. We cannot alienate them if we are looking to train them as our replacements. The emergency service industry is beginning to feel the tight labor market especially with higher paying jobs luring them into the technology fields and away from emergency service jobs. If we do not accept them into our classrooms, our future emergency service personnel will disappear.

As educators and trainers, we need to establish mentoring programs. By partnering older personnel with newer personnel, we allow each group to learn more about each other. The newer generation wants to be managed by hands off, but be there. This same mentality applies in the classroom. As instructors we need to allow this group to perform and when there are questions, be there to answer them. The newer generation are independent learners.

Feedback and rewards are imperative for a successful class. Be sensitive when giving feedback and give it immediately. Focus on the participant's behavior and not on their attitude. Be objective and not subjective. Rewards are important, from verbal rewards to incentives such as candy, when someone answers correctly or does something right.

Jennifer Salopek outlines a lesson plan as an instructional model in her article "The Young and the Rest of Us."

• Make it make sense.	• Make it safe to participate.	• Make it comfortable.
• Make it fun.	• Make it yours.	• Make testing less stressful.
• Make it personal.	• Make it theirs.	• Make trainees' experience count.
• Make it fast paced.	• Make it learner centered.	• Make it safe to disagree.
• Make it involving.	• Make it positive.	
• Make it chunky.	• Make it matter.	

As an instructor you need to be aware of and sensitive to student needs in your class. It is not your responsibility to identify those in your classes with a learning disability. It is your responsibility to reasonably accommodate those individuals with a learning disability.

Following are some of the more predominant characteristics of learning disabilities in adults.

- Reading or reading comprehension
- Math calculations, math language, and math concepts
- Social skills, or interpreting social cues
- Following a schedule, being on time, or meeting deadlines

- Reading or following maps
- Balancing a checkbook
- Following directions, especially on multi-step tasks
- Writing, sentence structure, spelling, and organizing written work
- Telling or understanding jokes

As an instructor you need to be aware that the individual may be able to learn information presented in one way, but not in others. The individual may be able to explain things verbally, but have difficulty writing ideas on paper. Other factors to consider include: misreading or miscopying, misinterpreting language, or poor comprehension of what is said. These individuals may find it difficult to memorize information.

Employers are responsible and required to make reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees with disabilities. Some examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Job restructuring
- Modifying work schedules
- Reassignment to another position
- Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices
- Adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies
- Providing qualified readers or interpreters
- Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to, and usable by, individuals with disabilities.

Keep in mind, you are not required, nor are you expected to lower quality or quantity of standards to make an accommodation. Nor are you required to provide personal items, such as glasses or hearing aids, as accommodations.

Individuals with learning disabilities may have difficulty with social skills. These difficulties may spill over into the classroom. As instructors we need to be sensitive to these issues. Some social issues include:

- Self-esteem
- Interpersonal relationships
- Workplace functioning
- Community participation

Providing an Adequate Learning Environment

How many classes have you attended where the information was what you had been waiting for, but the classroom environment was so poor you did not gain any valuable information? You need to ensure that the temperature, seating arrangements, noise levels, classroom layout, and the acoustic properties of the classroom are conducive to learning.

While temperature is a critical factor, it may be beyond your control. As a good instructor you need to be sensitive to the room temperature. You are going to be warmer than most students are just by moving about and the stress of standing in front of the class. Watch your students. If it is too warm they will begin to become somnial, if too cold they may lose their concentration. You may not be able to adjust the temperature to a level that is comfortable for everyone. Try your best to accommodate the majority of the group.

Seating is another important consideration. You may need to change the layout. There are a variety of ways to set-up the classroom for most effectiveness. Do you use tables or not? How do we arrange the chairs? Where should you stand?

Instructors must have good oral communication and interpersonal skills and an ability to effectively use visual and audio media.

- Oral communications require the:
    o Ability to speak in a clear, accurate, and understandable manner.
    o Ability to convey information using various methods of teaching to large and small groups of learners.
    o Ability to listen to others and help them clarify their statements.

- Visual and audio media use requires the:
    o Ability to use different means of media properly to assist in the learning process.
    o Combine various media with oral presentations to facilitate and enhance learning.

- Interpersonal skills require the:
    o Ability to understand and recognize the different types of learners and refine teaching and training techniques to effectively communicate information.
    o Ability to list the qualities of effective instructors and develop identified characteristics.
    o Ability to identify harassment issues and explain their importance.

Testing

Some programs include a written and/or a practical evaluation to document the students understanding of the course material. Unless otherwise stated or for continuing education credits, these evaluations are to be used as a means for the student to identify their weak areas. The instructor should also note any consistency in students missing the same question. This may denote the instructors need to evaluate their instruction for this particular area. Testing records should be maintained with all related training files.

Continuing Education Units/Hours (CEU/CEH)

Many states have already adopted and awarded CEU/CEH for many programs. In some cases, courses you teach may be eligible for this distinction. The purpose of CEU/CEH is to validate the educational integrity of your activities. The goal of continuing educational programs is to evaluate continuing educational offerings while assuring participants of the quality for these activities. All continuing educational sponsors must apply for eligibility and satisfy an organization's evaluation criteria.

Qualities of an Instructor

We can all remember certain instructors or teachers who greatly influenced us. What do you remember about these individuals that made them such good instructors? We can identify various characteristics which separate a great instructor from an adequate instructor. The instructor needs to have a genuine love for the topic they are presenting. If you disagree with the subject or just do not like it – Don't teach it! You will not be doing the participants or ESO the justice of the intent of the program. Let's look at some of the characteristics that participants look for in an instructor.

- Well prepared – There is no acceptable excuse for an instructor not being prepared.
- Enthusiastic about subject
- Cares about students
- Uses appropriate eye contact
- Uses positive feedback
- Punctual beginning and ending class times
- Uses appropriate humor
- Utilizes a variety of tone inflections
- Practices innovative teaching methods
- Uses appropriate gestures and movements during presentation
- Dresses appropriately
- Does not say "uh" or "um", but instead uses pauses for effect
- Talks with the participants instead of to or above the participants
- Intersperses appropriate real-life illustrations
- Is professional in all manners
- Is relaxed and comfortable within classroom setting
- Answers all questions honestly and with regards to who they represent
- Admits they do not know all the answers but finds them for the participants
- Stays calm and does not become defensive
- What are ones you would like to add…?

There are a variety of things an instructor should **not** do. Authors are relying on your ability as an instructor to send the message they have designed in their curricula. The following is a list of some of the things you should **not** be doing.

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- Yelling at students
- Berating students
- Ignoring concerns for safety issues
- Attempting to motivate participants with threats
- Encouraging or allowing off-color humor or sexist comments
- Belittling students
- Being unprepared to present the material
- Showing bias of personal interest and not support of instructional material
- Not communicating information effectively
- Chewing gum or tobacco
- Consuming alcohol or illegal drugs before or during the class time
- Aimless movement, wandering around, moving from place to place with no purpose is to be avoided. If and when you move around you should have a reason for doing so.

Here are a few to do's:

- Make eye contact with all participants
- Present the material without reading from the manual
- Relating "war stories" on a limited basis with relevance to material
- Being early for the session
- Using terms at the participants level
- Moving around the classroom and using appropriate gestures
- Avoid any device to show nervousness – twirling hair, jingling change, clicking pen caps, etc.
- Avoid the use of gender words such as "fireman" – use "firefighter", or "emergency responder"; "First Aider" – use "EMS" or "EMT."

Most of all, be YOURSELF! Do not try to be someone else. It may be beneficial to observe a good instructor in action. Adapt what they do well to fit your style. It is important to note that you are who you are. As hard as you may try, you cannot be someone else, nor do you want to be someone else. Find your own instructional niche and improve upon it.

Responsibilities and Actions of the Instructor

The role of the instructor is to promote a positive, dynamic class without lecturing to the participants. As an instructor your responsibilities and actions include:

- Setting a positive, low-stress, comfortable classroom environment
- Facilitate interaction and avoid lecture
- Understand the importance of following the course
- Understand the importance of following the guidelines as set forth by the ESO
- Complete all required paperwork and submit it in a timely fashion
- Motivate your students

- Be a role model during class and also outside of class
- Correct errors in technique using positive reinforcement.
- Constantly point out students' strengths and efforts to succeed.
- Assure a physically and emotionally safe learning environment.
- Keep your attention on the students.

Classroom Diversity

Instructors are responsible to establish a classroom format and environment that exemplifies professionalism. Each instructor should understand that many cultural, sociological, and economic factors could play into each participant's conduct and attentiveness during the education and training process. The instructor should lead by example and take into account the varying backgrounds associated with cultural diversity.

Harassment Issues

Instructors are expected to conduct themselves in a business-like manner at all times. Any behavior that is coercive, intimidating, harassing, or sexual in nature is inappropriate and prohibited. Any verbal, physical, or visual conduct that belittles or demeans an individual because of his or her race, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, or similar characteristic or circumstance is prohibited.

Incidents of harassment may be subjective in nature. To assist instructors in understanding what harassment is, particularly sexual harassment, the following is the federal government's definition in this policy:

"Sexual Harassment Is: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical, verbal, or visual conduct based on gender when (1) submission to the conduct is an explicit or implicit term or condition of employment, (2) submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for an employment decision, or (3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Sexual harassment can include any of the following kinds of behavior:

- Explicit sexual propositions
- Sexual innuendo
- Sexually suggestive comments
- Sexually oriented teasing or kidding
- Sexually oriented jokes
- Obscene gestures or language
- Obscene or sexually suggestive pictures, publications, or drawings
- Physical contact, such as patting, pinching, or touching

Instructors are responsible for maintaining a classroom that is free of harassment, but all participants are responsible for helping to assure that harassment does not occur by conducting themselves in an appropriate manner and by reporting harassment they observe.

Use of Media Devices

The use of multimedia in the classroom enhances the delivery of the material only if used properly. Whatever medium you are using, you need to make sure it is effective for the classroom environment. As an instructor you need to be conscious about your movement in front of the screen and blocking the view of participants in the classroom. It is imperative you check all your equipment prior to the start of the class and have a backup plan if the device does function properly.

The following defines some of the multimedia available for use with programs.

Overhead Projectors Although fading in popularity, many ESOs use overheads to supplement the course material. As an instructor you need to assure a projector is available and working before the start of class. Be sure the visual effectiveness of the overheads is adequate prior to the start of class. Depending on the lighting of the classroom, you may need to dim, turn off a portion or all of the lights for the best clarity. Also, any outside light source may affect the visibility of the transparency. Effective use of the overhead projector is important also. You may consider turning the projector off when not in use, having a transparency as a background while discussing a certain topic. It is always a wise alternative to never leave the projector on during the entire presentation.

Computer Projection Many training programs now come with PowerPoint presentations. Instructors may need to provide both the computer and the projector for this media. Be sure you are familiar with how to use this type of media effectively. It is always wise to have a backup means of media presentation in case of computer failure.

Slide Projectors Slide projectors may be considered technology of the past, but a seasoned instructor may use these devices effectively. Instructors need to be versed on projector use and assure spare bulbs and other backup materials are available.

Video Tapes There are a variety of programs, which utilize videotapes as a supplement to an education program. As with any other means of media, you need to assure everyone in the classroom can view the screen. This may mean elevating the television screen, making sure the screen is large enough, anything less than a 20" screen is inadequate in any classroom setting. A 27"—32" screen is recommended for the average class sizes. Sound is another important element of the effective use of video presentations. Be sure the volume level is adequate for all students in class. It is as important not to have it too loud as it is to not have too soft. Lighting can also be a factor

for adequate viewing. You may need to block outside light to prevent glare and also dim the lighting in the room.

Easel Charts If an easel chart is available for the classroom, it can be another effective instructional tool. An easel chart can be used to emphasize points or to illustrate a situation, which may be difficult to describe. Easel charts can be used again in future classes.

Chalkboards or Erasable Boards Chalkboards are probably as old as education itself. Chalkboards can also be used to illustrate topics, which may be difficult to describe. Erasable or white boards can be more effective in that you may use a variety of colors to get your message across. Remember to keep the student in mind when using these aids. Appropriate letter size and legibility is very important for the students in class to be able to receive the message.

Action Steps

The following are minimum components to consider when developing or enhancing your education and training program.
Develop policy with clear doable standard operating procedures that address:
- Education and training requirements
- Processes on how to obtain the training
Educate all staff on:
- Why specialty training is needed. (The Problem)
- Laws, Standards, Rules and Regulations
- ESO Policies
Train all staff on:
- Competency Based Skills
- Simulators (when available)
Provide testing in the following areas:
- Didactic
- Clinical
- Lab

Ensure concurrent and ongoing training:
- Conduct Annual Refresher Training

As An Instructor …

As an instructor, treat the adult learner the way you would want to be treated in the classroom setting. Every time you are a participant in a class, think of how you would like the instructor to conduct the class. Think about the positive aspects of the class and

do not be afraid to adopt them in your instruction delivery if it is appropriate to your teaching style and personality. The adult learner expects a lot from you as an instructor.

All education and training should be based on recognized practices. For applicable best practices, ESOs should reference current best practices from national trade organizations along with standards from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Fire Protection Association, United States Fire Administration, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Volunteer Fire Council, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, International Society of Fire Service Instructors, and the National Association of EMS Educators.

Professional Development

Objectives

- Understand the importance of professional development
- Identify four key management skills needed to perform the job
- Define the roles of the supervisor and manager within the ESO setting
- Identify the "Peter Principle" as it applies to leadership abilities

Scope

The concept of professional development is essential to the growth of the emergency services industry. Failure to prepare subordinates to become the future leaders of the fire and emergency services equals failure to function effectively and efficiently in current operations. As he works to mold future leaders the CEO must understand that both managers and leaders are not born, they are developed through quality education, training, and sound representative leadership.

Too often line officers at all levels are voted or placed into these supervisory positions because they are good firefighters or paramedics. Little or no supervisory training automatically sets up these new line officers (middle management) for failure. In reality, they did not fail, you as the organizational leadership failed them. Fact of the matter is, not every good firefighter or EMT will make a qualified supervisor. Furthermore, promoting all the good firefighters and EMT's to supervisory roles, even if qualified, may set up the field providers for failure. Why? Taking quality providers out of the field takes away the mentors for those that follow. Once an individual becomes a supervisor, they are no longer just one of the guys.

A delicate balance and critical challenge rests with top management regardless of the ESO makeup. No matter how someone views the risks and benefits of moving up the ladder, professional development at all levels remains vital to the growth of the ESO and the emergency services industry as a whole.

> "Leadership: To move successfully into the future, the fire service needs leaders capable of developing and managing their organizations in dramatically changing environments."
>
> Wingspread IV - 1996

Development Considerations

The CEO must have a clear understanding of three development definitions in order to plan and prepare subordinates to progress in professional development.

- Leadership is the ability to lead people, to manage the vision of the organization and to do the right thing.
- Management is the coordination and integration of resources through planning, organizing, directing, controlling, staffing, and coordinating. This is a task and goal oriented approach. Management does the right thing.
- Supervision is coordination of basic work activities of the organization in accordance with plans and procedures and oversees work activity of others. This is a one-on-one people and task oriented approach.

The desire for personnel to progress in their respective careers is fundamental with the human characteristic to succeed. Continuing education is a must and lies at the core of the emergency services industry. The CEO must understand that although continuing education is fundamental to professional development it also carries to a much higher level when you seek development of present and future leadership personnel.

Transitioning from Firefighter I & II. to Fire Officer I & II, or EMT and paramedic to a line supervisor or management position, requires continuous ongoing education and training. This in itself is professional development. Many programs and courses exist through fire and EMS academies, community colleges, and related outreach programs to educate all levels of the emergency services in basic through advanced supervisory, managerial, leadership, and administrative roles. The volunteer emergency services must step up to the plate to promote and enhance the educational backgrounds of their personnel.

ESO leadership must be conscious of and cautious not to invoke the Peter Principle of management. The Peter Principle states that every person in a hierarchy tends to rise to the level of incompetence. Although often joked about, the Peter Principle could not be further from the truth. In essence, an employee starts off competent, and then rises through the ranks to a position where he or she is not competent to perform the job. A classic example in the fire service is moving the best firefighter to a line officer position and the result is failure. Ask yourself do you want a chief firefighter or a fire chief? They result in two distinctly different sets of consequences.

Management Skills

ESOs should have practical position descriptions that qualify and quantify every positions expectation. Such descriptions should include education and training requirements. Hence the individual's ability to perform the job should be benchmarked to the respective position descriptions. These requirements represent what the ESO should base professional development programs. Use of assessment center based evaluations will also aid in selecting the right person for the position.

Four key management skills are considered basic in the development process. These skills can and should be taught as part of the overall development process. They include:

1. Conceptual skills: The ability to see the big picture and to recognize significant elements in a situation and to understand the relationship among the elements.
2. Technical skills: The knowledge and proficiency in activities involving methods, processes, and procedures. Managers need to be able to teach skills to their personnel.
3. Human skills: The ability to work with people – TEAMWORK! Creating an environment where people feel secure and free to express their opinion.
4. Design skills: The ability to design workable solutions to problems in light of the realities they are facing.

Many programs exist to prepare personnel for all positions within the ESO. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) alone has fire officer development standards for each level of the fire service. Each of these levels contains applicable training, education, experience, and self-development portions.

- NFPA Fire Officer I—Supervising Fire Officer
- NFPA Fire Officer II—Managing Fire Officer
- NFPA Fire Officer III—Administrative Fire Officer
- NFPA Fire Officer IV—Executive Fire Officer

Action Steps

The following are minimum components to consider when developing or enhancing your education and training program.

- Develop policy with clear doable standard operating procedures that address:
  - o Education and training requirements for professional development
  - o Processes on how to obtain the education and training

- Prepare and develop a plan to promote professional development throughout the ranks of the ESO

- Define clear and concise position descriptions for all levels of the ESO.

- Provide adequate resources to assure personnel can meet the requirements.

- Create a culture within the ESO that promotes continuing and ongoing education.

- Lead by example.

Summary

Professional development is essential for the growth of every ESO. The development process should be based on the identified needs and recognized best practices of the emergency services arena. The CEO must work to integrate all aspects of the development process into every department operation and function. For applicable best practices, ESOs should reference current best practices from national trade organizations along with standards from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Fire Protection Association, United States Fire Administration, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Volunteer Fire Council, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, International Society of Fire Service Instructors, and the National Association of EMS Educators.

There is nothing more important than the personnel in your ESO. Quality education and training, competency based testing, and continuing education are minimum components for any training program. Failure to prepare subordinates to become the future leaders of the fire and emergency services equals failure to function effectively and efficiently in current operations. Most importantly, organizational leadership must take and thus make the subjects of training and professional development the number one priority in any ESO. The culture must be created at the top, promoted and maintained by line officers and supervisory personnel, and only then will it be accepted and sustained by the ranks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Patrick served several years as the Director of EMS Programs and Emergency Service Initiatives for VFIS and currently serves as the Chief Fire Officer for the Estero Fire Rescue District. Rick has over twenty-seven years of diverse experience in Emergency Services. Mr. Patrick is a former chief officer with Annville Fire Department. He is a certified Paramedic/Firefighter with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Engineering Safety and a Masters Degree in Public Safety Administration.

Rick remains active as a paramedic, volunteer firefighter, fire administrator and is actively involved in many national, state, and local emergency service organizations. He is the Chief Executive Officer of the Annville (PA) Fire Department and the Annville Township Fire Marshal. Mr. Patrick is a nationally known leader, educator, lecturer, author, speaker, and consultant in emergency services.

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Appendices

A Checklist for the Classroom Teacher

1. Seat students with learning differences as near the teacher as possible, but include them as part of the regular classroom. The front row is ideal, away from distractions like windows.

2. Surround students with learning differences with good role models. Encourage peer tutoring and cooperative learning. Consider allowing peer note-taking if writing rapidly is difficult for the LD student.

3. Call their name before addressing them or asking them to recite, and maintain eye contact while speaking with them.

4. Praise their correct and acceptable work, do not just focus on their mistakes.

5. Recognize and give credit for their oral participation in class.

6. If grades on written material are given, consider designating one grade for content, thought and effort and another grade for spelling, punctuation, and handwriting.

7. Allow the opportunity for oral tests in each subject if it will help demonstrate their learning.

8. Encourage their interests and talents by allowing them occasionally to contribute a project instead of a written theme. Find and emphasize their talents whenever possible.

9. Practice spelling words in the order they will be presented on tests. Have the students write the words and spell them aloud.

10. Help your students get organized.

11. Give them an opportunity for extra time on tests by allowing them to return at recess, lunch or after school to complete a test.

12. Make specific arrangements for the complete homework assignments to reach their homes daily, i.e., an assignments notebook. They often cannot copy accurately from the board. Encourage parents to set up appropriate study space at home. (See NCLD Homework TIPS.)

13. Allow them to bring a recorder to class on review days. They often cannot write complete notes easily nor read them for study if they do.

14. Do not put them under pressure of time or competition if either can be avoided.

15. Do not ask them to read aloud without preparation.

16. Be cognizant of your own communication styles - is your handwriting on the chalkboard large enough? Neat enough? Do you speak slowly and clearly? Do you use ample visual aids?

17. Know what LD are and are not - read resource materials on learning disabilities.

18. Follow as structured a schedule as possible; when changes are necessary, try to make transitions between activities as painless as possible. Transitions are often tough for these children. Preparing for transitions, providing structure and warning children in advance that changes are coming are easy ways to begin.

19. Convey a positive attitude about special learners; children take their cues from the teacher's attitudes-you are the primary role model.

20. Be creative-help all students feel comfortable about asking questions. Often children with LD do not like to ask for help.

21. Provide clear and concise instructions. Repeat whenever necessary.

22. Be aware of problems in non-academic areas. Help children learn appropriate social interactions in the same way you teach them grammar and math.

23. Remember praise always encourages all of your students.

Class Checklist

Prior to Class:

Course Location: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Contact Name:_____ Phone Number: _____

Instructor Name: _____

Directions: _____

AV Equipment Needed:

☐ TV   ☐ Computer Projector
☐ VCR   ☐ Computer
☐ Slide Projector   ☐ Overhead Projector

Other Materials:

☐ Participant Manuals #_____
☐ Handouts #_____

Class:

☐ Set up room
☐ Check AV Equipment
☐ Tear out Evaluations & Course Certificates
☐ Be sure to leave the facility better than you found it
☐ Identify smoking areas
☐ Identify Restrooms
☐ Identify drinks/foods

After Class:

☐ Check all paperwork
☐ Send course rosters and evaluations (original copies) to ESO

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Training Techniques and Professional Development

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Develop a training and education plan to effectively allow personnel to move through the ranks by participating in continuing education.

☐ 2. Determine how you would promote the concept of professional development in your organization

☐ 3. Establish training criteria for all positions of the organization.

☐ 4. Assure that appropriate diversity issues are included in the education and training program.

☐ 5. Determine what you personally can do as the Fire Department CEO to improve the professional development of the organization.

Chapter 11

Information Management

By Michael Wieder

Information management is not restricted to the information in emergency run reports. Municipal data, budget information, public opinion, political input, and other written or automated data all play a role in the strategic planning for the organization and need to be coordinated, reviewed, and managed to assure effective use of information in managing the organization.

Information Management

It is probably safe to assume that no one ever joined their local fire department because of an intense interest in writing reports, filing documentation, and maintaining a departmental information management system. Of all the requisite tasks involved in the operation of a fire department, most firefighters and officers would probably describe record keeping and data management as the least desirable chore they perform.

Yet despite the tedious, unglamorous nature of developing and managing fire department informational data, this activity is crucial in ensuring the continued operation of each and every fire department. Every fire department, regardless of size, must maintain a variety of different types of records and information in an organized fashion that allows specific documents to be easily retrieved when the need arises. This may be a relatively simple process in a very small volunteer fire department and it will increase in complexity proportionately as the size of the department grows. Examples of situations that may require documents to be retrieved include:

- During fire rating inspections by organizations such as Insurance Services Organization (ISO)

- When a member is injured or killed in the line of duty

- When requested during the course of a legal process

- When developing periodic or annual departmental reports

- When researching departmental needs for budget preparation

- When researching a decision that was made at a previous departmental meeting.

The need to keep various kinds of records and maintain a fire department information system is outlined in several National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Chapter 21, Management Reports and Records, of NFPA 1201, *Standard for Developing Fire Protection Services for the Public* contains requirements for incident reporting, administrative reports, annual reports, and record retention. Chapter 4, Fire Department Administration, of NFPA 1500, *Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program* contains two specific sections (4.6 and 4.12) that address records, record management, and data analysis. In addition to these two sections, numerous specific objectives that address the need to record and maintain information are contained throughout the entire body of the document. Although not a standard per se, NFPA 1401, *Recommended Practice for Fire Service Training Records and Reports* contains detailed information on documenting the training functions of the fire

department and its members. Fire departments that are establishing or refining an information management system should consult these documents for direction.

In this chapter we will discuss various aspects of an overall fire department information management system. This includes the types of data and information that must be maintained, procedures for maintaining written documentation, and establishing and maintaining electronic data collection and management systems.

Types of Records and Data

There are a wide variety of types of records, reports, and other data that a professionally managed fire department may be expected to collect and maintain. Some of the basics, such as personnel and training records, must be kept by all fire departments. Others will vary depending on local or state requirements, insurance carrier requirements, and departmental pBibliography. The NFPA standards listed in the introduction of this chapter should be consulted for direction on some of the basic minimum requirements. Fire department leaders should also consult with local and state government officials, insurance company representatives, and fire department legal counsel on the range of records that should be required for that individual department. These sources may also provide direction on the depth and format of information needed and storage requirements for the information.

This section provides a brief description of some of the most common types records and data that should be maintained by most fire departments. In a chapter of this size it is impossible to list all of the specific details that should be recorded for each record or data type. As fire departments implement their information management system, they will need to develop standard formats for each of these data types so that all of the necessary information is collected in a consistent manner.

Personnel Records

All fire departments, at a minimum, should keep a personnel file on each member of the organization. This file will contain a wide variety of information. Much of the information in the member's personnel file must be considered confidential in nature. This confidentiality is required by both law (such as HIPAA requirements) and the NFPA standards. Thus, personnel records should be maintained in a secure manner and should be accessible only to approved fire department leaders who have legitimate reasons for retrieving the information. The following are some of the types of information that should be contained in each member's personnel file.

Personal information This information can be used to contact the member, their family, their employer, or other important people should the need arise. Fire departments should use a written or electronic form to record the following kinds of information.

