

## **Reluctant Chief Officer Promotions**

Executive Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

The problem facing the Tucson Fire Department was a reluctance for “Certified”, eligible, Captains to apply and test for the position of Battalion Chief. The term “Certified” means that the Captain had successfully completed an 88 hour Chief Officer Certification course. While the number of eligible Captains was large, those choosing to apply for the exam was small. As a result, this had caused serious concern that the department would not be providing leadership for the future.

The purpose of the research project was to determine the cause of a diminished *n* factor and find possible solutions. The project utilized an evaluative research method and asked the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to Captains’ reluctance to apply and test for Battalion Chief?
2. Is this problem specific to the fire service or does it occur in the military or private sector as well?
3. Does the potential for an 8 hour staff assignment deter candidates?
4. Does monetary compensation have a significant impact?

A literature review was completed to gain an historical perspective both in the fire service and the military on career transitions. The author discovered that in the military, all of those eligible for promotion are considered. They have no choice!

A survey instrument was sent to the 31 eligible Tucson Fire Department Captains who had not applied for the upcoming Battalion Chief’s exam. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into why some Captains, who took the time to complete the certification program to become eligible, did not apply for the Battalion Chief’s exam.

The analysis and interpretation of the data in the survey included a comparison of the year of completion of Chief Officer Certification and reasons for not taking the exam as well as the seniority of the individual and when they planned to retire.

The results showed that the main reason for not applying was the possibility of an 8 hour staff assignment. Pay was not an issue.

The recommendation for the Tucson Fire Department was to employ an Organizational Development Specialist to further analyze the staff assignment problem. This should be a consultant who can evaluate the Department's activities without being bound by internal culture, traditions, or politics.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Tucson Fire Department is a large, metropolitan department with 510 employees. Situated in a desert community of 480,000, they provide fire and EMS services through 17 fire stations.

The problem in the Tucson Fire Department was the reluctance of eligible Captains to apply and test for the position of Battalion Chief. While the  $n$  factor for those eligible was large, those choosing to apply was small. As a result, this had caused serious concern that the department would not be providing leadership for the future. “We, as Executive Fire Officers, must provide the leadership within our organizations... “ (Pottberg, 1993, p. 1).

The purpose of this study was to determine the cause of a diminished  $n$  factor and find possible solutions. The research method chosen was evaluative and the research questions were:

- 1 - What factors contribute to Captains’ reluctance to apply and test for Battalion Chief?
- 2 - Is this problem specific to the fire service or does it occur in the military or private sector as well?
- 3 - Does the potential for an 8 hour staff assignment deter candidates?
- 4 - Does monetary compensation have a significant impact?

## BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Tucson Fire Department is an all paid, metropolitan department situated in a desert community of 480,000 citizens. Constant staffing places 124 personnel each day in 17 Fire Stations (four Battalions) throughout 150 square miles.

The rank structure begins with Firefighter and after two years the next promotional step can be to Engineer (driver), Inspector, or Paramedic. After serving three years in one of those positions, the next step is Captain (front line supervisor). With another three years as Captain one can promote to

Battalion Chief. This is the last tested position for promotion. Assistant Chief and above are appointed positions.

Promotional opportunities exist within the organization from the beginning position of Firefighter. After successful completion of a certification program, candidates are considered eligible to test for the next position. Each certification program is repeated every two years and the exam follows the certification. Candidates who successfully complete certification, remain certified for the remainder of their career. Therefore, since the inception of certification in the early 1980's, several individuals *remain* certified to test in several ranks. The focus of this research project deals with the rank of Battalion Chief.

Chief Officer Certification consumes 88 hours over a 3 month period of time. Captains with one year in rank may enroll in certification classes, but must attend all classes and complete homework assignments to successfully complete the program and pass. Classes are held Monday through Thursday from 0830 until 1230 hours with the same class repeated on Monday / Tuesday and Wednesday / Thursday to accommodate shift schedules. Suppression Captains assigned to shift can only attend classes off-duty. When completed, those successful Captains have logged a substantial number of hours of off duty classtime.

