Elements of A Career Development Program

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
Abstract

The District of Columbia Fire Department (DCFD) does not have a Career Development Program (CDP). The problem is that, in the absence of a CDP, the performance of newly appointed officers is inconsistent. The purpose of this research is to identify elements of successful performance standards that could help assure consistent performance from newly promoted officers. The following research questions are asked: What national standards for company officers exist? What do other fire departments do to prepare their officers for promotion? What does private industry do to prepare their personnel for promotion? The research method is Descriptive. The research procedures are a literature review and surveys. The results support the hypothesis that a CDP is needed for the District of Columbia Fire Department. I recommend that the department create and implement a CDP.
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Introduction

The need for employees to fill the void when managers retire exists in any successful enterprise. Private industry understands the need to train its employees for the challenges of tomorrow. This is evident in the way Coca Cola, ATT, RSC and Sears Credit Companies invest in programs that train their employees for upward mobility (Slavenski, 1987, para.1; American Society for Training and Development, 1993, para. 6; Bushelt, para. 2; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). Like private industry, fire departments are realizing the critical need for adequate officer preparation. “The competent company officer is your department’s most valuable resource (Emery, 2003, para.1). The issue of professional development of these company officers is not a new one (IAFC, 2004, p. 2). It is one of the key issues in every conference since 1966 when it drew international attention at the first Wingspread Conference (IAFC, 2004, p. 2).

Unfortunately, the District of Columbia Fire Department (DCFD) is producing an officer core with a disparate level of job knowledge and performance. The problem is that, in the absence of an officer development program, the performance standards of newly appointed officers are often inconsistent. The purpose of this research is to identify elements of successful performance standards that could help ensure consistent performance from newly promoted officers. The research method to be used is Descriptive. The following research questions are asked: What National Standards exist? What do other departments do to prepare their officers for promotion? What does private industry do to prepare their personnel for promotion?

Background and Significance

The District of Columbia Fire Department (DCFD) provides fire protection and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) for an urban landscape of 69.7 square miles. Within these
boundaries, the DCFD provides fire and EMS protection to many national treasures, including but not limited to: the White House, United States Capital Building, House and Senate office buildings, and the Smithsonian Museum complex. The Department is also responsible for all of the fire and EMS work to the foreign embassies and their resident facilities, requiring that officers have knowledge of laws governing access to these buildings.

In order to accomplish their mission, the DCFD, with an operating budget of 140,000,000 dollars, employs 1,948 people both in civilian and uniformed capacity. The uniform corps consists of a Fire Chief, two Assistant Fire Chiefs, twelve Deputy Fire Chiefs, thirty-one Battalion Fire chiefs, sixty-six Captains, one hundred and seventy four Lieutenants, ninety-three Sergeants, and eleven hundred Firefighters.

The first career Firefighters were hired in 1864 by the federal government to primarily protect the government buildings in an area known as the Federal Triangle. The newly paid fire department had many issues with the volunteers, often escalating into street brawls at fires (Glory, C.O., 1971, p.18). This led to “an act to organize a paid fire department” in 1864 that eventually led to a fully career organization by 1870 (Glory, C.O., 1971, p. 18). The hiring practices of this new department were suspect at best. Often, appointments were the result of nepotism. Promotions were achieved either through nepotism or seniority; those who stayed around long enough were likely to one day be promoted.

Due to factors outside of the control of the Department, in 1902 the federal government placed DCFD under the civil service commission for the hiring processes. From that day forward, entrance to the department was the result of a competitive exam. However, unofficially, the Department still used seniority and nepotism to promote company officers. In 1920, Congress enacted legislation that not only granted the firefighters a raise, but also
established a promotional system run by the civil service commission (E.O. Glory, 1971, p. 88). Since 1920, promotions have been based on a competitive process. Assessment tests are given every two years and the promotion register lasts for two years. After the two years, another promotional exam is given, and names are used from the next promotional register.

In 1984, a federal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint was filed, charging that the department had discriminated against African American firefighters in hiring and promotions. The federal courts stopped all promotions for seven years. During this time, the Department regressed to relying on the seniority system. The most senior privates were put in charge of companies in an acting status regardless of their capabilities. Members who were Sergeants became Acting Lieutenants and Lieutenants became Acting Captains. All of this was done regardless of the individual’s qualifications. The only qualifying factor was seniority, who was employed the longest.

When the court case was settled in 1991, a new system for promotions was implemented. Previously, all members were promoted based on their performance on a 100 question multiple choice test. A member could also receive up to five points for seniority and four points for a college education. After the court case, the exam became divided into three parts: a 100 question multiple choice test worth 55% of the total score, a writing sample worth 5%, and a situation panel interview worth 40%. The first exam given after the resolution of the law suit had a significant number of problems. This test had 116 multiple choice questions; of these, over 50 questions were eliminated for various reasons, which left only 60 questions by which to assess the members. Of those who scored in the top 50 on this exam and who were promoted, some stated that they had scored only 45 correct of the 60 valid test questions. This is barely a passing grade on a high school or college test. The Department replaced all 100 Acting Sergeants based
on the results of this particular test. In fact, 35 of those promoted to Sergeant spent less than 4 months in that rank before being promoted to the position of Lieutenant because their Sergeant positions were made retroactive, thereby making the members eligible for promotion for Lieutenant without spending a year in grade. The informal mentoring that had gone on for generations was lost. Most of the officers were novices in their respective ranks, having no first hand knowledge of how the system worked in their new ranks. Because they were neophytes themselves, they had little to pass on.

Currently and for the last 30 years, the test has been written by Battalion Fire Chiefs and Captains in the DCFD under the supervision of the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM). These Battalion Fire Chiefs and Captains work at the OPM building and are temporarily sequestered, removed from their command assignments for a five to six month period. These individuals, referred to as Subject Matter Experts (SME), prepare an exam for promotional purposes.

I was a SME for the 2000 promotional exam process and the chairman of the SME team for the 2002 promotional exam. As chairman, I was involved with every aspect of the testing process, including reviewing the raw scores of the exam. The median test scores on both tests would have been a failing grade for high school and college tests. Yet, under our regulations, the next name on the registrar, even if he scored a 50 percent, would be promoted. Ostensibly, the competitive exam process is to test the requisite knowledge needed to perform the job adequately. However, individuals are promoted with scores that secondary educators would consider failing simply because they scored higher than others; these new officers’ poor test results indicate that they do not have the tools to succeed. Other than the examination process, the only other qualification requirement for promotion is time in grade. After finishing cadet
school and the initial one year probation period, the candidate does not have to demonstrate skills to compete at any level in the promotional process. Does a potential officer who scores what secondary educators consider a failing grade on the promotional exam have the job knowledge and skills to handle HAZ-MAT incidents, metro incidents, and terrorist attacks? Will these members understand their role in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to be used by a Department? No study has been done by DCFD to ascertain what skills the newly promoted officers may possess or lack. Because the exam questions are not divided into categories and the results subsequently analyzed, no data exists to determine in what areas the new officers (who scored poorly) are lacking: administrative, emergency management, etc. The possible consequences of having ill-equipped and unprepared officers in charge are mind-boggling. It is bad enough that firefighters may be placed in danger; it is even worse to consider the potential consequences to the public that we are sworn to protect. They deserve only the best. Not only is the potential danger to human life a sad proposition, but also the Department leaves itself open for lawsuits in an ever increasingly litigious society.

Once promoted, new officers also have little formal in-service training to prepare them for the awesome responsibility they face. In the past, DCFD has had one 40 hour class for newly promoted officers to give them the basic information about their jobs. Recently begun and currently in place, the Department requires all of their officers to go to an 80 hour class, which will certify them as Instructor I and Fire Officer I. However, no study has been completed to see if this training is effective, if it has increased new officers’ skill level or expertise.

Originally, I thought new officer preparedness was a problem to DCFD only, the seriousness of world events not withstanding. But during my library research at the National Fire Academy’s Executive Development class, I found countless projects on officer development
programs. Evidently, officers from other fire departments perceive a problem in this area, too. Since 9-11, the fire department officials have known that life in the fire service would never be the same. The disasters of 9-11 indicate the need for highly trained and knowledgeable people in charge of such complex incidents. We can no longer assume that the traditional methods of selecting and preparing officers will suffice. Therefore, researching and developing an officer’s development program meets objective number five in that it does “respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues” (“Executive Development Self Study Guide,” 2004, p. 4).