- Member's name
- Home address and telephone
- Cellular phone and pager numbers
- Work address, telephone, and supervisor's name
- Electronic mail address(es)
- Immediate family members and/or next-of-kin with contact information
- Date of birth
- Social Security Number
- Driver license information and authorization to access driving record from time to time
- Vehicle registration information, including personal insurance coverage information, and authorization to operate warning devices on the personal vehicle (if any)
- Background check information/report, if performed
- Date of appointment to department
- Date(s) of departmental rank promotion(s)

Medical Information This information documents the physical condition of the member when they join the fire department and periodically as they progress through their career. This information will also become useful in the unfortunate circumstance that the member becomes ill or injured while performing fire department functions. Both federal HIPAA requirements and NFPA 1500 require that all of this information be maintained in a strictly confidential manner. Information that should be included in this portion of the file should include:

- Copies of the member's entrance and annual physical examination reports
- Baseline information on the member's normal vital signs and health status
- Known existing medical conditions and medications the member regularly takes
- Allergies from which the member suffers
- Information on any previous injuries or illnesses
- The member's health insurance provider and contact information

Exposure to Hazards The member's file should document any incidents in which the member has been exposed to known or suspected toxic products and infectious/communicable diseases (Figure 11.1). This information will be valuable should the member begin to show symptoms at a later time. Examples of these types of incidents include hazardous materials incidents or medical responses that involve victims with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, or tuberculosis.

Figure 11.1 Courtesy of Bob Esposito

Training Records The personnel file should contain detailed information on the member's training activities both prior to joining the department and during the course of their career. This information is useful in many ways, including documenting qualifications for assignments (such as emergency vehicle driving) and promotions, determining that minimum annual training requirements are met, and in the event the member's qualifications are challenged in a legal proceeding.

Information documented in the training record section should include:

- High school and college course/degree completion information
- Fire and EMS courses completed and certifications
- Copies of certificates/diplomas that the member has been awarded
- Continuing education unit information
- Departmental training attendance and activities

NFPA 1401 provides an excellent guideline for developing and maintaining fire department training reports and records.

Commendations and Disciplinary Records Through the course of a member's career it is likely that they will receive some type of commendations or awards for their service to the organization. This may include things such as notice of valor for a specific incident, notice of achievement by the department, a customer, or community organization, and other awards or recognitions. Copies of these positive occurrences should be kept in the member's personnel folder.

Should the occasion arise where the member must be subjected to some type of fire department disciplinary procedure, all documentation relative to these proceedings should also be kept in the file. These may be of use should the member legally challenge the fire department or should they require further disciplinary actions later in their career.

Vehicle and Equipment Records

NFPA 1500 requires fire departments to maintain records on the inspection, maintenance, repair, and service of all apparatus and equipment that are used for fire department emergency operations and training activities. These records are required, in part, as one way of ensuring that fire departments are actually performing these activities on a regular or as needed basis. They are also useful in the event of an apparatus or equipment failure that results in injury to a firefighter.

Manufacturer-Supplied Documents In nearly every case, when a fire department purchases an apparatus or piece of equipment they are supplied with a variety documentation from the manufacturer of the item. This documentation may include:

- Sales documents and receipts
- Warranty information and certificates
- Documentation of preservice and manufacturer testing
- Owner's manual, including operating instructions, restrictions, and care and maintenance procedures

The original copies of all of this documentation should be kept in the formal fire department record keeping system. Copies of operating and maintenance procedures should be distributed, or at least made readily available, to those members who will be expected to operate or maintain the equipment.

Inspection Records NFPA 1500 requires fire departments to establish a periodic inspection and preventive maintenance program for all fire apparatus and equipment. The frequency of these functions will vary depending on the size and activity level of the fire department. In order to facilitate that consistent inspection procedures are being used, most fire departments develop or adopt checklists or forms that guide the inspector through the process. These forms should be filed in an organized manner, such as under the name of that apparatus or equipment being inspected. Information on performing apparatus and equipment inspections and developing appropriate forms can be found in the IFSTA *Fire Department Pumping Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook* or *Fire Department Aerial Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook.*

Maintenance and Repair Records The goal of periodic inspection programs is to identify deficiencies in apparatus and equipment before they become safety or operational hazards to firefighters. These deficiencies also pop up during normal operations. Once identified, appropriate corrective repair procedures should be completed and the process documented with a report. These reports should include what the problem was, how it was corrected, and who performed the repairs. This information is often useful when developing specifications and purchasing apparatus and equipment in the future.

Administrative Records

There are a wide variety of other types of records that a fire department may need to maintain during the course of normal operations. As mentioned previously, each department will need to determine their individual record keeping needs. However, the following four types of records are most likely to be needed by all departments.

Incident Reports Fire departments should fully document all responses to emergencies and other incidents (Figure 11.2). The information on these reports can be useful in a variety of manners, including legal issues, customer billing, activity surveys, and fire prevention planning. In some cases fire departments may have more than one type of incident report form to file for each incident. They may be a combination or printed or electronic forms. At a minimum, the fire department should have a form for departmental record keeping purposes. Depending on the jurisdiction they may also have forms that are required by the county or state government. Fire departments may wish to consult NFPA 901, *Standard Classifications for Incident Reporting and Fire Protection Data* for information on developing report formats that are compatible with regional and national reporting systems.

All fire departments are strongly encouraged to participate in the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) operated by the United States Fire Administration. This data provides information that is crucial in obtaining federal support and funding for the fire service.

Figure 11.2 Courtesy of Bob Esposito

Information that is captured on incident reports will vary depending on the needs of the documenting agency. At a minimum, the report should include:

- The time, date, type, and location of the incident
- The property owner and insurer
- Apparatus and personnel responding to the incident
- The equipment and supplies used on the incident
- Incident details and cause information

If the incident required an investigation of the fire origin and cause, reports documenting all of the evidence and information obtained during the course of the investigative process should also be maintained by the fire department. This information will be extremely important in criminal and civil legal cases that may stem from the incident.

Illness/Injury/Accident Reports NFPA 1500 requires fire departments to fully document any incidences of firefighter illness, jury, death, accidents, or exposures to hazardous substances. The information captured on these reports must be incident-specific so that they can be used for future reference when the need to review incident details arises. They should also contain enough detail so that they may used for research studies involving morbidity, mortality, and causation.

Financial Records All fire departments, regardless of their size, have the need to keep detailed records on departmental financial transactions and current balance of funds. These records are used to ensure that all policies and laws pertaining to the collection and use of fire department funds are being followed. Examples of these types of records include:

- Documentation of incomes from taxes, grants, donations, fund raising activities, and other sources
- Documentation of all expenditures in which fire department revenues were used
- Current bank account and investment balances
- Reports on fire department financial account audits

The laws and policies on maintaining fire department financial records will vary depending on local and state laws, as well as policies established by the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) over the fire department. Depending on the structure of the fire department, the AHJ over their financial affairs may be elected officers of the fire department, a board of commissioners, or local or county government officials.

Meeting Minutes All formal fire department meetings should be documented to ensure that all important discussions and decisions are recorded. This information is used to track the history of the department and to research past decisions. Depending on local department pBibliography, these meetings may be recorded with audiotapes or videotapes, by a member taking written minutes, or both. Some fire departments have histories that date well prior to the advent of mechanical recording equipment. This limited early minute taking to written minutes. These were often bound in large binders. Fire departments must develop procedures for safely storing all of these documents, as they may be the only formal record of the fire department's history.

Record Accessibility versus Confidentiality

Before establishing any type of record keeping system, fire department personnel must clearly understand the balance between accessibility and confidentiality of fire department records. Some records may be open to all fire department personnel, some must be made available to the public or other agencies, and still others must be completely confidential. The knowledge of which records meet each of these criteria must be factored into the data management system.

Items such as personnel files, individual training records, exposure reports, and medical files must be considered confidential and access to these documents must be limited. In addition to the fact that various laws and standards require these types of records to be kept confidential, it is to the member's benefit to keep information such as Social Security numbers, medical conditions, and test scores guarded. In fact, in this age of increased identity theft hazards, many organizations no longer use an employee's Social Security number for records identification. Access to confidential

information must be limited to management personal and other authorized personnel with a specific need to know.

Most other organizational records are not considered confidential in nature. Open-meeting laws and open records acts specify which records must be available to the public and media. In most cases, official meeting minutes and any other notes that are made as part of the meeting are considered part of the public record. The exception would be personnel issues that are discussed in an executive session. As well, other documents, maps, photographs, videotapes, handwritten notes, letters, computer data (including e-mails), and any other materials that were created or maintained by a government agency fall into the open record requirement. Typically, local and/or state laws will determine specific requirements for open record requirements.

In nearly every case there will be legal exceptions to the open record requirements. Just as alleged criminals are presumed innocent until proven guilty, records are presumed open until a jurisdiction shows sufficient cause for them to be exempt. In many cases the court will allow portions of records to be opened, allowing only sensitive parts to removed or obscured. One type of document that is almost always considered exempt from open record requirements is emergency medical incident reports. These typically contain information that is protected by federal HIPAA requirements. Fire incident and investigation documents may be made available to individuals who own the involved property or were otherwise directly involved in the incident. In every case, when fire department officials are setting up an information management system, they must ensure that they clearly understand which records must be kept confidential and which must be made available upon request.

Developing a Management Information System

Fire departments that are seeking to develop or overhaul their management information system should go about it systematically. The amount of effort involved in this process and the complexity of the system will generally be proportional to the size of the department and the amount of records and data to manage. Certainly, a chapter of this size cannot fully detail or explain the entire development process. However, the same basic major steps will need to be accomplished regardless of the size of the project. Those steps are:

1. Determine the system requirements.

2. Research potential alternatives that may be used.

3. Develop an implementation plan.

4. Implement the system.

5. Monitor the system and make adjustments as necessary.

Define System Requirements

Each department must make a realistic evaluation of the amount and types of data to be recorded and stored. As mentioned previously, much of this will depend on the size of the department and its activity level. Once the department has an accurate picture of its management information needs, the process of researching and planning a reasonable system to handle these needs will be more productive. Smaller departments may simply be looking at purchasing a couple of simple file cabinets, or possibly a single personal computer. Larger departments may require more sophisticated filing systems, off-site archival storage, and more significant electronic records entry and storage systems.

Research Acceptable Alternatives

Once the scope of the department's information management needs have been determined, the next logical step is to begin the process of searching for solutions to the need. There are numerous ways to accomplish this step. It may be as simple as determining what other departments of similar size have successfully implemented to meet this challenge. Most fire departments are very willing to share their experiences and lessons learned. The fire department may also choose to hire an information management consultant who can lead or assist in the identification of potential solutions. In some cases, people or companies in your community may have these capabilities and are willing to provide free assistance as a measure of good will or community support to the department. Similarly, there may be commercial vendors of information management systems and equipment that can be consulted for expertise and assistance in determining the best system fit for the fire department.

Develop an Implementation Plan

Once all the potential systems have been reviewed and an acceptable alternative has been selected, departmental members should develop a working plan for implementing the plan. Departmental leaders must be realistic when developing the implementation plan. The process of locating, categorizing, organizing, and storing all of the department's records and data is not likely to be accomplished overnight, or even within a few days. The plan must include a realistic timeline of activities, the people and material resources needed to accomplish the task, and a goal for project completion. When determining the personnel that will assist with the process, keep in mind that personnel who would normally have access to it should only handle confidential or otherwise sensitive data. Once an implementation plan has been developed, all parties involved in, or affected by, the plan should be briefed on its details.

Implement the Plan

Once the implementation plan is in place, it should be followed until the information management system has been realized. Keep in mind that virtually no plan will work as designed throughout the entire lifespan of a project. During the course of the project it is likely that logical deviations from the plan will become advantageous or necessary. When these situations occur, project leaders should be consulted and adjustments approved and made when their need has been justified.

Monitor the System

The job is not complete when the information management system has been implemented. First, it is incumbent on departmental leaders to ensure that all members of the department follow the rules of the system as it was designed and intended. No system will be successful unless all of the members use it at all times as it was designed. During the course of normal operations it may become apparent that the system, as designed, is not meeting the department's needs or could be improved. Departmental leaders should be monitoring for these situations and listening to feedback from members that suggest when adjustments to the system should be made. Depending on the complexity of the needed adjustment, it may simply be implemented or it may require a planning process similar to that described for the entire system.

Maintaining Hardcopy/Written Records and Data

Despite the advancement and availability of computers and software in today's society, every fire department has the need to establish a record keeping system for paper documentation. Even if it were possible to completely conduct all current and future documentation functions electronically, which is unlikely, all fire departments have records that predated electronic collection methods that must be stored in a retrievable manner. Some volunteer fire departments have been in existence for more than 200 years and have records that date back to the origins of the fire department.

In most cases, fire departments that are implementing their first true information management system will have a significant amount of existing paper documentation that needs to be placed into the system. It is often helpful to begin the implementation process by first organizing this existing data. Organizing existing records will provide a foundation for any new documents and procedures that are developed for ongoing operations. When organizing existing documentation, it should be grouped into logical categories for filing. Categories could include topics such as training records, incident reports, meeting minutes, and purchasing documents.

When the existing documentation has been sorted by category, each category should be organized logically. The organization method will vary depending on the type of data. For example, training and personnel records most likely will be organized by the

member's name and then filed alphabetically. Records such as meeting minutes and incident reports are most logically filed in a chronological system. Equipment and apparatus inspection and maintenance records should be organized according to the specific device and then chronologically within that record.

Once the existing documents have been sorted and organized accordingly, the next step is to determine which documentation may realistically be needed for current operations, report writing, or other needs. Much of the existing documentation falls into the category of historical records that will not need to be kept close at hand for ongoing operations. Examples of this include personnel records for people who are no longer members of the department, meeting minutes from more than five years previous, and purchasing records for equipment that is no longer in service.

When evaluating all of the existing documentation, members should also determine those documents that merit duplication for safety's sake. Given sufficient resources and a realistic number of documents it would be nice if all records could be duplicated in some manner. Duplication methods include simple photocopying, transferring information to microfiche, and scanning them into computer files. Realistically, most jurisdictions will not have the ability to compile a complete copy of all previous fire department records and they will need to prioritize those documents that are more likely to be needed in the future. Higher priority documents include meeting minutes and irreplaceable historical documents, current personnel records, and important financial records.

Records that have been duplicated for safety's sake should be maintained in a different facility than the primary set of records. Examples of alternate storage locations include a different fire station or fire department facility, a contracted records storage facility, another government building within the jurisdiction, or, if nothing else is available, a member's home or business. In jurisdictions prone to severe weather, such as tornados, the alternate facility should be remote enough from the primary storage location so as it would be unlikely for both locations to be affected by the same storm. Having these duplicates stored in an alternate location reduces the chance that a fire, flood, or other natural disaster will destroy both sets.

Once the records have been sorted and appropriate duplicates have been made, the fire department will need to determine the actual storage system that will be used. Small departments may be able to fit all of their written records into a simple two or four drawer file cabinet (Figure 11.3). If the number of records to be stored is more substantial, additional file cabinets or larger custom filing systems may be required (Figure 11.4). When determining the exact type of equipment that will be used to hold the written records, the following considerations must be taken:

Figure 11.3

Figure 11.4

- The storage equipment must be able to hold all of the current records in a manner that is not too cramped so that they will not be damaged and they are easily removed and replaced.

- Future record demands must be estimated and extra storage space should be planned accordingly.

- The most desirable storage cabinets are fully enclosed and protect the records from accidental exposure to water, smoke, fire, or other damaging conditions.

- When possible, the storage system should be located in a facility that is protected by an automatic sprinkler system.

- If multiple storage cabinets are used, they should be arranged in a logical, orderly manner so that appropriate sections and records can easily be located.

- Mechanisms for noting when a particular file has been pulled should be implemented. The system should include noting the name of the file that has been removed, who removed it, the date it was removed, and date of return.

- Storage containers that will be used to contain confidential files must have a secure locking system and only those people who have need to access the files should have the key or passcode to access those sections. These sections of storage should be locked at all times.

Fire departments that maintain a large number of records may choose to store only those records that are likely to be used on a regular basis in the primary storage system. Other records can then be stored in an archival system. An archival system is one in which the records are still stored in a logical manner (Figure 11.5), but not necessarily in a conveniently retrievable location. Often cases of archived records are stored in special boxes that may be placed in on- or off-site storage rooms. If the need to look back through some old documentation arises, the boxes are retrieved and the records located.

Figure 11.5

Fire department officials should consult with their legal counsel to determine any legal requirements for document storage. The lawyer may be able to provide important information on which documents should be saved and which should not. He or she may also to provide information on the length of time that some records should be saved and then discarded.

Maintaining Electronic Data and Records

In today's computer age, many jurisdictions are choosing to perform as much of their record keeping and data collection functions by electronic means as possible. Given sufficient resources and expertise, there is no record keeping or data collection function that cannot be done by electronic means.

As with manual storage systems, the size and complexity of an electronic data collection and storage system will be highly dependent on the size and activity level of the fire department that is using the system. In many cases, small to medium volunteer fire departments can handle all of their record keeping needs with the use of one or two personal computers (Figure 11.6). Larger departments may require networked computers or a small mainframe type computer system (Figure 11.7).

Figure 11.6

Figure 11.7

When designing or modifying an electronic data management system, it is highly advisable that the fire department first determine what they will need the system to do and then seek expert advice on setting up the system by someone who is highly knowledgeable in computer equipment and systems operations. In some cases there may be members of the fire department who have the expertise needed to set up the system. In other cases it may be necessary to locate people with this knowledge within the community. It is possible that a local computer business, a local industry or school's information technology department, or computer-wise individuals within the community can be recruited to provide this assistance at little or no charge as a matter of good will to the community or assistance to the fire department.

In a chapter of this size and scope, it is impossible to list and describe all of the possible types of computer hardware that could be used to establish a fire department electronic data management system. There are an endless variety of computers, file servers, and other electronic hardware on the market and the changes in technology and capabilities of this equipment is extremely rapid. However, a few basic principles can be used when determining the exact equipment that the fire department will select for its data management system:

- Purchase the best equipment available that is within the fire department's budget. Skimping on hardware in many cases will get the electronic data management system off to a poor start, as personnel will be frustrated by slow operating equipment that is subject to frequent failures.

- Computers and file servers should be purchased with the maximum amount of storage capacity available. This allows for maximum data storage capabilities as well as space for software that may be needed to perform department functions.

- If it is anticipated that the equipment will be used remote from a fixed office setting, make sure that the equipment is of rugged design that will stand up to the environment in which it will be operated.

- At a minimum, computer equipment should be plugged into an electrical outlet that is equipped with surge protection. Larger computer systems and equipment may be connected to uninterrupted power supply (UPS) systems that prevent damage or loss of data during a failure of the primary electrical supply system.

- If it is not included in the purchase contract, identify a reliable source for equipment repair and servicing so that minimal delays will result when a problem occurs.

It is highly recommended that any computer equipment purchased for fire department use also have the capability of accessing the Internet. The Internet is a

valuable tool for researching information that can be used to manage the fire department and in some cases even purchasing tools and equipment. As well, fire departments that participate in state or national incident reporting systems or who apply for various types of grants must also be able to submit their reports or applications electronically via the World Wide Web.

Depending on the department's location, a variety of mechanisms for accessing the Internet may be available. The most simple is by a modem arrangement that utilizes a standard telephone line. While this arrangement is simple and in many cases the least expensive option, it also is the slowest in terms of operating speed. The time required to open complex websites, submit forms, or receive sizeable electronic mail files can be substantial and frustrating. However in many jurisdictions, particularly rural ones, this is the only reliable way to access the Internet. If the department anticipates that the computer will be used on a regular basis, it may be advisable to have a second phone line installed specifically for the computer (you could also hook a fax machine to this line). Otherwise, telephone callers attempting to phone the fire station will be unable to get through while the computer is being used online.

There are a variety of faster, more powerful ways to connect to the Internet available in today's market. Again, the ability to use these mechanisms will depend on whether the jurisdiction has access to these services. Some of these high-speed connections include wireless access, high-speed phone lines (referred to as DSL lines), access through digital cable television systems, and other forms of direct connection to the Internet. In some cases several of these options will be available to the department. This is a situation where someone who is knowledgeable in computer equipment and operations can provide valuable advice on what the best option for your particular situation.

Once the hardware and Internet options have been reviewed and equipment has been selected, the next thing that must be considered is the software that will be placed on the computer. Software is a computer programming package that turns the computer into a useful tool for the end user. There exists a dizzying array of software packages available to computer users and in many cases the selection of appropriate software can be considerably more complicated than the selection and purchase of the computer equipment itself.

In almost every case personal computers are provided with a basic software package when they are purchased. This software package typically includes a word processing program, basic spreadsheet capabilities, a file management system, software for Internet access, an electronic mail program, and other basic personal and small business programs. Fire department personnel should review the basic software that comes with the computer to determine whether or not it will meet the department's needs or if other programs will be required.

In many cases, the basic software that comes with the computer in and of itself will not be sufficient to perform all of the tasks for which the fire department seeks to use the computer equipment. Special software may be required to document training activities, report inspection reports, log personnel records, record financial information,

and other types of computer operations. In these cases the most viable option will be for the fire department to identify vendors who produce predesigned software packages for the specific functions the department seeks to perform. There are an almost countless number of vendors who produce special software for the fire service and general business. The department should research all the available options for the software they need before making a selection. Try to purchase software that is easy to use, captures all of the data to be stored, is provided by a reputable company with a proven track record, and meets the department's budget requirements. Selecting software is another excellent example of how access to the Internet can be very useful. Most reputable software vendors have websites that provide extensive detail on their products and in many cases examples of how they work. This is useful when examining the various options available to the department.

Certainly, some of the primary reasons that fire departments turn toward the use of an electronic data management system are convenience, speed, efficiency, and accessibility of the information after it has been recorded. Another benefit of these systems is the ability to easily make copies of all of the information that the fire department generates and stores. Paper based systems rely on extensive photocopying and space consuming records storage. In many cases the effort and expense required to make a duplicate set of information is so extensive that fire departments fail to do so.

Because computer equipment is subject to failure for a variety of reasons, it is important that departments using electronic data management systems develop a policy and procedure for making electronic backup files on a regular basis. It is foolish and dangerous to maintain sole copies of important computer files on a hard drive or in a file server system. One equipment or human error could result in the permanent loss of all data stored on the system. Making backup copies of electronic information is relatively quick and easy.

The exact procedure for making backups will vary depending on the complexity of the system. Departments that operate personal computers or very small network systems will typically have to perform manual backup operations. In these cases someone will have to use software on the computer to burn copies of the data to some type of external recording medium. Examples of these include CDs, floppy disks, computer tapes, and external computer storage hardware. It is recommended that a set schedule be established for performing backups. The frequency will be dependent on how often critical data is entered into the system. Smaller departments may only need to backup weekly or monthly. Larger operations that use computers extensively may need to backup on a daily basis. Larger network systems typically have an automatic backup function that produces backup copies on a scheduled basis.

When making backup copies of data, it is recommended that at least two copies be made. This is in addition to any data that is kept on the computer hard drive or network system. One copy can be stored in a secure location within the fire station or office. The rules for storing this copy are generally the same as those described for written documentation. The second set of backup files should be kept off site, again following the same rules listed for written documents that are stored off site.

As computer technology continues to evolve, the fire service finds more and more uses for computer equipment in the field. Fire apparatus have been equipped with mobile data/computer terminals for many years. This equipment allows communications between the dispatcher and field units rather than using the radio for all communications. Command vehicles have also been equipped with personal computers that contain information on hazards in the community and can be used to obtain information on hazardous materials. As the reliability of small, hand-held computers continues to improve, the fire service is beginning to use them for functions such as fire inspections and preincident planning. Fire departments that are seeking to use this field technology should ensure that any fixed computer systems they have for data management are compatible with the field systems so that the transfer of information is simple and painless.

Conclusion

Historically, fire departments and the fire service as a whole have done a poor job of data and information management. In many cases this was a result of fire service leader's inability to see the advantages of having all types of information readily available. As the fire service continues to evolve as a profession, it is imperative that fire departments, regardless of their size, develop and maintain an effective system of managing written and electronic data and information. This information can be used to protect the fire department from liability, to provide valuable insight into department needs, and to help justify requests for additional resources from funding bodies. All fire departments should take the establishment of an information management system as a significant priority and make every effort to see that one is started as soon as possible.

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Information Management

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Identify what records you will maintain.

☐ 2. Establish a security/controlled access system for confidential, sensitive records.

☐ 3. For electronic data keeping: determine the department needs, then seek expert advice on setting up the system.

☐ 4. Develop an implementation plan.

☐ 5. Determine what confidentiality requirements exist and how they will be implemented.

Chapter 12

Management Liability and Employment Practices Liability

By Michael McCall, J.D.

Discrimination, sexual harassment, and wrongful termination are three of the more identifiable management and employment practices liability issues which have transitioned into emergency services in recent years. As these issues become more prevalent, prevention and management techniques must be understood and implemented.

Management Liability And Employment Practices Liability

Personnel or employment-related exposures include, but are not limited to, lawsuits based on allegations of workplace discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and improper termination. These Management Liability claims could involve employees or volunteers within your fire department.

The multitude of federal, state, and local statutes and court decisions cannot be comprehensively covered in this one chapter. Importantly, leaders of fire departments are not expected to act as in-house legal counsel.

This chapter is designed to educate Fire Chiefs, Administrators, Presidents, Commissioners, Directors, and Trustees about employment practices exposures. Risk management analysis and suggestions are provided for improving personnel relations and reducing exposure to claims for your fire department.

Why Are There So Many Personnel-Related Lawsuits?

Issues at the center of personnel law are not going away any time soon. Sexual comments, innuendoes, and advances are often part of people working together. Discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, national origin, disability, and other legally protected classes is, unfortunately, still prevalent in every facet of society. Emotions, interpersonal conflict, and misunderstanding are part of any workplace environment. Everyday, complex personnel-related laws are passed, amended, and interpreted.

Fire departments are also vulnerable to the employment practices litigation boom, particularly claims like harassment, discrimination, and wrongful discharge. Living in the information age and with attorney advertising at an all-time high, the number of personnel-related claims are not likely to drastically decline any time soon. The flood of civil litigation impacts all American businesses, regardless of their size, location, or mission.

NIMBY, also known as **N**ot **I**n **M**y **B**ack **Y**ard, is a sentiment shared by many fire departments. Personnel-related litigation contradicts the close knit, family work environment fostered by most fire departments. Unfortunately, the belief that, *"no employee or volunteer would ever sue our organization"*, can greatly increase exposure to liability for personnel claims.

The belief that, "no employee or volunteer would ever sue our organization", can greatly increase exposure to liability for personnel claims.

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How Can Your Fire Department Protect Itself?