After successful completion of Chief Officer Certification, those individuals are considered "Certified" and may then apply for the Battalion Chief's exam. After the exam process, all participants are listed in order of rank on a promotional list with a two year expiration. If any vacancies in the rank of Battalion Chief occur during that two year period, the next seven names on the list are presented to the Fire Chief for promotion. The Fire Chief has the authority to choose anyone in those seven positions for promotion. This is known as the Civil Service Rule of Seven. As a side note, should only

seven individuals apply to take the exam, the exam is canceled and the seven names are presented to the Fire Chief without ranking. The most current Battalion Chief promotional flyer is attached as appendix A.

The following table shows the year Chief Officer Certification was completed, the number of Captains eligible to apply for the exam, and the number of those who actually applied.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number Eligible</b>	<b>Number Applied</b>
<b>1986</b>	unknown	22
<b>1988</b>	44	24
<b>1990</b>	34	24
<b>1992</b>	44	24
<b>1994</b>	42	14
<b>1996</b>	41	9
<b>1998</b>	40	9

TABLE 1 Number of Candidates

Clearly, as evidenced in Table 1, fewer and fewer candidates are choosing to apply for the exam process. From the mid 1980s to the early 1990s approximately 50% of those eligible chose to apply. 1994 was the first year that a substantial reduction occurred. In recent years, since 1994, the numbers have steadily declined to as few as 22.5% in 1998.

This study is significant to the fire service because our future depends on the best qualified personnel promoting to leadership positions. For the Tucson Fire Department, those choosing to promote to the Battalion Chief position has significantly diminished over the past few years. Consistent leadership and long-range planning are two of the enhancements that will be gained as this problem is



solved. By providing a greater number of individuals to test for management positions, the Fire Chief will have a better pool from which to choose.

This study directly relates to the EFOP course Executive Leadership. Chapter 10 speaks to the student on life's transitions from when firefighters join the service early in life, promote through the ranks, and through to the retirement years. A major part of Leadership is executive planning for the future of the organization.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review was performed to gain an historical perspective both in the fire service and the military on career transitions. The literature review was limited to some extent due to limited material on the subject. "Fire Departments, as well as other organizations, long have been concerned with the problem of identifying and promoting the best qualified talent into areas of more responsibility" (Shield, 1983, p. 13).

The Tucson Fire Department uses a very sound promotion system. Officers who meet the minimum standards and complete Chief Officer Certification are justified in believing that their future promotion will provide a rewarding career. At the same time, however, the work of the department must be done, and its promotion system must provide the flow of trained and ready officers to move into higher responsibilities. These future leaders must be identified, trained, and finally provided with the degree of authority that each will need to discharge greater responsibility. The training of good officers through the certification program is the justification for promotion so that good men and women will be ready when needed.

Atilla the Hun once said,

Few Huns will sustain themselves as chieftains without strong personal desire - an inherent commitment to influencing people, processes and outcomes. Weak is the chieftain who does not want to be one. We must be careful to avoid placing capable warriors into positions of leadership that they have no desire to fulfill (Roberts, 1987, p. 18).

Clearly, the fire service is no different. There must be a desire in our personnel to promote to management positions. More than desire, there must exist a passion to succeed ... a passion that drives one to prepare oneself and one's subordinates to excel.

There is sacrifice for those who choose to lead others. Attila spoke to his chieftains on this topic...

You must be willing to make unrecognized and thankless personal sacrifice for those you serve and those you lead. This sacrifice may take the form of absence from a tribal hunt, spending extraordinary energies and patience to develop subordinates and tending to the needs of these subordinates at times when your own needs go unfulfilled. You must be willing to bypass a festival in your own camp if a situation in another camp requires your presence and attention (Roberts, 1987, p. 27).

It sounds as if Atilla were speaking of the fire service here. Replace the word firestation for camp and he suddenly speaks directly to a suppression Battalion Chief.

The military is also a source of comparison to the fire service. In checking the rules of promotion within the military, the author discovered that *all* of those eligible for promotion are considered. According to the *Army Officers Guidebook*, (1996) "He or she does not have the option

to decline being considered...” (p. 285). Clearly the military has solved the problem of a reluctance of candidates choosing to apply and test for promotion. They, in essence, require everyone to test!