This is not only an emerging issue in the nation’s fire departments, but also in other emergency service professions which are requiring higher standards. For example, the D.C. Police Department (DCPD) now requires that public officers obtain a bachelor’s degree after five years of service or lose their employment. The DCPD officials see the need for higher education and increased officer preparedness. Our elected representatives will soon force these standards on us if we do not act first.

My project also meets the criteria for first year course Executive Development segment on Organization Change and Culture because of the anti-education sentiment that has existed within the DCFD ranks. Tradition in the fire service is both a blessing and a curse. Tradition often leads to a stable work environment and sets some parameters in fire fighting that are tried and true methods to work at an alarm. However, an unknown author once stated that, “100 years of tradition [have been] unencumbered by progress.” Likewise, the fire department still has many advocates for the current promotional system. They believe that it was good enough for 100 years, and it is good enough now. These same officers still obstinately oppose higher education.
I know this tradition from personal experience, having been on the receiving end of ridicule. When I was a young firefighter taking college classes at night, my captain asked me if I was going to throw my text book at the fire to put it out. Most of my fellow firefighters laughed heartily in response to my captain’s remark that day in the sitting room. How many young firefighters avoided college classes to avoid ridicule? These same officers who disregarded education often instituted roadblocks to prevent other firefighters from attending school, including refusing to grant school leave (which fifteen years ago was allowed) so members could not finish classes. Unfortunately, the anti-education sentiment still exists in the Department today. I recently heard a lieutenant tell a young member who was studying, “You gonna throw that textbook at the fire?” I did not laugh and informed the firefighter that he was doing the right thing. I relay this story to illustrate that my project meets the criteria for first year course Executive Development segment on Organization Change and Culture. The career development program will be a technical and adaptive change. The technical elements will be far easier to name than the adaptive change of attitude towards education. The negative attitude towards education must be addressed and methods must be found to diffuse it. That is why a career development plan is both an organizational and cultural change.

Literature Review:

National Standards: What are the National Standards?

When considering the creation and implementation of a career development program, it is logical to begin with identifying nationally recognized standards that officers should meet. National organizations such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have already identified the criteria for an officer and these standards serve as guidelines for departments around the country. No fire department operates in a vacuum. The national standards have
identified skill and knowledge sets that an officer must have to effectively and safely achieve their departments’ objectives. All departments should note that national fire associations recognize and promote both initial and ongoing education and training. It is also interesting that they recognize the importance of communication and administrative skills as well as fire ground management methods.

The 2003 National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) *1021 Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* is the most recognized standard nationally for all firefighters. It is quoted often in the *International Association of Fire Chief’s Officer Development Handbook* (2004). The standard identifies four levels of fire officer ranging from Fire Officer I through Fire Officer IV. All of the requirements for a level must be met before an individual can attain certification for the next level. Fire Officer I, for example, requires that a member obtain Firefighter I and Firefighter II certification and Fire Instructor I as defined in NFPA 1041 (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, an officer must possess general prerequisite knowledge and skills before accomplishing the specific requisite knowledge and skills for each of the fire officer levels. General prerequisite knowledge and skills for Fire Officer I include but are not limited to: organizational structure; the district standard operating procedures; Incident Management Systems; safety; departmental budgeting process; record keeping; fire prevention and building codes; cultural diversity; methods used by supervisors; and accepted ethical practices (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). The standard also requires the ability to effectively communicate in writing using up to date technology (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). The officer must be able to write memos, reports, and letters utilizing a word processing management system and effectively operate at all levels in incident management system (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). After meeting the prerequisite skills and knowledge, the candidate must become proficient in seven areas: human resource management;
community and government relations; administration; inspection and investigation; emergency service delivery; and health and safety. Each one of these seven areas contain certain criteria that is broken down in the requisite knowledge and skills section of the NFPA 1021 Standards. An example of this is that the officer must have a basic knowledge of building construction and fire loads associated with them (NFPA, 2003, p.8).

Like the NFPA, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) also publishes an Officer Development Handbook, which often refers to NFPA Standard 1021. The IAFC parallels the structure of 1021 in that it has four levels of officer development: Supervisory Fire Officer, Managing Fire Officer, Administrative Fire Officer, and Executive Fire Officer. The IAFC Handbook states, “Professional development is the planned progressive lifelong process of education, training, self-development and experience” (IAFC, 2004, p.4). This multi-facet approach is seen as the key to developing competent and well-rounded officers. Achieving each level requires work in the four elements of professional development: training, education (college), experience, and self-development.

Examples of these four elements can be examined by reviewing the requirements for achieving one of the levels: Supervisory Fire Officer. In order to achieve Supervisory Fire Officer, the candidate must acquire the following training and certifications: Firefighter I and II, Fire Officer I, Incident and Safety Officer, Knowledge Incident Management System, Instructor I, and Inspector I. The candidates must also have a valid driver’s license and receive Emergency Medical Services and Hazardous Material operations level training. Either while attaining or after receiving these credentials, the candidate must attend fifteen college classes which will include English composition, Public speaking, Business Communication, Building construction, Sociology, Psychology, and Human Resource Management (IAFC, 2004, pp.14 –15). The
candidate is required to gain experience in the following: coaching, directing resources, incident management, planning, instruction, human resource management, emergency management, community involvement, and participation in professional associations. The self-development portion stresses health and fitness, physical ability, career mapping, communication, interpersonal dynamic skills, diversity, ethics, legal issues, technology, and local Hazardous Materials issues (IAFC, 2004, p. 17). Each of the other three levels (Managing Fire Officer, Administrative Fire Officer, and Executive Fire Officer) has similar requirements. In order for candidates to advance to the next level, they must fulfill all of the requirements of the previous level. They then begin the next stage of training, education, experience, and self-development. This process ensures an accumulative base line of knowledge for each level.

It is important to note that the IAFC Handbook clearly states that, while the focus is on certifications and academic transcripts, the true objective is “the knowledge, skill, or ability to which the credential attests” (IAFC, 2004, p. 6). Likewise, although the handbook concentrates on specifying training and education requirements, the IAFC also recognizes the critical importance of mentoring, of informal or formal relationships with more experienced members in fire services who can teach valuable leadership skills (IAFC, 2004, pp. 3-4). Clearly, the IAFC Handbook promotes a career development program that will create better, safer, and more effective leaders as a whole.

The NFPA and the IAFC are not the only organizations to emphasize national standards; the National Wildlife Coordinating Group (NWCG) publishes the *Wildland and Prescribed Incident Management System Guide* (NWCG, 2000, pp. vii-11). The Guide was established because so many different organizations and fire departments work together when fighting wild-land fires. The guide prescribes minimum standards for all positions in the Incident
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Management System (IMS) fighting wildland fires. “The Wildland and Prescribed Qualification system is a performance based qualification system” (NWCG, 2000, p. 2). Within this system qualifications are based on “demonstrated performance as measured in wild-land fires, prescribed fires, other incidents, normal job activities, in simulated exercises or classroom activities” (NWCG, 2000, p. 2). This system relies heavily on the certification process. Though every position does not require classroom training (requisite knowledge could have been acquired outside of the traditional classroom setting), all members must be certified by a qualifying person. This usually requires that the candidate working that position at a fire perform under the watchful eye of a previously certified member. The system has checks and balances in that training and experience requirements alone do not guarantee a candidate’s certification (NWCG, 2000, p. 7). The candidate’s performance is closely watched to see if he meets the minimum standards for the position (NWCG, 2000, p. 7). This observation process ensures that only qualified people are assigned to each level in the IMS system. All the needed observations are kept in a position task book (NWCG, 2000, p. 8). In order for a member to advance to the next level, he must successfully complete the previous level. This NWCG system is used primarily in the western part of the country and where the National Wildfire Coordinating group publishes the *Wild-land and Prescribed Fire Qualifications System Guide*. NWCG’s process establishes minimum interagency training, skills, experience, and fitness standards.