Start by answering the following questions, *What has the fire department done in the past year to address Management Liability / Employment Practices issues? Can we produce evidence of actions the department took to prevent and properly investigate workplace wrongdoing?* This chapter provides tools to help fire departments mitigate personnel law risks.

Develop Written Personnel Policies

Poorly written personnel policy manuals can cause your fire department problems. The key to any well run organization is effective communication of expectations, rules, regulations, and procedures. Personnel related policies and procedures are no different, serving as the foundation for your Management Liability/Employment Practices compliance program.

Assess and Regularly Update

Thoroughly review personnel policies, procedures and guidelines on a reasonably periodic basis. Whenever possible, a qualified employment practices consultant, attorney, or human resources professional should assist in the assessment or audit of your department's personnel policies and guidelines to help ensure compliance with current laws, court decisions, and trends. Assessments or audits often uncover outdated policies that fail to fully protect members and the fire department. Incomplete or confusing policies can create the perception to members (and jurors) that the fire department does not place sufficient importance on preventing workplace wrongdoing and preparing the organization to address personnel concerns.

Determine rules and regulations that pertain to personnel functions, and put them in writing for all members to read and understand. At a minimum each fire department should maintain policies or guidelines that address the following personnel issues:

- Hiring procedures—background checks, requirements for membership, and consequences for providing false information on applications
- Nature of employment relationship — at-will employment if applicable
- Orientation
- Attendance requirements
- Equal employment opportunity
- Probationary period (if applicable)
- Rules of conduct
- Progressive discipline
- Drugs / Alcohol

- Anti-discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Reporting procedure for workplace wrongdoing
- Weapons in the workplace
- Workplace violence
- Anti-retaliation
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Disability and accommodation requests

Comprehensive Policies and Procedures

A detailed personnel policy and procedure manual should include:
- Table of Contents
- Key issues addressed as separate policies, for instance, a stand-alone sexual harassment prevention policy should be found in a personnel manual rather than addressing sexual harassment within the text of a code of conduct policy
- Easy to understand (from a juror's perspective) policies and procedures
- No conflicting or confusing policies or procedures
- Zero tolerance policy for workplace wrongdoing (i.e., sexual harassment, discrimination, drug and alcohol use)
- Definitions and examples for clarification of pertinent issues
- More than two reporting alternatives for policy violations
- Consistent reporting procedures for various types of policy violations
- Non-retaliation for those who report wrongdoing or participate in related investigations
- Non-confrontation statement that would allow an alleged victim of workplace wrongdoing to bypass the alleged wrongdoer and report to other available persons affiliated with the fire department
- Prohibitions for false allegations
- Application of the fire department rules (i.e., no tolerance of sexual harassment), to all business related functions – such as celebrations or other off-duty fire department sponsored activities
- Assurances that investigations of alleged workplace wrongdoing will be conducted as confidentially as possible while still allowing for a prompt and effective investigation
- Investigation guidelines provided for reports of wrongdoing
- Disciplinary consequences of rules violations

Heightening Member Awareness

Each time the fire department reviews and updates its personnel policies and procedures, it is important that all members are trained and allowed an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification. Once changes are made, it is imperative that

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policies and procedures are followed, as consistent application of policies helps ensure an equitable work environment. Distribute copies of personnel policies and procedures to each member, or otherwise make them easily available, such as on the fire department's internal website or in each substation. Utilize training sessions to communicate no tolerance for workplace wrongdoing, and designate who can further assist members with any questions and clarifications.

Personnel Practices

If a policy, procedure or practice is written*, it must be followed.* One of the most important questions that must be answered by a fire department is, a*re all written personnel policies, procedures and practices being followed exactly as written?* In the event of a personnel-related claim, plaintiff's counsel will customarily attack those written policies that were not followed with exact precision. As a leader of a fire department, you should continually ask, *is this policy **in practice** at the fire department?*

Equal Employment Opportunity and Discrimination Prevention

Fire department leaders should strive to maintain a work culture free from unlawful harassment and discrimination. Management Liability / Employment Practices claims often involve allegations of harassment or discrimination based on legally protected grounds, such as race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, veteran status, or disability. Fire Chiefs, Presidents, and other leaders must be able to demonstrate their fire department continues to take active steps to prevent and promptly correct workplace harassment and discrimination.

Generally, it is illegal to discriminate in any aspect of employment or membership, including:
- Recruitment
- Testing
- Hiring and firing
- Compensation, assignment, or classification of personnel
- Transfer, promotion, layoff, or recall
- Advertising for jobs or positions
- Use of fire department facilities or equipment
- Training opportunities
- Benefits programs
- Pay, retirement plans, or disability leave
- Other terms and conditions of employment

Sexual Harassment

Nothing will decrease productivity or rack up legal bills like a sexual harassment lawsuit against your fire department. This section explores some of the reasons why sexual harassment claims continue to harm the reputations, morale, and financial health of fire departments nationwide. Most importantly, tips are offered to help prevent sexual harassment incidents and lawsuits, and prepare your fire department to legally respond to employee / volunteer complaints.

Difficult Risk to Manage

Unfortunately, sexual advances, innuendoes, and comments have been, and will continue to be, part of human beings working together. It is arguable whether behavior that would constitute sexual harassment is more or less prevalent today as compared to the work environment 25 years ago.

Establishing a Harassment-Free Culture

Who does not like a dirty joke every now and then? Fire departments face life and death issues in their normal business operations, so sexual jokes, comments, and banter help ease tension. The two preceding sentences are not uncommon within fire departments.

As a leader, you must balance *the way our culture or work environment has always been*, with the business realities of being punished for allowing harassment to occur. It is difficult to administer workplace rules that have become more stringent, whereas virtually every other aspect of society tells members that sexually related conversation and behavior is acceptable. Fire departments are held to a high standard of integrity and jurors likely will not find the humor in sexually related comments or banter that may be an accepted part of the work environment.

Risk Management Tips

Update your policy – A qualified employment attorney and / or human resources professional should review and update the policy on an annual basis to ensure all employee / volunteer protections are in place. The following points should be addressed in a comprehensive Sexual Harassment Prevention policy.

Scope of the policy – No tolerance for harassing behavior should extend to all department-related activities, including off-site. The policy applies to all employees, volunteers, board members, visitors, and other persons not affiliated with the department, regardless of their title, position, or gender.

Definition and examples of sexual harassment – Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that can occur in a variety of different circumstances. Examples of unlawful work-related sexual harassment, include, but are not limited to:

- Conduct unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance, or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment
- Direct or implied threats that submission to sexual advances will be a condition of employment or continued service with the fire department
- Sexually related material such as pornography, objects, pictures, or Internet sites
- Unwelcome verbal or visual conduct of a sexual nature such as comments, innuendoes, jokes, e-mail, voicemail messages, gestures, leering, or stalking
- Unwelcome physical sexual contact, such as grabbing, groping, pinching, patting, massaging someone's neck or shoulders, pulling against another's body, rape, molestation, or any attempts to commit such wrongdoing

Investigation of allegations – The fire department takes allegations of sexual harassment seriously and will promptly and thoroughly respond to all complaints.

Offer multiple avenues of complaint – Courts make it clear that multiple avenues of internal complaint must be made available for members alleging workplace harassment. A clear reporting procedure should be easily identified as a bolded, separately marked section of the policy. The policy should also articulate that an alleged victim of harassment is *not required to confront* the person who is the source of the problem or closely associated with the person who is the source of the problem. Instead, the member may utilize any of the other various avenues of internal complaint. This helps eliminate real or perceived barriers to reporting. Should a member fear reporting via the traditional chain of command, consider offering the department's Board as an alternative avenue of complaint.

Non-retaliation and false allegations – Prohibit retaliation made against any member who lodges a complaint of harassment, or participates in any related investigation. Include language addressing discipline and consequences for false allegations.

Conflict of interest check for investigators – Ensure every effort will be made that those named in a complaint, or are too closely associated with those named in a complaint, will not be part of the investigative team.

Third-party investigator – Provide notice that the fire department can, at its discretion, utilize a neutral third-party investigator to address harassment allegations.

Discipline – The fire department will discipline, up to and including termination, any member reasonably believed to have committed unlawful harassment and violated fire department policy.

Refine Investigation Procedures – A member may ask, *why should I make a complaint of harassment if the organization is not prepared to investigate the incident?* Another member may suggest that any internal investigation would be biased. To address these types of concerns, train those designated to investigate allegations of sexual harassment. This communicates to all members that the department is prepared to address their complaints or concerns.

Periodic Training – Employees, volunteers, and Board members should attend mandatory sexual harassment prevention training on a periodic basis. Nothing communicates a no tolerance policy for sexual harassment more than effective training sessions, lead by credible and knowledgeable professionals. Consistent training helps demonstrate the fire department's sexual harassment policy does not simply sit on the shelf gathering dust, but is instead an active policy.

Know Your Resources – What professionals would your department call upon to address a sexual harassment allegation? Does the department have a member with experience and / or education in human resource management? Is there an established relationship with an attorney who has experience investigating and / or helping to resolve harassment complaints? An attorney with a labor and employment practice will likely be more effective than a generalist.

Fire departments are encouraged to recognize the harsh business realities associated with exposure to sexual harassment litigation, which is no joking matter. Take steps to implement clear harassment prevention policies and procedures to protect all members of your department.

Importance of Employment-Related Training

Most fire departments understand the importance of keeping operational skills current, offering practical training sessions regularly to members. However, training on personnel-related topics is often overlooked. All members, including volunteers, should receive periodic training on personnel subjects, frequent enough to help demonstrate the fire department's commitment to providing a safe and productive work environment.

Training Topics

In order to strengthen working relations and reduce exposure to personnel-related claims, consider the important training topics below for all members and supervisors.

- New hire orientation
- Nature of working relationship (i.e., employment at-will)
- Internal reporting procedures
- Rules of conduct
- Equal employment opportunity / anti-discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Retaliation prevention
- Violence / threats of violence
- Weapons in the workplace
- Family and medical leave
- Drug and alcohol use / abuse
- Electronic communication systems (i.e., Internet and email usage)

Supervisory training can decrease exposures to personnel claims by providing tools to help manage, develop, and improve members' performance. Uniform disciplinary decisions are more easily supported in court, whereas decisions that are inconsistent can appear discriminatory. The following training topics should be customized to assist supervisors in meeting their heightened legal responsibilities.

- Hiring / selection
- Performance evaluations / management
- Counseling / warnings
- Promotion processes
- Disciplinary procedures (reprimands, suspensions, demotions)
- Termination / dismissal
- Record keeping / file maintenance
- Reporting and properly responding to allegations, claims, or incidents of workplace risk and wrongdoing (i.e., sexual harassment, discrimination)

Document and retain accurate records for all supervisors and members who receive employment-related training. Records should reflect total hours spent per training session, the frequency of training, and who served as the trainer.

Qualify an Outside Trainer

In order to comprehensively cover important issues, many fire departments find educating and training members on personnel-related topics is best accomplished by an outside professional. The following checklist can aid your fire department in qualifying the right trainer for your needs.

- Request a resume / biography to learn of experience and education in employment law and / or human resources.

- Ideally, the trainer should have familiarity with the fire service and its operations.
- Contact a number of Bibliography – find out their level of satisfaction.
- Ask to sit in on the presenter's training session to observe first hand the presenter's communication style, effectiveness, and interaction with an audience.
- If not possible to observe another training session, ask the presenter to prepare a brief, mock presentation on relevant subject matter.
- Request samples of handout materials to ensure quality and professionalism.

Problems Associated with Members Who Fail to Report Workplace Wrongdoing

An employment practices liability trend involves a fire department first receiving notification of alleged harassment or discrimination *after* an employee or member's voluntary or involuntary termination. It is common for a member to allege workplace wrongdoing only after the working relationship is severed. While it may not seem fair, a fire department can be held civilly liable for workplace harassment or discrimination it was never given the opportunity to investigate or stop.

Why Do Members Fail to Report?

There are a variety of reasons a member may argue that he or she did not complain during the working relationship. Courts and juries *may* accept these reasons, which include alleged fear of retaliation, isolation, and intimidation from superiors and / or coworkers. Some members may believe their complaints will be ignored, or experience a loss of dignity, or loss of privacy. Additionally, members may argue they were confused about who within the department is designated to respond to an allegation, and importantly who is qualified to investigate the complaint.

Encouraging Members to Report

Promptly investigating and resolving incidents of harassment or discrimination is the first priority when an allegation surfaces at your fire department. However, your fire department is unable to respond when unaware of alleged wrongdoing. A key to fostering a true open door environment is maintaining a written policy with several clear reporting alternatives. Policies should include easily identifiable reporting procedures. Encourage internal reporting by continually educating members on how to report and their responsibility to do so.

Opportunities to Advertise Internal Reporting Procedures

There are several opportunities during the working relationship to encourage reporting and reinforce various avenues of internal complaint. Written policies and

practices must be active, in that the fire department must consistently advertise its policies to its members. Policies that sit on a shelf do not provide proper member awareness.

Orientation The orientation period serves as the first opportunity to establish a workplace culture that prohibits workplace wrongdoing. Many organizations use orientation to familiarize new personnel with policy and procedure manual information. After reviewing the Personnel Manual, a signed member acknowledgement form should be returned to the fire department. The members should acknowledge understanding of internal reporting procedures, and agreement to report internally any wrongdoing they observe or personally experience.

Periodic Training During the course of the working relationship, consistent training should focus on preventing workplace wrongdoing as well as retaliation against anyone who brings forth a complaint or provides information during an investigation. Personnel policies and procedures should be reaffirmed beyond the orientation and / or probationary period.

Evaluations/Performance Management Annual evaluations / performance management meetings are effective communication vehicles in many ways. Generally, supervisors use this opportunity to review member goals and focus on performance development. This also is a prime opportunity to ask members if they are aware of any workplace wrongdoing or if they have any issues they need to address. Including a written statement with the formal evaluation acknowledging reporting procedures, as well as the agreement to report, encourages communication and makes your department's open door policy more of a reality.

Exit Interviews Exit interviews provide a fire department another opportunity to learn of any workplace wrongdoing that may have occurred during a member's tenure. Simply asking questions may be enough to encourage a member to come forward with an allegation, rather than hold on to an allegation until a later date. The main objective is for the fire department to learn of alleged harassment or discrimination, thus allowing a prompt and thorough investigation. By conducting an exit interview the fire department will also strengthen its position that it took every reasonable measure to learn of and rectify workplace wrongdoing.

Accountability

Fire departments and their members share responsibilities in preventing and stopping workplace harassment, discrimination, and other wrongdoing. Fire departments are accountable for establishing reasonable measures to prevent and correct workplace harassment and discrimination. In turn, members are held accountable to avail themselves to the department's preventive and corrective

opportunities. In court, members may have a difficult time explaining their failure to make an internal complaint during the working relationship, thus not giving the department an opportunity to promptly investigate and resolve wrongdoing.

Internal Investigation Procedures

Investigate Your Investigation Procedures

How does your fire department investigate employee or volunteer allegations of workplace wrongdoing? Are uniform investigation procedures followed for every allegation of harassment, discrimination, retaliation, violence, theft, substance abuse, or unsafe work practices? Would an outside third-party consider the fire department's internal investigations unbiased? Do procedures protect both the accuser and accused?

A prominent plaintiff's attorney stated that exploiting supervisors' mistakes for the client's benefit is the fuel that drives his practice, "*I live to depose managers and will be there to ask you about the things you should have done in an investigation.*" Are you prepared to sit in the hot seat during a jury trial or deposition?

Investigating allegations of workplace wrongdoing such as discrimination, harassment, retaliation, theft, and threats of violence is not an everyday occurrence for fire departments. A lack of practical experience of investigating personnel matters may actually make your organization more vulnerable to liability for employment-related practices claims.

Fire Service professionals are experts in operations technicalities of their industry. Keeping up with the multitude of compliance and safety issues, can be a daunting task. Because of time and resource limitations, it is not uncommon for human resources compliance and training to be placed on the backburner. However, national reports show employment-related lawsuits damage the reputations and financial well-being of fire departments.

What Is the Liability Exposure?

A plaintiff's attorney will harshly scrutinize your fire department's investigation processes:
- *Was the discrimination allegation taken seriously and promptly investigated?*
- *Did the fire department conduct a thorough harassment investigation that was equitable to all parties involved?*
- *Were those members responsible for investigating ever trained on how to conduct impartial and comprehensive investigations?*
- *Did the fire department follow guidelines that were in place well before the investigation of the incident in question?*

Fire department leaders are not held to a standard of being experts in conducting investigations. Nevertheless, a fire department should establish investigation or fact finding guidelines for responding to personnel complaints.

National Trend – Unprepared to Investigate

Not unlike other employers, many fire departments are negligently unprepared to properly investigate internal allegations of work-related wrongs and / or personnel disputes. What steps can your organization take to refine its internal investigation policies and procedures?

> ***What steps can your fire department take to refine its internal investigation procedures?***

Consider the following risk management tips:

Tip #1 — Establish an Internal Investigation Team — In the world of risk management, two heads are better than one. A predetermined team of two to five members should be in place to promptly and effectively investigate allegations of personnel conflict or wrongdoing. The investigation team should reflect the diversity and make-up of the workforce.

To ensure the most impartial internal investigation possible, a conflict of interest check is needed to identify and remove any team members named in a complaint or too closely associated with those involved. Avoid situations where individual supervisors are responsible for conducting investigations. Instead, the goal is to institute fair and systematic investigation processes, facilitated by those who are educated on conducting investigations.

Tip #2 — Train the Investigation Team — It is recommended that an attorney or human resources expert periodically train the investigation team, in preparation for reasonably responding to the variety of potential member reports of workplace wrongdoing. Training on case scenarios is a productive trial run for investigations, designed to help avoid mistakes with a member's actual complaint. Proactive training familiarizes team members with established investigation guidelines, and also strengthens employee and volunteer confidence in the department's fair internal processes.

Which members of the department should serve on the investigation team? Consider the following characteristics.

- Trusted and respected members of the department
- Job responsibilities include managing personnel issues

- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Interviewing skills
- Detail oriented / well organized
- Document well
- Keep matters confidential
- Unbiased, reasonable decision makers
- Available for follow up

Tip #3 — Know What Constitutes an Effective Investigation — An investigation should promptly and effectively stop any workplace wrongdoing and prevent future occurrences. Sound investigations include many factors, including but not limited to:

- Fair to all involved
- Prompt action taken
- Review of relevant fire department policies and procedures
- Non-retaliation measures
- Protecting confidentiality to the greatest extent possible while allowing for a thorough investigation
- Outlining investigation steps for all interested parties
- Informing interested parties that false and / or malicious allegations or participation in the investigation will lead to discipline
- Communicating an estimated timeframe for completion of the investigation

The key is to assess whether your fire department's internal investigation practices will stand up to scrutiny. Federal and state regulatory agencies, attorneys, judges, and juries are not very forgiving.

Tip #4 — Incorporate Standardized Investigation Forms — Supervisors should not come up with their own methods of documentation and investigation. Simply taking copious notes on a blank pad of paper may not demonstrate a high level of preparedness for investigating personnel complaints. Instead, utilize standardized forms and questions for interviewing the person making the complaint (accuser), the accused, and any witnesses. Pre-established forms help develop consistency from one investigation to the next, yet allow for customization depending upon who is being interviewed.

Designate a gatekeeper for interview forms and other associated documentation once the investigation is complete, to help ensure confidentiality to the greatest extent possible. Remember that it is wise to assume all documentation surrounding the investigation may be discoverable, and ultimately produced to opposing legal counsel, the judge, and jury.

Tip #5 — Third-Party Investigations — Circumstances may arise where any internal investigation may be perceived as biased for the fire department's benefit. Examples of when an outside third-party investigation may be appropriate include:

- A high-ranking member is accused of wrongdoing
- Multiple complainants; a member argues he/she has nowhere to turn because the department is small
- Other internal conflicts of interest exist or are perceived

A human resources consultant, private investigator, or external legal counsel may serve as a third-party investigator. Select an investigator based on the level of education and experience in relation to the nature of the personnel complaint.

Tip #6 — Consider Involving Outside Legal Counsel — Avoid your legal counsel asking, *why didn't you tell me about this personnel complaint until now?* Many personnel problems don't require retaining outside legal counsel. However, depending upon the nature and severity of the allegation or incident, do not hesitate involving an experienced employment and labor attorney.

There are valid reasons for and against utilizing your regular legal counsel as the third-party investigator. One of the reasons behind utilizing retained legal counsel would be attempting to keep all or part of the documentation surrounding the investigation confidential for subsequent litigation. For this, protected documentation should be labeled "attorney work product" and / or "privileged attorney-client communication".

One possible disadvantage of using your fire department's regular attorney for conducting the investigation may be that the attorney may serve as a witness in subsequent litigation, and therefore be unable to represent the fire department in litigation. Consult with outside legal counsel to determine what investigation strategies will be incorporated should the department face a personnel-related complaint.

Technology Increases Exposure to Personnel Claims

Who could have imagined that technological advancements could have drastically heightened exposure to personnel-related litigation for fire departments? Availability of computers, Internet, email, television, and cell phones increases the number of costly lawsuits. Hostile work environment claims often include elements of technology. Fire departments frequently are forced to address members' inappropriate utilization of technology, resulting in discipline such as suspension, demotion, and termination. What steps can your organization take to prevent technology abuses and reduce exposure to personnel-related claims?

Internet and Email

A sexual harassment hostile environment claim could uncover members accessing the Internet or email to view and / or disseminate inappropriate jokes, pictures, or websites. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 78% of employers find that some employees abuse Internet privileges, such as downloading pornography. Moreover, a growing concern involves members bringing their personal laptops to work and accessing inappropriate materials.

Modern Day Television

Unlike most businesses, watching television while on shift at a fire department may be a common activity. Cable and regular broadcast television programming today is different from the *Andy Griffith* or *Leave it to Beaver* generation. Some members, due to moral and / or religious convictions, may be offended by commonplace programming that includes controversial issues such as sex, race, profanity, and sexual orientation. Fire department leaders are responsible for regulating the work environment such that television viewing does not cross the often subjective line of being considered unreasonably offensive, thus contributing to a hostile work environment.

Policy Development and Review

Fire departments are under a duty to implement written policies and procedures designed to provide a workplace free from harassment and discrimination. Develop or update your fire department's policy governing all electronic communications. Retained legal counsel, specializing in employment and labor law, should review and approve any policy language prior to implementation.

Harassment Prevention

Policies should clearly communicate that electronic communication systems are not to be used in any way that may be offensive to others, or harmful to morale. Prohibit viewing or sharing any images, messages, or other communications that could be construed as discriminating or harassing to others based on legally protected grounds such as race, color, gender, national origin, disability, religion, marital status, or veteran status. Computer software programs may also be purchased to help filter inappropriate subject matter.

> *A sexual harassment hostile environment claim could uncover members accessing the Internet or email to disseminate inappropriate jokes, pictures, or websites.*

Right to Monitor

Granting members access to electronic communications systems while on the job is a privilege and not a right. Availability of technology at work is designed to enhance business practices, rather than decrease productivity and increase legal liability. While members are entitled to a reasonable expectation of personal privacy at work, communicate that privacy interests are limited while conducting business, on fire department property, or using fire department owned equipment.

Policies should indicate all computer files, including emails sent or received, are considered and treated as business-related information. A policy should also reflect that the department reserves the right, with or without notice, to access, monitor, copy, and / or delete any computer files, including email sent or received, and all web site communications and / or transactions. Research shows 75% of businesses monitor Internet usage, 63% monitor email, and 40% monitor telephone calls.

> *78% of employees / members abuse Internet privileges, such as downloading pornography.*

Personal Use

Many fire departments allow incidental personal use of electronic communications systems. However, most find it difficult to prohibit all personal use. Studies reveal that 30% to 40% of Internet surfing during regular work hours is not work related. Knowledge of the department's right to monitor computers systems usage may help deter abusing the privilege of personal use. Some departments may prohibit personal use or deny access to Internet or email to limit liability and avoid decreased productivity.

Reporting Procedure

For reporting policy violations, make several avenues of internal complaint available to your members. Policies addressing harassment or discrimination, including those governing electronic communications, should articulate that an alleged victim of harassment or discrimination is *not required to confront* the person who violated policy or is closely associated with the person who is the source of the problem. Instead, the member may utilize any of the other various avenues of internal complaint.

Discipline

Progressive discipline applies to those who violate policy and engage in harassing, discriminatory or other inappropriate behavior. However, in some circumstances, a

first violation may be severe enough that termination may be the most appropriate finding. Disciplinary consequences should be included in an electronic communications policy and administered uniformly.

Training

Once instituted, fire departments should train their members on the electronic communications systems policy. Living in the information age, it is crucial to clearly define the parameters of utilizing technology while on the job. Retained legal counsel should assist in developing a form for members to sign acknowledging their understanding of the parameters of the electronic communications systems policy and the fire department's ability to monitor their usage.

Performance Development/Evaluations

Communication through performance evaluations helps strengthen personnel relations. To not complete performance evaluations communicates to your fire department members that their professional development is not important. Moreover, personnel-related litigation often involves analysis of written performance evaluations.

Costly lawsuits for wrongful termination, discipline, and failure to promote, plague fire departments. Many wrongful termination or discharge lawsuits hinge on whether the department can sufficiently defend its decision to terminate a member. Claims often involve a former member alleging the department's decision to terminate was based on unlawful reasons, such as discrimination. In turn, departments must be able to point to documentation regarding the former member's work performance that helps support the termination. Documentation of performance evaluations may help or hurt a fire department in the event of litigation.

Building an Effective Evaluation Process

- ***Buy-in from Members*** – Those utilizing the performance management system must believe it is a valuable process that benefits members and the fire department alike. Supervisors and non-supervisors should be given the opportunity to provide input regarding the evaluation process, so it will fit the fire department's needs and job descriptions.

  For implementing or revising performance evaluation procedures, consider establishing a Performance Management Committee which analyzes evaluation forms and processes from other fire departments. Customization allows personnel to believe more in the fairness and purpose of the performance management system. Consider utilizing a human resources consultant and / or

legal counsel for assisting in the development or revision of the department's evaluation process.

- **Quality and Timeliness** – Are evaluations performed on or around the date as set forth in written procedures? It is recommended more than one level of supervision review each evaluation.

- **Training –** Too often, supervisors receive little or no formal instruction concerning how to conduct proper and uniform evaluations.

- **Evaluation Meetings** – Fire department leaders often fail to dedicate time to evaluate performance, outline individual expectations, and set goals. It can be difficult for some supervisors to confront problems with members not wishing to damage relationships, as they would rather avoid conflict. It may seem easier to avoid discussing minor incidents, with the expectation they will resolve themselves. However, it is far more difficult to rectify a problem that escalates to a major issue. Allowing issues and concerns to progress can lead to frustrated members who perceive their needs and concerns are not valued. Moreover, ignoring poor performance also often leads to other members' resentment for picking up the slack.