This military posture has some merit, however, an organizational culture change of great magnitude would need to take place for this to occur in the fire service.

One cannot research this topic without dealing with the staff assignment issue. As firefighters promote up through the ranks, they get closer and closer to the dreaded staff position. Clearly, one reason firefighters become firefighters is because of the shift schedule. As we recognize the growing importance of staff roles, there still remains a wide chasm between the desirability of staff and field assignments. Laurich states, “Job Jail was a local term that was born into the Colorado Springs Fire Department when a seasoned officer was given a staff assignment” (Laurich, 1995, p. ii). While there are incentives such as rotation policy, assignment pay, take home vehicle, and educational opportunities, most officers will say that they prefer the 24 hour shift. “Through the research it was found that there has in the past been reluctance to move from the field to staff positions” (Pottberg, 1993, p. 9). “Once the line lifestyle is ingrained in firefighters, they often are reluctant to exchange their present work hours for a conventional 40-hour week” (Laurich, 1995, p.5).

In Pottberg’s report (1993) the author discusses lowering the rank requirements to allow for an increase in the pool of eligible candidates for staff positions. He states that this is sometimes governed by provisions of statutes and union contracts, and that only a small percentage of fire departments have the flexibility to alter the rank of staff positions. This procedure could, however, provide the Tucson Fire Department with an alternative to staff positions and therefore, reduce the odds of being selected to a staff assignment as a Chief Officer. In other words, the pool of candidates for staff positions would

begin with the Captain's ranks. On the down side, perhaps this would create a reduction in those desiring to promote to Captain.

Firefighters enter the fire service with a well-rounded knowledge and life experience that fits well into the job description of emergency services. They're good with mechanical situations and life-threatening decisions. When put in a staff assignment they are out of their environment and extremely uncomfortable. (Laurich, 1995)

Introducing new members to the mission of the fire service in relation to staff positions was also mentioned in Pottberg's report (1993). By training new firefighters from the first day that they will be expected to spend time in a staff assignment might be a way of changing the organizational behavior of the department. It must be emphasized to the new recruit that it will take both field and staff assignments to meet the challenges faced by the department now and in the future. Clearly, this process would take quite some time.

Organizational behavior, as defined by Szilagy (1987), is concerned with the study of the behavior, attitudes, and performance of workers in an organizational setting. To change the behavior of the organization, most managers know that definitive answers are elusive, however, one *best* answer is unrealistic. Instead, several approaches should be utilized.

One might begin with the *task approach* to focus on the job performed by the individual, emphasizing motivational and job design changes and behavioral skills. This can be accomplished through such techniques as new training programs and entry level selection procedures.

"The view of the individual worker as an unlimited resource who is solely motivated by economic means is far too simplistic" (Szilagy, 1987, p.88). Motivation incorporates the concepts of needs, drives, goals, and rewards. The challenge is to determine what is missing in our organization to

preclude those Captains from the goal (and reward) of promotion. Motivation is based on the principle of hedonism; Individuals behave in a manner that will provide pleasure and minimize displeasure.

(Szilagyi, 1987) With this in mind what bearing does motivation play in the problem of poor selection to test?

Iacocca (1984) once said, “Money and a promotion are the tangible ways a company can say: most valuable player” (p.52). Clearly, the private sector promotes based on performance. The fire service, as with most civil service jobs, promotes based on the individual’s ability to test. The motivation, presumably, in the fire service is not to do a good job, but to test well and reap the rewards of promotion.

## **PROCEDURES**

The author selected this specific research topic from a personally perceived problem facing the Tucson Fire Department. A survey instrument was utilized to gather first hand information from certified Captains on the Tucson Fire Department. The term “Certified Captain” means that the individual has completed the Chief Officer Certification Program offered by the department. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into why some Captains, who took the time to complete the certification, did not apply for the Battalion Chief’s exam.

Prior to preparing a survey instrument, three certified Captains were asked for their input into the problem. Two of the Captains were not scheduled to take the upcoming exam, however, one had submitted an application. From that input the survey was refined to reflect as accurately as possible, questions that would yield a significant result.