*Other Fire Departments’ Career Development Plans: What do other Departments do to prepare their officers for promotion?*

My research has shown that the way fire departments prepare their members for advancement falls into three general categories (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987; Los Angelos Fire Department Memo, 2005; Slavenski, 1987; Bennett, 2003; International
Association of Fire Chiefs, 2004; Gates, 2003). One method institutes a comprehensive written and implemented career development program. The second way is to set up classes sponsored by the fire department to prepare their members for the promotional exam. Finally, the third method ensures that the members are given a list of study materials that they use to prepare themselves for the promotional exam (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987; Los Angelos Fire Department Memo, 2005; Slavenski, 1987; Bennett, 2003; International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2004; Gates, 2003). I have chosen three representative cities to illustrate how each method works.

Richmond, Virginia, which utilizes the first method, has an extensive written career development program called *Building Blocks to Success*. The program incorporates the following concepts: customer satisfaction, management, community service, loyalty, leadership, advancement, fire science education, performance, and skills (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987). The basic goals of the CDP are:

1) to provide an avenue for employees to advance to higher salary levels based on possession and development of professional, specialized skills and formal education;
2) to promote productive, efficient, and effective job performance; 3) to improve employee job satisfaction; 4) to allow some employees the flexibility to advance to higher salary levels without moving into a supervisory level. (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 3)

This system not only sets the criteria for promotion in a step by step process, but it also provides an avenue for all members, even those who do not want a promotion, to improve their abilities and salary.
This system encapsulates the total organization. The plan has requirements for education and supervisory techniques. In order to successfully complete this section, a candidate must complete required fire courses, college classes, attend seminars, and successfully achieve management certifications. The college classes include Building Construction, and Psychology. A concern for safety must be demonstrated; the candidate must have fewer than two minor preventable accidents. A candidate will have no suspension reduction in rank for the last 24 months. The member also could have no more than two letters of reprimand and no convictions for criminal offenses in the last 24 months. Finally, a member must meet time in grade requirements and successfully compete in promotion exams. Leadership is demonstrated by following rules, regulations, and laws (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987).

Once a member reaches a level in the CDP system, he must stay current with that level’s certifications. To ensure compliance, a CDP counselor is assigned to all members participating in the program. Program goals are easily defined by a point system. Each category has a point value given to its requirements. For example, each one semester hour is worth one point towards the college requirements for that goal. The CDP counselor also assists that member with setting and achieving his goals. Finally, officers are given coaching classes to further assist their subordinates in achieving these goals (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, pp. 2-3, 15, 16).

The Los Angelos Fire Department (LAFD) is an example of the second way a department prepares members for advancement: setting up classes sponsored by the fire department to prepare their members for the promotional exam. Approximately one year before the promotional exam, the LAFD announces (through a memo) the start of the Captain promotional study program. Members attending the program receive 25 college credits towards a liberal arts
degree. The program also certifies members in CSFM Fire Officer; Fire Command 1A, 1B, 1C; Fire Instructor 1A and 1B; Fire Investigator 1A; Fire Management 1; Fire Prevention 1 A and B; and Incident Command System 100 through 400. The department bears the cost but does not require the classes. The members attend the class on their own time. The members also must have a certain time in grade and successfully compete in the promotional process to advance (Los Angelos Fire Department Memo, 2005).

Finally, the District of Columbia Fire Department (DCFD) is an example of the third way that a Department prepares its members. One year prior to the promotional exam date, the Department issues a special order in which all the study materials, including approximately seventeen books, are listed for the upcoming test. The test is based on questions derived from the study material. From the list (which includes the seventeen texts plus various other study material), the member must then discern what will be tested and what will not. The Department gives no direction on what it considers important. The candidate is forced to play a form of trivial pursuit. How can a candidate know what is important if there is no guidance from the upper management?

Which of the three methods is most effective: a career development program, specific classes, or simply a list of study material? To answer that question, the goals and needs of fire departments overall must be considered. In addition, the role of management must be examined.

Today, the role of the fire chief is no longer one of super micro-manager, and the most effective way to manage a department is through delegation (Moore, 2002, para.1). To do this, we must prepare middle and upper management for roles previously occupied by the chief (Moore, 2002, para.1). Therefore, the fire service must let the firefighters know the department’s goals, providing a clear understanding of what the department is trying to accomplish (Gardiner,
An officer development program is one way to ensure this happens (Gardiner, 2002, para. 6). An officer development program must: begin with the firefighters; encompass the needs of all officers, including the fire chief; and provide continuous training (Gardiner, 2002, para. 7-8). Finally, while reinforcing the basics and standard operating procedures (SOPs), we must prepare the officers by helping them to develop critical thinking skills for those unusual circumstances (Gardiner, 2002, para. 8). Therefore, the most effective method of preparing members for advancement is to implement a comprehensive written career development program.

An important part of a career development program, SOPs must be included. According to Dennis Compton, written SOPs provide the foundation for firefighters’ and officers’ responses. Compton states that the department must have written SOPs; the mere fact that they exist does not ensure use (Compton, 2000, p.36). In addition, the skills of the members must be constantly reinforced and evaluated because our members “play like they practice” (Compton, 2000, p. 36). Positive reinforcement, along with critiques and evaluations, facilitate improvement. Training needs to ensure that members are able to handle today’s emergencies while preparing for tomorrow’s challenges (Compton, 2000, p. 36).

According to Gardiner, members must develop critical thinking skills (Gardiner, 2002, para. 8). In order to assist officers in developing the critical thinking skills that they need, the U.S. Fire Administration has hosted the Fire and Emergency Services Conference in Higher Education (FESHE) for the last three years (Bennett, 2003, p. 21). The 2002 conference instituted a professional development model (Bennett, 2003, p. 21). “It recommended an efficient pathway for the fire and emergency services personnel professional development made possible by collaboration between fire-related training, higher education, and certification providers”
Elements of 19 (Bennett, 2003, p. 21). The purpose of the program is to form all risk managers (Bennett, 2003, p. 21). FESHE wanted to help officers develop thinking skills by providing competency based approaches in order to develop a well-rounded officer, one that does not just have the technical knowledge, but also thinks outside the box. In addition, the National Fire Academy (NFA), to further encourage firefighters to complete college, sponsors Degrees at a Distance Program (DDP) (Bercik, Connealy, Lowe, Mooney, 2004, para.15). This enables firefighters to take courses on-line so they can attend college without attending classes which often conflict with their work schedules (Bercik et al., 2004, para.15).

Furthermore, career development plans (CDPs) must include higher education for the fire service to get professional stature. “The CDP must be systematic and deliberate” (Moschella & Chou, 2004, para. 3). To do this, the fire service must overcome cultural barriers that are the most significant block to higher education in the fire service (Bercik et al., 2004, para. 8). In Houston, the mayor and city council stepped in when they realized much of their upper echelon did not have college degrees; they created a position in the fire department of assistant fire chief of career development (Berick, et al., 2004, para. 8). The new chief’s job is to ensure that members avail themselves of higher education opportunities available to them (Bercik et al., 2004, para. 10).

In addition to formal continuing education, mentoring is critical to developing a smooth transition in the promotional process. Todd A. Gates states mentoring in an informal way has been going on in the fire service in the area of the technical aspects of our job for hundreds of years (Gates, 2003, para. 1). He states that this is an effective way to pass down vital information, and it must not stop at the technical level (Gates, 2003, para. 1). He further states that the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) must mentor junior officers so they can become our future
leaders (Gates, 2003, para.1). “Mentoring is the tool that can be used to bridge the gap between the knowledge required for the management activities and the skills needed for a leadership role” (Gates, 2003, para. 2).

Gates describes four types of mentoring: formal or informal, one on one and group/peer (Gates, 2003, para.9). Formal is common in private industry, but often departments find this method cost prohibitive (Gates, 2003, para.10). Informal is the most common and often it is done without either party calling it mentoring. The EFO helps the junior member learn the ropes (Gates, 2003, para. 11). One-on-one mentoring, while quite effective, is a serious drain of time on both the senior EFO and the junior officer (Gates, 2003, para. 12). Peer/group mentoring is when two people of equal rank assist and challenge each other, which encourages the members to exchange ideas that are not downward dominant as would be from a senior EFO.