> *It can be difficult for some supervisors to confront problems with their employees, as they would rather avoid conflict.*

Counseling and constructive criticism can be sensitive, especially when dealing with a difficult member. Similar to discipline or termination sessions, emotions can run high. With only two people in a room, conversation can sometimes turn into a matter of "he said, she said". Fire departments should consider including a third person in evaluation meetings, preferably another supervisor.

Self–Evaluations – Completing self-evaluations prior to meeting with their supervisors allows members to take ownership of the process. This two-way communication enables members to identify their accomplishments and areas for improvement. Some members more harshly scrutinize their own performance than their supervisors. Others may classify themselves as surpassing expectations, whereas the supervisor's perspective is different. Ultimately, avenues of communication are opened, and expectations clarified.

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – Many are unfamiliar with the PIP concept, which may be necessary when a member's performance and / or behavior is not satisfactory. A PIP is a joint effort between a supervisor and subordinate, to develop a plan of increased communication, guidance and accountability. Supervisors ask questions like, *"How can the fire department and I enable you to better meet the*

responsibilities of your position?" In turn, a plan is documented holding the member accountable for meeting time specific goals.

Evaluate Supervisors – Are supervisors evaluated, in part, on whether they complete evaluations in a timely and thorough manner? Performance management is a substantial responsibility and should be quantified in evaluating a supervisor's performance.

Consider Renaming the Process – Some members feel threatened by possible subjectivity of evaluations. Referring to the process as performance development rather than evaluations may help members focus on the true purpose of the process, which is personal and institutional growth.

Progressive Discipline/Terminations

Utilize Progressive Discipline Processes

Addressing member performance deficiencies or conflict can be a difficult aspect of anyone's job duties. Implementing a progressive discipline process and providing supervisors with training and necessary tools instills confidence to manage personnel relations.

Most progressive disciplinary processes include steps to assist a member by correcting specific deficiencies. For example, the first step may be a verbal counseling session, where the supervisor makes the member aware of the problem and seeks correction. A verbal warning follows the counseling session where the supervisor facilitates a formal discussion with the member and a written record is placed in the member's personnel file. As a next step, written reprimands generally outline specific improvement steps and a required timeline, or a Performance Improvement Plan.

Demotion or suspension is a common phase of discipline before termination. One may be suspended with or without pay, but the fire department should be consistent with similar past infractions. After the progressive discipline process is followed, members who fail to meet their performance improvement goals are generally *terminated*. It is recommended that written policies include examples of conduct that may warrant discipline. Policy language should also allow the organization flexibility to suspend or even terminate on a first offense, if the serious nature of the violation so warrants.

Terminations are Rare

Wrongful termination lawsuits are at the top of the list for the most frequent and severe personnel claims facing the fire service. You ask, *"How could that be? Our department rarely terminates anyone!"* Interestingly enough, the fact that terminations are so infrequent is a major factor behind fire departments' vulnerability to litigation.

At-will employment is a reality for most private industry employees across the country, meaning they can be terminated at any time except for an unlawful reason. This is not the case for many in the fire service. Fire department employees benefit from many due process protections, often enumerated in union and employment contracts. As a Fire Chief once said, *"An employee must try really hard to get terminated from our department!"*

We Are Family

Emergency services organizations are unique. Unlike typical private industry employees, those in the fire service consider their fellow workers as family members. An obvious bond exists between those in the fire service due to the mission and nature of the profession.

Emotions Fuel Wrongful Termination Claims

When involuntarily dismissed, members typically are angry and refuse to accept their performance was sub-par or their conduct warranted dismissal. Many wrongful termination claims are rooted in the former member's belief that there must be some unlawful reason for the separation, as opposed to the reason offered by the fire department.

Facts generally will overcome emotional arguments. A fire department must take care to diligently document the legitimate business interests behind terminations. Written performance evaluations, counseling sessions, reprimands, suspensions, and performance improvement plans can all point to lawful reasons for the dismissal.

Improve Disciplinary and Termination Practices

Attorneys defending fire departments in wrongful termination lawsuits often say, *"During litigation we teach the fire department what it should have done to properly manage its disciplinary, grievance, or termination procedures."* These processes are typically cumbersome to administer and a fire department is susceptible to not following procedures exactly as written in a Personnel Manual or collective

bargaining agreement. By not following stated procedures, a member may argue breach of contract and wrongful termination. Ensure Personnel Policy Manuals do not create explicit or implicit contractual obligations.

Determining Discipline and Termination Checklists

The following checklists are designed to assist your fire department in determining whether disciplinary action is appropriate and conducting proper terminations. Not every risk management procedure in these checklists will apply to each disciplinary decision, but the fire department may consider each point.

Determining Discipline / Dismissal

❑ Consult with the fire department's legal counsel. (The attorney should be experienced in labor and employment law).

❑ Has the fire department followed what is required by personnel policies and / or collective bargaining agreement?

❑ Did the fire department follow its relevant progressive discipline policies?

❑ When applicable, follow the terms and conditions of an employee's individual employment contract.

❑ Has the fire department conducted an impartial review of the facts and circumstances surrounding the potential discipline or termination?

❑ Has the fire department considered the member's point of view?

❑ Has the disciplinary decision been reviewed by appropriate persons as designated in the Personnel Manual and / or collective bargaining agreement?

❑ What harmful impact did the member's conduct or wrongdoing have on other personnel, the fire department, or community members? Consider future possible impact as well.

❑ If little or no harm was caused, what was or could be the potential harm to co-workers, the fire department, or community members?

❑ Did the member have sufficient time and opportunity to correct behavior or conduct that lead to the disciplinary action?

❑ Was the member's conduct malicious, intentional, or negligent?

❑ Is the member likely to commit future wrongdoing or misconduct?

❑ What are the legitimate business reasons for the discipline or termination?

❑ What does the member's personnel record / file reflect concerning the circumstances surrounding the disciplinary or termination decision?

❑ What prior notice or disciplinary documentation exists with respect to deficiencies regarding performance, misconduct, and an opportunity to correct such actions?

❑ In the event of litigation, what witnesses and documentation would be available to justify the disciplinary or termination decision?

❑ How were other members treated or disciplined for similar acts in the past?

❑ Did the member cooperate with investigation efforts?

❑ If the member committed workplace wrongdoing or otherwise violated fire department rules, did the member show remorse?

❑ What is the impact of the member's continued presence on fellow workers and community members?

❑ What action best prevents further wrongdoing or misconduct while protecting co-workers, outsiders, and providing a safe and productive work environment?

❑ Is an alternative to termination appropriate in order to allow for additional time to investigate and deliberate before termination, or otherwise allow the member's performance to turn around? Examples include suspension, probation, leave of absence, reassignment, demotion, or instituting a performance improvement plan.

❑ Has the fire department hired or does it plan to hire another person to take over the terminated member's job responsibilities? Be prepared to explain how, when, and why those arrangements were made. What are the qualifications of the replacement member? Are there any facts present that could suggest unlawful discrimination or nepotism?

❑ Would a jury conclude that the fire department's treatment of the dismissed member was unquestionably fair and reasonable?

Termination Administration

❑ Did the fire department consult with legal counsel experienced in employment and labor laws before the termination meeting?

❑ Did the fire department follow its written policies and procedures regarding discipline and termination (i.e., progressive discipline and collective bargaining agreement)?

❑ All termination letters, severance agreements, and other correspondence should be reviewed internally by those responsible for personnel administration and legal counsel.

❑ Have those conducting the termination session received training on proper procedures?

❑ Has a written outline been prepared to make sure all necessary points are covered in a termination session?

❑ Has the dismissal interview been scheduled at a time that will eliminate or minimize the member's personal contact with other members before he or she leaves the premises?

❑ Termination meeting documented (i.e., exit interview form).

❑ Be careful what is said and written during the termination session. Remember that everything written could be seen by others outside of the fire department (i.e., attorneys, judges, juries).

❑ Listen to what the member has to say and write down everything for the record.

❏ Let the member read and sign the exit interview form. If the member refuses to sign, note the refusal on the form.

❏ Send an exit interview form to the former member if he / she refuses to meet in person to conduct an exit interview.

❏ Place the exit interview form in the member's personnel file.

❏ Is it necessary to have a witness present for the termination meeting? It is recommended to have a witness present to help corroborate what was said to reduce exposure to defamation claims and also protect against potential violence.

❏ Prepare documentation and other materials for presentation during the meeting and be prepared to explain. Examples include severance agreements and releases, confidentiality agreements, final paycheck, and particulars of compensation and benefits.

❏ Has the fire department considered whether outplacement counseling is appropriate?

> ***Wrongful termination allegations present a tremendous exposure to fire departments.***

Don't Be Caught Off Guard

It is strongly recommended that a fire department take appropriate personnel and Board members through extensive training on its existing disciplinary and termination guidelines. Practice means preparedness. The goal is to ensure a fair process is in place that benefits all personnel and helps eliminate procedural mistakes. Fire departments are not immune to wrongful termination claims and can take immediate steps to reduce their exposure to liability.

Conclusion – Are You at Risk?

Can your fire department objectively prove that it took every reasonable measure in the last 12 months to prevent workplace wrongdoing and prepare the organization to promptly respond to any allegations? Is there a close working relationship with legal counsel specializing in labor and employment matters? Your department can control its level of vulnerability for personnel-related lawsuits by implementing sound risk management processes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Management Liability And Employment Practices Liability

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. If you have written personnel policies, periodically review them. If not, develop written personnel policies.

☐ 2. Review Equal Employment Opportunities and Discrimination Prevention – Practices and Policies.

☐ 3. Develop and deliver employment-related training to your employment practice liability issues.

☐ 4. Establish or update your internal investigations procedures.

☐ 5. If you have a progressive discipline policy review and update it. If not, establish a progressive discipline policy.

Chapter 13

Understanding the Legislative Process

By William M. Webb, Executive Director
Congressional Fire Services Institute

Politics play a major role in any ESO. Understanding how the political leadership thinks, what their priorities are, and how you are perceived all play a role in your success, whether the political issue is municipal/local, regional, or national. Remember, politics is not being partisan, it is about making the personal, social, and business interface an effective one.

Understanding The Legislative Process

So you want to understand how the legislative process works at the state and federal levels because you have an issue to bring before your state legislature or U.S. Congress. Depending on the issue and the level of government involved, there are differences in the processes; however, from a lobbyist perspective, many of the same techniques and skills required at the federal level can also be applied at the state level.

Because most states have bicameral legislatures, the differences between the legislative processes at the state and federal are not drastically different. If there's one thing you will see, it is that the legislative process is more an art than a science. So much depends on timing and instincts – on knowing when to act and when to keep your powder dry.

Lobbying is referred to here in the generic sense. Whenever an individual meets with a member of Congress or staff to discuss legislative issues, he is there as a lobbyist—he is there to influence a legislator toward a desired action.

The term lobbying often has a negative connotation. It can conjure negative thoughts about a legislative process run amok, strongly influenced by highly financed special interests. Yes, registered lobbyists do have certain advantages not afforded to nonprofit organizations or trade associations. They can be better financed and provide certain inducements to sway opinions. Many have Political Action Committees (PACs) that contribute funds to legislators loyal to their causes. Yet the most successful lobbyist is one who can effectively articulate a position — a position that can convey a sense of urgency or demonstrate the greatest benefit to the public's interest and well being.

Lobbying is about educating and influencing opinions. It is about providing your perspective—the right perspective—on an issue to a decision-maker. For the fire and emergency services, this means conveying the importance of government programs benefiting our one million firefighters and rescue personnel.

The fire service has made tremendous strides in recent years on Capitol Hill winning support for new programs and expansion of existing programs. Yet we cannot rest on our laurels and expect continued support because of who we are. We must remain active presenting our case to lawmakers. We must continue to work together as a unified fire service, speaking in one voice to demonstrate our strength and solidarity. Otherwise, we will send conflicting signals to our elected leaders, and when that happens, our messages become diluted, undermining our chances for future successes.

So where do aspiring lobbyists begin?   You start with understanding the legislative process. The process itself is very complex, some would equate it with driving the LA freeways. There are many routes to take to getting bills passed, but there are also many exits that can lead you in the wrong direction. You need to understand the process in order to understand the correct route to take.

Part of the process involves timing. You need to understand when to make your move – when to make the phone call or write the letter. You need to know when to

request a meeting with your legislator. If your timing is off, you increase your chance for failure. Moreover, you may never get a second chance. And when that opportunity presents itself, you must know what to say. Know your issue from every perspective possible. This means delving into the mind of your opponents and becoming proficient on their side of the argument. Know how to respond to their concerns and opposing arguments. This may never come up in the course of a discussion with a member of Congress, but do not go into a meeting unprepared.

Some individuals who represent the fire service and other constituencies on Capitol Hill for many years thrive on their work, whereas others discover it's not for them. It takes a measure of resilience and thick skin to persevere. When you get knocked to the canvas, you have to learn how to stand up and continue the fight.

Where to Start

Where to start depends on the status of a piece of legislation. If you have an idea for legislation that you want a member to introduce, consider putting together a working group to develop a white paper that would form the basis of the legislation. The working group should be comprised of your peers from the fire service and other individuals representing organizations with a vested interest in fire and life safety.

The organizations do not have to have the word fire in the title. I have often worked with organizations outside of the fire service on a number of initiatives that advance public safety—organizations such as the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association. Together, we have formed partnership to promote a number of EMS-related legislative measures. Presently, CFSI is partnering with the National Fire Sprinkler Association, the American Fire Sprinkler Association and the major fire organizations to advance legislation that would provide a tax incentive for installing automatic sprinklers. Do you recall the adage, "strength in numbers"? This is very important when you go before Congress lobbying for an issue.

Back to the concept of a white paper. It should cite why the legislation is necessary. Does the federal government have a responsibility in this particular area? And what has been done at the state level to address this issue? When the national fire organizations were lobbying for the legislation to create the FIRE Grant program, Congress repeatedly asked this question during meetings and hearings. Before considering the notion of a federal grant program, Congress wanted to know if all options at the state level had been considered. Fortunately, we were prepared and had crafted a response, explaining the critical role of the fire service serves in protecting the federal infrastructure.

The white paper should speak in general terms, addressing the fundamental elements of a legislative proposal. Be realistic with your proposal. Do not ask for the sublime unless you are absolutely convinced that you can prevail. Cite statistics to lend credence to your paper. It can be both anecdotal and empirical. The National Fire Protection Association provides the best available data on fire loss in this country. Also

include comparative data that would show the benefits to the fire service—and nation as a whole—if the legislation you are proposing were approved.

Do not release the white paper until every member of your working group approves it and agrees to sign it. Depending on the issue and whether it addresses a state or federal matter, share it with either the state or national fire associations. Make sure that the paper is consistent with the positions of the state or national fire organizations, depending on the level of jurisdiction for the proposal. Unity is the key. A unified message is imperative to advancing our agenda in both the state houses and in Congress. Remember what Lincoln said about how a house divided cannot stand.

Once the paper meets everyone's approval, you are now prepared to schedule meetings with your elected leaders to discuss your proposal.

Looking for a Champion

When seeking a sponsor for a measure, the first inclination is to ask your own member. However, there are some key factors to take into consideration before you make that decision. First, does your member have a history of supporting the fire service? What is his/her voting record on such key issues as funding for the FIRE Act or the Reauthorization of the United States Fire Administration to name a few? Ideally, you want a member passionate about your issue—a zealot wholeheartedly devoted to your mission.

Secondly, does your member have a seat on the committee that would most likely have jurisdiction over your measure? Certain committees are less inclined to consider a bill unless it was sponsored by one of its own members. Quite often when a committee decides to take action, the original sponsor will abdicate control and allow a committee member to become the chief sponsor.

Once you decide on a sponsor, arrange a meeting in his/her office. Do not be discouraged if your meeting is with a congressional aide. As the eyes and ears for a member, a staffer is the key adviser who helps members form decisions on legislative issues. Once you gain their support, you have most likely gained the support of the member.

Do you remember the saying about first impressions? Prior to your meeting, make certain that you are well prepared so that you make a favorable impression. If you are accompanied by a group of peers, rehearse your roles in advance and determine who will speak first. Do not stray from your issue, nor should the group send conflicting messages. Before you enter a meeting, make sure you resolve any differences among the group. If you do not, you will jeopardize your goals for your meeting.

When presenting the white paper, you should provide extra copies for the staff. Review the key points of the white paper. In the back of your mind, be prepared for questions about how you derived certain figures, or the statistical data. You might also be asked why the federal government should assume additional financial responsibilities to aid local fire departments, or whether your initiative will release states of their fiduciary responsibilities. In reply, address the role of the fire service in

protecting the federal infrastructures and our nation's commerce. Be able to say that local and state governments have exhausted their funds for local first responders and your proposal will address this shortfall.

Do not expect answers at the end of your meeting, but stay in contact with the member or his/her staff. If your elected leader agrees to champion your cause, you have cleared the first hurdle. If he/she declines to support your initiative, do not be discouraged. Instead, working with your coalition, target another member(s) and start the process all over again.

From Conception to Legislation

Congratulations. You have found a member who has agreed to sponsor your measure. In hiking terms, you have made it to the base camp. Awaiting you is the climb to the summit. During the 107th session of Congress, 4,269 measures were introduced in both the House and Senate, and only 241 were signed into law. I bring this up for two reasons. First, it is important to understand just how challenging it is to have a piece of legislation approved. We all know about the FIRE Act, but we tend to forget is that it took three years to gain Congressional approval. Secondly, one member of Congress alone cannot get a bill approved. It takes many members, which means that you will have to work tirelessly with your member to gain the support of other members.

This is why coalitions play such a critical role in passing legislation. An effective coalition is one capable of reaching out to as many legislators as possible. But rather than casting your nets wide in hopes of bringing in a huge catch, you need to give some thought to targeting certain members first. Your first priority should be members who serve on the committees of jurisdiction.

When bills are introduced, they are assigned to committees of jurisdiction. Every federal agency and every federal program is under at least one committee of jurisdiction in both the House and the Senate. For example, a bill introduced in the U.S. Congress involving the U.S. Fire Administration would be assigned to the House Science Committee and the Senate Commerce Committee. All tax measures are referred to the House Ways and Means Committee or Senate Finance Committee, and all spending measures to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

For committee listings, refer to an online service called THOMAS. A free service offered by the Library of Congress, THOMAS provides a gold mine of information on the U.S. Congress including the status of every bill pending before Congress, a listing of all members in both the House and Senate, and all committee assignments. It also contains a comprehensive listing of all legislation introduced since 1973. The address is http://thomas.loc.gov/.

When targeting members of a committee, look for any type of associations between coalition members and the members of Congress. For example, a coalition member might reside in a particular member of Congress's district. Or a coalition member might

have an existing relationship with a legislator based on another issue. These members should be first on your call list.

Drafting Legislation

Let's say you have met with a number of members and you found one who has agreed to advance your white paper into a legislative proposal. Within Congress, there are professional staff assigned the task of writing legislation. They are called Legislative Council. Using ideas submitted to them by members of Congress (quite often white papers) they develop proposals into draft legislation in accordance with existing U.S. codes. Once they complete their work, the draft measure is submitted to the member for his/her review.

At this stage, the member should share with you the draft for your feedback. Quite often, the intent of your proposal can get lost in the translation from a white paper to a piece of federal legislation. Before a bill is introduced, you need to make certain that the desired intent of your white paper is clearly stated in the draft bill. Otherwise, it is nearly impossible to make any changes to the legislation.

Time for the Introduction

By now, you have your chief congressional sponsor(s) and the members of your coalition have reviewed your piece of legislation. It is now time to introduce the measure. From the onset, it is important to develop momentum in order to demonstrate your support to the sponsor and generate interest within Congress and the public safety community. The best way is to conduct a press conference. Participants should include the sponsoring member of Congress and the key coalition leaders. When conducting our own events, we always make every attempt to involve both Democratic and Republicans to illustrate bipartisan support for our measures.

As the organizer of the press conference, you should be the one to select the speakers from the public safety community; however, the sponsoring member's office should determine the date and time. All speakers should limit their remarks. The media is looking for sound bites, not dissertations on your measure. For added effect, arrange to have uniformed firefighters standing behind the podium as they provide a good backdrop. And always remember to bring a legislative summary of the bill highlighting the key components and contact information. You should never be without proper contact information.

Engaging in the Process

The bill has been introduced and now it is time to engage in the legislative process. Very few bills can move through the legislative process on merit alone, particularly ones that impact the government's budget. They require persistence on the part of the sponsoring member and coalition forces to recruit other members to co-sponsor the bill.

Referring to earlier comments about targeting members, direct your energies on members who serve on the committee(s) who have jurisdiction over the measure. Attempt to meet with as many of them as possible and ask them to co-sponsor the measure. In meetings, share with them the white papers and include a list of coalition supporters. In advance, contact individuals or organizations within the members' Congressional districts and ask them to write letters of support for your initiative. More often than not, a member is more inclined to listen to you if it can be demonstrated that your legislation will benefit his constituents.

How many co-sponsors does it take for a bill to clear the House or Senate? It is hard to say. In rare instances, only one. More often, a much larger number. When approved by the House in 2000, the FIRE Act had over 230 co-sponsors. More recently, the Hometown Heroes legislation—which expanded the Public Safety Officers Survivors Benefit eligibility to firefighters who died as a result of heart attacks or strokes—had 281 members. So you can see that the required number varies. Although there is no mathematical equation to derive the correct figure, it often takes into account both the number of co-sponsors and status of each member including his/her committee assignments and quite often the party affiliations.

Yes, party affiliation plays a significant part in determining the fate of a measure. Presently, Republicans control both the House and Senate. A bill supported predominantly by Democratic members stands little chance of passage without Republican support. This is not a tactic exclusively practiced by a Republican-controlled Congress. The Democrats exercised the same control over the legislative process when they last controlled both the Senate and House. You need support from the party in power in order for your legislation to advance.

After a bill is introduced, the next hurdle in the normal legislative process is a committee hearing. Scheduled by the committee chairperson, hearings provide a forum for committee members to openly discuss the merits of a legislative proposal with panels of experts. The majority of legislation never makes it to this stage. What often determines whether a chairperson will schedule a hearing is the number of members who have co-sponsored a measure and how many of them serve on the committee of jurisdiction. Reiterating an earlier comment, this is why you need to aggressively recruit co-sponsors. And as you convince members to co-sponsor a measure, impress upon them the need to have the authorizing committee conduct a hearing.

Hearings

Part of our democratic process, a congressional hearing is an open forum that allows members of Congress to hear diverging positions from experts on issues pending in Congress. These experts can come from the private sector as well as local and state government. In addition, Administration officials are called upon regularly to testify before Congress on national and global issues.

There are 18 standing committees in the Senate and 20 standing committees in the House. Within each committee there are subcommittees assigned specific areas of

jurisdiction. For instance, the House Science Committee has four subcommittees: Energy; Environment, Technology and Standards; Research; and Space and Aeronautics. Hearings can be held by both the full committee and subcommittees. During the hearings, experts will present oral testimony and provide written copies in advance. Time is allowed for questions and answers.

The chairperson of the committee will exercise control over the panel selection. Working with the ranking member from the minority party, the Chairman will determine the number of speakers and control the gavel during the hearing. However, as part of this process, you and members of your coalition can provide written testimony which will be submitted into the record. If your position is not conveyed in the hearing, then I would advise you to submit testimony. It can mirror the content of the original white paper and provide additional information that will add credence to your arguments.

Post Hearing

Just because Congress conducted a hearing on your measure does not mean that the switch has been flicked to autopilot and your measure is now on the fast track. Instead, you enter the stage where you must stay focused and be persistent. You may need to apply gentle pressure on the committee to release the bill to allow either the full House or Senate (depending on the committee taking the action) to vote on the measure.

Quite often, the Committee chair will act voluntarily, particularly when measure is noncontroversial. Other times, pressure needs to be applied—either from other members or outside sources. In this instance, you should write letters and make phone calls urging the committee to release the bill so that the full House or Senate can vote on the measure.

For a listing of committee phone numbers, contact the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. They can transfer your call to the right committee. When you reach the committee office, ask to speak to the staff assigned to your issue. Ask him/her the status of your measure and whether the committee will release it for full consideration by the House or Senate. If you do not receive a definitive answer in the affirmative, you need to energize your coalition to prepare to flood the phone lines. If you receive some indication that the Committee will take imminent action, give them a little time. If the signals you receive indicate no future action, turn your forces loose. Flood the phone lines and write the letters to encourage the committee to release the bill. Sometimes a little prodding is all it takes to force Congress into action. If you do not prevail, your legislation will most likely have met its fate.

Judgment Day

Using a track and field analogy, the legislative process is like a hurdle race; not the 110 meter race but the 330 meter race. It is a protracted process where a piece of legislation must clear many hurdles, the last of which is the final vote. There is little

advice to give at this stage because it is quite obvious what needs to be done: call your members and urge them to vote in favor of your measure.

If you have worked closely with a congressional staff person—whether it be committee staff or a member's personal staff—he/she will alert you when Congress has scheduled a vote on your measure. When that time comes, make sure you have every member of your coalition on standby to make calls. Not one call per office, but as many as possible. Direct your calls to the member's Washington, DC office instead of the district office. Attempt to speak to the legislative assistant assigned to your issue. Remember, it is not the quality of a call as much as the quantity. Make sure you provide your name and the organization you represent and ask how your member is expected to vote.

At the end of the day, you will hopefully be able to celebrate a partial victory, because this process needs to take place in both the House and Senate. Both chambers have to approve the measure before it can be sent to the President for his signature. When similar measures are approved with slight variations between the two, a group of Senators and House members must convene a conference to work out differences. The final product is called a conference report, which must be approved without additional amendments by both the House and Senate. It is important to remain engaged in this process because changes might be made to your legislation to satisfaction of both House and Senate members. It is not until the conference report is approved and signed into law that you can celebrate complete victory!

Conclusion

You can walk into any bookstore and find many voluminous books on successful lobbying strategies. What I have attempted to provide in this chapter is a very abridged process for advancing an idea into a piece of legislation and hopefully transforming it into law.

Many steps are involved in the legislative process, much of which receives little public attention. To many, the process involves two steps: introducing a measure and voting on it. We are oblivious to the actions that occur in between. Yet it is during these stages where the fate of a measure is most often determined.