A survey instrument was prepared (Appendix “B”). The survey population was defined as fire Captains in the Tucson Fire Department who had completed Chief Officer Certification and, therefore,

were “certified” and eligible to apply and test for the position of Battalion Chief, but had not applied for the most recent test (September 1998). All of these individuals were males since the only female Captain employed by the Tucson Fire Department is not yet eligible to enroll in Chief Officer Certification. This amounted to 31 “Certified” Fire Captains currently employed.

The time frame given to return the surveys was 3 weeks and when the due date arrived, only 19 of 31 had been returned. Statistical sampling requires 28 of 31 be returned for 95% accuracy. In order to gain a valid statistical sample, the author personally contacted each individual to encourage participation. Since the survey was anonymous, the author had no way of knowing who had returned a survey and who had not. Therefore, all 31 individuals were contacted. After this, 10 additional surveys were returned for a total of 29. None were returned incomplete.

It was assumed that all individuals who responded to the survey understood the questions and answered truthfully. These assumptions, however, could not be confirmed. Additionally, since all responses were from male Captains, it cannot be assumed that female Captains would respond similarly.

The data from the survey was collated into tables and analyzed to determine answers to the research questions. The first four questions were asked to gain background knowledge on the individual. Question five listed 14 possible reasons why certified Captains choose not to apply for the Battalion Chief’s exam including a category of “other” with room for remarks.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis and interpretation of the data included a comparison of the year of completion of Chief Officer Certification and reasons for not taking the Battalion Chief’s exam as well as the seniority of the individual and when they planned to retire.

In answering the research question regarding what factors contributed to Captains' reluctance to apply and test for Battalion Chief, the author discovered a wide array of reasons. The survey provided 14 reasons and all 14 were chosen by those surveyed as well as several additional reasons.

The author was also able to determine that this problem is specific to the fire service. The military and the private sector are not presented with this type of problem. In fact, the military considers all candidates eligible for promotion. The candidate has no choice.

It was found, by the survey results, that the potential for an 8 hour staff assignment is a significant deterrent for candidates choosing not to apply for the exam. The issue of monetary compensation has no impact.

The respondents were asked to indicate three reasons why, after completing certification, they would not want to apply for the exam process. Some responding individuals provided only one or two reasons. Table 2 displays the reasons for not applying for those seven individuals who completed Chief Officer Certification prior to 1986.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	3	23%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	0	
Don't want to work for this administration	3	23%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	0	
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	1	8%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	1	8%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	0	
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	2	15%
No perceived available position in the next two years	0	
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	0	
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	1	8%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	1	8%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	0	
Other: Too much favoritism.	1	8%

TABLE 2                      Certification prior to 1986                      *n* = 13

As shown in Table 2, the primary reason for not applying for the exam was *no longer interested in the position* and *don't want to work for this administration*. Secondly was that they *only took certification classes to gain the knowledge*.



Table 3 displays the reasons for not applying for those 14 responding individuals who completed Chief Officer Certification in the years of 1988, 1990, and 1992.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	7	17%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	2	5%
Don't want to work for this administration	4	10%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	1	2%
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	0	
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	11	27%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	0	
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	1	2%
No perceived available position in next two years	2	5%
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	3	7%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	2	5%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	1	2%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	3	7%
Other: Administration wants all white male upper management structure.  Chiefs have lost contact with those they supervise.  Not able to treat subordinates as shabbily as are currently treated. Don't respect current B.C.'s.	4	10%

TABLE 3 Certification in 1988, 1990, 1992 *n* = 41

As shown in Table 3, the primary reason for not applying for the exam was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. Secondly was that they were *no longer interested in the position*.

Table 4 displays the reasons for not applying for those eight responding individuals who completed Chief Officer Certification in the most recent years of 1994, 1996, and 1998.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	1	4%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	0	
Don't want to work for this administration	1	4%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	0	
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	2	8%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	3	12%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	3	12%
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	2	8%
No perceived available position in the next two years	0	
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	1	4%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	2	8%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	1	4%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	4	16%
Other: The job needs to be redesigned.  Don't feel I have enough time in current position.  Job is not much fun.  Ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain.	4	16%

TABLE 4. Certification in 1994, 1996, 1998  $n = 24$

As shown in Table 4, the primary reason for not applying for the exam was a *desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby* and the “*other*” category. Secondly was that they *don’t want possible 8 hour staff assignment and currently feel challenged with Captain’s responsibilities*.