Effective leadership involves hard work, long term commitment to study, a need for excellence, setting high standards, having good examples of leaders and finally an effective mentor (Carter, 2002, para. 2). Therefore, the most effective method of preparing members for advancement is to implement a comprehensive written career development program. Such a program should include involvement in departmental goals; written SOPs; training to develop critical thinking skills; commitment to higher education; and mentoring. When such a program is put into place, fire departments, officers, and individual firefighters benefit.

**Private Industry: What does private industry do to prepare their personnel for promotion?**

Private industry recognizes that it must have a clear vision to be successful (Smith, 1995, p. 13). Company employees and supervisors must be aware of what they are seeking to achieve. In the computer industry, it was saturation of the market. “Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft Vision, was to have a computer on every desk in every home running on Microsoft software”
(Smith, 1995, p.13). For political leaders, the goal is often a national achievement. In 1960, for example, John Kennedy challenged United States citizens to envision an American man on the moon by the end of the decade. That goal was achieved in 1969 (Smith, 1995, p. 14). Some corporations seek to provide superior service. GTE Directory Corporation’s goal is 100% customer satisfaction through quality. As a result, they were awarded the Malcom Baldridge Quality Award in 1994 (Smith, 1995, p. 14).

A goal/vision statement has to be in place before the company or corporation can seek to meet that goal. Albrecht theorizes that a goal/vision statement has three basic components. First, it must create a picture people can see as a reality. Second, “it must have a noble purpose worth doing” (Smith, 1995, p. 13). Third, people must have the expectation that they can achieve the goal (Smith, 1995, p. 13).

In order for a vision statement to be attained, the corporation must have a formal written strategic plan (Messmer, 2003, para. 1). A goal is not enough; companies must have a detailed plan to achieve the target. These formal written plans provide the framework for employees to make the proper decisions to reach the desire objectives of the company. This document also provides important information, enabling employees to plan their own professional development (Messmer, 2003, para. 1).

When a company has a good strategic plan, it enables supervisors to give guidance to employees through career mapping (Messmer, 2003, para. 3). Providing career mapping assistance to employees shows them how much the company values them (Messmer, 2003, para. 3). This program further increases an employee’s loyalty to the corporation. People feel that the company is interested in them and wants them to succeed (Messmer, 2003, para. 3).
To begin a career mapping program, the employee uses a worksheet to assess himself in four areas: values, working style, strengths, and weaknesses (Messemer, 2003, para. 8). The supervisor goes over the worksheet with the employee, taking into account the corporation and the employee’s personal goals (Messemer, 2003, para. 9). The employee and the supervisor then devise a strategy to develop one professional objective (Messemer, 2003, para. 9). The supervisor then checks in with the employee each quarter to determine the progress made. Has the employee moved closer to the goal through education, experience, etc? (Messemer, 2003, para. 10). “Career planning is a useful way to support your employees’ professional development and enhance their contributions to your company” (Messemer, 2003, para. 15).

Forms of career mapping are evident in many large companies. Coca Cola’s vision has four major objectives: develop personnel in advance of staffing needs; “encourage managers to assist in the development of workers;” promote from within; and give primary responsibility for career development to the worker (Slavenski, 1987, para. 1). To accomplish this vision, Coca Cola instituted a company wide career development program. Their program is based on individual career development sessions, succession planning reviews, and the use of matching and selection criteria for promotions. Each member is responsible for his own career development and is encouraged to write out a career map (Slavenski, 1987, para. 1). The program is supported by Coca Cola’s Human Resources Department. The company provides free access to training as well as career planning manuals and workshops (Slavenski, 1987, para. 1).

Sears Credit Corporation, after going through a major downsizing, instituted a career development program to assist employees to better prepare themselves for future opportunities (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). The support of top management was one of the keys to
the program’s success (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). With full upper management support, the team assigned to develop the program was able to define skills and competencies required for the positions the corporation would be filling (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2). The new program stressed individual responsibility (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2; Bright, 2003, para. 1). To assist the employees, the Sears program developed manager/peer assessment, self assessment, and training for career planning (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). It is worthy to note that the IAFC in their self development portion of their program recommends career mapping (IAFC, 2004, p. 17).

The way they set the competencies and skills for the restructured jobs was also new to Sears. They surveyed the employees for their input, and after supervisor review, the new competencies for the restructured jobs were written (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 15). By using this method, the company let the associates and the managers take ownership of the program (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 15).

Because theirs was a new concept for Sears Credit, they required all employees to attend a mandatory two day workshop (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 17). Supervisory personnel were required to attend additional training to learn how to become career coaches (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 18). This training enabled the managers to assist the subordinates in career mapping (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 18). Participation for associates after the initial training was voluntary, but managers were required to participate when an employee needed assistance.

Sears Human Resources also had to make major philosophical adjustments (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 20). In the past, job descriptions and competencies were treated like national secrets (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2). The Human Resources Department was
ordered to post jobs and make all relevant information known to all associates (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 20). Other major companies also do this. 3 M is an example, having a Job Information System (O’Herron & Simonsen, para. 5). They post their jobs and qualifications for access to all employees (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 5). For Sears, communication is essential for the success of the program. A quarterly newsletter is published to announce to all employees career opportunities in the company (O’Herron & Simonsen, para. 21).

Unlike the large Sears Corporation, RSC is a 30 person consulting firm. Because this company is a service provider, it understands that people are its biggest asset (Bushelt, 2001, para. 2). The company invests in its employees by having in place a step by step career development program showing employees how they can advance in the company (Bushelt, 2001, para. 2). Each employee is allotted $5,000 annual stipend towards educational opportunities (Bushelt, 2001, para. 12). (Other companies have similar programs. Arthur Anderson invests 306,726,651 or 6% of its profit on education (Consortium Bench Marketing Study Best Practice Report, 1985, p.85). RSC has their employees post their resume on-line, providing a way of showing the benefit of the process (Bushelt, 2001, para. 2 -3). The resume is updated anytime an educational goal is met. This lets the company and the employees know their true worth (Bushelt, 2001, para. 6). By doing this, the employee is encouraged to grow and their potential benefit to the firm is increased (Bushelt, 2001, para. 6). This career development program is called “Me Inc.” because every person knows his live worth and could leave the company if not properly compensated (Bushelt, 2001, para. 6). On a secure site, the company also lets the associates know their goals and visions (Bushelt, 2001, para. 10). This further helps its employees move ahead by tailoring education and training to meet the company’s changing needs.
A larger service provider, AT&T has a unique partnership with its two large unions. Its career development program has an “AT&T and Alliance Learning Center” (American Society for Training and Development, 1993, para. 7). The Center serves close to 3,500 employees. It incorporates a prepaid tuition plan for local colleges, on-site classes taught by AT&T employees, individual career and educational counseling, career discussions with supervisors, and a career library (American Society for Training and Development, 1993, para. 8).

Overall, resources on career development programs also incorporate information on Organizational Development. Career Development is only one component of Organizational Development (OD). Including employees in the process is critical. “Frederick Taylor, an early theorist in Organizational Development, felt strongly that workers’ input [in developing an OD plan] was essential for better productivity” (Waisbord, 1985, p. 5). A. G. Sargent agrees with Waisbord. “Theorists have defined management as a concern for people and task and concern for productivity and morale” (Sargent, 1985, p. 141). For an organization development program to be effective, it must incorporate the total system. The managers must be able to address effectively the organization’s administrative, technical, and social systems (Sargent, 1985, p. 141). Because managers spend 50 to 80% of their time communicating, managers must have entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills to be effective (Sargent, 1985, p. 141).

According to Truskie, setting up an organizational development plan requires four things: 1) Redirect the goal of making ideal managers into one that produces performing ones. 2) Assess organization training needs for managers, changes that must occur within the organization. 3) Develop strategy that imparts both of these needs. 4) Provide sufficient support and a means to follow up on progress (Allen, 1964, p. 190, Truskie, 1985, p.182).
According to Gordon Lippitt, using task forces is the best way to implement an organization development plan (Lippitt, 1984, p.196).

Phase I defines mission goals and objectives, Phase II data collection and analysis, Phase III plan activities and process, Phase IV implementation and scheduling, and Phase V review and evaluate the process. (Lippitt, 1984, p.194)

These step by step processes are a template for initiating an organizational development program for in any fire department.