Each session, hundreds of measures never get beyond introduction. They are referred to a committee of jurisdiction where they fall into a black hole and are never mentioned again. Quite often the death of proposed legislation is because of atrophy on the part of the sponsor and the individuals and organizations that lead the charge for the bill's introduction. They expended their energy on getting the measure introduced and lacked the commitment and persistence to work the measure through the system.

Back when the idea of a major fire grant program was first proposed, there were many naysayers who said the idea didn't have a chance. But there were some who disagreed. They didn't give up when Congress failed to act on the FIRE Act during the 106th Congress. They returned the next session and reintroduced another bill. Gradually, more members co-sponsored the measure after they were inundated with

letters and phone calls from their local fire departments. The congressional committees that had jurisdiction over the measure became aware of the insurgency of interest in the legislation and recognized the need to take action.

Eventually, the legislation came before the full House and Senate and the support was overwhelming in favor the program. Now, it is one of the most popular grant programs in the country. But we must remember the history of this program and apply what we learned to addressing future initiatives. Just because you have a Maltese cross on your uniform does not guarantee support from government, whether it be local, state or federal government. You need a strategy which takes into account many of the issues just addressed. It begins with a white paper articulating your initiative, a coalition comprised of allied individuals and organizations and a knowledge of the legislative process. And it takes a willingness to persevere . . . to remain focused and engaged and to never relent.

As one Japanese proverb reads, "Fall seven times, stand up eight." That's what the legislative process is all about.

This process is fundamental, regardless of whether it is a local, state, or federal legislative issue.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Webb has served as Executive Director of the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) since 1995. Established in 1989, CFSI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute designed to enhance congressional awareness about the concerns and needs of the fire and emergency services. In his capacity as Executive Director, Mr. Webb works closely with members of Congress and fire service leaders on developing federal legislation and creating new federal programs designed to improve the readiness of our nation's fire and emergency services. His efforts have focused on funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program and the role of FEMA/USFA within the new Department of Homeland Security to ensure a strong fire service presence within the new department. Previously, he served in the first Bush Administration as a special assistant to cabinet secretaries at the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, preparing briefings and accompanying the secretaries as a personal travel aide. He and his wife, Katie, reside in Vienna, Virginia with their three children.

Understanding the Legislative Process

Things for you to do ….

☐ 1. Identify the key issues you want to have legislation developed on at the local, state, or federal level.

☐ 2. Establish a process where the concepts could be developed as a white paper.

☐ 3. Who would advance the white paper and to whom.

☐ 4. What people/groups make up the collation to advance the issue/white paper.

☐ 5. What glitches exist in getting your legislation accepted.

Chapter 14

Quality Management

By Robert Fleming, Ph.D., CFO

Today's successful ESOs recognize the importance of implementing and assuring service quality to their customer. Quality efforts are driven by certification and accreditation processes as well as the intent by the ESO to deliver professional, effective, and efficient services safely, while assuring community support and confidence.

Quality Management

The contemporary fire department faces many unprecedented challenges. The previous chapters of this text have identified many of these challenges and appropriate strategies to address them in a proactive manner that ensures effectiveness, efficiency, safety, and professionalism in the delivery of fire and emergency medical services. The focus of this chapter is on assuring quality of service delivery. While the various strategies discussed in previous chapters are crucial in building the foundation for organizational quality, the management of quality must be recognized as a primary responsibility of the administrative and operational officers of the contemporary fire department.

Stakeholders and Their Expectations

The contemporary fire department can expect to be called upon to respond to emergency and nonemergency situations involving those who live in, work in, or travel through its response territory. In each of these instances, where the fire department is called to assist, individuals will have expectations regarding the quality of the services that they will receive. This is to be expected in that the contemporary world in which they live, work and travel is one in which they have come to expect quality. On a daily basis these individuals work for and interact with a wide range of organizations where the focus on the customer and quality transcends all of the processes of the organization.

Primary Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that have an interest in the success of an organization. Those who live in, work in, or travel through our jurisdictions are clearly stakeholders of the fire and emergency medical services that we provide. We refer to these stakeholder groups as primary stakeholders in that they are the direct recipients of our services.

Secondary Stakeholders

Although they are not the direct recipients of fire and emergency medical services, secondary stakeholders are individuals, groups, and organizations that have a vested interest in the effective, efficient, professional, and safe delivery of these services. Members of the law enforcement community on the scene of a multi-vehicle accident with injuries, fire, or a hazardous materials release are secondary stakeholders of the fire department. Elected officials and governmental entities would also be considered secondary stakeholders of the fire department.

Stakeholder Expectations

Stakeholders have expectations with respect to the services provided by fire departments, just as they have expectations for all of the other organizations they deal with. Developing an understanding of what your stakeholders expect and formulating the necessary strategies to meet and exceed these expectations is an integral responsibility of the administrative and operational officers of your fire department. If stakeholders perceive that your organization has failed to meet their expectations, the consequences in terms of loss of support, reputation, and credibility can be devastating. The losses can represent a major threat to the success and survival of your fire department.

In contrast, the situation in which a fire department not only meets, but exceeds the expectations of its stakeholders affords that organization the opportunity to gain enduring support from the public, business community, and appointed and elected governmental officials. While the concept of meeting and exceeding stakeholder expectations sounds like a task that would be very difficult to accomplish, it can be fairly easy if each and every member of the fire department accepts personal responsibility for ensuring the quality of services delivered. An example of this would be when the fire department responds to a "one room and contents" fire. After a quick and successful extinguishment of the fire you are packing the hose and returning the self-contained breathing apparatus and other equipment to service. While the members are readying the apparatus and equipment for response to the next call, an officer is talking to the homeowner to secure necessary information for completion of the incident report. This is where a prime opportunity arises to meet and exceed stakeholder expectations. In this case, the homeowner, a primary stakeholder, called the fire department. The expectations were obvious: rescue occupants of the home and extinguish the fire in a timely manner. Your fire department met these expectations, but you now have the opportunity to exceed expectations by taking just a few minutes to talk to the homeowner.

To simply advise the owner regarding the extent and nature of the fire damage and to downplay the circumstances through the use of words like minor fire or one room and contents fire denies you the opportunity to exceed stakeholder expectations. It turns out that a one room and contents fire is a rather significant event if it is at your residence and you have no clue what to do next to return your life to a normal state. Taking a few minutes to share with the homeowner what he or she needs to do next affords you the opportunity to exceed stakeholder expectations. Your fire department could prepare a checklist or brochure for use in this situation. The United States Fire Administration (USFA) has a free publication, *After the Fire,* which will be useful as you prepare to

enhance the services you provide to your stakeholders. This easy to implement strategy will greatly enhance your reputation and support as this stakeholder becomes an ambassador for your fire department to other primary and secondary stakeholders.

Defining Quality

Before a fire department can proactively develop and implement strategies to enhance quality, it is important to develop a working definition of quality. Review of the various ways in which quality can be defined contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the full meaning of quality and typical stakeholder expectations regarding quality.

Product Definition

The *product definition* of quality identifies specific features of a product or service that represent higher quality. An example of this might be a fire department that offers emergency medical services.

Relative Quality Definition

This approach to defining quality recognizes the use of comparisons between different product or service offerings of different organizations. This would mean that stakeholder expectations with regard to such things as service level may be the same regardless of whether a service is volunteer, combination, or fully paid.

Manufacturing Definition

The *manufacturing definition* of quality evaluates quality in terms of conformance to standards. Evaluating fire department services in terms of mobilization and response times would illustrate this definition of quality.

Value Definition

This definition of quality assumes that stakeholders are capable of accurately evaluating the value of the products or services they receive in light of the associated costs. Under this definition, the volunteer or combination department should recognize the opportunity to demonstrate both its effectiveness and efficiency.

User Definition

Under the *user definition* the product or service that most satisfies stakeholder expectations is viewed as having the highest quality. While the other definitions provide important insights that should be considered in formulating and implementing a quality management program, the *user definition* is in reality the most useful. It clearly articulates the role of perception as the primary and secondary stakeholders of the fire department formulate their judgments regarding service quality. Our focus must be on seeking to fully understand and respond to the expectations of our stakeholders in a manner that meets and exceeds all *reasonable* stakeholder expectations.

Characteristics of Fire and Emergency Medical Services

The services provided by fire departments have expanded over the years. As an example, many fire departments have expanded their service offerings in the areas of rescue, hazardous materials, and emergency medical services. Further expansion of the services and capabilities of fire departments is to be anticipated given the many new challenges of the contemporary world.

In considering the matter of service quality, an important starting point must be to fully appreciate the nature and characteristics of the services provided by fire departments. These service characteristics present challenges with respect to assurance of quality.

Intangible Delivery

The services provided by a fire department are typically intangible. Unlike a tangible product that stakeholders could purchase at a retail store, they cannot hold in their hands the services that your fire department provides as they objectively evaluate them. Thus, the evaluation of quality will be subjective, rather than objective, in nature.

Transaction Volume

An important aspect of ensuring an organization's readiness to be responsive to customers is to predict demand in terms of transaction volume and dedicate appropriate organizational resources, including personnel staffing, to meet the anticipated demand for services. Our transaction volume has limited predictability and thus makes staffing a continual challenge.

Unscheduled Service Delivery

Ideally an organization should be able to schedule all but the unexpected emergency situation in advance, thus ensuring its readiness to deliver services in an effective and efficient manner that contributes to stakeholder satisfaction. While this is reasonably easy to do under most circumstances in a business environment where control exists in the scheduling of service delivery, it will never be the case in the world of fire departments.   We never know when and where we will be called to serve.   Thus, staffing to anticipate any and all variations in transaction volume and service demand is not possible.

Time Critical Services

The vast majority of the calls to which the fire department is dispatched involve the provision of time critical services.   This characteristic differentiates fire departments from most other service organizations.   Although many of the fire calls your fire department responds to may turn out to be unfounded or minor in nature, getting fire department personnel on the incident scene in a timely manner is crucial.   Your primary and secondary stakeholders expect this and have a right to expect nothing less. In cases where the services provided by the fire department include emergency medical services, the time critical nature of services is typically even greater.

Immediate Service Consumption

The services provided by the fire department are immediately consumed or utilized.   Unlike the purchase of a product that a stakeholder may utilize over a number of days, weeks or months, or a service that covers an extended period of time, the services of the fire department are delivered and utilized on the day of a given emergency incident.   Related to this is the fact that the fire department cannot produce and stockpile its services for later delivery.

Customization of Services

It is not unusual for products to be standardized before they are produced and delivered to customers.   Services can also be standardized, but by their very nature tend to often require customization. This is always the case when the fire department responds to an incident. The size-up process utilized at fire scenes and the patient assessment during emergency medical services calls is designed to provide the necessary information required to develop firefighting goals, strategies and tactics, or emergency medical services patient treatment plans. The need for customization of services has the potential of presenting challenges with respect to quality assurance.

Labor Intensive

In producing and delivering products or services, organizations typically look for ways to increase effectiveness and efficiency through the use of capital resources that are used by organizational personnel. While fire departments have certainly taken advantage of new technologies and resulting commercialized fire service and emergency medical services products such as large diameter hose and high capacity pumpers, the nature of our work and the services that we provide demand that we have the necessary number of properly trained personnel to effectively, efficiently, safely, and professionally perform our responsibilities.

Stakeholder Expectations of Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Before a fire department can successfully develop and implement strategies designed to assure quality service delivery, it must first identify the expectations of its stakeholders. These expectations relate to both the attributes of the services provided and the attributes of fire department personnel involved in service delivery.

Professionalism

Professionalism relates to the manner in which fire department personnel represent their department and deliver its services. Professionalism results when fire department personnel have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform their roles and responsibilities properly. The ability of your fire department to meet the expectations of its primary and secondary stakeholders will in large part be determined by the professionalism of its personnel, from the ranks of the fire chief through that of the new firefighter recruit. Given the significant influence of stakeholder perceptions in making value judgments with respect to your fire department, its services, and whether or not it is meeting stakeholder expectations, the importance of professionalism must be understood and embraced by all members of your fire department.

Timeliness

The time critical nature of the fire and emergency medical services that the contemporary fire department provides dictates that the fire department must be prepared to respond to incidents and operate on the incident scene in a manner that is both effective and efficient. The stakeholders of the fire department expect that when they call for assistance, the fire department will be dispatched, respond and operate in an efficient manner. Perceived delays in response and arrival on the incident scene can lead to unfulfilled stakeholder expectations, loss of reputation and community support, and negative publicity. It is imperative that

fire departments proactively address any and all contributing factors to delays in response, including those outside their immediate control such as the time required to receive and dispatch calls through a 9-1-1 center.

Effectiveness

The primary and secondary stakeholders of a fire department expect that when the fire department responds to a call it will demonstrate effectiveness in resolving the emergency situation. Effectiveness thus considers whether the fire department has fulfilled its mission and goals and has appropriately delivered required services at an emergency incident.

Efficiency

Efficiency assumes the effectiveness of the fire department and raises the additional matter of the resource costs involved in addressing a given emergency situation.   The stakeholders of the fire department, who typically directly or indirectly support the fire department by donating to fund drives or providing the necessary budget revenues or allocations to support the resource needs of the fire department, have a right to expect that they are getting their money's worth. This relates to the *value definition* of quality provided earlier. The officers of your fire department must ensure the effective utilization of scarce resources and engage in the necessary strategies to communicate to both primary and secondary stakeholders that their fire department demonstrates stewardship in the use of the resources with which it has been entrusted.

Accessibility

Stakeholders of your fire department expect that when they need your services they will have ready access to them.   This requires that the fire department ensure its level of response readiness and its ability to effectively and efficiently receive notification of the need for services and respond to that need.

Convenience

One of the characteristics of the contemporary world in which we live is convenience. We can order an endless array of products or services with a simple telephone call or click of a computer mouse. When stakeholders of the fire department have an emergency and need assistance, the same degree of convenience must be available when they pick up the telephone and dial 9-1-1. This must be one-stop shopping wherein one call is all it takes to get a trained emergency services telecommunicator to take ownership for the caller's problem and ensure that the necessary resources are dispatched, respond and arrive on

the incident scene to effectively, efficiently, safely, and professionally resolve the emergency situation.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is related to a number of the expectations previously mentioned. Customer responsiveness is one of the key components of gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage in the business world. Fire departments, likewise, must ensure that they are thoroughly prepared to respond to and operate at all of the types of incidents to which they are likely to be dispatched.

Completeness

Completeness is simply whether or not an organization fully completes delivery of a service in the perceptions of its stakeholders. The primary and secondary stakeholders of the fire department expect that the fire department will make sure that all necessary tasks have been completed before packing up and leaving the scene to return to the fire station. Completeness could include such things as utilizing appropriate ventilation techniques to enable effective and efficient firefighting operations. Returning to an incident scene a number of hours later to handle a rekindle would usually be viewed as a failure to fulfill the stakeholder expectation of completeness.

Consistency

Consistency means that, regardless of when the fire department responds or which personnel respond, its stakeholders can expect consistent capabilities, performance, and outcomes. The stakeholders of your fire department have a right to expect this and will hold you accountable in this area. In addition to dealing with staffing issues including recruitment and retention, your fire department must ensure that all members have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their assigned roles and responsibilities successfully. Training and certification are essential elements of ensuring and validating the level of personnel qualifications and capabilities within your fire department. An integral strategy for ensuring consistency is to establish and utilize appropriate criteria in considering the qualifications of personnel for appointment or election to chief and line officer positions.

Courtesy

Every stakeholder of the fire department expects that he or she will receive courteous treatment. This applies to the primary stakeholder groups of those who live in, work in, or travel through your jurisdiction. There must be no second

class citizens. Those who travel through your community or work in it should receive the same high quality service, including courtesy and professionalism, as do long-time residents of your community. Courteous treatment by all fire department personnel sets the tone for stakeholders to evaluate your performance with respect to their other expectations in a more favorable light. A lack of courtesy most often leads to a perceived failure to meet other stakeholder expectations. Courtesy is equally important when fire department personnel are representing their department as they interact with secondary stakeholders such as elected officials or business owners.

Image

The image that your fire department presents will also be considered by your stakeholders. Image relates to how you present your fire department. It relates to how you care for and maintain your apparatus and equipment and how your personnel dress and conduct themselves. The stakeholders of the fire department, both primary and secondary, expect a professional image and perceiving this gives them enhanced confidence in your capabilities to effectively, efficiently, safely, and professionally deliver services when they are needed.

Challenges in Delivering Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Stakeholder expectations for fire and emergency medical services, while similar to expectations for other products and services, are also unique given the nature of the fire department's mission and the characteristics or attributes of the services that fire departments provide. A fire department that commits to the assurance of quality must address a number of challenging issues.

Determination of Quality Indicators

Before a fire department can develop and implement strategies designed to enhance quality it must identify the indicators or factors that it plans to focus on in assurance of quality. These quality indicators should be selected in accordance with the expectations of stakeholders of the fire department with respect to quality.

Determination of Appropriate Quality Measures and Measurement Techniques

After reaching consensus on the factors that will be used to measure quality, specific metrics and measurement techniques for the collection of data regarding quality must be determined. The specific measures selected should provide appropriate indications of the quality factors established by the fire department.

The measurement techniques utilized must be operationally appropriate and provide for the efficient collection of relevant data.

Determination of Appropriate Service Levels

An essential component of a quality assurance program is the establishment of appropriate service levels. In retailing, a service level might be that 97% of the customers can expect to find a desired product in stock. A fire department service level could address response times or the number of pieces of apparatus or personnel responding to calls. While such service levels can be problematic for some fire departments, particularly volunteer and combination departments, mutual aid arrangements can be utilized to improve service levels.

Recognizing the Role of Behavior in Quality

Review of the stakeholder expectations for fire and emergency medical services presented earlier in this chapter, will reveal that fire department personnel will be a crucial determinant of whether or not a department can fulfill any or all of these expectations. The work of any organization, including a fire department, is typically performed by individuals working in groups or teams. The individual behavior of each and every member of the fire department contributes directly to stakeholder expectations involving professionalism, courtesy, and image, and indirectly to the other expectations that stakeholders have for fire departments.

Providing Appropriate Quality Control Activities

Once quality indicators and corresponding quality measures and measurement techniques have been established, a number of decisions must be made regarding appropriate quality control strategies. Three important questions must be addressed regarding quality control: (1) What should be controlled? (2) Who should provide this control? (3) Under what situations should this control be exercised? Quality control within the fire department will occur both on and off the incident scene. In formulating quality control strategies the realities of the incident scene must be considered.

Costs of Quality Deficiencies

A fire department's success in meeting and exceeding the expectations of its stakeholders will in large part be determined by its success in assuring the quality of the services that it delivers. Quality deficiencies compromise the fire department's ability to meet the expectations of both its primary and secondary stakeholders.

Actual Lack of Quality

A fire department that does not embrace the importance of quality and make the necessary commitment to enhance quality runs the risk of offering services that lack the quality that stakeholders deserve and expect.

Perceived Lack of Quality

It is possible that a fire department may achieve desired levels of quality and in reality meet the expectations of its stakeholders, but that stakeholders may not perceive this to be the case. When this happens, often as a consequence of a failure to involve and communicate with stakeholders effectively, the result is a perception on the part of its stakeholders that their fire department is failing to meet their expectations.

Loss of Organizational Reputation

One of the most significant consequences of quality deficiencies is a loss of fire department reputation. This diminished reputation can compromise relationships with the community, as well as with other emergency services organizations.

Loss of Public Confidence and Trust

This consequence of quality deficiencies is related to the loss of fire department reputation and can have devastating results for the fire department. The primary and secondary stakeholders of your fire department need to know that they can count on your fire department to effectively, efficiently, safely, and professionally enact the responsibilities that it has been granted and accepted.

Loss of Community Support

The previously discussed consequences of actual or perceived quality deficiencies ultimately result in a loss of community support for the fire department. This may be in the form of declining support from residents or businesses in fund drives or in cutbacks in budget allocations by elected officials. The potential also exists for elected officials to reduce response territories and for other fire departments to change their mutual aid assignments.

Failure to Fulfill Organizational Mission

Perhaps this consequence best relates the ultimate costs of quality deficiencies. An organization's mission is its purpose or reason for being. There is no greater indicator of a fire department's failure than its inability to fulfill its established

mission of serving those who live in, work in, and travel through its response territory.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Fire departments and other contemporary organizations committed to achieving superior quality have implemented total quality management (TQM) programs and have achieved remarkable results. These customer or stakeholder focused programs enable organizations to more successfully meet and exceed stakeholder expectations. While these programs vary in name from organization to organization, their characteristics and processes are similar.

Change in Philosophy

Instituting a total quality management program in any organization requires a fundamental change in organizational philosophy and processes. Rather than continue to do things the way that they have always been done, fire departments that adopt a total quality management approach become customer-focused and thus, as appropriate, redesign their services, processes and resource inputs in the interest of enhancing organizational quality.

Management Commitment and Leadership

A central element of a total quality management program is the proactive involvement of management at all levels of the organization. While commitment of top-level officers, including the fire company president and fire chief, is absolutely necessary for a total quality management program to succeed, the active involvement of all of the fire department's operational and administrative officers is also a determinant of overall program success.

Total Involvement

A successful total quality management program requires the further commitment of all members of the fire department. Each and every member of the fire department has an important role in enhancing organizational quality and thus enabling the fire department to fully meet and exceed the expectations of its stakeholders.

Understand and Fulfill Stakeholder Expectations

The importance of a fire department fully understanding the expectations of its stakeholders was related earlier in this chapter. Understanding stakeholder expectations provides the necessary direction that the fire department leadership

can use in developing and implementing strategies designed to enhance quality and fulfill stakeholder expectations.

Coordinated with Strategic Planning Initiatives

An increasing number of contemporary fire departments utilize strategic planning to establish strategic direction and properly position the fire department to achieve success and fulfill its mission. A commitment to quality assurance is frequently evident in the mission statement and accompanying goals, objectives and strategies of these departments. It is important that total quality management programs be linked to and coordinated with strategic initiatives articulated through strategic planning processes.

Continual Improvement Process

Total quality management is a continual improvement process in that once a set of strategies has been successful in enhancing organizational quality, the organization begins its search for new areas and ways in which it can further enhance quality. In a sense, this is similar to the continual size-up process that an Incident Commander engages in throughout the management of an incident. This continual improvement process involves such crucial activities as ongoing evaluation, provision of training and development opportunities, and organizational learning. Through organizational learning, a fire department can learn from insights gained from experience to make better decisions.

Essential Program Elements

Total quality management programs are data-driven. Data related to quality indicators is gathered, analyzed, and interpreted. These data activities utilize previously described decisions regarding identification of quality indicators, quality measures and measurement techniques. Action plans are then developed that are formulated to include quality improvement strategies. Upon implementation, additional data collection enables the fire department to evaluate the outcomes of its total quality management program and through organizational learning begin the quality improvement cycle again.

The Deming Cycle

Dr. W. Edwards Deming, a pioneer in the quality movement, developed a quality improvement process that is fundamental to total quality management programs. The Deming PDCA Cycle incorporates the following four sequential steps.

Plan – Develop a plan designed to improve organizational quality.

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- **Do** – Implement the quality improvement plan.
- **Check** – Study and evaluate the outcomes achieved in terms of quality improvement.
- **Act** – As appropriate, change the plan and develop new strategies.

Benefits of Total Quality Management

A fire department can realize many benefits by successfully designing, implementing and operating a total quality management program. Major benefits include accomplishment of organizational mission and increasing organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The real beneficiaries of a successful total quality management program are the primary and secondary stakeholders of the fire department, given that the fire department's abilities to meet and exceed their expectations in greatly enhanced.

Requirements for a Total Quality Management Program

It should be obvious that initiating and operating a successful total quality management program has the potential of producing the desired results discussed throughout this chapter, but that it requires more than just lip service. It is simply not enough to talk the talk; you have to walk the walk.

Many of the requirements of a successful total quality management program were discussed earlier in the chapter, but due to their importance are delineated again along with other requirements.

Management Support

The success of any fire department total quality management program will be determined by the active involvement and support of its administrative and operational officers at all ranks. Similar to successful incident management, everyone must be on the same page.

Total Involvement

All members of the fire department must understand the total quality management program, be committed to it, and be actively involved in seeking opportunities to enhance organizational quality.

Leadership

Leadership is necessary at all levels of the organization. Both formal and informal leadership will enable the fire department to recognize and act

appropriately on opportunities to enhance quality and more fully meet the expectations of organizational stakeholders.

Systems Thinking

A key to success in total quality management programs is that decision making must become focused on how each and every member of the organization and organizational unit can contribute to enhancing overall organizational quality.

Long-Term Focus

The natural tendency is for organizations to focus on the short-term. Successful total quality management programs shift the focus of the organization to the long-term, as does strategic planning.

Communication

At the core of a successful total quality management program is communication. Fire departments must ensure that communication channels are available and operational to allow the necessary communication to enable the department to fully realize the desired outcomes from a total quality management program. In addition to internal communications, communications with organizational stakeholders are necessary.

Training and Education

The importance of providing fire department members with the technical and management training necessary to enhance their knowledge and skills and consequently improve organizational quality and fulfillment of stakeholder expectations is obvious. These training and development activities, however, must be supplemented with the provision of quality management training to provide fire department members with an understanding of quality improvement and assurance techniques. Fire department members will need differing levels of training in quality management based on their designated roles within the department's quality management program. All members need a basic level of training; those assigned to leadership responsibilities for the department's quality program need more extensive training.

Measurement System

Appropriate systems must be developed and implemented to track necessary data related to the fire department's quality indicators and measures. Thorough tracking of this data will enable the fire department to benchmark its progress

over time and to compare itself to other fire departments through the use of comparative benchmarking.

Reporting Systems

It is not enough to simply collect data. Data must be analyzed and interpreted. Useful information that is accurate, credible, relevant, and timely must be produced for use in total quality management program activities and initiatives.

Information Availability and Access

The fact that data has been collected and analyzed and that information has been recorded in various reporting formats is important. For this information to contribute fully to the fire department's total quality management program, it must be readily available to members throughout the organization. Total involvement of the fire department members requires that they are empowered and have access to all necessary information to fully utilize their talents in enhancing organizational quality.

The Present and Future

Fire departments across our nation and around the world have learned that they can significantly enhance the quality of the services they provide and their ability to meet and exceed stakeholder expectations through the use of quality management programs. Properly designed and implemented, these programs are achieving remarkable results at a time in our history when contemporary fire departments are facing an array of new challenges.   These programs will continue to be important determinants of fire department success in the future.

As an administrative or operational officer of your fire department, it is your responsibility to assure the quality of the services currently offered by your department and to seek to continually improve this quality. Together, you and the other members of your department are responsible for charting your department's future course and ensuring its ability to meet and exceed the expectations of its present and future stakeholders.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Quality Management

Things to do …

☐ 1. Determine who are the primary and secondary stakeholders of your fire department, and what are the expectations of each group with respect to the services that your department provides.