The next three tables, numbers five, six, and seven compare the reasons for not applying for the exam to the years of service. Table 5 displays the data from those seven responding individuals with 15 to 20 years of service.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	1	5%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	0	
Don't want to work for this administration	1	5%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	0	
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	2	10%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	3	14%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	3	14%
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	2	10%
No perceived available position in the next two years	0	
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	1	5%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	1	5%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	0	
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	3	14%
Other: The job needs to be redesigned.  Job is not much fun.  Don't feel I have enough time in current position.  Ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain.	4	19%

TABLE 5

15 to 20 Years of Service*n* = 21

As shown in table 5, those individuals with 15 to 20 years of service used the “*other*” category as their primary reason for not applying to test, while *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment* and *currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities* were the secondary reasons.

Table 6 displays the responses of those 10 responding individuals with 21 to 25 years of service.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	4	14%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	1	4%
Don't want to work for this administration	4	14%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	1	4%
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	1	4%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	4	14%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	0	
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	1	4%
No perceived available position in the next two years	1	4%
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	2	7%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	3	10%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	2	7%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	3	10%
Other: Administration wants all white male upper management structure.  Not able to treat subordinates as shabbily as are currently treated.	2	7%

TABLE 6

21 to 25 Years of Service

n = 29

As shown in Table 6, the primary reason for not applying for the exam was *no longer interested in the position, don't want to work for this administration, and don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. Secondly was that they are *frustrated with the exam process/ poor quality exam* and they have a *desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby*.

Table 7 displays the responses of those 12 individuals with over 25 years of service.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	6	23%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	1	4%
Don't want to work for this administration	3	12%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	0	
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	0	
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	8	31%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	0	
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	2	8%
No perceived available position in the next two years	1	4%
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	1	4%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	1	4%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	1	4%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	1	4%
Other: Chiefs have lost contact with those they supervise. Don't respect current B.C.'s.	2	8%

TABLE 7

&gt; 25 Years of Service

n = 27



As shown in Table 7 above, the primary reason for not applying for the exam was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. The secondary reason was *no longer interested in the position*.

The next two tables, numbers eight and nine, compare the reasons for not applying to the time frame until retirement. There were three responding individuals who were undecided as to when they would retire. Table 8 displays the responses of those 15 individuals who plan on retiring within the next 5 years.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	8	20%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	1	3%
Don't want to work for this administration	4	10%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	1	3%
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	2	5%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	9	23%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	0	
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	3	8%
No perceived available position in the next two years	2	5%
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	2	5%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	0	
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	2	5%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	2	5%
Other: Don't respect current B.C.'s.  Not able to treat subordinates as shabbily as are currently treated.  The job needs to be redesigned  Ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain.	4	10%

TABLE 8 Retirement within next 5 years  $n = 40$

As shown in the above table, those individuals who plan to retire within the next 5 years stated that the primary reason they did not apply to test for Battalion Chief was because they *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. Secondary was *no longer interested in the position*.

Table 9 displays the responses of those 11 individuals who plan on retiring in 6 or more years.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	2	7%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	1	3%
Don't want to work for this administration	2	7%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	0	
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	1	3%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	6	20%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	3	10%
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	2	7%
No perceived available position in the next two years	0	
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	2	7%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	3	10%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	1	3%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	5	17%
Other: Chiefs have lost contact with those they supervise.	2	7%
Job is not much fun.		

TABLE 9 Retirement in 6 or more years

*n* = 30

As shown in the above table, those individuals who plan to retire in 6 or more years stated that the primary reason they did not apply to test for Battalion Chief was because they *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. Secondary was a *desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby*.

Table 10 displays the total responses of all 29 individuals who completed the survey. Some provided only one or two reasons.