Barriers to developing an effective organizational and/or career development plan must be acknowledged and problem solved. The Human Resource Planning Society did a study of career development of African Americans in training and organizational development. They found four structural barriers to their upward movement in a corporation (Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2005, para.14). The number one issue was lack of diversity in the work place, followed closely by the good old boy system, lack of mentoring, and poor succession planning (Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2005, para.14). Lack of a role model with political savvy and organizational knowledge was identified as having the most profound negative impact on upward mobility in an organization. Career succession programs were identified as second to mentoring. Education, training, and sensitivity programs were all determined to improve employees and managers chances for success (Palmer & Bailey, 2005, para.14).

Procedures

In order to determine whether national recommendations for officer development were actually being applied, I developed a survey based on my review of the literature. Because research indicates that skills such as communication and human resource management are just as
critical as emergency management training (NFPA, 2003; IAFC, 2004) my survey focused on a diverse array of skills and knowledge.

The survey was developed using software from Infopoll <http://infopoll.net> and was posted on-line. The survey was targeted at 50 Fire Department officers from a random selection of small, medium, and large departments throughout the United States. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

A series of questions were drafted based on the literature review and with the goal of determining the elements of a career development program in order to eventually create and implement a career development program in the Washington D.C. Fire Department. The first four questions were designed to gather baseline data about the size of the respondents’ fire departments and the existence and perceived quality of their departments’ career development programs. The next two questions asked the elements of an effective career development program and the skills of an effective firefighter. Questions seven and eight addressed the officers’ perceived level of preparedness for their leadership positions. Question nine asked the respondents to identify the skills necessary to be an effective officer. Questions ten through fifteen sought specific information about the respondents’ current departmental promotion criteria and preparation. Question 16 asked for input about the type of preferred training opportunities. Questions 17 and 18 asked for specific career development programs.

A similar survey was developed and notices were mailed out to fifty randomly selected private industries my review of the literature revealed to have strong career development programs. I received several responses through the mail. These respondents refused to participate in the survey due to corporate secrets.
Finally, a third survey was developed and notices were emailed to fifty randomly selected police departments throughout Virginia and Maryland. These email addresses were obtained via an internet directory. Only nine responded despite an email reminder sent out a week after the original notification.

Results

The literature review finds that NFPA Standard 1021 is the most recognized National Standard. The standard promotes initial and ongoing training. The IAFC states that “Professional development is the planned progressive life long process of education, training, self-development, and experience” (IAFC, 2004, p.1). This statement supports the theory that a comprehensive Career Development Program is the solution to the problem in the DCFD. The standards are clearly defined in NFPA 1021 and must be the basis for any CDP. The IAFC Handbook mirrors the standards of NFPA 1021 and should be used as the blueprint for any program.

Of the three methods identified in page 14 of the literature review, the research supports the implementation of a comprehensive CDP. Firefighters must have an understanding of the goals of the department and a comprehensive CDP is one way to ensure that (Gardiner, 2002, para.6). The National Fire Academy and Moschella & Chou are among many others that support a comprehensive CDP to include college training (Bennet, 20003, para. 21; Berrick et al., 2004, para.15; Moschella & Chou, 2004, para.3).

Additionally, the literature review confirms that private industry supports a comprehensive CDP. Major companies such as Coca Cola, Sears, and Australian Institute of Banking all have CDPs for their employees (Slavenski,1987, para.1; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.1; Bright, 2003, para.1). The three companies all have career mapping as a component
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of their CDP, a process endorsed by the AFC (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2; Slavenski, 1987, para.1; IAFC, 2004, p.13). Furthermore, RSC and Arthur Anderson support higher education by providing funds for their members to attend college (Bushelt, 2001, para. 2; Consortium for Benching Marking Study Best Practice, 1998, p. 85) This emphasis on higher education is also highly endorsed by the IAFC and the National Fire Academy (IAFC, 2004, p.13; Bennet, 2003, p. 21). In addition, mentoring is also incorporated into the CDP. Coca Cola and Sears use their managers as career coaches, a form of mentoring (Slavenski, 1987, para. 2; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.1). The IAFC, Human Resource Planning Society, and Gates agree with the above companies that mentoring is an important part of a CDP (IAFC, 2004, p. 3; Palmer & Bailey, 2005, para.14, Gates, 2003, para. 9).

In order to determine whether national recommendations for officer development were actually being applied, I developed a survey based on my review of the literature. Because research indicates that skills such as communication and human resource management are just as critical as emergency management training (NFPA, 2003; IAFC, 2004) my survey focused on a diverse array of skills and knowledge. The survey was developed using software from Infopoll <http://infopoll.net> and was posted on-line. The survey was targeted at 50 Fire Department officers from a random selection of small, medium, and large departments throughout the United States. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

Of the 50 people who received the survey, 33 responded for a response rate of 66%. Of those that responded, 16 of the 33 or 48.5 % were from departments with less then 100 employees, seven of the 33 or 21.2% were from fire departments with more then 500 people, 5 of the 33 or 15.2 % were from departments having 100 to 300 people, and 5 of the 33, or 15.2%,
were from fire departments having 100 to 300 employees. The differences in the size of the department did not significantly affect the results.

In response to the question regarding a written career development program, 14 of the 33, or 42.4%, had a written program while 19 of 33, or 57.6%, reported they did not. However, when asked about whether their department had a career development program (without specifying written), the results are the direct opposite: 57.6% stated they did have some form of a career development program while 42.4% said that they did not. I think the discrepancy was caused by specifying “written” in one question and not the other. The responses suggest that some departments have informal programs that are not written. Because I am interested in career development programs in general, not necessarily written, I will focus on the results that indicate that 57.6% do have a plan of some kind. Sixty-eight percent reported their program to be highly effective; 15.8% judged their program to be somewhat ineffective; and 10% determined theirs to be ineffective.

The survey asked what a firefighter needs to do his job effectively. The skills and knowledge were rated in the following order from most important to least important: 32 of the 33, or 97%, believe that communication skills are critical; 30 of 33, or 90.9%, rate knowledge of building construction important, 29 of 33, or 87.9%, rank writing skills high; 26 of 33, or 78.8%, emphasize conflict resolution skills; 26 of 33, or 78.8%, think knowledge of Standard Operating Procedures is important; 24 of 33, or 72.7%, believe firefighters need knowledge of truck operating procedures. Last on the list: only 16 of 33, or 48.5%, prioritize Haz-mat training; just 15 of 33, or 45.5%, identify knowledge of the order book; and only seven of the 33, or 21.2%, prioritized metro-operating procedures as critical for firefighters to know.
The survey provided a list of responses regarding training and continuing education. Respondents were asked to choose which their departments had. The results were as follows: 28 of 33, or 84.8%, had tuition reimbursement; 21 of 33, or 63.6%, provided nationally recognized fire certification programs; 19 of 33, or 57.6%, offered classes specific to their department’s training academy; 14 of 33, or 42.4%, provided mentoring programs; ten of 33, or 30.3%, gave access to on-line courses; and six respondents had additional, unspecified, options.

When asked how effective their career development programs were (with a score of one being highly effective and a score of 10 as least effective), the results were as followed: four of 19, or 21.1%, rated a two; 36.8% rated a three; 10.5% rated a four; 5.3% rated a 5; 5.3%, rated a six; 10.5% rated a seven; and 10.5% rated an eight.

Thirty of the 33, or 90.9%, responded to the question asking what makes an effective career development program. Thirty of the thirty, or 100%, wanted employee input; 27 of the 30, or 90%, desired managerial input; 24 of the 30, or 80%, sought mentoring programs; 21 of 30, or 70%, wanted in-service training; 19 of 30, or 63.3%, wanted college reimbursement; 17 of 30, or 56.7%, desired classes specific to their department’s training academy; 17 of 30, or 56.7%, sought nationally recognized fire certification; and 11 of 33, or 36.7%, wanted on-line courses.

When asked how well you felt prepared when you first became a fire-ground officer only 31 of the 33 respondents answered this question for a rate of 93.9%, a 1 is least prepared and 10 is most prepared, 1 of 31 rated a one or 3.2%, 2 of the 31 or 6.5% rated 2, 2 of 31 or 6.5% rated a 3, 7 of 31 or 22.6% rated it a 4, 8 of 31 or 25.5% rated 5, 4 of 31 or 12.9% rated 6, 4 of 31 or 12.9% rated 7, 3 of 31 or 9.7% rated 9.