☐ 2. In what areas could your fire department enhance its quality and thus its ability to meet and exceed the expectations of its stakeholders?

☐ 3. How could a total quality management program be utilized in your department to enhance quality? If your fire department already has a quality management program, how could the effectiveness of this program be improved?

☐ 4. What areas would you initially focus on if you implemented a total quality management program in your fire department?

☐ 5. What strategies would you utilize to secure the support, active participation, and commitment of members of your fire department to a total quality management program?

Chapter 15

Public Information Management

By Dennis Jones

Personal and social interface—providing effective information to the public—can make or break the ESO's perception in the mind of customers and local community leaders. What and how to effect that communication becomes critical. Effective planning and implementation of public information is the most reliable way to assure public information works for you.

Public Information Management

Putting Together a Fire Department Information Packet

Emergency Service Personnel know the importance of having the right tools for the job, and they know the importance of completing every job they undertake.

When it comes to tackling the job of community relations, an information packet about the Emergency Service Organization is nothing less than the right tool for the job. It is essential in completing the Emergency Service Organization's community relations job.

What Is an Information Packet?

The following pages will show what comprises an information packet. It contains well organized, easy-to-understand, short answers to the questions people are likely to ask about your department. It also provides the kind of information you'd like them to know. What do you do? Who are you? What do you cost me? What is that stuff you wear? Do you need all of those emergency vehicles? How do you know what to do? How can I help?

These are the kinds of questions you will have to answer in speeches, meetings, and in the local news media. But even your most interested audience will forget details, and that is where information packets come in.

An information packet is something you hand to people after you have told them your story.

It is something they can refer to, it is something they can share with others, and it is something that may encourage them to call you with more questions or an offer of help. It is a reminder and a reference source.

Who appreciates them?

Let us start with journalists. Picture this, and it should not be hard, a major house fire in the middle of the night. A reporter shows up late, gets the basic facts from you and has to run back to their office to write the story for the morning's paper. The reporter's editor wants the reporter to write three pages and they badly need more information. So, they turn to the information packet you provided them a month ago and are able to tell the readers about the equipment that responded and the number of fires you fought last year. Not only did you help by anticipating the reporter's need, but they did not wake you up at 4 a.m. to ask more questions.

Another example: You've just met with the vice president of the local department store, who seemed impressed by your presentation. You have asked for a contribution and left an information packet behind. The next afternoon, the vice president meets with

the store's president, recommends a contribution and is asked a few tough questions. To convince the boss, the vice president needs more information. Where does the vice president turn?

The packet has the facts the boss needs.

Want more examples? Easy. How about local officials arguing over competing budget needs? How about local civic club members deciding which service project to select? How about homeowners who have just suffered a fire and are genuinely interested in knowing more about you? How about potential new recruits? How about new residents to the community (in one of our pilot communities, the Welcome Wagon gave out Emergency Service Organization information)? How about members of your own department, who themselves may not have the big picture view of all that the department is and does?

Look at an information packet as the exclamation point at the end of a sentence. It makes you think about the sentence and says this is important.

We do not recommend that you mail an information packet to every resident in your town. That would be like putting the exclamation point at the beginning of the sentence before you've said anything; a waste of money.

But you will find that packets are the right tool for many of the community relations jobs you will tackle. Collect the pages together into a folder with pockets, and put a copy, in fact, put 50 copies, in your tool box. You will use them.

What to Include in the Information Packet

The following pages provide examples of the kind of things that can be included in an Emergency Service Organization information packet. Each fact sheet should be only a page or two long. Feel free to add to or subtract from this list to meet your own needs.

A letter from the chief — Use this as the "Welcome to the Organization!" Keep the letter short—about three or four paragraphs should be enough. Print it on department letterhead.

A history of the department — Try to show in what ways the department has developed and is a part of the community. Show how the department grew as the town grew.

Who we are — A page that describes in general terms who the members of the department are and what they do both for the department and when they are not on duty.

When describing what you do, show how a volunteer's average week breaks out: eat, sleep, family activities, job training, respond to emergencies, fill out paperwork,

call bingo, maintain apparatus and equipment. You may scare some folks away from volunteering, but people need to know how very much you contribute, and that it is more than just responding to calls.

What we do — Describes the services of the department. People often are not aware that many fire departments not only respond to fires, but also provide emergency medical and rescue services, not to mention other nontraditional services like youth counseling and recreation programs.

Also, think about including information that shows how all responses, or certain types of responses, have increased over the last few years. This helps you to make a case about the department's need for additional resources to keep pace with increased need.

How we know what to do — Deals with the training that is required of every emergency responder. Few people know how much and how often firefighters train, and the different skills that must be learned. You also may want to mention costs associated with training, including charges for course materials, as well as for tuition, travel, and lodging.

How we get to the scene — Deals with response times and the different vehicles used by the department to respond based on the kind of incident. When it comes to talking about response times, use an average rather than specifics (so that nobody tries to hold you to an exact time for arriving at Hollywood and Vine during rush hour!).

When explaining how you get to emergencies, you may want to explain, if this is the case, that the department allows firefighters to go to the scene directly from home or work and how this policy helps response times. Your neighbors will appreciate the details.

Most important, emphasize the concept of arriving at the scene safely. Especially in an emergency, people value safety, and firefighters must set the right example.

What we wear to work — Gives the details about personal protective clothing and equipment. Do not pass up the opportunity to tell people how much each item costs, and provide the total cost for outfitting a firefighter. Consider adding a drawing or photograph of a firefighter in full turnout gear, with the parts labeled.

Money: what we spend it on, where we get it — Provides key information about the emergency service organization's budget and expenses. Tables, charts, and graphs can be very useful tools when presenting this information. The key is not to provide pages of numbers, but rather to present the facts in a way that the average

person can relate to them. Comparing a fire department's annual budget to a typical household budget for your area is one way to do this.

If your department has saved money for the community, by entering into group purchasing agreements or equipment sharing (auto-aid) arrangements, by purchasing used equipment and apparatus, or by building the new station with donated labor and materials, make special note of it on this fact sheet.

Another idea is to break down annual fire department operations into a cost-per-person or per-household within your service area. Again, this helps put the cost of running the department into perspective and helps people to see what a bargain they are getting. Compare the per-household cost of running the fire department (for example, $8 per household per month) to the cost of a common entertainment item––such as cable TV, a movie, a large pizza.

If you want to make a dramatic statement about the savings of a volunteer or combination department to a community, compare it to what it would cost for an all-career department providing the same level of protection. Show people how their taxes would increase if they had to support a career department.

How you can help — A key piece that describes the many ways in which people can help the department. If your department provides benefits, such as member status, pension, length of service awards, or workers' compensation, mention these things as well.

Also, encourage people to call the department if they want to contribute a talent or skill not listed on the fact sheet, as long as someone has something to contribute, you can figure out a way to use them.

How you can get more information about us — Provides the list of key contact people and their phone numbers. We suggest organizing it by the kind of questions people might have about the department (regarding a specific fire, how to join the department, fire prevention, fundraising, etc.). Notes on when each contact person is easiest to reach is a nice touch and especially useful if they are volunteers and not always reachable at the station.

On that note, it might be useful to invest in an answering machine for the non-emergency number of the department, especially if there are times when nobody is around to answer the phone. Also, put a telephone message pad next to the phone, and dedicate a section of a bulletin board for posting phone messages. Even more frustrating than not being able to leave a message for someone is leaving a message that does not get delivered. Do not let it happen!

Final Thoughts about Information Packets

When you produce your own packet, keep it direct, simple, and free of fire service jargon. Make it easy to use and presentable. Nothing says more about your department than clean, accurate work. Where possible, use illustrations, photos, charts and graphs

to make the point. Show a firefighter in turnout gear. Show the apparatus you run. Make a pie chart to show how a firefighter spends a typical day. Create a bar chart to show the increase in emergency medical calls over the last five years. It is worth learning how to make charts and graphs on the computer, or finding someone who knows how. You know what they say—a picture can be worth a thousand words. Make it as easy as possible for people to get more information. At the bottom of each page of the packet, put a phone number for people to call for more information. List digital pager numbers if you have them.

Wherever appropriate, explain that government agencies and insurance companies require that you do and buy certain things. For example, insurance rating bureaus require departments to have certain pieces of apparatus and to meet certain standards. Complying with these requirements allow a department to keep the community's insurance rating down, which saves residents and businesses money on insurance premiums.

You may want to tailor the contents or presentation of the information packet depending on your audience. For example, business leaders may require more information about the financial aspects of the department than would the average homeowner.

Finally, more and more Emergency Service Organizations are developing websites on the Internet. Consider using the information packet material on your website as a source of information to be used on the internet.

Getting Good Media Coverage

Media coverage is a two-edged sword. It can build public support or destroy the reputation of your department. Fire officials often complain that the press only wants to know who got hurt in the fire, or gives the department coverage only when we screw up. Or they have a problem with the unhappy department member who complains off the record to reporters about how an incident was covered, only to find that his off the record comments were quoted in the papers the next day. Sound familiar?

As a fire official, you do not have much choice but to deal with the media. Face it, what you do is newsworthy, that is, the public wants to know what the Emergency Service Organization is up to, and reporters intend to find out.

In other words, you are going to get press coverage anyway, so you may as well do what you can to help ensure that the things you want covered, are covered, in the positive way that you want them to be covered. This section provides guidance on dealing with representatives of the media, reporters, editors, and columnists employed by newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations.

Preparing to Deal with the Media

You already may be dealing with the media in your community. But even if you are, you may want to take a step back and prepare to deal with them on your terms.

1. **Have a formal policy for dealing with the media.**

    Every department should have a policy about who may represent the department in dealings with the news media, and when and where they may do it. In some departments, only the chief is allowed to deal with reporters. In others, it is the highest ranking official at the scene when there is an incident, and the chief at all other times. Some departments have a designated public information officer whose main responsibility is to deal with members of the media, convey all official department communications, and try to get positive press for the department.

    Though one spokesperson per department is best to avoid confusion, you may want to consider assigning separate spokespersons for the fireground and administrative aspects of department operations. For example, the chief may be the main spokesperson for the fireground operations, but a separate public information officer can work through the administrative president of the department and deal with department community activities such as spaghetti dinners and open houses.

    Whatever you decide your policy is, it is important that the department speak with a consistent voice. All individuals who have responsibilities as a department spokesperson should communicate with one another frequently and coordinate their messages. Anyone in the department who deals with the media should be prepared with some basic skills for being interviewed, covered later in this chapter.

    Let the other members of the department know who is authorized to speak officially for the department. If non-authorized department members are contacted by the media, they should be instructed to refer the call to the
    department spokesperson.

2. **Put Together an Emergency Service Organization Information Packet.**

    An information packet can help reporters to better understand the Emergency Service Organization, and demonstrates that the Emergency Service Organization wants to make their job easier.

    Imagine: a reporter is sitting at her computer at 2 a.m., trying to meet a 2:30 deadline. She needs to fill a column of space on local news. It is too late to call anyone for an interview, and she is getting desperate. Wait! She remembers, there is an information packet on the Emergency Service Organization in her file. Retrieving it, she finds a page that talks about how much it costs to outfit a firefighter with protective clothing. Perfect. In it goes, almost word-for-word.

Look at how many purposes were served by that information packet: First, the article in the paper later that day educates the public about how their contributions or tax dollars are helping to keep firefighters safe. Second, the Emergency Service Organization had total control over the positive publicity it received. Third, the reporter was grateful to the department for having given her that packet the month before. A win-win-win situation!

That information packet will come in handy to reporters again and again, not just when they are looking to fill space in the paper, but also when they are thinking about topics for their next big story, when they are doing research before a vote on the department's budget, and when they want to write a companion story to go along with their coverage of your latest response. So do not pass up the opportunity to give them this information before they really need it.

Getting to Know the Media, and Getting Them to Know You

- As fire officials, you certainly have every opportunity to get to know the news media. Taking the time to get to know reporters, editors, columnists, and other members of the media who cover your activities can have a two-fold benefit:

- You will be more likely to get positive coverage, because you will be creating more opportunities to convey positive messages about the department; and even if an uncomplimentary story is about to hit the papers, a reporter may be more likely to ask for your side of the story, or even hold up the story for an extra day to allow you to provide more information.

- If you have never tried to build relationships with the media before, or if you would like to get to know them better, here are a few tips.

  First, find out which reporters cover the department. If you do not know from the bylines on the newspaper articles, call the paper to find out which reporters cover local community news and events. Depending on the size of the paper and whether it is produced weekly or daily, the reporter assigned to cover your activities might be covering everything else for the paper too, or might cover just fire and police activities. One reporter might cover your department responses, while a different reporter for the same paper might cover your community relations events.

  At a radio station, you will want to locate the news director or the public affairs director. At a TV station (do not forget the local cable TV station), the news editor or assignment editor would be the ones to call.

Once you have identified the name and number of the person who covers emergency service organization stories, give the reporter a call to introduce yourself (ask if it is a good time to talk, when reporters are on a deadline they can not be interrupted, and so they may ask you to call back later). Invite him or her to the station to share your information packet and begin the education and relationship-building process.

It can be as easy as it sounds. Commissioner Lew Conley of the Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company in Lower Township, New Jersey, had a great deal of success in increasing positive media coverage for the department simply by asking local reporters to work with the fire department as it embarked on its new community relations program.

Educating reporters is a continuing process: there is often a lot of turnover on newspaper staffs, and reporters get reassigned to different beats. Be prepared to educate new reporters often.

Here are some additional ideas for reaching out to and educating the media:

- Hold a Press Day, in which reporters are invited to a training session. Put them in turnout gear and (closely supervised) guide them in putting out a fire — or explain to them what is going on as they observe firefighters putting out fires. Not only will the reporters gain understanding that will help them cover incidents in the future; they might even write an article about their own training experience.

- If you have an extra pager to spare, lend it to a reporter who is assigned to cover department responses. That way, the reporter will know about the call as soon as you do, and will get a good head start on the story.

- Is your local cable TV station looking for interesting programming? Can you get local college students to help with video projects for free or at cost? The Fire Chiefs Association of Jefferson County, Kentucky, works with its local cable station and skilled volunteers (including a local TV news personality) to produce a one-hour program that interviews the chiefs on public safety topics of local interest. Every time a new episode is produced, the station shows it on the air several times — and it is one of the highest-rated programs on the station.

- Invite reporters into the fire station to show them what a day in the life of a firefighter is like. If you do this, make sure that department members are doing the kind of things you would want a reporter to write about. For example, if the alarm does not ring, are department members keeping busy cleaning the station, maintaining equipment, conducting inspections, and filling out reports? Or are they sitting around watching TV and eating?

- If your attempts to develop a relationship with a reporter do not result in good press, do not be discouraged. There tends to be high turnover among reporters, and the nemesis reporter may get reassigned. Be patient.

Being Interviewed

Whether at the scene of a fire or in your office, the following interview rules of the road should keep you on course.

1. Make reporters aware of the names and phone numbers of the designated spokesperson(s) for the department.

Give the reporters and other media representatives who cover department activities a list of names and phone numbers for the chief and any other people who are authorized to speak for the department.

Include the Emergency Service Organization number, day and evening phone numbers and pager numbers, if possible. Someone who is authorized to speak for the department should be accessible at all times. Encourage reporters to call whenever they have a question or need information.

Find out how you can contact the reporters by phone, fax, and electronic mail, as well as how to reach them quickly in an emergency, especially before and after regular business hours.

When a reporter calls you, try to return the call as soon as possible. A reporter on deadline does not have much time to complete a story. A reporter may not be inclined to give the department positive coverage if you consistently do not return phone calls.

2. Be prepared.

Know what it is you want to say about your department and write down your main messages to help you remember them. If possible, put some statistics and anecdotes down on paper to back up your message.

Look proactively at everything about an incident or a situation that could prompt tough questions by a reporter. Think about what you would say to a reporter if asked those questions. Being prepared with good answers in advance will help prevent you from being put on the spot by a reporter.

How are you supposed to know what questions will be asked at a fire? Think back. For the most part, reporters ask virtually the same questions, fire after fire.

If a reporter calls for an appointment, ask what the subject of the interview will be. That is all you are likely to learn. Most reporters will not share actual questions in advance. And do not even bother asking to see a copy of the article before it goes to print.

If you request the interview, have your key points written down even before you call for an appointment.

3. **Approach the interview with the right attitude.**

Do not assume that the reporter is going to be hostile or that he or she will confuse the facts. If you know that the interview will be hostile, ask yourself a simple question. "Must I do it?" You may have no choice, but there is no law that says you have to talk to reporters.

4. **Present your story from the public's viewpoint, not your own. Keep your story human and personal.**

You are in the business of protecting the people of your community. Try to tell your story from the perspective of the people who rely on you. For example, rather than talking about how many features the department's new aerial truck has, talk instead about how having this new aerial truck will help rescue residents from the senior citizens' housing complex. Talk about how purchasing the aerial truck enabled the department to improve its insurance rating by a point — thus decreasing insurance rates for homeowners and businesses in town.

5. **If you do not want a statement quoted, do not make the statement.**

What about off-the-record comments? Most reporters will honor off-the-record comments if the restriction is clear before the statement is made. But many people who deal with the media believe that there is really no such thing as an off-the-record comment. The safest bet is to keep your private thoughts to yourself.

6. **Keep it simple and concise.**

Begin with your most important point. Stick to your key arguments. Do not have too many key arguments — limit yourself to two or three at the most.

Also, remember your audience — avoid using technical jargon.

7. **Make sure you understand the question being asked.**

   If you think you have been asked a trick question, repeat it in different words until you know precisely what is being asked. If you choose not to answer it, simply say so. If the reporter persists with the same question, end the interview.

8. **Do not argue with a reporter or become angry.**

   Reporters use a range of techniques to obtain the best possible story from you. Some will attempt to anger you, to loosen you up. Do not fall for it. Keep your cool.

9. **If a question contains offensive language or words you do not like, do not repeat them — even to deny them.**

   And be on the lookout for reporters who try to put words in your mouth. Reporters have been known to toss out an unsubstantiated charge, and then print your denial: For example, the President of Shell Oil was once asked if his profits were a "bonanza." He denied the charge angrily. The next day's headlines quoted him accurately enough: "Oil Profits No Bonanza, Executive Says."

10. **If a reporter asks a direct question, provide a direct answer.**

    Evasive answers to direct questions often result in tougher, more direct questions, and make a reporter skeptical.

11. **If you do not know the answer to a question, do not fake it. Offer to find out.**

    It is better to appear ignorant than dishonest. Again, do not fake it. Once you have the answer to the question, be sure to follow up with the reporter. If you are unable to find the answer in time for the reporter to meet a deadline, call back anyway and explain what steps you took to try to get the answer.

    If you are asked a question you cannot answer, say so. Along these lines, think twice before answering a question about a victim. If you want to protect the privacy of victims and their families, explain this to the reporter.

12. **Tell the truth, even if it hurts.**

    You make a choice to be interviewed and so you assume the risk. If you think the risk is too great, do not do the interview. Lies are the fuel for big, ugly, embarrassing stories.

13. Do not exaggerate.

To a reporter, an exaggeration is a lie and the lie may just become the story. Do not do it. Life is too short.

Reacting to Bad Press

If you or someone else in the department is misquoted, or if a news item appears that you believe is unfair or misrepresents a situation involving the department, you will need to decide whether to respond and, if so, how best to respond.

Sometimes, doing nothing is best. Though it is hard to accept at the time, you should think about whether by protesting the negative coverage, you are turning the issue from a one day story into a story that drags out for days or even weeks.

You also should evaluate whether the misinformation is something that can be corrected by educating the reporter. Try calling the reporter directly, and politely request a correction. If that does not work, try talking to the reporter's editor or news director. If all else fails, point out the error in a letter to the editor or station manager. Then, be satisfied that you did everything you could to try to correct the mistake.

If legitimate points were not made in the story, try writing a letter to the editor for publication that does not criticize the original story, but rather adds your points in a positive way.

Consider that perhaps the department itself is not the best organization to respond. Will the mayor or another elected official come to your defense? Is a citizen willing to publicly call or write to the reporter to correct the misinformation?

If the media outlet consistently misrepresents department news, consider getting your position out to the public in some other way. Several of our pilot departments found that a series of presentations about the needs of the department, given to influential groups of citizens over several months, was a more effective way to reach people with a message that the department was better able to control and target.

An easy way to report a response: the faxable report form. Reporters do not always have the time to attend every fire. Recognizing this, Chief Bill Bondshu of the Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department in California developed an easy-to-complete form on his computer to report fires via the fax machine to local media outlets. It has a fill-in-the-blank format that gives the details of the fire, and provides a contact name and number for the reporter to call for more information.

The completed form (a copy of which is reproduced at the end of this chapter) is then used by reporters to write an article. In this way, the reporters' lives are made easier, the department is not burdened with having to write its own articles on each response, and the result is an increase in media coverage for the department.

If you decide to use a fax cover page to report department responses, make sure you call the media outlet first to see if it is acceptable to do so. Some reporters do not

like to receive unsolicited faxes. Also, get the name of the person to whom the fax should be directed, sometimes, a fax that is not addressed to any particular person does not get delivered anywhere, it just gets thrown out.

Sometimes you will want to do more than report a response. If you have some news about the department you would like to share, or want to get the word out about an upcoming event, a press release is a better way to go.

Writing Press Releases

Press releases are a basic tool for letting publications know what is going on with your department. Maybe you've obtained a new piece of apparatus or initiated a cutting-edge training program. Perhaps you're planning an open house, a fundraising drive, or a smoke detector giveaway. It is worth learning how to write about these events so that they are more likely to be used by the media: all you need is a little training, common sense, elbow grease, and practice.

There are two basic kinds of press releases: the news release and the feature release. The news release generally tells people something brand new and important – – much like the news you find on the front page of your local paper. The feature release provides background, like the stories you read in the Home or Style sections of your local paper.

Both kinds of releases answer seven basic questions:

1. Who did it?
2. What did they do?
3. When did they do it?
4. Where did they do it?
5. Why did they do it?
6. How did they do it?
7. Who cares that they did it?

The News Release

As the story goes: Back in the days of the telegraph, Morse Code operators learned to put all of the important facts in the first paragraph of their reports back to civilization because telegraph lines tended to fall down, with a little help from bandits, before reports were fully transmitted.

Supposedly, that practice led to the inverted pyramid style of news writing. Read the stories on the front page of this morning's paper and you will see that the most important news gets crammed into the first paragraph, called the lead. In the lead, you will find answers to at least four, and perhaps all, of the seven questions.

See the example that follows:

Chief Robert Smith today announced the appointment of Charles Jones as Fire Marshal of Wyattsville. "Charlie Jones' knowledge of the fire codes makes him the very best person for the job," the Chief said.

1. Chief Robert Smith is the *who*.
2. today is the *when*.
3. appointment of Charles Jones as Fire Marshal is the *what*.
4. Wyattsville is the *where*.
5. knowledge of the fire codes makes him the very best person is the *why*.

Writing an informative, concise lead paragraph is the toughest part of the job. A good lead generally:

- Emphasizes the most important fact. Maybe the most important thing is who, or what or even when. Whatever it is, it should be the point you emphasize.

- Is about 30 words long, generally in a single paragraph. Do not count little words like "to", "and" or "from."

- Uses tricks of the trade. For example, in the sample lead paragraph "Chief Robert Smith today announced ..". People do not talk like that, but good leads find ways to get a lot of information in a small space.

Read half a dozen newspaper articles each day to pick up other tricks.

In his new capacity, Jones, who was recently promoted to Lieutenant, will direct all fire prevention activities for the Wyattsville Department.

A 1991 graduate of Wyattsville High, Jones has attended the Morris County, state and national fire academies. In 1994, he was named Firefighter of the Year for the county.

"My goal will be to see a significant drop in the number of house fires in this town," Jones said. "Wyattsville had 75 house fires last year and lost nearly $2 million in property. I know we can do better."

Jones will assume his new duties immediately.

Once you have written the lead, the following paragraphs should provide the details, in priority order. For example, the next few paragraphs might read: Since the who and what are the most important points in the lead, the next two paragraphs tell us more about what Jones will do and who he is. Then the writer tells us why we should care. Finally, the writer returns to the question when.

Deciding what is most important, and what is next important and so forth is up to you. But remember: You want the release to be interesting first to a newspaper editor, who, after all, must decide to use it, and then it must be interesting to the public.

The Feature Release

If the news release tells readers something new, the feature release tells them more about something they probably already know.

Feature releases can provide background to readers about such things as:

- People in the news. Did you know that Chief Smith has ten children, two of whom are astronauts?

- Learn how Captain Williams, a volunteer with the Cashtown Fire Company, spends a typical week: side-by-side photographs that go along with the story show her in civilian garb at work, and suited up to respond to a fire call.

- Why things are done.

- Ever wonder why fire trucks are red?

- Why shouldn't homeowners overload circuits?

- What could happen.

- How, if the community supports our building program, we will be able to reach every home in town in under four minutes.

- How things work. How a house fire spreads. How to become a volunteer.

- What things cost. Did you know how much the emergency service organization has to pay for each piece of protective clothing and equipment firefighters are required to wear? How the expenses of running an emergency service organization compare with the expenses of running a household.

Feature releases cover the same bases. Readers still want to know who, what, when, where, how and so what. You just go about it at a friendlier pace. Once again, the hard part is that first paragraph. Journalists tend to stick to a few standard approaches. Here are a few easy ones.

The question lead
How could anyone give up a night's sleep, risk their life and feel good about it? Volunteer firefighters do it all the time.

The story-telling lead
The radio wakes Bob Jones from a dead sleep. Ten minutes later, Bob rescues a four-year-old and a teddy bear from a burning home. Not bad for a middle-aged car salesman who is now in his third year as a member of the Wyattsville Volunteer Fire Department.

The quotation lead
"The people of Wyattsville will decide for themselves the sort of fire protection they want." Said Chief Bob Jones last week in reviewing plans of the department's new facilities on Watson Road.

The controversy lead:
Some Wyattsville residents think the new firehouse should be nearer Main Street. But others argue that, with the construction of the past decade, Watson Road is now the center of town.

Notice something? All of the rules of writing a news release can go out the window with a feature release. The lead can be longer. It doesn't have to squeeze all of the who-what-where-when-why-how and the so-whats into a 30-word paragraph. A feature lead can be more than one paragraph.

Feature leads tend to emphasize one element of the story. As with news releases, the feature lead sets the tone for the rest of the story.

What News and Feature Releases Should Look Like

Follow these guidelines and editors will find it easier to read and use your feature and news releases.