<i>Reason for not applying</i>	<i>number / percent</i>	
No longer interested in the position	11	14%
Not enough pay difference between Captain and B.C.	2	3%
Don't want to work for this administration	8	11%
Battalion Chiefs have too much work	1	1%
Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined	3	4%
Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment	15	20%
Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities	3	4%
Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge	5	7%
No perceived available position in the next two years	2	3%
No desire to invest the amount of study time required	4	5%
Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam	5	7%
Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)	3	4%
Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby	7	9%
Other: -Chiefs have lost contact with those they supervise. -Job is not much fun. -Administration wants all white male upper management structure. -Ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain. -The job needs to be redesigned -Not able to treat subordinates as shabbily as are currently treated. -Don't respect current B.C.'s.	7	9%

TABLE 10

Total of all responses

n=76

As shown in the above table, the primary reason provided by all respondents was because they *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. Secondary was *no longer interested in the position*.

## DISCUSSION

### Year of Certification

The first analysis of the data compares the year of completion of Chief Officer Certification and the respondent's reasons for not taking the Battalion Chief's exam. Table 2 provides data for certification taken prior to 1986. Since this was the beginning of the Certification Program, it was believed that most respondents would choose *only took certification classes to gain the knowledge*. This was not the case with only two responses in this area. Not surprising was the primary answer of *no longer interested in the position*. Clearly, after this length of time, it was no surprise to the author that these individuals are no longer interested. However, the other primary reason was *don't want to work for this administration*. What was not asked on the survey was would they have wanted to work for the previous administration in place prior to 1986, when they originally attended certification classes.

Table 3 displays data for those 14 responding individuals who completed certification during the years of 1988, 1990, and 1992. This is immediately prior to the 1994 significant drop in applicants. During these years, the primary reason for not applying was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*. This response was overwhelming with eleven answers (27%) in this category. The author was unable to determine if there was an increase in 8 hour staff assignments during this time period, however, as the data indicates, staff assignments were clearly on the minds of those applying to test. The next closest answer at 17% was *no longer interested in the position*. Again, after 10 years, this answer is not surprising.

The final table in the area of year certified, table 4, displays data for the most recent years of 1994, 1996, and 1998. These responses were evenly arrayed over most of the reasons provided with the primary reason given as *desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby* and “*other*”. The other responses provided included: *the job needs to be redesigned, don't feel I have enough time in current position, job is not much fun*, and finally, *ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain*. These responses don't provide conclusive evidence in any one area.

### **Years of Service**

The second analysis of the data compares the reasons for not applying for the exam to the years of service of the respondent. Table 5 displays data for those seven responding individuals with 15 to 20 years of service with the Tucson Fire Department. These responses were evenly arrayed with no significant reason for not applying. The “*other*” category was used most frequently at 19% with responses: *the job needs to be redesigned, job is not much fun, don't feel I have enough time in current position*, and *ineligible to test - don't have 3 yrs as Captain*.

Table 6 displays the responses of those 10 individuals with 21 to 25 years of service. Again, these responses were evenly arrayed with no significant reason for not applying although three reasons tied with primary. The primary reasons given were: *no longer interested in the position, don't want to work for this administration*, and *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment*.

Table 7 displays the responses of those 12 individuals with over 25 years of service. The primary reason given here was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment* with 31% of those responding. This response most likely comes from having worked suppression for many years and no desire to change to a staff position. The second reason was *no longer interested in the position*.

Again, this not was surprising since those with over 25 years of service would perhaps be considering retirement.

### **Time Frame to Retirement**

The third analysis of the data compares the reasons for not applying to the time frame to retirement. It was believed by the author that those with a short time to planned retirement would no longer be interested in the position. This was found to be somewhat accurate in that the primary reason given for those with less than 5 years to retirement was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment* with a 23% response, but the secondary reason was *no longer interested in the position* with a 20% response. Table 8 displayed this data.

Table 9 displays the responses of those 11 individuals who plan to retire in 6 or more years. The startling primary reason provided was *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment* with a 20% response.