Respondents were asked to identify how well prepared they felt, when first promoted to an officer’s rank, for their new administrative obligations. One was least and ten was most
prepared. Thirty-three respondents ranked their perceived level of preparedness. The following ranked themselves under five (least prepared): One (3%) rated one; three (9.1%) rated a two; two (6.1%) rated a three; five (15.2%) rated a four; and eleven (33.3%) rated a five. The following ranked themselves as better or well prepared: two (6.1%) rated a six; six (18.2%) rated a seven, two (6.1%) rated an eight, and one (3.0%) rated a nine.

When asked whether they thought ongoing training should be required for longevity step increases, 32 of the 33 respondents answered this question for a response rate of 96.9%. Of those that answered, 87.5% answered yes while 12.5% answered no. When asked whether their departments have criteria that must be met before a firefighter can take a promotional exam, 32 of the 33 respondents answered this question for a 96.9% response rate. Of those that answered the question, 93.8% answered yes while 6.2% answered no. Those who answered that their departments did indeed have criteria that must be met were asked what criteria their departments had for eligibility for the promotional process to sergeant. Seventy percent did not have the rank of sergeant. Of the remaining, eight of 30 (26.7%) required time in grade, four (13.3%) required national certifications, only one (3.3%) required college credits of less than 60 hours and only one (3.3%) required an Associate’s degree.

When asked to identify the criteria departments require for eligibility for the promotional process to Lieutenant, 29 of the 33 respondents, or 87.8%, answered this question. Of those that answered the question, 19 (65.5%) required time in grade; nine (31%) did not have the rank of lieutenant, seven (24.1%) required national certifications; five (17.2%) required less than 60 college credits; and only one (3.4%) required an Associate’s degree.

When asked to identify the department’s criteria for eligibility for the promotional process to captain, 29 of the 33 respondents, or 87.8%, answered the question. Of those that
answered the question, 28 of the 29 required time in grade. Eleven of the 29 (37.9%) required national certifications; seven (24.1%) required an Associate’s degree; and only two (6.9%) required less than 60 credits.

When asked to identify the department’s criteria for eligibility for the promotional process to ranks above captain, 31 of the 33 respondents, or 93.9%, answered the question. Of those that answered the question, 29 of the 31 required time in grade. Twelve required a Bachelors degree. Ten required national certifications. Seven (22.6%) required Associates degree. Three (9.7%) required less than 60 college credits.

Respondents were asked to identify what they would want in an officer training program. Thirty-two of the 33 respondents, or 96.9%, answered the question. Of those that answered the question, 27 of the 32 (84.4%) wanted classes at the National Fire Academy; 25 (78.1%) desired nationally recognized fire certification programs; 23 (71.9%) wanted mentoring programs; 23 (71.9%) wanted University or college courses; 20 (62.5%) wanted online courses; and 19 (59.2%) wanted courses specific to their department’s training academy.

Discussion

When a cross tabulation of the survey results was done between those who had an effective CDP and those who felt prepared for their administrative duties, 54% of those who judged their program as effective also felt prepared to perform their administrative duties. A cross tabulation of the survey results between those who said they had an effective CDP and those who felt prepared to perform their fire-ground duties, only 42% felt prepared. Only 21% of those with no CDP felt prepared. This is a clear indication that an effective CDP creates an environment where employees feel better prepared to do their jobs. This result is consistent with the research in that the IAFC, Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, Coca Cola, Sears, and
ATT all agree that a CDP is vital for preparing their employees for the future (IAFC, 2004, p.4; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 4; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.1; American Society for Training and Development, 1993, para. 8). The survey results and the research indicate a need for a structured CDP that is available to all the members. Additionally, survey results reveal that members felt more prepared for their administrative duties than their fire-ground duties. This could indicate the need for a greater emphasis on the fire-ground portion of the CDP. A further study of this issue is needed.

The respondents felt that communication skills were the most critical ability for both firefighters and officers to possess. I think this is because communication is used not only on the fire-ground when dealing with the public, but also extensively at every firehouse. It has been my professional experience that firefighters and officers get into trouble when dealing with the public due to inability to communicate effectively. Often they don’t understand how body language or tone of voice can alter a civil conversation into a conflict that is hard to resolve. One of the standards of NFPA 1021 is to be able to communicate in writing using the most updated forms of technology (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). Additionally, the IAFC requires classes in public speaking, coaching, communication, interpersonal dynamic skills and English Composition, showing their high regard for communication skills (IAFC, 2004, p. 15, 17). Alice Sargent estimates that managers (our officers) spend from 50% to 80% of their time communicating (Sargent, 1985, p. 141). The ability to communicate effectively is clearly of critical importance and should be an integral part of an effective CDP.

Knowledge of building construction was also perceived as important for both firefighters and officers. This knowledge is crucial for safety on the fire-ground. There is a slight discrepancy in that 90.9% felt it critical for firefighters to possess this information while 73% felt
Elements of

it important for officers. This may be due to the fact that this information has to be memorized and mastered before a firefighter is promoted; promotional exams test specifically for knowledge of building construction. Therefore, the respondents could have assumed that officers would already possess this critical knowledge. The IAFC, NFPA Standard 1021, and Richmond’s Career Development Program all require building construction for their officers (IAFC, 2004, p. 14; NFPA, Standard 1021, 2003, p. 8; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 3). It is the author’s opinion that building construction must be a constant area that officers and firefighters alike constantly review and it must be included in an officer’s career development program. The fact that the survey indicated that only 42% of officers felt prepared to do firefighting duties while 54% felt capable of doing administrative duties may indicate that departments are overlooking building construction as important for officers’ on-going training. Further study of this result is needed.

The ability to write well was also highly rated. One hundred percent of respondents rated writing skills as crucial for officers and 87.9% felt it was important for firefighters. This skill is needed for filling out reports and for all forms of record keeping. As a Captain and a Battalion Fire Chief, I have had to spend many hours correcting grammatical and syntax errors in reports. Improperly writing a report can lead to misinterpretation of the facts of a situation. The ability to relay facts clearly and accurately also falls under the category of communication; a failure to master writing skills is a failure to communicate ideas and information. The IAFC also thinks this is important in that it requires English Composition for their Supervisory Fire Officer, their first level (IAFC, 2004, p.14-15). The IAFC also requires that an officer must be able to use up-to-date technology when preparing reports, memos, and letters (IAFC, 2004, p. 14-15) while NFPA Standard 1021 requires that an employee be able to communicate in writing using the
most updated forms of technology (NFPA, 2003, p.6). This clearly indicates that working on writing skills is imperative to a CDP. This would help the DCFD in that it would enable its employees to write reports in a clear and concise manner.

Conflict resolution skills were also rated as critical for both officers (90.9%) and firefighters (78%). Why is that? Many times when responding to calls, both firefighters and officers meet civilians in agitated states; when we respond, these individuals are, after all, usually in an emergency situation. Panic or fear can often lead quickly to feelings of anger. We are often called on to mitigate an emergency and calm a citizen at the same time. The NFPA Standard 1021 requires officers to understand cultural diversity so they can respectfully deal with members of the public with knowledge of their customs (NFPA, 2003, p.6). In addition, an officer must often mediate disputes between subordinates and among other officers. Knowledge of interpersonal dynamics is a requirement by the IAFC, emphasizing strong conflict resolution skills along with an understanding of different cultures (IAFC, 2004, p.14-15). Alice Sargant states that for managers to be effective, they must possess interpersonal skills (Sargant, 1985, p. 141). Interpersonal skills must be part of any effective career development program. The DCFD would benefit greatly from this training in that we serve a diverse population with a diverse workforce. The better we understand one another and the more effective we are in handling conflicts, the more efficient we will be in doing our mission. Although DCFD’s approval rating, at 73%, is the best it has ever been, the author feels that working with officers to develop better interpersonal skills would significantly increase this rating.

According to the survey, knowledge of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) was almost equally important for officers and firefighters; 84.8% felt officers needed to know SOPs while 78.8% felt that firefighters needed this knowledge. Dennis Compton states a department
must have written SOPs and must continually practice them (Compton, 2000, p. 36). This further reinforces the need for having knowledge of SOPs as requisite knowledge for a CDP. This would increase the department’s ability to perform effectively and efficiently. A focus on the SOPs would increase the efficiency of fire-ground operations. This could lead to a decrease in fire loss and injuries to members.

Survey respondents ranked engine and truck operating procedures as almost equally important for firefighters and officers (72.7% feeling these were important for firefighters and 63.6% and 60.6% respectively thinking they were important for officers). With over 50% of the respondents ranking this knowledge high, it should be included in a CDP for both firefighters and officers.

A flaw in the survey was discovered after results were tabulated. The checklist question asking for input about requirements for an officer’s success had one different option than the checklist question seeking feedback about what a firefighter needs to succeed: administrative skills. This made sense to the author when preparing the survey but was later determined to be detrimental. It became difficult to compare responses and that tainted the results. A future survey is needed. It should consist of the same possible checklist choices for both officers and firefighters. When responding to the question about what officers needed to be effective, 87% checked administrative functions as important. However, this author did not include the option of administrative duties as a choice for the question seeking input about what firefighters needed for success. The many administrative duties that firefighters perform were not considered at the time that this survey was developed. For example, in DCFD, firefighters are responsible for the entries in the desk journal, the input information on the 902s, and daily checklists which are reviewed by the company officer. This is but a small example of the administrative duties they
perform. Administrative skills are important to both firefighters and officers. NFPA Standard 1021 requires officers to be knowledgeable in record keeping and the budgeting process; both are important administrative functions (NFPA, 2003, p. 6). The IAFC also considers such functions to be important in that it is one of its primary components in all of its four officer levels (IAFC, 2004, p. 12, 19, 26, 33). Officers in the DCFD are responsible for many administrative functions, including, but not limited to: maintaining proper pay and leave balances for the members, recording disciplinary actions, maintaining drill records, and overseeing the firefighters’ administrative duties. Properly trained members would increase the efficiency of the department.

Survey respondents rated mentoring skills high; 81.8% felt it was important for officers to possess. In addition, 80% of those responding to the question felt that mentoring programs had to be included in an effective CDP. This is also supported by research. IAFC recognizes the critical importance of mentoring (IAFC, 2004, p.6). Todd A. Gates states that a senior EFO must mentor junior officers so they can become our future leaders (Gates, 2003, para. 1). IAFC states that informal and formal relationships teach valuable leadership skills, while Todd Gates says that mentoring bridges the gap between knowledge required and skills needed for leadership roles (IAFC, 2004, p. 3-4; Gates, 2003, para. 1). Evidence indicating the detrimental effects of not having a mentoring program is also available. African Americans have stated that lack of mentors is one of the key obstacles in their career development (Palmer & Bailey, 2005, para. 14). In DCFD, mentoring was once a key method for firefighters to learn their trade. Often, at the firefighter level the older firefighters informally mentored their younger charges. At this level, it is the observation of the author that this still, at times, exists. However, the educated belief of this author is that the informal mentoring that used to happen amongst officers is now often non-
existent in the DCFD. In most cases, the officers do not take the time to foster the mentoring relationships that are needed to ensure that officers are prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. The department must step in and establish formal mentoring programs if mentoring, an important part of a CDP, is to take place. This would ensure that the DCFD would have leaders with the knowledge that can only be passed on from one person to another. Mentoring builds skills that are needed for members to assume leadership roles (Gates, 2003, para. 2). A mentoring program would benefit the department not only in preparing officers to become the leaders of tomorrow but also in ensuring diversity in the officer ranks.

It was initially surprising to see that less than half of the survey respondents ranked the possession of Hazmat training and metro operating procedural knowledge as important. In Washington D.C., a high number of incidents in both of these categories exists. However, it is logical that respondents in departments without a rail system would not have identified metro procedural knowledge as important. Likewise, a department that did not have a significant number of Haz-Mat calls might rank Haz-Mat knowledge as unimportant. A future survey should be conducted to see if there is a correlation between lack of incidents and a perceived need for training.

Overall, the need for a clear plan for each member is needed for a CDP to be effective. Career mapping is endorsed by the IAFC, Coca Cola, and Sears (IAFC, 2004, p. 3-4; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1; O’Herron & Simensen, 1995, para. 1). Messemer states career planning/mapping is a way to enhance employees’ contributions to a company (Messemer, 2003, para.15). Career mapping gives an employee the opportunity to assess where they are and where they are headed. By stating their goals in writing, the member plans their career. They can then check their own progress regularly, making them accountable to themselves. Sears, Coca Cola, and the Australian
Institute of Banking and Finance all stress individual responsibility while providing employee support (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1; Bright, 2003, para.1).

The DCFD must embrace the need for employees to state their goals and career mapping is the best way to accomplish this. Members’ goals would then be their template for advancement. The department should then put in place CDP counselors. These counselors are in place in one form or another in Sears, Coca Cola, and Richmond Fire Department, giving the employees much needed support when planning and achieving their goals (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 2; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.3). Career counselors would help ensure that all members are trying to reach their potential. The Richmond Fire Department’s Career development uses CDP counselors. Their program offers financial incentives; counselors ensure that all requirements are met so members can receive extra pay (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 4). Other companies, such as Sears, teach managers to be career coaches (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 18). The DCFD should use a combination of the two. CDP counselors should help an employee in verifying a goal accomplished and receiving incentive pay. Additionally, every officer in the department should be trained as a career coach, assisting members in achieving their goals. Sears requires their mangers to perform this vital function and it appears to work well (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.18). If members feel they are progressing in an organization, they feel more vested in the organization, thereby increasing productivity (Messener, 2003, para.15; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 15). This would benefit the department by doing just that; letting the employees know where they are headed helps vest them into the organization, creating a better employee.
When members were asked to identify what makes a good career development program, of the 30 of the total 33 respondents, or 90%, answered this question. The following percentages are based on those 30 who answered the question. All thirty (100% of those who answered the question) identified employee input as essential for an effective career development program. Likewise, Richmond Fire and Emergency Services and Frederick Taylor promoted employee input (Richmond Fire And Emergency Services, 1987, p. 4; Waisbord, 1985, p.5). Richmond Fire Department set up a committee that included representation from all stakeholders within the department (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.5). Frederick Taylor states that employee input is essential for better productivity (Waisbord, 1985, p. 5). Clearly, survey and research findings agree that employee input is a must for success. Employees must have a vested interest in the program in order for them to use it and make it work. Career mapping is a part of this process; the more the employee feels invested in the process, the more likely it will succeed. In the authors opinion this will pay great dividends to DCFD in increased productivity and morale.

Of the 30 people that answered the question 27, or 90.0%, said managerial input was a must for an effective CDP. Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, Sears, and Coca Cola all included managerial input as an integral part of their CDP (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.5, O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.2; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1). In fact, Sears stated that one of the key reasons that it succeeded was that top management was on board from the start (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.2) Having top management support will be vital for any CDP created for the DCFD. The top leadership must support the program in order for it to succeed. Since DCFD is in the public sector, the program will also have to receive the support of elected officials who will finance it.
Seventy percent of the respondents who answered the program considered in-service training programs important. The research conducted bears this out as the one of the four elements of the IAFC’s professional development is training (IAFC, 2004, p.4). Furthermore, Dennis Compton states that employees “play like they practice” (Compton, 2000, p.36). These are just two examples of the many different programs that require in-service or local training as part of the CDP. This is important in the author’s opinion in that in-house courses are often geared to local problems that might not be covered in global training outlook. A program with in-service training is important in that it ensures that members who do not actively participate in the CDP will receive at least minimum training.

College tuition reimbursement was favored by 63.3%. This result is perplexing but predictable. It is perplexing in that the research shows that private industry places a high regard on higher education; Arthur Anderson invests $306,726,651 and a small company like RSC allots $5,000 per person for higher education (Consortium Benchmarking Report, p.85; Bushelt, 2001, para. 12). Also, many fire departments and place a high regard on education. The IAFC Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, U.S. Fire Administration, and City of Houston are a few organizations that understand the importance of higher education. (IAFC, 2004, p. 4; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.5; Bennet, 2003, para. 6, 21; Berrick et al., 2004, para. 10). It is sad that a full 37% of the respondents who answered the question did not value investment in higher education. Yet, their responses are predictable given the author’s own negative responses from fellow firefighters and officers when he attended college as a young firefighter. Research indicates a cultural problem in the fire service; “cultural barriers are viewed by the authors as one of the most significant barriers limiting higher education within the fire service” (Berrick, Connealy, Lowe, Mooney, 2004, para. 8). The city of Houston found that the
problem was so bad in their department that they created a staff position at the rank of Assistant Fire Chief of Career Development to ensure that officers avail themselves of the higher education opportunities available ”(Berrick et al., 2004, para. 9). The National Fire Academy also strongly supports higher educations initiatives in the fire service (Bennett 2003, para. 21; Berrick et al., 2004, para. 8.) The author believes this is going to be one of the most difficult components to introduce into a CDP for the DCFD in that it is not only a technical change but an adaptive one as well. The DCFD already offers a free college education. Any member of the Department can take classes without having to pay out of pocket expenses for tuition. However, sadly, it is used by less then 20% of the department’s members. Higher education gives members the thinking skills needed to solve those technical and adaptive challenges that the DCFD will face in the future (IAFC, 2004, p.3-4; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.6; Bushelt, 2001, para. 12 ; Moschella & Chou, 2004, para. 2, 4; Bennet, 2003, para. 6). The department must embrace the need for higher education in order to succeed in the 21st century.

Interestingly, only 36% rated on-line courses as important. The National Fire Academy has gone to great lengths to make courses available on-line (Bercik et al., 2004, para. 15). The author feels further research is needed in this area. Perhaps older firefighters like me are uncomfortable outside of the traditional classroom setting. Members that grew up “on-line” may be much more amenable to on-line courses. A future survey question might inquire to determine whether a certain age group does rate on-line courses high. The department could benefit from on-line courses if members would avail themselves of this valuable resource.

Finally, while researching, CDPs the author found that an effective CDP was only part of an effective organizational development plan. Alice Sargent states that for an organizational development plan to be effective, it must incorporate the total system (Sargent, 1985, p. 141).
Organizational development is in effect a career development program for an entire company. It gives direction to where the organization is heading and provides employees with the tools to succeed in the future. Although this was only touched on by this author, the information on this subject was pervasive. Due to time and space allotted for this research project, the concept of organizational development could not receive the attention it deserves. A separate paper devoted to organizational development is warranted and will be done by the author.

Recommendations

In the research, three possible methods were identified to prepare firefighters for their responsibilities as officers in the District of Columbia Fire Department: providing a list study materials; providing a series of classes; or providing a comprehensive CDP. The research and survey results support the implementation of a comprehensive CDP. The finding is evident in both private industry as well as in fire department organizations at large (IAFC, 2004, p.4; NWCG, 2000, p.2; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p.2; Benn et al., 2003, para. 21; Mochella & Chou, 2004, para. 3; Slavenski, 1987, para.1; O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). The research clearly shows that the development and implementation of a comprehensive CDP is essential if the District of Columbia Fire Department is to solve the problem of inconsistent performance within the officer core (IAFC, 2004, p. 4; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 2; Berrick, Connealy, Lowe, Mooney, 2004, para. 10).

The first step in realizing the goal of a comprehensive CDP will be to secure the support of upper management. Research indicates that this is an integral piece in a successful CDP (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1; Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1). In an informal poll, the upper management in the District of Columbia
Fire Department in general reports that they are in favor of a comprehensive CDP. However, the informal poll revealed that the inclusion of college classes would be a problem amongst several members of upper management. Yet, research has shown that higher education is a vital part of any successful CDP (Richmond Fire and Emergency Services, 1987, p. 2; IAFC, 2004, p. 4; Bercik et. al., 2004, para.10; Moschella & Chou, 2004, para. 3). Resistance to higher education was identified as a problem early in the research in the Background and Significance portion of this paper. A cultural distrust and ridicule of higher education is one of the most significant barriers that must be overcome (Bercik et al., 2004, para.8). To do this, members of upper management will have to be persuaded that the lessons learned in this research project will benefit the department. Therefore, the author has presented the CDP to sympathetic ears, has already enlisted the support of two key department members, and has plans to secure more support in the near future. This support will be critical if the CDP is to be adopted.

Once the upper management buys into the program, the next major challenge will be to enlist the support of the rank and file members. This is as important a step as enlisting the support of upper management; 100% of survey respondents indicated that employee input was essential for an effective CDP. One way to ensure employee participation is to conduct surveys (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para.1) Officers and firefighters would be asked for their input just as Sears employees and managers were polled for their suggestions (O’Herron & Simonsen, 1995, para. 1). This will help to ensure that all members feel part of the process. In addition, the members must make informed choices so they can answer in an educated fashion and not one which reflects fear of the unknown. Again, Sears’ model provides a process. Like at Sears, seminars could be conducted to inform DCFD employees about CDP opportunities (O’Herron,
1995, para. 17). This educational forum should relieve the anxiety many employees will feel, enabling them to give informed opinions.

A CDP would then be developed. This CDP should be a written step by step process showing employees how they can advance in the department (Bushelt, 2001, para. 2). The program must include the elements identified in the survey and in research: higher education, mentoring, career mapping, assistance with college tuition, succession planning, job information system, conflict resolution skills, diversity training, communication skills, CDP counselors, and administrative duties (Berrcik, et al., 2004, para.10; O’Herron, 1995, para 3; Slavenski, 1987, para. 1; IAFC, 2004, p. 4). It must also include methods to break down the structural barriers that African Americans have identified as impeding their upward movement in the department (Palmer & Bailey, 2005, para.14).

The first portion of the CDP should address the ranks of firefighter and sergeant, which would affect the majority of the department. In addition, on average, these members are younger and not as resistant to change since they tend to be less established in their habits and belief systems. The benefit for firefighters and sergeants is more obvious in that it would open up opportunities that they may not have seen as available to them in the past. Additionally, the rank of sergeant is at the beginning of the promotional process, which would make change easier because the members are just starting their careers and wouldn’t have as vested an interest in maintaining the status quo. The program could be phased in over a two year period, coinciding with the two year promotional cycle. The department would have to review the CDP on an annual basis to see if it is effective. Adjustments could be made to improve the program to ensure its success.
The next step would be to phase in a CDP for the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Fire Chief through to Deputy Fire Chief. In the author’s opinion, this portion of the program will prove more difficult to implement. The members in these ranks are more vested in the current system. Education will be the key to success. As with the Sears Credit Company, informational seminars must be given to relieve any anxiety that members might feel (O’Herron, 1995, para. 17). The same process used for phasing in the CDP during the two year cycle of the promotional process would hold here as well.

One benefit of implementing a CDP in DCFD is to create better and more consistent performance from newly promoted company officers. The long term benefit would be the increased preparedness of the DCFD to face the challenges of tomorrow by creating officers who have the tools to think outside the box. Because the fire service must respond to post-911 realities, such creativity and discipline within the ranks is critical for the security of the city since Washington, D.C. is considered a prime target. Finally, another long-term benefit is that succession planning within the department will be enhanced.

The author realizes that further research is needed. For example, the survey results raised questions. Why did many of the jurisdictions not find railroad procedures or Haz-Mat training a priority in a CDP? Why did the survey show that on-line courses are so unpopular? A detailed study, including a new survey that would answer these questions, should be included in the process of writing the CDP.

If a CDP is put in place and is successful, it could lead to even broader changes within the department. The department should be looking at an Organizational Development Plan. As stated in the paper, a CDP is only a part of a comprehensive Organizational Development Plan (Waisbord, 1985, p. 5). An ODP requires a mission statement, plans, and goals for each specific
section of the department and would include, as part of that, a CDP. The author recommends further study in Organizational Development. The research should be as extensive as that for the CDP.

Therefore, future researchers should begin by studying the broader subject of implementing an organizational development plan. They should examine some of the same literature referenced in this paper but focus initially on organizational development as most departments without a CDP lack an ODP as well. Future researchers will want to implement a survey of their department to gather critical input from their members. Including members in the initial stages of an ODP will also encourage future support and implementation of such a program.
References