- Your release should be typed and double-spaced. You can put it on your department's letterhead, but if your department does not have letterhead, it is OK to use plain, white paper and type the words PRESS RELEASE or NEWS RELEASE at the top.

Leave about two inches of room at the top so the editor can jot down some notes.

- At the top of page one, write the date and the line:

For more information, contact (name of department spokesperson) at (daytime phone number).

- Next, you will need a headline, just a few words summarizing your story.
- Headlines do not have to sound like Tarzan speaking to Jane. They simply need to make the single most important point in the story.

   For example: New Firehouse to Result in Faster Emergency Response
   No Smoke Detector May Mean No Escape
   Sherwin Appointed Chief

- Your story comes next. If you want, begin it with a dateline, the name of your community written in capital letters.

   For example: If your release is longer than one page:

- At the bottom of each page of your release, type the words:

   WYATTSVILLE — Chief Russ Sherwin today announced the appointment of five new firefighters.

At the top of each of the next pages, type a short version of the headline and the page number like this:

Emergency response
2-2-2-2-2-2-2-2-2

And remember, at the end of your release, type the symbol

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so the editor will know you are finished. Few things are more irritating to a busy editor than looking for a next page that doesn't exist.

Practice will never make perfect. Practice anyhow.

Here are a few exercises to limber up your news and feature release skills.

- Read your local newspaper for style. That is, do not pay attention to the actual story, observe the way reporters write their headlines, leads, and articles. You

will begin seeing some of the techniques discussed in this section and, no doubt, you will pick up others.

- Select one article a week and rewrite the lead three different ways. Take a lead that emphasizes the who and make it emphasize the what or the why.

- If your department has sent out releases in the past, take a few and see what you like and do not like about them. Try rewriting a few.

- Pick a story you would like to tell in a news or feature release. Create a list of facts and use this list to write the lead story.

Go back and decide what should go next, and then next and so forth. Start adding paragraphs. Because a release is more than a collection of facts, read your release to make sure it flows. The paragraphs should follow each other logically and smoothly.

- Finally, stick with it. Writing a press release is a lot easier than putting out a fire.

Placing the Release

You can send press releases by regular mail to your list of media outlets, by fax (if you have permission — some media offices do not appreciate unsolicited faxes) or by hand delivery. It's a good idea to address the release to a specific reporter or editor (if you're not sure who should get it, call the publications or stations, tell them what the topic of the release is, and get the name and title of the person to whom it should be addressed).

Update your mailing/faxing list regularly. Because reporters tend to get different assignments and change jobs often, and because phone numbers and addresses change on occasion, it is a good idea to take the time at least once a month to verify that the names, titles, addresses, and phone and fax numbers you have are still current.

When you are compiling a list of local media, remember to include newsletters of community organizations. Editors of these publications are always looking for information to share with their members.

Once you have sent the release out, relax. You've done what you can do. The decision to publish or broadcast your news is now out of your hands. Someone from the paper or station will contact you if they want more information. But if they do not want to use your news, you can not make them use it. If, after trying several times, you fail to get coverage, meet with the editor or station manager to educate them about the department and find out how to give them what they are looking for.

Measuring Results

A politician, probably one who did not last in office very long, is claimed to have said, "I don't care what you print about me, just spell my name right."

You should care what is printed in the newspaper or reported on radio or TV about you and your department. There is, after all, a very big difference between good and bad news media coverage. Get lots of good coverage, and lots of good things are likely to happen to your department. Contributions will increase, new volunteers will appear. Lots of bad coverage? Well, you're not going to let that happen.

How are you going to keep track of your progress with the news media?

It is easier keeping track of newspaper articles, because you can cut them out and save them, as opposed to radio and television coverage, which can be taped, but only if you know to do it.

For each piece of coverage, you will want to consider four factors:

Factor 1. Overall, whether it is a favorable or unfavorable piece, do not worry about a negative sentence or two.

Consider the headline and the first few paragraphs and then decide. If you like it a lot, give yourself five points. If the article is an absolute disaster, give yourself minus five points. Most articles will be nice but not great, so give them a two or three. You get the idea.

Rank all articles according to this plus five to minus five scale (don't use zero because it will mess you up later).

Factor 2. Readers are more likely to notice the article if it is on the front page, or a televised story if it is early in the newscast. We call this factor prominence. If the piece is buried on page 39 under the shoe store ad, give yourself one point. If it is the top story on page one, give yourself five points. Most stories will fall someplace in between.

Factor 3. The next factor is size. A large article with a photograph is more likely to be seen than a small one without a photo. Give yourself one point if the story is very small, and five points if it takes up a whole page. Most stories will fall someplace in the middle. With radio and TV, the amount of time spent on the story is the deciding factor.

Factor 4. Finally, consider the newspaper, TV or radio station covering your story. Five points for the major media in your area, one point for very small outlets and the rest in between.

For each story or article you rate, you will combine these four factors in this way:

Step one: add factors 2, 3 and 4. This will give you an idea of how many people were likely to see or hear the story.

Step two: multiply the number you get from step one by factor 1. This will tell you how good or bad the story was.

For example, a highly favorable story (5 points) on page one (5 points) — covering most of the page (5 points) in a large newspaper (5 points) would give you 75 points (5 + 5 +5 =15 x 5 = 75)—a big score! A negative story in exactly the same place would produce −75 points.

The advantage of keeping score is to keep things in perspective and to see how you're doing over time. One bad article might upset you so much that you assume all coverage has been bad. This will help you see the forest for the trees.

It only takes a minute to do it, and as you progress with your media relations program, you will see the points add up. You will begin to see what kinds of stories do best with the newspapers, radio and television stations in your area, which means you can try to promote those kinds of stories more often.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dennis Jones served as a Fire Chief in Missouri and has over 20 years of experience in the industry.

Public Information Management

Things for you to do …

☐ 1. Develop or revise your Information Packet to include areas outlined in this chapter.

☐ 2. Get to know your local media (TV, radio, news,). Develop a proactive method to involve them.

☐ 3. Develop SOP for talking to the media and emergency response incidents.

☐ 4. Develop a press release (real or imaginary) as a practice for future events/issues.

☐ 5 Name a Public Information Officer and develop an appropriate job description.

Chapter 16

Using Legal Counsel

By Bernie Heinze, J.D.

Most ESOs have had to use legal counsel at one time or another. But knowing when and why to use an attorney (e.g. Mutual Aid Agreements, facilities agreements, equipment agreements, contracts, deeds, loans, etc.) is a critical management knowledge component.

*The content of this chapter contains information of a general nature only, and should not be considered formal legal advice. The specific laws, statutes, and ordinances of each municipality, city or incorporated township vary widely. The authors recommend that before any of the material in this chapter is evaluated for implementation, that an attorney properly admitted to the bar in the state in which the fire department is located be consulted to ensure no impediments exist within the state or municipality or city to preclude the use of this information in whole or in part.

Using Legal Counsel

Conventional wisdom has through time advocated that lawyers should be avoided at all costs. It was always believed that fire service professionals and attorneys had little in common when it came to understanding or appreciating one another's value to the community. The thought also was that their respective interests could not be further apart. Those times have changed. The advent of more lawsuits against volunteer and combination fire departments, changing laws and regulations, increased insurance premiums for general liability, workers compensation, errors and omissions and professional liability coverage, drafting standard operating procedures and other forms or procedures on a variety of matters including internet usage within the firehouse, applying for and monitoring the fulfillment of requirements for private, state and federal grants, negotiating and drafting releases and contracts, tracking compliance on contractual agreements with municipalities, mutual aid companies and vendors selling products ranging from apparatus, tools and services to software, can allow today's fire professionals and their departments to benefit from an attorney's experience, added value, and pro-active involvement.

Nevertheless, for most organizations the thought of retaining legal counsel is often met with fear, trepidation, and sometimes outright hostility. These concerns are often the result of a past experience or a relationship that was formed hurriedly or because of a festering problem that was not contributing to an organization's mission and bottom line. However, when counsel is thought of – and presents him or herself as a trusted business advisor and problem-solver, these fears give way to a relationship which is beneficial to the organization in both the short and long term.

Today's volunteer fire service is comprised of hundreds of departments, and thousands of men, women, and young people across the country, who continue the legacy of departments built on the long-standing traditions of camaraderie, professionalism, integrity, and mutual trust. They provide various invaluable services and commitments to their communities and to one another. However, while past customs remain the foundation of the volunteer fire service, the reality is that we live in a new and different world. A world in which volunteers and their departments are sued regularly for incidents of accidents with apparatus responding to an emergency, or causing damage to a homeowners property when performing ventilation, salvage and overhaul or rescue operations. An engineer or officer in charge may be questioned after an accident or at the fire/rescue ground because they have a trace of alcohol on their breath. There are even situations where volunteers sue their own department for discrimination or violation of their civil rights.

The legal world today is a difficult one – filled with many who seek only to creatively construe a factual scenario in the hope of a quick insurance settlement or to bring their case before a jury for alleged damages and losses – without any care for the party that may be on the other side. The key for today's fire department is to be proactive and, much like the necessity of pre-plan maps and procedures to respond to a variety of possible scenarios, devise a set of standard operating guidelines, reporting and record

retention policies, and other actions to be prepared for these situations in the event they arise. A dedicated attorney can also perform another important function for the overall good and welfare of the department and its members. There are many personal and professional benefits to being a member of the fire service. There are also many questions, problems, and issues members will have unrelated to the fire department, but which impact their personal lives. Having an attorney on board, without having to worry about costs for initial consultations, is another member benefit. This chapter will compliment the other excellent efforts of our colleagues in this book by recommending ways in which the formerly avoided counsel of lawyers can be brought within the fire department organization for mutual benefit in a variety of ways.

Selecting the Right Attorney

We have all heard the term "horses for courses." Depending on the type of track, weather conditions, and other issues of the day, a trainer needs to decide which horse is going to be put into the race. The same holds true in selecting the right attorney to partner with the fire department. Each department will have a unique structure (volunteer, combination, paid, etc), and each will have specific needs, goals, contractual arrangements, and other requirements that can be aided by an attorney concentrating their practice in those various areas.

There may also be times when a department is either sued or brought into litigation. When a formal civil action complaint is filed against the fire department, an attorney will usually be retained by the fire department's insurance company to defend its interests. A local solicitor or attorney representing the municipality may also serve in this role. In these types of situations, it is imperative to have the attorney involved as soon as possible. Answering legal complaints, responding to subpoenas seeking copies of fire incident reports, names of personnel on scene, and other information, preparing witnesses for depositions and responses to questions involved in the litigation, are all examples of vitally important matters that are required to be answered under oath, and where an attorney for the department can be of added value. Therefore, in looking to bring an attorney on-board, or to use as a resource, the following recommendations will be helpful in the selection process.

- Identify and write down the specific needs and requirements to be addressed by the fire department's chief legal advisor.

- Prepare a written list of the department's needs and requirements to be addressed by the attorney or prepare a more formal Request for Proposal (RFP) setting forth the company's needs and expectations that is then sent to a number of candidates for response and bidding on opportunity of being trusted with the department's business.

- Develop a list of candidates from reliable referral sources and provide each candidate with a copy of the department's specific needs and requirements.

- Review responses to the company's inquiries regarding counsel and interview those whom the company feels offer the most pertinent experience and complement the company's structure and overall mission.

- Visit the attorney's firm or offices to get a sense of their operations.

- Obtain and, if possible, contact Bibliography provided by the attorney.

- Negotiate the financial arrangements of the attorney's retention (see further discussion, the *Cost of Counsel* section)

- Select the attorney best suited for the position based upon the needs and expectations of the company.

To ensure that the process of selecting counsel before a specific need arises is most useful, the company needs to be cognizant of its present needs and how they may change in the future. An attorney can provide the department with advice on being given comprehensive information regarding engine, truck, rescue, emergency medical services, fire service, legal, contract, regulatory, and other department administrative and other operations. Counsel should also be geared toward preventing future legal problems. This preventive approach has a number of benefits.

- Legal risks and exposures may be avoided, eliminated or reduced when they are identified in advance.

- Department transactions and contracts can be structured in a way that will ensure a strong position if and when a dispute develops.

- Money is saved by avoiding unnecessary or avoidable litigation.

While limited experience with fire departments may be acceptable when an attorney is chosen regarding a specific case or issue, the fire company's chief legal advisor should have experience relating to the overall spectrum of fire company management and litigation avoidance.

A Fire Department is a unique hybrid of two and sometimes three entities: (1) a legal/business/municipal entity; (2) a community; and often, (3) an employer. Throughout its existence, a fire company will encounter issues touching upon almost every field of legal practice, including business organization, contracts, mediations, personal injury and employment law, real estate matters and risk management concerns, just to name a few. Thus, to derive full benefit of having a chief counsel, a

fire department should choose an attorney after appropriate due diligence into the background, expertise, and experience of the attorney.

If litigation is filed or needs to be filed on behalf of the department, it will want to retain a litigator specializing in the type of matter at issue. However, this attorney, like the company's chief legal advisor, should also be sensitive and responsive to the department's individual needs. An early meeting and discussion with the prospective attorney is often the best way of determining if there is a fit between the company and its particular problem and the attorney.

Before meeting with an attorney, whether retained by the department or on its behalf, it will be necessary to gather all materials relating to the litigation, including, if the company is the defendant, any papers served by a process server, noting the date on which the papers were received or served, and by whom. If possible, forward as many of the materials to the attorney in advance of the meeting to allow time for review. Ask to hear about similar cases the attorney may have handled. You may also want to ask if the attorney will handle the case personally or if it will be handled by others within the firm. In matters like this, a personal relationship is a key element to the successful work that needs to be done.

Every client needs an attorney whose philosophy and personality is compatible with their own, but an attorney must be permitted to exercise independent judgment and be able to provide frank advice. Telling any client what they may not want to hear is not easy, but often necessary. The fire company client needs to be open and honest in all dealings with its attorneys, even when things have not gone as hoped. Only when an attorney knows all the facts may he or she be in a position to represent the company to the best extent possible. There is simply no substitute for open and continual communication. If it is to work successfully, it will need to be a two-way street. As should be clear with any situation, communication with counsel, and lots of it, is the best way to ensure that a fire company is well-represented and satisfied with the nature and extent of services of its legal advisors. As fire service professionals, we are well aware of providing timely updates and regular reports to the incident commander and the emergency dispatch center. The relationship with counsel should be subject to the same rules. Therefore, to ensure a successful relationship with attorneys, some basic rules should be followed.

- Be sure that the attorney and the fire company share the same goals.

- Be sure that the leaders of the fire company, or at least the company's principle contact with counsel, are comfortable with the attorney's working style and that they have a clear picture of the expected timetable for the matters being handled.

- Be sure that the attorney has been given all information and documents necessary to understand the matters for which legal representation is needed.

- Be sure that the fire company has been fully apprised of the attorney's billing practices and how the attorney is to be paid.

Cost of Counsel

Before getting started on the benefits, let's dispel another common myth. Lawyers are expensive. While it is true that the cost of legal talent has increased in certain fields of expertise or areas of the country, most law firms and attorneys practicing law or living in the community are more than willing to give something back and volunteer their services to the fire department on what is referred to as a *pro bono* or no cost arrangement. Such an understanding can be of benefit to both the fire department and counsel. Aside from volunteering their professional legal services, they might even see the greater benefit of volunteering their time and other talents for the department overall, as a firefighter, engineer, fire police, first responder, in an administrative position or some other capacity.

Should the *pro bono* arrangement not be possible, a department can budget funds individually, or in combination with other fire departments in the area, to keep an attorney on a financial retainer that is mutually agreeable. When done, the manner in which counsel will be paid should be set forth in a written agreement, signed both by the fire department and the attorney. A written fee agreement is equally important when retaining litigation counsel for a particular matter. The agreement should set forth the services the attorney is going to perform and how the attorney will be paid. Possible questions regarding financial issues include:

- How will the attorney bill for his time? Will it be on an hourly basis? If the fire company is bringing legal action, will the attorney receive a percentage of the amount, if any, recovered by the fire company?

- It might also be possible to negotiate a flat fee retainer or an agreed-upon fee for special services rendered, in which the attorney is compensated for all work undertaken on behalf of the department on an annual, monthly, or other basis.

- Who else will be working on the case: partner, associate, paralegal? How will that time be billed?

- What can the fire department do to reduce fees and costs?

- On specific projects of limited duration, what is the attorney's estimate of the total charges?

- How will the firm or attorney bill the department for out-of-pocket expenses?

It is recommended that whatever financial arrangement is agreed upon, that any statements or invoices for professional services rendered be on a monthly billing cycle. This allows the department to keep track of its budget for the activity, the expenses being paid, and any changes that may need to be made in light of changing circumstances. It also helps the attorney keep track of their efforts and billings.

Regardless of the circumstances of compensation, the return on investment for having an attorney the department can call upon will be a positive one. Aside from the services that can be offered and performed for the fire department, counsel can also be a resource to individual members for their personal needs. This added member benefit can be another advantage of involving an attorney within the framework of the enterprise. Against this background, let's review some of the professional services in which attorneys can add value to the fire service.

Organization and Management of the Fire Department

Whether the fire department has been existence for decades, or is just getting started, attorneys can guide an entity's initial and annual review of formal corporate documents. This would include incorporation of the entity by preparing and filing the necessary documentation with the department of state, drafting the necessary bylaws and constitution of the department, preparing the appropriate state and federal[5] income tax exemption requests, and helping to design the department's strategic plan and annual budget. Many states also require annual recertification of the department, and to be advised of changes in executive or administrative/line officer leadership.

Bylaws and Constitution

The Bylaws and Constitution of the department are the fundamental foundation of its existence from a corporate perspective. No entity can survive without them, and they must be followed. They provide the organization, construction and guidelines of the entity and, while capable of being amended by the qualified members of the department, remain the source of guidance for the administrative operations and provide the members with what will be expected of them. An attorney can be a valuable resource in drafting and helping the department implement them.

The basic components of the Bylaws and Constitution are:

- Organization and Mission Statement of the department
- Format and frequency of meetings
- Membership classifications and qualifications

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[5] Most fire departments can organize and apply for exemption from the imposition of federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and under the applicable state tax code. Requests can also be made to the Internal Revenue Service for an exemption of the fire department from filing an annual tax return under Section 990 of the Internal Revenue Code as a charitable organization.

- Composition, qualifications, duties, and terms of office for the Executive Board
- Composition, qualifications, duties, and terms of office for the line officers
- Election procedures
- Removal from office, suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary matters
- Regulations
  - Fire House Rules
  - Station Code of Conduct
  - Fire/Rescue Scene Code of Conduct
  - Safety
  - Care and use of equipment
  - Purchases
  - General misconduct
- Awards
- Anti-discrimination statement
- Amendments and interpretations

As noted, the Bylaws should contain an anti-discrimination or zero-tolerance of what amounts to discriminatory conduct or behavior. Whether the department is all volunteer, combination, or paid, the laws of our country establish the basic civil rights and privileges to which we are all entitled as US citizens[6]. Therefore, the department is compelled to ensure these same rights and privileges are afforded to its members. Examples of this conduct would include discriminating against an applicant or member because of, among other things, their gender, marital status, national origin/race, religion, age or disability; allowing a hostile environment to exist in the fire house or at the fire scene, which amount to subjecting firefighters of the opposite or same sex to conditions that are offensive to them; and other behaviors being advanced by fire department members that are unwanted and distasteful.

In paid, combination, and even in some volunteer fire departments, handbooks have been written and implemented pertaining to specific expectations of the members by the department. Commonly referred to as an Employee Handbook, the manual delineates a history of the department, provides information on the executive and line officers, and the duties and responsibilities of the members and their rights under state and federal law. This is another area in which the attorney can be helpful, by ensuring the handbook provisions comply with existing laws and regulations, and that the minimum requirements are all adequately addressed.

It will also be helpful to designate a neutral person within the fire department to whom members can bring questions, concerns and complaints arising under these circumstances, without any fear of reprisal. An established procedure for the filing,

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[6] *See,* the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1871 (42 USC §1983), stating in pertinent part: "…every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom or usage of any state or territory" deprives any one of their "rights, privileges, and immunities secured by the Constitution and laws" of the United States shall be liable to the injured party. These include the rights to due process of law, equal protection and other rights and immunities as established by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

prompt investigation, and resolution of human relations complaints can further reduce the prospect of additional future liabilities for the department.

Beyond the Bylaws and Constitution, the attorney can also serve as a resource for the president and chief of the department in drafting and implementing the standard operation guidelines and other directives. These are more procedural in nature and are addressed to a particular set of circumstances. However, they add an important element to the structure of the department.

Budgets and Strategic Planning

An attorney can also be of assistance in working with the department in preparing and executing its budget and business and strategic plan. In today's environment where the majority of fire department funding comes from the assessment of property and other taxes by the local municipality, voluntary donations from the public, and the receipt of relief association, state and federal grants, the transparency of the fire department's fiscal affairs is another important consideration.

While it is true that the department is usually a separately incorporated entity, many are also tied to the municipalities they serve. While it is also true that the financial expenses made and revenues received are usually within the department's discretion, good business practices and the fostering of relations with the public – our customers – dictate the accounting a department should make to the public. It amounts to good public relations and builds stronger trust between the fire department, its members, the governmental unit and the public.

The attorney can also work on implementing regular financial reports, audits and other performance measures to ensure the appropriated dollars are being used for their intended purposes. The unfortunate reality is that there are limited financial resources a municipality can allocate to the fire department. Code enforcement, fines, inspections, filing fees, and other sources can complement the tax dollars vital to our survival. Every executive and line officer, firefighter, fire police officer, engineer and administrative professional worth their salt can provide a substantial number of items that would allow the department the capability of doing more for its community, residents and businesses. Regrettably, there is only a limited amount of funding that can be obtained from a local governmental unit. The rest will be up to the creativity of the fire department's members through fire prevention, direct mail and other donations, raffles, holding open houses, car washes, and other fund raising opportunities.

Counsel will also provide value in the drafting of state and federal grant requests for additional projects and resources. As many of the request forms and requirements contain legal obligations, it is advisable to have an understanding of them and a plan in place for full compliance at the inception of the process.

Beyond this, an attorney can also assist in the development of the vehicle replacement and strategic plan for the department. Making investments in apparatus and equipment is one of the department's most important decisions in developing its fleet. Considerations of budgeting for maintenance and replacement also become an

important part of the department's overall strategic plan. Capital purchases for these major assets brings with it the opportunity to complement the fire department's existing capabilities with a skilled negotiator. An attorney can fill this role by becoming a member of the committee designing a new apparatus to the department's specifications. Further, the attorney can aid the department in the competitive bid process, where local governmental regulations require a special procedure before capital expenditures can be made. Counsel can assist in drafting the specifications, the bidding process, and agreeing on the final contract terms and conditions with vendors of apparatus, equipment, building and other services, as well as loans or other sources of funding for capital expenditures. During the course of building the apparatus or construction of new facilities, the department's attorney can follow the progress and insert themselves in the process as warranted. Mutual aid agreements between municipalities for multiple alarms or other circumstances, provide another opportunity to utilize counsel's expertise in the drafting and review of those contracts.

Finally, attorneys are accustomed to being brought in after things have already gone wrong. As a consequence, they are accustomed to solving problems. Involving counsel at the front end – before a problem develops – can also save substantial money and concerns down the road. This would include examining the various functions and operations of the department, the consequences of those operations if something should go wrong, and to assist in the development of risk and loss management activities. For example, where a department had a consistent series of injuries resulting from the evolution of erecting ladders in the performance of their activities as a Fire Assistance and Support Team (FAST); or where members of another department sustained slip and fall related injuries on water flow operations during the freezing weather months, appropriate risk management solutions were recommended by attorneys to mitigate further occurrences. On the FAST Team, counsel was able to work with the chief of the department in mandating a minimum number of firefighters work together on erecting ground, roof and extension ladders to better enable the weight to be spread, and that the maneuverability of the ladders take place more effectively without incident. Where volunteers were injuring themselves on the fireground in the winter months due to water freezing on the ground surfaces, counsel worked with the local municipality to have a salt truck from its public works department run first due with the dispatch of the fire department. The incident commander would call for salt to be applied as conditions deteriorated, thus preventing a repeat of these injuries.

Operational Issues

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid, and the Inter-Governmental Agreements which support it, are another central component of a modern day fire department's commitment to the community and surrounding region. With the competing interests of balancing a career, family and home life, the challenge of committing discretionary time to the volunteer fire service are

becoming increasingly difficult. The stretch of resources necessary for one community can also tax a department. Thus, mutual aid agreements can arrange to deliver an additional ladder, cascade, tanker, engine company, FAST Team, hazardous material technicians, manpower, a stand-by crew or other support for the benefit of the first due company as needed. Often the mutual aid agreements become a tangled web of negotiations between municipalities. An attorney can provide guidance in the drafting of these agreements, and reviewing any possible liability issues that might arise, so the department can stay out of future difficulty.

To the same extent, given our living in the time of possible terrorist activities, the usage of biological, chemical and other weapons of mass destruction, and increased uncertainties from Mother Nature, there has never been a more important time to assure a fully trained and equipped fire response is available for any potential situation. In undertaking the pre-planning function of reviewing the various scenarios and designing appropriate responses, mutual aid agreements can again consolidate the assets and resources of neighboring departments for the greater good of the residents and businesses served. Task Forces are being created among neighboring communities, which can be alerted for a coordinated response as soon as a disaster occurs. With the assistance of counsel, a resource inventory of the tools, equipment, manpower expertise, apparatus, etc. can be prepared and ready.

Preserving the Fire Scene

A subject receiving increased attention is the fire department's activities on the fire ground during fire suppression and salvage and overhaul operations. Traditionally, Fire Departments have undertaken their necessary tasks on arriving at the scene of a fire, without substantial regard to the personal property or other fire-related evidence that may become disturbed or damaged in the process.

In the age of increased litigation, fire marshals and other experts are making more use of scientific and technological tools to determine the cause of a fire. Others will use enhanced techniques to attribute responsibility to one party or another, or on a manufacturer or installer of a product that can be identified as to where the fire originated. Prosecutors rely on the fire department to help in identifying evidence of flammable liquid, ignition sources, and other evidence of suspected arson in their efforts to prosecute the criminals who set these fires. Therefore, it is important for the chief of the department, training officer, and incident commanders to educate the firefighters in advance – as well as reiterate at the scene – that the fire ground and any involved property must be preserved. Even the location of certain property, furniture, commercial machines and equipment involved in the area where the fire occurred is important to the investigator for inclusion in the determination of fire cause and origin. Where possible during the salvage and overhaul operations, and before property is removed from the dwelling or location where it existed at the time of fire inception, it is advisable to photograph the scene or provide a drawing indicating the location of involved

combustible material, before it is removed outside of the involved building or dwelling, or from the scene.