### **All Responses**

Finally, table 10 displays all of the responses from the 29 individuals who completed the survey instrument. The issue of *don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment* came out most frequently (20%) with *no longer interested in the position* a close second place at 14%. The data suggests that most individuals did not want a possible 8 hour staff assignment. This is consistent with the findings of Laurich and Pottberg in the literature review. Laurich (1995) states, "Once the line lifestyle is ingrained in firefighters, they often are reluctant to exchange their present work hours for a conventional 40-hour week" (p. 5). Firefighters enter the fire service with a well-rounded knowledge and life experience that fits well into the job description of emergency services. They're good with mechanical situations and life-threatening decisions. When put in a staff assignment they are out of their environment and



extremely uncomfortable. (Laurich, 1995) It has become evident to this author that even the opportunity for promotion isn't enough to persuade firefighters to work the dreaded 8 hour staff assignment.

The second most frequent reason, *no longer interested in the position*, is perhaps too general in nature and should have been more focused to gain a better understanding as to why the respondent chose not to apply for the exam.

The third most frequent response was *don't want to work for this administration*. This alarmingly high response, 11%, should be a red flag to the Fire Chief to determine the reasons behind this response. All of the other responses garnered less than 10% of the overall reasons.

In a surprise finding, the reason *not enough pay difference between Captain and Battalion Chief / current pay O.K.*, was given only twice (3%) as a reason for not applying to test. During the most recent promotional opportunity for Battalion Chief, a significant pay raise was announced for July 1, 1998. In fact, for those officers in staff positions, \$10,000 per year over shift positions was offered. The closing for those eligible to participate in the exam process was two months later on August 28, 1998. Still only nine candidates chose to apply.

### **Implications**

The implication of these results on our organization is that, if a change is to be made, it should be in the area of the 8 hour staff assignment. As stated earlier, the upper administration should look closely at the eight responses that *don't want to work for this administration*. The other reasons given were dwarfed in comparison. Clearly, pay was not an issue, or if it was... \$10,000 annually was not enough to work a staff assignment!

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The results discovered did not reveal enough substantial evaluated material detailing a conclusive decision regarding the best plan of action necessary to solve the problem. The overwhelming response by those surveyed indicating no desire to work an 8 hour staff assignment, certainly shows that the organization has developed a behavior that is not conducive to administrative duties. This behavior can be changed, but it would require that an Organizational Development Specialist be employed by the Tucson Fire Department to further analyze the problem.

Additionally, the second most frequent response, *don't want to work for this administration*, is an area on which an O.D. specialist could shed some light. Organizational development efforts frequently require someone with an outside perspective to facilitate change. This should be a consultant who can evaluate the Tucson Fire Department's activities without being bound by internal culture, traditions, or politics.

“Enhancing employee motivation and positive reinforcement is where management is going to be doing the most research in the future” (Laurich, 1995, p. 14). Effective performance must be recognized and rewarded in terms that are meaningful to the individual. This could include financial, psychological or both. Obviously, staff assignments are not recognized as terms that are meaningful to the individual !

An area that the study did not focus on was recruiting more Captains to take certification classes. In the late 1980s, the Tucson Fire Department discovered that entry level applicants were mostly white males so the Department aggressively recruited women and minorities. This effort was very successful. Perhaps the organization needs to do the same within the rank of Captain. One solution may be to have junior Captains spend a day with an 8 hour staff Battalion Chief to observe the

job. Another solution may be a formal mentoring process by current Battalion Chiefs to those Captains who are interested. There certainly exists an informal mentoring process now, but by formalizing it, perhaps more Captains would become involved. By increasing the numbers of Captains who complete certification class, we have the potential to increase the number of those applying to test.

## REFERENCE LIST

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**APPENDIX "A"**

# ANNOUNCEMENT OF IN-SERVICE CAREER PROMOTIONAL TEST FIRE BATTALION CHIEF

**SALARY:** Range PFP-E-PS \$57,600 - \$66,000/Annually  
Range PFP-D-PS \$60,100 - \$77,200/Annually ( Staff Assignment only)

**POSITION:** This is supervisory management work planning, organizing and directing the activities of a Fire District or Fire Department section or serving in a specialized staff assignment. Considerable independent judgment is required in making decisions in emergency, command and administrative matters.