In the event the incident commander believes arson or other suspicious behavior was involved in causing the fire, any evidence believed to be involved should not be disturbed from the position in which it was found on the fire ground until such time as the fire marshal, police, or other designated investigating authority has catalogued and documented its particulars. It is essential to maintain the chain of custody and to preserve this evidence as it will become integral to any further efforts in prosecuting those responsible. The fire service is the first line of responsibility that law enforcement will rely upon in these situations.

Once the drawings and photographs have been completed, they should become part of the official incident report and kept on file. Counsel can assist in the process of maintaining the information and working with law enforcement to assure the information, reports, and other evidence is appropriately preserved and maintained.

Internet Usage

In the firehouses across the country, internet usage has become more an essential component of daily operations than a luxury as departments make more use of their information technology. If e-mail and internet access and downloading of information is permitted to members, a proper internet usage policy is absolutely necessary to avoid any potential liabilities. A sample format appears below:

Internet and Technology Usage Agreement

The use of technology and the Internet offers tremendous opportunities to interact with our customers, suppliers, and fellow members. It can increase efficiency, reduce costs, improve accuracy, provide efficient access to unique resources, and increase our opportunities for collaboration. However, Internet usage presents a number of new and potentially serious challenges that must be addressed. Set forth below are the fire department's operating policies relating to the use of technology and the Internet.

Instructions: Please read and signify concurrence by initialing each paragraph. This form will be placed in the member's permanent personnel record.

Initials

1. **Property of the Department**: The computers, networks, communication devices (phones, pagers, 2-way radios, fax, etc.), servers, printers, voice mail, communication systems and all other FIRE DEPARTMENT owned or controlled equipment, hardware and software, provided or made available to you by the FIRE DEPARTMENT ("FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources") are the property of the FIRE DEPARTMENT. Records, including all information and

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data created through the use of FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources, are the property of the FIRE DEPARTMENT.

2. **The Internet Connection:** The network communications facilities providing Internet service are expensive and will be shared among FIRE DEPARTMENT members. This requires your efficient and ethical utilization of FIRE DEPARTMENT'S Resources. Each Internet access facility is monitored and each facility generates detailed audit logs reflecting every request for service, both in-bound and out-bound. These logs and/or data passing through such facilities may be monitored by the FIRE DEPARTMENT or a third party designated by the FIRE DEPARTMENT, at the sole discretion of the FIRE DEPARTMENT. You understand and acknowledge that although the FIRE DEPARTMENT reserves the right to monitor Internet activity, the FIRE DEPARTMENT is under no obligation to monitor the use of FIRE DEPARTMENT'S Resources or to censor or filter data or information stored on or transmitted through FIRE DEPARTMENT'S Resources. You assume any risk associated with access to the Internet and use of FIRE DEPARTMENT'S Resources. All permissions and/or technical issues relating to Internet access and/or connection to FIRE DEPARTMENT resources will be authorized/provided by the Computer and Technology Division.

3. **Obtaining Internet Access:** Internet access will be provided to FIRE DEPARTMENT employees and volunteer members, at the sole discretion of the FIRE DEPARTMENT. The FIRE DEPARTMENT may grant or revoke any employee or volunteer member's access to the Internet through or with FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources at any time, for any or no reason. Access will not be provided until this agreement is signed and returned to the Computer and Technology Division

4. **Right to Monitor and Authorized Access**: The FIRE DEPARTMENT reserves the right to monitor the operation and use of FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources, to access all records and data within such resources, and to retain or dispose of these records and data as the FIRE DEPARTMENT deems necessary. You agree to use FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources for department purposes; and in a manner that is proper, legal and ethical. You may use FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources for personal purposes (i.e., personal email, etc.) so long as such use is reasonable, does not interfere with or adversely impact your responsibilities and/or obligations to the FIRE DEPARTMENT and otherwise complies with FIRE

DEPARTMENT'S policies and procedures. You agree to limit your access and use of FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources to resources you are authorized to access and use, and not to attempt to access FIRE DEPARTMENT Resources that you have not been authorized to access. You agree to cooperate with the FIRE DEPARTMENT in the investigation of any apparent unauthorized access by you of any FIRE DEPARTMENT Resource or an unauthorized release by you of any confidential information.

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5. **Specific Responsibilities Associated with Internet Use**
Violation of any of the below prohibited actions can result in immediate termination of membership with the FIRE DEPARTMENT.

- Transmission of threatening, defamatory, or offensive material is prohibited. Such material includes (i) anything that would embarrass the department; (ii) indecent or obscene images, text or other materials; or (iii) other images, text or materials which encourage or promote activities that would, if conducted, be illegal.

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- Transmission of any material in violation of any laws is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, material protected by copyright and trademark laws.

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- Release of your password to anyone for any reason is prohibited. You acknowledge that it is your responsibility to safeguard your password and you agree that you will not take any action that would compromise the integrity or security of any FIRE DEPARTMENT Resource.

_____

Acknowledgment and Consent

I have read and accept the terms and conditions set forth above. I understand that failure to comply with these terms, conditions, and requirements may result in the immediate termination of my Internet access as well as disciplinary action up to and including termination, and/or appropriate legal action.

Signature:_

Date:_

Name (print):_

Buying and Selling Assets

Physical property, (e.g. land, buildings, vehicles, major equipment) are routinely bought and sold by emergency service organizations. Bills of sale, risk transfer documents, land acquisition documents, etc. are frequently required as part of these transactions. These documents are generally foreign to emergency service organization officers and necessitate the use of legal counsel to properly guide the organization through the purchase/sale process.

NFPA Guidelines Compliance

There are numerous provisions of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in which an attorney can assist the Department in adopting or promulgating procedures for implementation and compliance of the guidelines. These include:

NFPA Section	Standard or Recommendation
NFPA 13E	Recommended practice for fire department operations in properties protected by sprinkler and standpipe systems
NFPA 329	Recommended practice for handling releases of flammable and combustible liquids and gases
NFPA 471	Recommended practice fro responding to hazardous materials incidents
NFPA 472	Standard for professional competence of responders to hazardous materials incidents
NFPA 1001	Standard for fire fighter professional operations
NFPA 1002	Standard for fire apparatus driver/operator professional qualifications
NFPA 1006	Standard for rescue technician professional qualifications
NFPA 1021	Standard for fire officer professional qualifications
NFPA 1035	Standard for professional qualifications for public fire and life safety educator
NFPA 1201	Standard for providing emergency services to the public
NFPA 1250	Recommended practice in emergency service organization risk management
NFPA 1401	Recommended practice for fire service training reports and records
NFPA 1403	Standard on live fire training evolutions

NFPA 1404	Standard for fire service respiratory protection training
NFPA 1410	Standard on training for initial emergency scene operations
NFPA 1451	Standard for a fire service vehicle operations training program
NFPA 1500	Standard on fire department occupational safety and health program
NFPA 1521	Standard for fire department safety officer
NFPA 1561	Standard on emergency services incident management system
NFPA 1581	Standard on fire department infection control program
NFPA 1582	Standard on comprehensive occupational medical program for fire departments
NFPA 1583	Standard on health-related fitness programs for firefighters
NFPA 1584	Recommended practice on the rehabilitation of members operating at incident scene operations and training exercises
NFPA 1600	Standard on disaster/emergency management and business continuity programs
NFPA 1620	Recommended practice for pre-incident planning
NFPA 1670	Standard on operations and training for technical search and rescue incidents
NFPA 1720	Standard for the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations and special operations to the public by volunteer fire departments
NFPA 1851	Standard on the selection, care and maintenance of structural fire fighting protective ensembles
NFPA 1852	Standard on selection, care and maintenance of open-circuit self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA)
NFPA 1901	Standard for automotive fire apparatus
NFPA 1915	Standard for fire apparatus preventive maintenance program
NFPA 1932	Standard on use, maintenance, and service testing of in-service fire department ground ladders

NFPA 1962	Standard for the inspection, care and use of fire hose, couplings and nozzles; and the service testing of fire hose
NFPA 1989	Standard on breathing air quality for fire and emergency services respiratory protection

There are additional NFPA documents, standards and recommendations applicable to fire department operations that may have applicability to a particular department's operations that are not set forth in the previous table. Further, manufacturer specifications and testing procedures relating to particular equipment are also in existence. These should be reviewed with counsel as warranted.

Record Retention

Each department should also have a documented records retention policy. The attorney can provide advice as to the length of time financial and accounting records, bank statements, audit reports, fire incident and investigation reports, photographs of a fire scene, training records, personnel records and certifications, and other documents on file should be maintained by the fire department. These records may become relevant and material in any ongoing fire cause and origin investigation, lawsuit or other proceeding. Storage space is at a premium however, copies of these documents must be maintained for future reference, usually five years, to assure that the department can respond to inquiries, requests, or subpoenas for these documents as needed. With the advent of technology, document imaging is becoming another accepted way to maintain large quantities of information, records and materials. Documents can be scanned and then saved on the department's computer system, server, or on a CD-ROM for easy retrieval as required.

Conclusion

The fire service has a respected reputation in every community, town and city in which firefighters, fire police, engineers, special operations, and administrative personnel work together to accomplish their duties and responsibilities. The modern day fire department is also looking at increasing the capabilities of fire protection, suppression, and prevention that can be offered to the residents and businesses served. The development of strategic plans, standards, protocols, administration and operational guidelines, and other opportunities can only enhance the delivery of services, customer satisfaction, public relations, and the request for appropriate funding.

Involving an attorney in the process where appropriate can play a vital role in achieving the department's goals and objectives. Getting them involved as an active member is even better. If other professionals also dedicate the benefit of their expertise

to the operations, there is no reason not to take advantage of a lawyer's experience and specialization in areas of importance to the fire department. Fully considering the department's choice of counsel, and ensuring that everyone is on the same page in terms of representing the interests of the company, will promote and usually lead to a healthy, consultative relationship between the fire company and its legal counsel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernd G. Heinze, Esquire is a practicing attorney, president and an active firefighter with the Fire Department of Montgomery Township, Pennsylvania (www.fdmt.org). He has been a firefighter since 1990. He has served as congressional assistant to Congressman Jack Kemp in Washington, DC, and graduated from the Temple University School of Law in 1983, where he received the International Association of Trial Lawyers award for excellence in oral advocacy. He has been an equity partner with an international law firm and chief national litigation counsel for a major US insurance company. He now is president and chief executive officer of Sequent Insurance Group, LLC an international consulting operation with offices in King of Prussia, PA, Columbus, OH, and London, England. He is a founding member of the International Litigation Management Association and a member of the Bar of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Supreme Court of the United States and the Pennsylvania federal courts. Mr. Heinze resides with his wife Martha and their two daughters in Montgomery Township, PA.

Chapter 17

Strategic Planning

By William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFO

No business is successful without some type of strategic planning — making sure that the business will survive. The ESO is no different, and volunteer ESOs require planning even more so, due to the limited funding and resources available to make the organization successful. Strategic Plans in business (and ESOs) lay the ground work for effective organizational management and performance.

Strategic Planning

What are the fire department's objectives for the next five years?. Where will the fire department be in seven years? What are the fire department capital purchasing plans for the next 10 years? What is the fire department's Standard of Response Cover? Have you heard these questions yet from political officials? If not, be prepared, they aren't far off; and you need to be prepared to answer them.

Through recent years there have been a number of approaches to improving the performance of both profit and nonprofit organizations. While terminology varies from "Transformation" to "Performance Improvement", development of a "Strategic Focus" is whatever process is used to drive an organization to look toward the future and make the organization successful. Creating and implementing a Strategic Focus helps an organization understand the resources, capabilities, and needs for their type of organization. To be successful in the creation of a Strategic Focus, an appropriate planning model must be used. The ***VFIS Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus Model*** was created to assist the Volunteer Fire Service manage change and organizational performance.

The ***VFIS Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus Model*** is driven by three components:
1. Organization Resource Assessment
2. Defined Service Expectation
3. Priority Planning to enable resources to meet expectations

The Planning Process

The ***VFIS Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus Model*** uses a derivative of the basic decision making process, employing five basic activities to evaluate these three components.

These five activities include:

Activity 1 Identification and Analysis of Key Issues

- Mission and Vision
- Standard of Response Cover
- Identification of Roles and Responsibilities
- Goals and Objectives
- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats
- Strategic Alliances

Activity 2. Obtain Direction from Key Sources of Input

- From organizational members
- From the community leaders
- From the citizenry
- From the business community
- From mutual aid agencies

Activity 3. Development of a Plan for Implementation over a Defined Time Period

- Immediate Action Steps to achieve goals and objectives
- Long Term Plan for Implementation

Activity 4. Implementation of a Plan with Responsibilities and Time Frames involving

- Finance
- Personnel
- Apparatus
- Equipment
- Facilities
- Processes and Procedures

Activity 5. Design and utilize a monitoring method to assure plan success

Through the use of the ***VFIS Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus Model,*** an organization is directly involved in identifying individualized issues and needs to determine the necessary steps to create a plan which turns vision into reality.

Result

The result of any strategic focus activity is ***change***. Therefore, any such process must be undertaken by an organization that is ready for change. If the organization is not ready for the change, then conflict can and will exist. As a result, change management practices must be identified and cataloged for reference as the planning process moves forward.

Benefits

Similar to a doctor analyzing a patient, step one of the process identifies the symptoms to be evaluated. As the symptoms become more pronounced, multiple symptoms surface, and testing and evaluation prove a specific problem exists, helping identify the necessary prescription (goals and objectives) that can be established to

resolve the problem and enable organizational health. However, the underlying causes of the problems must be resolved to manage long term health of the organization or problems will recur.

The output of the ***VFIS Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus Model*** is a set of goals, objectives, and action steps dealing with the organizational aspects of:
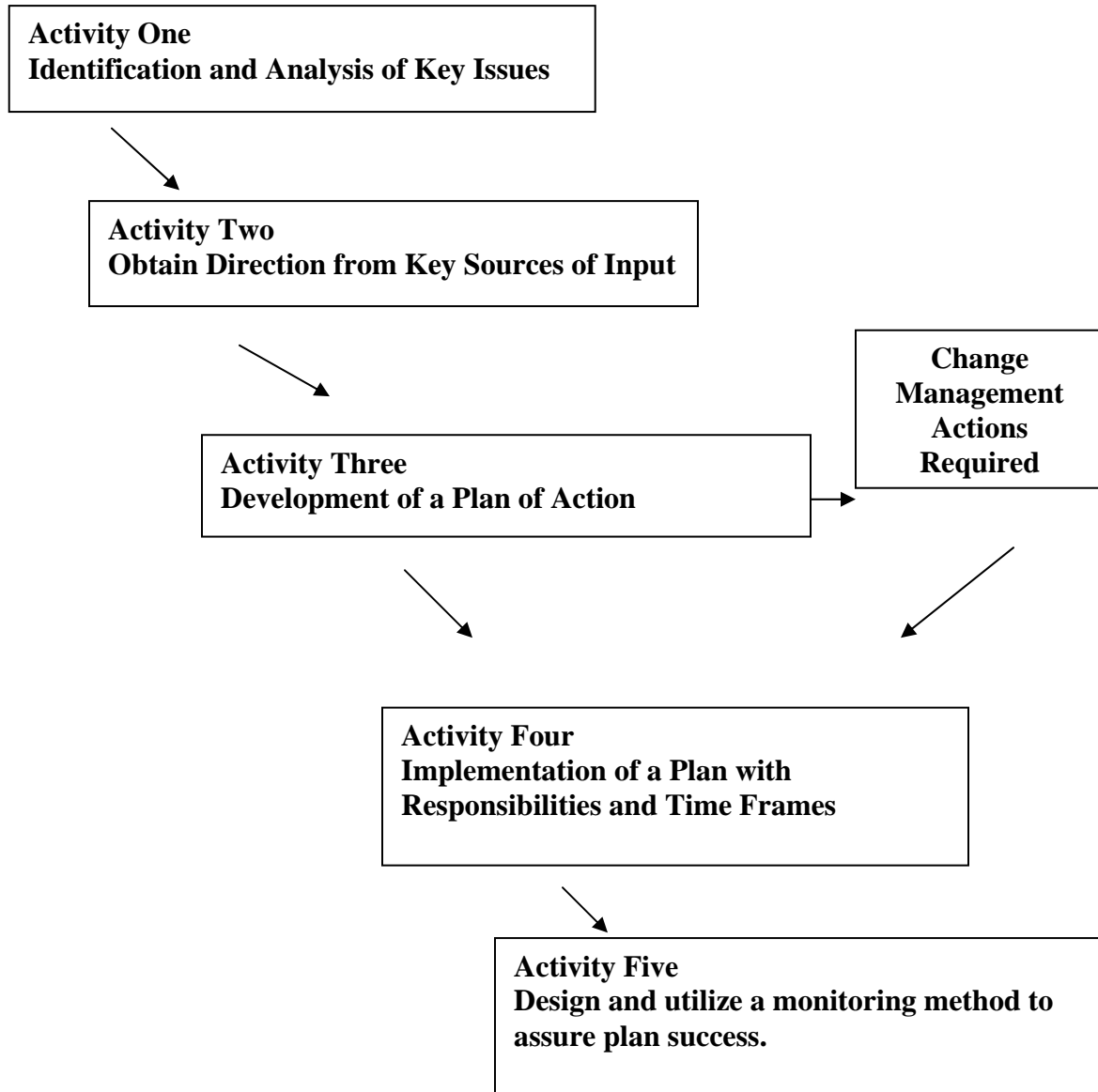
- Finance
- Personnel
- Facilities
- Apparatus
- Equipment
- Procedural/Process

These are consolidated into planning documents, including identified costs, time frames to complete, and responsibilities for completion. The process then identifies different sets of objectives for organizational action.

Conclusion

The fire department CEO in a volunteer or combination department is the critical leadership position to assure the overall organization functions properly. You may identify a number of other qualities or capabilities a fire department CEO should have, however, starting with the twenty items identified by VFIS will assist your organization to be more effective in basic operations. All of the pre-defined components are part of a management system that must be defined, managed, and orchestrated - JUST LIKE A BUSINESS.

The Planning Process

| Activity One |
| Identification and Analysis of Key Issues |

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| Activity Two |
| Obtain Direction from Key Sources of Input |

↓

| Activity Three |
| Development of a Plan of Action |
→
| **Change Management Actions Required** |

↓   ↓

| Activity Four |
| Implementation of a Plan with |
| Responsibilities and Time Frames |

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| Activity Five |
| Design and utilize a monitoring method to |
| assure plan success. |

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. William F. Jenaway, CFO, CFPS, is the Executive Vice President of VFIS Education and Training Services, President of the Congressional Fire Services Institute; Chairman of NFPA 1201, Fire Department Organization; and a Commissioner for the Commission on Fire Accreditation International

Bibliography

The process used to facilitate development of this service is a compilation of several strategic planning organizations and documents, customized to meet the needs of volunteer fire service (non-profit) agencies.

Among the Bibliography are:

Center for Simplified Strategic Planning

The Support Center – "What are the steps of a strategic planning process"
"What are the key concepts and definitions in strategic planning"

Organized Change Consultancy – "Strategic Planning and Organizational Change"

William F. Jenaway, Ph.D. — *Transforming the Volunteer Fire Service*

William F. Jenaway, Ph.D. and Daniel B C. Gardiner – Fire Protection in the 21st Century

Myrna Associates Inc. – "What Strategic Planning Can Do For You"

Strategic Planning

Things to do …..

☐ 1. If you have a Strategic Plan, review and update it. If you do not have one, develop one.

☐ 2. The plan must be customer-centered.

☐ 3. Determine how you will manage the change associated with the plan.

☐ 4. You may need a facilitator to help work through the issues. Do not hesitate to access a facilitator.

☐ 5. There are several sources of help you can access to develop a strategic plan from your local business community. Use these talents.

Chapter 18

Avoiding Trouble

By David Wyrwas

Policies, procedures, supervision and enforcement are critical to assuring that the organization is effectively managed. Manage them or trouble may arise.

Avoiding Trouble

In today's emergency response world, our time and resource availability is simply too valuable to risk by getting into problems, conflicts, and challenges. In fact, one key purpose of this book is to help the Chief Executive Officer of the Emergency Service Organization, be it Chief, President, or Commissioner to understand best business practices that enable the organization to function more efficiently and stay out of trouble. However, there are some issues that are more significant than others that warrant special emphasis.

Failure to properly lead

This book is about leadership. It defines the knowledge and skill sets you need to have as an emergency service organization leader in the 21st century. The times have changed, the ground rules have changed, and the expectations have changed.

Part of leadership is attitude. Too many Emergency Service Organization CEO's have a mightier than thou approach. It is seen repeatedly with conflicts at emergency scenes, conflicts with political leaders, and conflicts with the public. The emergency service of today is not the club house of the 1800's. It is a service delivery system that the public counts on for professional service. It requires a leader, not a dictator, not a clubhouse or clique director, and surely not a social director. Attitude and pompous actions have no place in the emergency service world of the 21st century.

Leadership involves the ability to manage conflict and develop staff, including development of replacements and other leaders. The role of the fire department CEO used to be leadership by instinct and experience. Today, leadership involves an understanding of the political system you work within, the people and processes you have to manage, and how to get people to work for your customer's goals and organization's goals.

Failure to plan

Whether it is a strategic plan, a marketing plan, a public information plan, a retention and recruitment plan, etc., planning today is a fundamental part of management and the CEO is ultimately responsible to assure these plans are developed. In today's world, the development of such plans may be enhanced (or even developed) by having a local business executive assist you. Tap the skills of outside experts — it can only help you.

Failing to plan results in the inability to understand issues, and needs. Ultimately, it can result in failure to succeed. The International Association of Fire Chiefs conducted a survey and found that 70% of the chief fire executives had NO plan in place for their organizations; and a survey of the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs found that 85% of their problems were due to lack of marketing (and a related plan for marketing). Is it any wonder that success is limited when you do not plan your way to achieve goals and objectives?

Failure to change

If Wal-Mart, Microsoft, Google, and other current successful businesses of our day did not change with the customer expectations, they will be along side G.C. Murphy Co., Packard Motor Cars, and Montgomery Ward — out of business or consolidated with a larger, stronger, similar organization. Change is inevitable. Your organization will change as a result of people, technology, service demands, or community deterioration, contraction, or growth. How you manage this change process will directly affect your long term success or failure.

One of the most frustrating situations to me is to visit a fire department where the personnel sit around a table and complain to themselves how bad things are, that they have no money, that their equipment is deteriorated, and that no one appreciates them. These same people will generally not be out in the public except for emergency responses, generally have limited contact with local public leaders, and have minimal – if any – knowledge of significant changes taking place in their community that affect them. To understand change and be effective in changing with the community, you have to open the bay doors and let the people in, and you have to go out and mingle with your customers, on their turf. The biggest change that has occurred for the emergency services in the last thirty years is that many developments and situations are taking people, money, and interest away from your organization. You have to be aggressive and go out into the marketplace to get those assets back. No longer can you sit in the fire station and have everything given to you that you want.

Failure to be customer centered

Keep the customer Number One in your mind. You exist for them. Nothing you do should benefit the emergency service organization. You are here for the customer. You serve them, they support you. If you fail to remember this simple approach and stay self-focused, failure looms for you. Customer centered service focus is critical to your overall success. Remember your last trip to a business that didn't consider the customer (your) needs and wants – how did you feel? Imagine that person who has just had the worst possible day, experiencing some type of property loss, an injury or worse, where you did not treat them with the highest possible courtesy, support, or service. What will they think of you and your organization?

Failure to continue to develop professionally

It isn't enough to rest on your laurels with respect to existing knowledge and skills. Too many CEO's assume their position and fail to continue to develop professionally. You must keep pace with changing legislation, new tools and technology, new management approaches, successes and failures of peer organizations, etc., and you

must see what is happening outside of your community in the industry. Failure to keep tabs on the outside world will create complacency, limit success, and create internal conflict. A comprehensive initial, refresher, and continuing training process must be included.

Failure to understand the effect of change and changing issues on your organization

An excellent example of this issue is management liability and employment practices liability. Because people are involved in your organization, the opportunity for interpersonal conflict raises the potential for such issues as harassment, discrimination, and wrongful discharge, among other types of management liability issues. These new types of challenges will force you (if challenged) to assure that your organization has taken every reasonable measure to prevent workplace wrongdoing and prepare the organization to promptly respond to any allegations.

Failure to get help from the general public

Accountants, physicians, business owners and managers, teachers, skilled tradesmen, and others with specific skills and knowledge that can help your organization may not have an interest in becoming firefighters or emergency medical responders for a variety of reasons. However, they may have the interest to help you with accounting practices, public presentations, fundraising, strategic planning, work with political or business leaders, help with construction projects, etc. Unfortunately, many emergency service organizations do not seek this type of assistance, or when they do receive it, they do not treat the person with equivalent value to those who respond to emergencies. In reality, they may be of more value than many of your firefighters. If the planning and support effort they provide is of value your conflicts may reduce, your budget may be enhanced, and your operations may run smoother. In most cases, all you have to do is ask. What's wrong with that?

So remember these key ways to avoid failure…

- Lead
- Plan
- Change
- Be customer centered
- Seek out and attend professional development programs
- Get help from the general public

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Wyrwas, President of VFIS, has been in the insurance industry for over 36 years. His career began in the commercial claims department of an insurance company. His focus shifted to Pension Plans, and eventually expanded to all forms of employee benefits, financial planning, and individual life and disability. In 1982, Dave joined Glatfelter Insurance Group as manager of the Life Group - Pension Department, and eventually was promoted to Vice President of VFIS Benefits Division. In 2001, he assumed his current role as President.

Dave graduated from St. Joseph's University with a BS in Business Administration and a minor in Marketing, and received his Masters Degree in Financial Services from American College. He holds numerous insurance designations, including Chartered Life Underwriter,(CLU), Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC), Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC), and Certified Risk Manager (CRM).

He is Vice President of the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Service Institute, a Corporate Advisory Board member of the Fallen Firefighter Foundation, and provides technical expertise to a number of national, regional, and statewide emergency service organizations and boards.

Avoiding Trouble

Things for you to do….

☐ 1. Review the information in this chapter with your officer team.

☐ 2. Have a discussion among the officers of how neighboring departments have gotten into trouble, what caused it, what they did, and what the results were.

☐ 3. Determine what you are doing similarly that could cause problems for your organization.

☐ 4. Determine what you would do differently to avoid the type of trouble your neighboring departments encountered.

☐ 5. Prioritize the types of issues you face, that may result in you getting into trouble, and what you should do to prevent or manage them.