**ELIGIBILITY:** Eligibility is limited to those Tucson Fire Department Fire Captains with a minimum of three years service in grade prior to October 26, 1998 and who have successfully completed Fire Battalion Chief certification.

<u>EXAMINATION PROCESS:</u>	<u>WEIGHT:</u>
Part I: Objective Written Exam (Based upon, not limited to Battalion Chief certification process materials)	35%
Part II: Performance Assessment. May include but is not limited to the following: Presentation Exercise Role Play Exercise Fire Simulation Exercise Executive Oral Board	55%
<b>SENIORITY:</b> Based upon total months of service in classification of Fire Captain or Paramedic Supervisor. Seniority will be calculated through October 26 1998. MAXIMUM CREDIT: 120 months	5%
<b>EDUCATION:</b> Credit will be given for each unit successfully completed at an accredited University, College, or Junior College as shown on an official document of that institution. <u>Applicants are responsible for personally verifying that such documents are current and on file with the Human Resources Department by August 7, 1998.</u> MAXIMUM CREDIT: 100 Units	5%
TOTAL	100%

In accordance with Rule III, Section 8, Sub-section (d) (1), Civil Service Commission Rules and Regulations, only those candidates, that achieve a minimum score on all examination measurements stated in Parts I and II of the Examination Process, will have Seniority and Education scores added to their combined score from Parts I and II and be placed on the eligibility list.

**METHOD OF CERTIFICATION:** "Rule of Seven." The top seven names on the eligibility list will be certified to the hiring authority for any particular vacancy.

Applications **must** be filed at the Human Resources Department, 110 E. Pennington, City Hall Annex, Third Floor by **AUGUST 7, 1998.**

**APPENDIX "B"**

September 22, 1998

Dear Captain,

I am currently enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) at the National Fire Academy and I am required to do a research project. I have chosen a topic related to promotion to a management position.

The intent is to assist the Tucson Fire Department in determining why so few qualified Captains are applying for promotion to Battalion Chief. Over the past few years, the number of those officers taking the Batt Chief test has diminished significantly.

The conclusions drawn from this study will offer insight into how the department can change or alter the testing process or the certification process, to attract more candidates.

I have provided an enclosed survey and a pre-addressed envelope for your use. It should take no more than 5 - 10 minutes to complete the survey. All information that is provided on the survey will be kept *strictly confidential* and therefore, you **should not** include your name. A copy of the current BC certification list is included to provide the year you completed certification.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with my project. Please complete and return the survey by October 13, 1998.

Sincerely,

William Ross  
Battalion Chief  
District III, "C" shift



## SURVEY

1. When did you complete Chief Officer Certification:
  - A. prior to 1986
  - B. 5/88
  - C. 5/90
  - D. 5/92
  - E. 4/94
  - F. 5/96
  - G. 5/98
  
2. How many years do you have on the job? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many Battalion Chief exams have you **applied** for? \_\_\_\_\_  
(This does not ask how many exams you have taken)
  
4. When do you plan on retiring?
  - A. within next 1 year
  - B. 1 - 5 years
  - C. 6 - 10 years
  - D. more than 10 years
  - E. undecided
  
5. Mark the top three (3) reasons why you did not apply for the most recent Battalion Chief exam.  
If your reason is not listed, please explain below.
  - A. No longer interested in the position
  - B. Not enough pay difference between Captain and Battalion Chief / current pay O.K.
  - C. Don't want to work for this administration
  - D. Battalion Chiefs have too much work
  - E. Job expectations for Battalion Chief poorly defined
  - F. Don't want possible 8 hour staff assignment
  - G. Currently feel challenged with Captain's responsibilities
  - H. Only took certification classes to gain the knowledge
  - I. No perceived available position in the next two years
  - J. No desire to invest the amount of study time required
  - K. Frustrated with the exam process / poor quality exam
  - L. Family commitments (inc. sick spouse, young children, caring for parents, etc.)
  - M. Desire to invest time in other areas such as other job or hobby
  - N. Other. Please explain: