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Dynamics of working for a small professional fire department

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I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and the appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abstract

If we were to take look at today's firefighter we will see individuals joining our ranks for many reasons. Tradition, family ties, something new, and some may join due to the thrill seeking side of our job. Whatever reason they choose the fire service, as leaders it's up to us to provide them with the education, training, equipment and work environment for a successful and rewarding career.

The problem we are seeing at Nevada Fire Department is how we address any fears or concerns our new firefighters may have or experience during their probationary period. The purpose of this research paper will be to identify some of those fears, and create an orientation guide that both the leadership and employees could use during the probation period, thus allowing a smoother process into their fire service careers.

The action research method was used to address the following questions: a) what is expected during the probation period for the selected fire departments; b) what were some of the fears or concerns new employees experienced during their probation period; c) how did the department address those fears of new employees entering the fire service; d) what responsibilities did the department leaders have in addressing probationary members fears or concerns?

Procedures used for this project included a survey, personal interviews, and literature review. The results discovered during this project provided the necessary material to develop an orientation guide for us to use during the probationary period. The research project developed two recommendations; the first included adding a personal section into our probationary program, while the second recommendation pointed out the need for continuous evaluation of our probationary program.

## Introduction

In today's fire service we address many challenges on a daily basis. These issues aren't isolated to any one fire department based on their size, budget, population, or services rendered. How we handle these situations depends on our anticipation and preparation of a specific issue before it surfaces. One of those challenges deals with the fears or concerns new employees may experience during their probationary period or beyond.

Starting in the fire service in 1985 on a small volunteer fire department in Kansas, my ambitions and expectations were high. My first department had a call volume of 100 to 150 incidents per year covering most of the major types of calls we face today. Realizing that this was the profession for me, I started to obtain the necessary education and training to pursue my dream job. In May of 1993 that dream was realized when the Nevada Fire Department (NFD) gave me the opportunity to start my career in the fire service.

Reporting to work on my first day as a career firefighter left many unanswered questions and a few fears that surrounded this new adventure. Keeping in mind the long line of tradition in the fire service and how new firefighters are treated and looked at didn't help with those fears. After the first few months it was clear to me that if there were any unanswered questions or fears it would be up to me to provide the answer or solution to those concerns.

We are not isolated or immune to this issue when it comes to probationary firefighters and their first few days on the job, the problem facing NFD is the lack of knowledge on how to address those fears or concerns new employees bring with them into the fire service. In order to develop the proposed guide for this research project, several questions were drafted, searching for the information needed to make this project successful. Those questions are listed below.

- (a) What is expected of the new firefighter during the probationary period for the selected fire departments?
- (b) What were some of the fears or concerns new employees experienced during their probation period?
- (c) How did the department address those fears of new employees entering the fire service?
- (d) What responsibilities did department leaders have in addressing probationary member's fears?

Utilizing the action research method and the information gathered from the previous questions will provide the foundation for the development of the proposed guide. Additionally, a survey will be sent to other fire departments located in our region that are comparable to NFD in both size and population. The last piece of this research project will be to draft an orientation guide that could be used by both the employees and employers providing a smoother transition for the firefighter into the fire service (see appendix C).

#### Background and Significance

If you look at the historical past of the fire service you would see that we pride ourselves in many traditions. Some of these traditions are significant and have merit throughout the fire service, while others are department specific. Starting with the birth of the fire service in the United States in New Amsterdam, the Dutch colony that became New York City, in 1648 (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 20). Insurance companies recognized the need for an organization of individuals to respond to their clients to provide fire protection, thus keeping the replacement costs down for their company. Although many of these departments include volunteer, some of them would bill for the fires they extinguished even if they weren't a client of their company. This type of service continued to exist until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the

transformation from volunteer to paid fire departments started to take place (Bush & McLaughlin, p. 24).

Established in 1885, NFD was created in Vernon County, Missouri. Located approximately 100 miles south of Kansas City, the city of Nevada is the largest city in Vernon County, with a population of 8065, (US Census, 2010) and expanding to an estimated population of over 15,000 during business hours. NFD covers 9 square miles and provides several services to its citizens, including fire suppression, technical rescue, hazardous materials team, emergency medical services, and fire prevention/education programs for all ages.

NFD is staffed by 13 full time personnel operating out of one station. We work a 24/48 hour schedule, with a four person staff. In 2010 our department responded to 867 calls for service, included in this number were 25 structure fires, 228 rescue and emergency medical calls, along with 15 vehicle fires, (Nevada Fire Department, 2010).

Considered to be a rural setting, Nevada is home to approximately 450 businesses. Some of the larger commercial businesses include 3M, American Standard/Crane plumbing, Thorco, and Precision Aero. In addition to these companies we have several medical facilities including Nevada Regional Medical Center, Heartland Behavioral Hospital, and one of the State of Missouri mental hospitals.

In the past, NFD along with many other fire departments hired probationary firefighters based on a series of tests. These tests consisted of a written exam, physical agility, physiological exam and finally ended with an oral review board. If the candidate accepted the position they would be assigned to one of our three shifts to complete their probationary period. The City of Nevada has a six month probationary period for all new employees, which can be extended at the discretion of the department head. One of the major problems NFD faced was the lack of

consistency during that probationary period and what was expected of the new firefighter. Because there was no real guidance during the probationary period we only added to the fears and concerns new firefighters might experience during those first few months.

Currently NFD has a written probationary period program that each candidate must complete or pass with a certain grade before their six months of probation is reached. In addition to the program we don't allow them to be in an Immediate Danger to Life and Health (IDLH) environment until they have reached a certain point during their training. This has provided us the time to build up that all important trust factors allowing us to do our job safer and more efficient. We must always keep in mind we aren't hiring someone to mop the floors or clean the windows; we are hiring someone that will need to work with others in a life or death situation. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to develop a game plan to address any fears or concerns those new firefighters may experience during that probationary period of time.

Since this problem isn't isolated to NFD, data would need to be gathered from other departments to assist with the development of the proposed orientation guide. As stated before, we are located in Southwest Missouri and are fortunate to have two other departments located within an hour from us that mirror NFD. Those departments include Ft. Scott, Ks approximately 20 miles west of us and Neosho, Mo located 50 miles south of our location. Both of these fire departments are small, full time, professional departments and offer the same types of service we provide. Provided in the following paragraphs is a brief description of each of the fire departments and why they were chosen to assist with this research project.

Starting with our neighbors to the west, the City of Ft. Scott, Kansas has a population of 8,087 (US Census Bureau, 2010). The Fort Scott fire department consists of thirteen career fire personnel and a force of six reserve firefighters. They operate out of two stations and provide



the basic services to their residents; in addition they provide a secondary means of EMS for the city by hosting a Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance for Mercy hospital (City of Fort Scott F.D., 2011). Their call volume is comparable to ours, as well as their city infrastructure and business make up. Because of our close proximity we have a mutual aid agreement with them to assist in any large structure fires or any other major incidents they may need assistance with. Since starting with NFD in 1993, we have called for their services approximately 20 times to assist with several of our large commercial building fires.

The next city chosen for this research project was Neosho, Mo. Located 60 miles south of Nevada, Neosho has a population of 11,835(US Census Bureau, 2010). The Neosho fire department consists of 17 full time firefighters, one administrative assistant, and three paid per call firefighters. They operate out of two fire stations, and cover 92 square miles which includes a fire protection district, north of the city limits. In 2010 the Neosho fire department responded to 1,165 calls for service, with about 40% of those calls falling into the emergency medical category (The City of Neosho, FD, 2011).

As required by the program each of our research projects has to address one of the five United States Fire Academy (USFA) strategic goals. The first goal of reducing the risk at the local level through prevention and mitigation was chosen for this project (United States Fire Administration, 2011). Having a list of resources or organizations that could be used for assistance will allow us the ability to help address or eliminate those fears or concerns that the new employee may have when starting with the fire service.

Additionally, there has to be a linkage to this project and the final class on Executive Leadership. After reviewing the manual it was decided to use chapter twelve, “managing multiple roles” (United States Fire Administration, 2011, chap. 12). In today’s fire service

officers aren't only responsible for on scene leadership, but we are now being called upon at times to provide counseling for the new firefighters. Having another resource such as the proposed guide will allow us the ability to provide useful and educational based guidance.

### Literature Review

There are a total of 30,125 fire departments located in the United States, of those departments 4,355 are made up of all career or mostly career staffing. There are an estimated 1,103,300 firefighters in the United States, with 30% of that number or 335,150 classified as a career firefighter. According to the same profile, approximately 60% of the departments provide some type of emergency medical services, (EMS), whether it was basic or advance life support, (Karter, 2011). The 30-39 years old age group finished on top with 27%, followed by 40-49 with 26%. The final group included the 20-29 year olds making up 21% of the firefighters in the U.S. Unfortunately the report didn't show the experience level associated with these numbers.

The next topic contains two parts. The first part addresses, who is applying for the position and the second part, why are they doing it? The "firefighter is an individual who is trained in both fire prevention and suppression", additionally they must possess "both the knowledge and skills to be able to perform safely and effectively at an emergency incident" (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 26).

As seen in the fire service, the starting age for most professional fire departments is 21. Along with the age requirement, many departments will include a list of certifications the individual must possess in order to be considered for employment. Certifications may include firefighter 1 & 2, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Emergency Medical Technician Paramedic (EMT-P), and some may even require a minimum number of college credits.

Coupled with age and educational requirements, many fire departments have a lengthy hiring process. The hiring process generally starts with the application or acceptance of some ones resume; those applications are then sorted and scored based on the minimum job requirements. Once that process is complete those selected individuals will take a series of tests, including written, psychological, and physical. At the completion and passing of these tests a series of interviews may conclude the process, with the final piece of the puzzle coming in the way of a job offer to that candidate. As seen across the fire service each department is unique in regards to their hiring practice and the previous mentioned job process for probationary candidates is just a sampling of some of the techniques used today.

As reported in the fire department profile released by NFPA, the age group of 20-29 year olds represented 21% of the firefighters currently working in the U.S. (Karter, 2011). Focusing on this group of individuals we see that most of them are, more than likely, getting started in the work force for the first time in their lives. Others may have some limited time or experience in the workforce doing other types of jobs not related to the fire service.

In today's work force we are seeing a wide variety of individuals applying for these positions. They may include family members of a firefighter already serving that fire department, college students that are looking for something other than the typical nine to five job, or an individual that sees the fire service as something totally different than what it is.

Some of the candidates may look at the fire service as a way to give back to the community they live in, while others look at the fire service as a challenge to themselves and wonder whether or not they could run into a burning building while others run out? Whatever the reason these perspective candidates have for looking at joining the fire service, each individual has their own objectives or goals they wish to attain.

The second part of the question asks why these individuals are looking at a career in the fire service. There are numerous reasons someone might be interested in joining the fire service. Some of these may include the pay or benefits associated with the job, security could also be a reason for their interest in the fire service. Some individuals will benefit on a more personal basis which will be discussed later during this research project. Whatever the reason or reasons they seek out the fire service as a career move truly depends on that individual and their inner needs.

As we have seen over the past ten years, jobs in America have become scarcer and the job market has become a battle ground for those jobs that have a good benefit package associated with them. The fire service historically has been known to have a great benefit package associated with the job. Starting with the hours we work, early in the history of organized fire protection fire companies worked 24 hour shifts, seven days a week. They were allowed two meal hours a day and a varying number of days off each month (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 7). Since 1946 more cities went to a three platoon system, with an average work week of 56 hours, not counting vacation, sick or holidays. The idea of being able to work one day out of three is very appealing to many candidates. Because of our set days and hours available to us, most employees may work a second job if so desired.

Another important benefit to perspective candidates is the idea of the paid time off we receive. These days include holidays, sick time, vacation and in some departments the idea of a Kelly day or time off instead of pay. Many organizations look at education and training as a vital part of their mission statement. Because of this many firefighters have received college degrees and countless hours of specialized training, allowing them to do their job safely and more efficiently (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 12).

Even though it isn't on the fore front of most employees when they start in the fire service, another key benefit available is our retirement system (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 9). There are numerous retirement systems available to our employers; some of them require the employee to work a certain number of years within that organization, while others require them to reach a certain age in order to receive that benefit. No matter the minimum requirements needed for retirement the idea of having that monthly pay check is an added benefit over other professions.

Another benefit we receive in the fire service is attached to our actual position within the department. Starting pay in the fire service is definitely tied to the area of the country the fire department is located. If the employee is interested and wants to receive a higher salary they may consider testing for a promotion to a higher rank within the organization. Although this may not appeal to all employees there are a few that live for the challenge of becoming a leader in their organization. The aforementioned benefits only represent some of the major benefits available to firefighters entering the fire service today.

The next part of this project will focus on two parts. The first part will discuss why someone may join the fire service for a career path? The second part will focus on what some of the resources have to say in regards to those fears or concerns expressed by new or seasoned firefighters during their probationary period with their department.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow published the paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation", (Maslow, 1943, p. 370). Maslow extended the idea to include his observations of humans' innate curiosity, and created what he called his hierarchy of needs. He used a pyramid to show the different needs with the largest of the needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualization at the top. The first level includes physiological needs, which include the basic needs such as air,

water, and food. Safety needs occupies the next step and they include personal and financial security, health and well being needs.

The third spot on the pyramid discusses our need for love or belonging, this would cover our friends, family and intimacy. The fourth space shows our need for esteem, both self-esteem and self-respect, this describes the human desire to be accepted and valued by others. Finally the top spot on the pyramid covers the subject matter of self-actualization. This level pertains to what a person's full potential is and realizing that potential (Maslow, 1943).

Using this pyramid we can see how and why some individuals would come to the fire service as a career choice. A majority of firefighters in the U.S. look at firefighting as an exciting life and job, and look forward to the dangers it imposes at time; and the challenges we face every day. As leaders in our departments it is important to have a basic understanding of Maslow's theory, this will allow us to be aware of those personal needs our members may have.

As officers in the fire service we have to have a basic understanding of learning styles associated with individuals allowing us to ensure that the information we are using or passing on is getting thru to the firefighter. Freidman and Alley in 1984 reviewed more than thirty different learning style instruments and came up with the top six styles, (Bastable, 2008, p. 115). The first style is by which the educator prefers to teach and the style by which the learner prefers to learn, next had educators guarding against relying on teaching methods and tools that match their own preferred learning style.

The third style states that educators are most helpful when they assist learners in identifying and learning through their own style preference. The fourth style states learners should have the opportunity to learn through their preferred style, learners should be encouraged to diversify their style preference finished fifth on the list. Finally educators can develop specific

learning activities that reinforce each modality or style. Having an understanding of how someone learns will allow us to address or educate our firefighters which will hopefully lead to less fears or concerns while doing our job (Bastable, 2008, p. 116).

The next tool used for this research project was a short survey sent out to two other local fire departments that shared the same characteristics as NFD. Each member of those departments was asked to share any fears or concerns they may have had when starting in the fire service especially during their probationary period of time. They were tasked by listing the top five fears experienced during that time frame and then asked if anyone in their organization had help ease those fears. The following pages will describe what some of the experts say as to why they may have felt that way or the root of the fears they experienced.

The number one fear that was expressed included the idea of fitting in. It is important for many individuals to feel that they belong to the organization on many levels. As Maslow discussed, it is important for our personal needs to be met at all times (Maslow, 1943). With most jobs, it takes all types of personalities to make the organization work and the fire service is no exception. Keeping this in mind we need to know what type of personalities our employees are and how they work together to keep sanity inside the department.

There are many models and styles of how to identify one's personality however for this research project the personality type theory from John Holland was chosen to be used. Holland proposed six basic career-related personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, (Santrock, 2008, p. 482).

Realistic shows that person enjoys the outdoors, and working in manual activities. They often are less social, have difficulty in demanding situations, and prefer to work alone. These types of individuals usually match up with jobs as truck driver, construction worker, and farmers

just to name a few. His next classification talks about the investigative personality. These individuals are interested in ideas more than people, are rather indifferent to social relationships, and are troubled by emotional situations. This type of personality matches up with scientific or intellectually orientated professions (Santrock, 2008, p. 482).

The third type of personality described was that of the artistic person. Just as the title proposes these are the people who are creative and enjoy working with ideas and materials that allow them to express themselves. He goes onto to state that there aren't many jobs that match up with this type, therefore many of the professionals use this in their second or third job choices allowing them to express their feelings. Next on the list includes the individuals that enjoy working with others, and tend to have a helping orientation. Yes we are talking about the social type of employee, because they like working with others this type of person usually fits into the teaching, social work or counseling categories of jobs (Santrock, 2008, p. 482).

Continuing onto the fifth type, which describes the enterprising employee. They are usually more oriented toward people rather than ideas. They may try to dominate others, which is ironic because these types of people usually work in the sales, management or of all things politics. He concludes with the conventional employee, these are the people who are well-structured in life. They are skilled at working with detail, and they will match up well jobs such as an accountant, bank teller, and secretary (Santrock, 2008, p. 483).

In 1987 Holland stated, "That individuals rarely are pure types, and most persons are a combination of two or three types" (Santrock, 2008, p. 483). Because we have heard over and over that the fire department is only as strong as its weakest link it is very important that we strive to fill all six of these personality types within our organization. Being able to check this



box will allow the organization the ability to grow through its employees because of their style of leaning and personality traits.

Another reason an individual may fear the idea of not fitting in, may fall into the category of their knowledge base. As stated in the text book, *Nurse as Educator*, “how much someone knows about the subject or how proficient that person is at performing a task is an important factor when designing and implementing instruction”, (Bastable, 2008, p. 113). This is very important to remember especially in the fire service. If we don’t establish a good foundation of what each of our members understand and bring to the table, we are only selling ourselves short. Additionally not recognizing the skills or knowledge base they lack may hinder their development into the firefighters or officers we need.

To finish with the number one fear of fitting in, we need to focus on the risk that we all take when starting a new career. Risk requires us to make a calculated leap of faith (Bay & Macpherson, 1998, p. 52). They proposed we are willing to make a calculated risk, because of the amount of risk planning we do can reduce the doubts that usually kick in when we consider taking the risk in the first place. This is very evident when we look at the new employees venturing into the fire service for the first time. There are some that may have had previous knowledge of the fire service and what they could expect, and then there are the ones who are looking at it for a personal gain or challenge on whether they could do the job. Whatever the reason someone may choose the fire service as a career choice that individual will be making a leap of faith when it comes to the risk of succeeding or the idea of failure.

The next fear expressed during their probationary period of time dealt with the idea of what is expected of me? As with any new job that idea of what is expected of you is a fear we all face no matter the profession. However in the fire service we may have a strike against us

depending on how you look at it, this is referring to the television and movies that have been produced about our profession. Although these shows depict the fire service as a dangerous job at times they also mislead our prospective candidates into thinking that practical jokes, romance, fighting and my all time favorite, “drinking will on duty” are acceptable practices as well. Most of my colleagues will agree that even though there are number of fire departments that fit into this genre, the majority of departments frown on these activities.

Because this idea is out there we need to be prepared to educate our new employees from day one as to what is expected of them (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 26). They walk in thinking that we all eat, sleep and breathe together which isn't true at all. In fact many fire departments share only a few meals together, have individual bedrooms instead of dorms, and live other lives outside of the fire department. Another factor we have to consider when new employees come into the fire service is those stories told to them by other firefighters about the “good ol' days”. Times have changed just like our equipment, what's acceptable into today's work force and the services we provide to our citizens. So the best way to approach these employees would be to educate them on what the fire service has become since those good ol' days, and hopefully provide them with enough information that they will be able to buy into the new concept we are trying to project.

*The Adult Learner*, list six characteristics of adult learners and educational implications, (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 1998, p. 64-68). The six classifications on the list included the need to know, the learners' self-concept, role of the learners' experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and finally motivation. As leaders in our departments we can see several of these characteristics in our new employees the first day on the job. Having a basic knowledge

of what is associated with these characteristics will allow the acceptance and progression of the probationary firefighter through their program.

One of the last items that we associate with this fear of what is expected could include the idea of promotion within the department (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 11). Although many firefighters enter the fire service with the idea of going into burning buildings others have the desire to promote into the higher ranks of that department. A good leader should recognize those individuals showing characteristics of advancement and give them the ability to succeed with their endeavors. As to the employees that may not have the desire to promote we still need to encourage them to be successful in the current rank and not become stagnant in their professional development. Being able to address those fears of what is expected of me sooner in the probationary period will allow those employees the ability to focus on the necessary skills and experience to succeed in the fire service.

Another fear that some of the respondents mentioned dealt with education. Educational requirements over the past thirty years have continued to grow in the fire service. Gone are the days when you filled out an application and possibly have had an interview or just received a phone call or letter advising you to show up for work. Today's fire service is requiring certifications in firefighting, emergency medical field, college education including a set number of hours or a certain level of degree, and finally some specialized skills or training may be related to your job title (Klinoff, 2003, p. 2).

Many of today's fire departments may require you to have this training or certifications before you are able to apply to that organization. Others will have you complete the application, interview, and job offer time period before you attend a fire academy developed for other new firefighters to the organization. Because the minimum requirements are specific to that one fire

department it has created a fear in some new employees they may not have enough education to obtain a job in the fire service.

Why is education important to the fire service? According to experts in the fire service, education serves as a catalyst on several levels. First off to perform effectively, a fire department must have well-trained members, the ability to learn is essential (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 11-12). The learning process continues throughout a member's career with each stage building on the one before. They also summarized the training regimen that most fire departments have, starting with the basic training. Continuing with in-service training to improve their skill, departmental courses to train specialists, courses to increase knowledge of fire science, advanced or college courses, departmental or resident college courses, and finally receiving some type of college degree.

Another reason education is important is the ability to become more proficient at the job we do. Despite the department's best efforts to recruit quality employees, maintaining high standards among the employees is a constant battle. According to *Managing Fire and Rescue Services*, (International City/County Management Association [ICMA], 2002, p. 152) continuous quality training is often what differentiates professional fire departments (whether career or volunteer), from the less capable ones. It goes onto to state that on occasions discipline is needed to help with the learning process. As most of us have seen or felt discipline can be of both a negative or positive nature, therefore the quality of the leader handing down the discipline will play a huge part in how the probationary firefighter will accept it.

Unfortunately for our profession it has its inherited dangers, both hidden and visible. During the survey presented to all three departments the idea of not getting hurt was one of the top five fears expressed. There are three key components that make up our operational

environment; procedures, equipment, and personnel, which make up the “Safety Triad” (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 111-115). To help mitigate injuries or eliminate our fears about getting hurt our organizations need to address each of these components.

Starting with procedures, fire departments across the nation have Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Procedures or processes are the structures from which all activity at an incident begins. Our procedures can be formal or informal. The formal procedures are in writing and spell out what the company would do on an incident. Informal procedures include those tasks that we carry out on an incident, but these tasks aren't in writing.

The next component of the safety triad includes our equipment we use every day. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1500 sets those minimum safety standards our equipment must meet to be used in our departments. This equipment includes our personal protective equipment, self contained breathing apparatus, fire apparatus, ladders, hose, and other loose equipment we need to do our jobs. Another standard addressed by NFPA involves the maintenance and inspection of our equipment. This standard addresses how the items are inspected, when they are inspected and the procedures we need to follow during these inspections.

The final piece of the safety triad includes our personnel. Subject matters include training, firefighter fitness and health, and attitude. Each position within our department has a set of minimum educational requirements associated with them, from the entry level firefighter continuing to the fire chief. Because human factors are often cited as the cause of injuries or deaths it is important that we encourage all of our personnel to educate themselves and continue to train in the new techniques available to us.

Unfortunately, over the years the fire service has seen on average 100 firefighter fatalities each year. In 2010 there were 81 line of duty deaths in the fire service; this represented a seven percent decrease from 2009. Heart attacks were responsible for the deaths of 48 firefighters in 2011. Another ten firefighters loss their lives associated with wild land fires, the lowest number since 1996. Fifty-four percent of all firefighter fatalities occurred while performing emergency duties, with only three deaths involving vehicle collisions (U.S. Fire Administration [USFA], 2011). Reviewing these statistics each year with our staff should show the importance of being healthy both in mind and body.

Another issue we have to evaluate when it comes to doing our job safely is attitude. Many factors affect the attitude of a given individual, not to mention the fact that attitudes are dynamic. Some of the factors that affect attitude include the fire department's safety culture, history, and examples set by others (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 116-117). The same resource reveals the steps a firefighter can take to create a positive safety attitude in the work place. They include practicing good habits, learning from others, and being vigilant.

The last piece of the safety puzzle we need to address includes the experience factor. Whether it's your first day on the job or 25 years into the fire service we all have life experience we can bring to the table. As an officer in the fire service it is vital for us to show our new probationary firefighters that we know what we are doing on all types of incidents. The way we conduct station business and handle any disciplinary issues will show the probationary firefighters that we are well versed in how a leader should conduct them. However, we need to be flexible and willing to listen to our new firefighter's feedback or concerns they may have.

The last fear expressed during the survey dealt with the idea of working a 24 hour shift. The real difference between fire service working hours and those in other occupations is that a

fire fighter's workweek consists of a number of duty periods, not so many hours per calendar day. Other than command and support staff, eight hour employees are very rare in the fire service. As stated before, many departments utilize the 24 hour on 48 hour off schedule, or another example of scheduling was developed in Berkley, California, where fire fighters worked nine 24 hour shifts, with six days off during the same time period (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 7).

Located in the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is family and friendship. It is important as leaders to understand and recognize any issues that surface with our probationary firefighters. Being gone from their families for 24 hours at a time, will surely become an issue at one time or another during their career. Because of our work schedule they may miss numerous school functions, family gatherings or celebrations, church functions, and personal activities. Having a solid support function established at home will allow our probationary firefighters the ability to do the job they were hired to do.

#### Procedures

The purpose of this research project was the development of a guide that we could use as leaders to answer or address any fears or concerns felt by our probationary firefighters. In order to provide the answers needed to address those fears a total of four research questions were drafted. A short survey was developed and then distributed to the three fire departments chosen for this research project. The three fire departments selected for this research project represented the cities of Nevada, Neosho, and Ft. Scott. In addition to our department Neosho, Mo and Ft. Scott, Ks were chosen to participate in this survey due their population, types of services provided, number of personnel and proximity to our city limits.

The first research question asked, what is expected of the new firefighter during the probationary period for the selected fire departments? In order to answer this question contact was made with each of the fire chiefs for the three fire department. Information about their minimum job requirements, probationary period requirements and probation time was sought. Any clarification on the information gathered was obtained up by a follow up phone call or personal visit with that chief. The information gathered will be discussed in the results section of this research project.

The second research question asked, what were some of the fears or concerns new employees experienced during their probation period? In order to obtain this information a short survey was developed and then distributed to the members of the three selected fire departments. A copy of the short survey can be found in appendix A. Question number six provided the list of fears or concerns the firefighters experienced during their probationary period. The complete list of concerns expressed during the survey can be found in appendix B. The top five fears were selected to be used during the literature review, and discussion section of this paper.

The third research question asked, how did the department address those fears of new employees entering the fire service? Questions seven through nine on the short survey will provide the necessary data to answer research question number three. Information gathered will be used during the discussion section of the paper, with those results reflected in the new employee guide.

The final research question asked, what responsibilities did department leaders have in addressing probationary member's fears? Utilizing the input from the short survey and the final four questions will provide the necessary direction to answer this question. In addition the



information gathered will be discussed in the results section with the final input shown in the employee guide.

The culmination of this research project will be the development of a new employee guide to be used by the three departments. This guide should be considered a tool that the leadership of the departments could utilize during the probationary period with their new employees to address any fears or concerns they may have during that time frame. This guide isn't intended to answer all the questions or address all fears they may be experiencing rather than just give them some helpful web sites, book, journals, and other professional organizations available to us.

There were no major limitations identified during this research project. The short survey received a good response and contained enough valuable information allowing this research project to proceed. The cooperation from the three departments chosen for this project and their chiefs was much appreciated. Furthermore, there was enough current and in some cases older resources available for this project, and they are listed in the reference section.

## Results

The first of my research questions asked what was expected of the new firefighters during their probationary period? Each of the three selected departments was solicited for any information or programs they used to address this issue within their organization. My first contact was a face to face meeting with all three fire chiefs, followed by an email, and finally a phone call to answer any questions that may have arisen.

Starting with my organization and Fire Chief Robert Benn, I had developed a small list of information seeking questions to present to each one of them. Starting with what are the minimum requirements needed to obtain a job with NFD? Chief Benn stated, "NFD requires a

minimum of firefighter one and first responder”, he went on to say. “Firefighter two and emergency medical technician are preferred” (R. Benn, personal communication, November 12, 2011). The next question asked what is involved with the application process, Chief Benn went on to state, “NFD is an original member of the Tri-State Alliance firefighter testing organization which includes approximately 20 other full time departments located in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma”. This organization administers the written and physical agility test for our organization. If successful, the candidate is placed on the eligibility list for the organization and then each of the members can choose to proceed with that candidate if they so desire.

As for NFD, we solicit applications from interested candidates and invite them for an interview, over seen by our oral review board. The board members consist of the Chief, human resources representative, and the three shift captains. During the interview the candidates are asked a variety of questions and based on their answers and final scores the hiring list is set. Once the ideal candidate is chosen they are given a conditional job offer subject to our medical screening, drug screening and background check.

If the candidate is successful they are required to attend our rookie school which is held Monday thru Friday, 0700 hours to 1700 hours and is designed for a period of three to four weeks depending on the outcomes of each subject. During this school they are put through a series of training scenarios, skill and equipment tests, SOG review, and finish with a review of the city’s policies and procedures manual. At the completion of the rookie school they are then assigned to their respective shifts and begin working shift work. The last piece of their probationary puzzle is to keep their nose clean and do their job, and at the end of the six month probationary period they are cleared to work as a full employee status.

Located in Ft. Scott, Kansas, the second department chosen for this project was the Ft. Scott city fire department. My contact for the following information was Fire Chief Paul Ballou, (P. Ballou, personal communication, November 14, 2011). He started by saying, “there are a few things that are similar to your process, but as with most departments there are a few things that we want to see in our new firefighters”.

Their process starts with the basic application period, followed by a written and physical agility test. At the time of this interview Ft. Scott F.D. was entertaining the idea of joining Tri-State Alliance. If the candidate receives passing grades in both of those tests, they are scheduled for an interview. Their interview process was similar to ours with the oral review board consisting of their leadership and a representative from human resources attending as well. The one thing that stood out during our discussion pertained to their minimum requirements.

If their new firefighter doesn't meet a requirement they are allowed them six months to obtain that certification and if they don't then that individual is dismissed. They require them to have EMT certification within the first 12 to 18 months. He went on to say, “if the applicant already has these certifications they stand a better chance during the hiring process”. In addition to their basic staffing positions they also have a reserved spot assigned. When a full time position is available they would look at their reserve program first and if no one was interested then they would seek outside applications.

He provided me a copy of the probationary work sheet their training officer fills out on all new firefighters. The time frame for completion is six months, however as stated above there are some exceptions when it comes to certain requirements. Once all requirements are met they are released from probation and carry the status as full time firefighters.

The City of Neosho fire department was the final department selected for this project. The fire chief for this department is Chief Mike Eads and the following information was provided by him during my visit, (M. Eads, personal communication, November 14, 2011). They are members of the Tri-State Alliance therefore they allow this organization to conduct the written and physical agility tests. Their minimum requirement for consideration includes firefighter one and two, along with first responder training. If the candidate has the minimum certifications and passes the entrance exam they are interviewed by the oral board.

During the probation period they work with their assigned shift and the training officer. In addition to the hours spent at the station they are required to spend four hours at their dispatch center, as well as four of ride time with Newton County Ambulance. He wasn't able to provide a probationary check list, but did state that their probationary period was six months. If a candidate progress faster than they would be let off probation earlier if they felt it was appropriate. If the firefighter wasn't able to complete the requirements during the allotted time frame they could allow an extension if the officers felt that it could change the outcome.

The next subject discussed with the fire chiefs included the benefit package available to their employees. All three departments offered the standard package of benefits including medical, dental, and vision insurance, sick pay, vacation pay, holiday pay, and some form of retirement. Another benefit available to us is the organization called employee assistance program (EAP). Located in our employee manual and discussed at staff meetings this benefit is rarely used by our staff.

As leaders in our department it is important to have an understanding of the services provided by EAP. The range of services provided by EAP professionals today include marriage

and family problems, stress related problems, financial and legal difficulties, and psychological and workplace conflict (Employee Assistance Program [EAP], 2011).

Information for the next two research questions was gathered by developing and distributing a short survey to the staff of the three fire departments. The first of the two questions dealt with any fears or concerns the new firefighters may have had or experienced during their probationary period time. Research question number three asked if their department did anything to address those fears. Over the next several pages the results of that short survey will be explained.

When the survey was distributed there were a total of 52 members working in the three departments, of those members 45 surveys were completed and returned, this represented an 87% response to the short survey. Survey questions one thru five established the basic information on each of the members completing the survey. Information given included which department they worked for, years of service to that department, overall years in the fire service, current rank in department and the total amount of time in that position.

Question number six asked the respondents to list their top five concerns or fears when starting in the fire service. They were also asked to give a brief explanation of why they felt that way if possible. There was a hand full of individuals that didn't list any fears when they started with their department. A total of 27 fears were expressed on the remaining surveys, it was decided on to use the top ten fears listed for this research project. The number one fear expressed by 11 members involved the fear of not fitting in, followed by the number two fear with nine votes, what is going to be expected of me?

Education was number three with seven votes, while a total of six members feared getting hurt. Tied for number five was the question of whether or not they could work a 24 hour shift,

and the idea or fear of advancement both receiving five votes. The next two fears both received four votes, they included the idea of not screwing up and can I do this job? Three members had a fear of their first real structure fire, and number ten on the list involved the probation period itself.

Survey question number seven asked if they felt those concerns were addressed by their department. Thirty-one surveys stated that indeed their department did try and address their fears during the probationary period. A total of ten surveys stated no help or assistance was given to them during their probationary period, with four surveys leaving this question blank.

Question number eight asked them to provide a brief example of how their department assisted them to try and overcome their fears. The top four responses included training, experience, co-workers, and leadership. On the other side of the coin was question number nine which asked them if their employer didn't help did they feel that there was something they could have done. Although this question is a direct reflection of those who felt as if their employer dropped the ball, not many responses were given. However, of those given, it appeared that communication and not listening to the employee was their biggest complaint.

Question ten asked them to focus on their current position within their organization and if they still had the same fears. Eight surveys stated that they felt as if some of their initial fears were still present. The next question in the survey asked them to give a brief explanation of why they felt that way and in most cases the response was more positive than negative. They stated that in our business it is important for us to always be safe, continue our training, and never become stagnant. There was one response stating that nothing had changed and they felt the same as they did the first day, and they also went onto express their disappointment in their department.

As expected, the responses to question number twelve which asked them to explain how they overcame their fears included gaining more experience, extensive or specialized training, building a bond with other members, and maturity. Trust is an important factor in the work place especially in the fire service. Due to the nature of our job we have to trust the person next to us and believe that they have our back when times get tough. The final questions asked if there was anyone specific that helped them conquer their fears and if they answered yes, how they accomplished that task. Some answers given included their shift officer, close friend and in some cases a family member currently working in the fire service or with previous experience. These individuals were able to share with them their personal experiences and how they handled them when they surfaced. In addition to personal experience they were able to point them in the right direction to gain assistance with their fears on a more professional level.

The fourth and final research question asks what responsibilities did department leaders have in addressing probationary member's fear. Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organization and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions, (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 13). Keeping this idea in mind as leaders in our organizations we have to be able to identify those members experiencing any fears or concerns.

Technical and adaptive are the two types of challenges our members may face during their careers. Adaptive challenge is the gap between the values people stand for and the reality that they face, (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 303). The definition of a technical problem is a problem that can be diagnosed and solved, generally within a short time frame, by applying established know-how and procedures. Technical problems are amenable to authoritative expertise and management of routine processes (Heifetz et al., p. 307).

Heifetz & Linsky place these challenges into two categories, “what’s the work” and “who does the work”? Under the technical challenge, the answer to “what’s the work”, is the ability to apply the current know-how, authorities are the ones “who do the work”. The adaptive challenge of “what’s the work” includes learning new ways, and the people with the problem “do the work”, (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 14). “The single most common source of leadership failure, is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems” (Heifetz & Linsky, p. 14).

Because every employee is different and life affects us in different ways having a basic understanding of the two challenges will allow us provide some guidance to our staff when needed. As leaders, there are two challenges we should be able to meet: (1) manage yourself in that environment and (2) help people tolerate the discomfort they are experiencing, (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 28). Most of us have, at one time, worked for or spent time with a supervisor that didn’t seem to have an understanding of these challenges. These are the leaders who need more training on being effective leaders.

Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles, (ICMA, 2002, p. 233). We set the tone for our departments, its imperative we identify those individuals needing some extra guidance in carrying out our mission statement. With a successful outcome with that employee others will see our desire to see our members excel, additionally they will seek out help from us if we show that we do care. There may come a time when we won’t have the answers to their obstacle, and when this situation arises it is important for us to know those resources that are able to help with these cases. In addition to providing them another avenue for help we need to provide them with the utmost secrecy while they deal with their fears.



Finally, we need to continue our education and training with the new ideas that surface from time to time in the fire service. With the different types of personalities in our department to the citizens we may come into contact with, we need assure our employer that we are watching out for the organization. Those leaders, who don't attend seminars, leadership classes or just seek out new information available to us, will eventually hurt the organization. Furthermore, they will set the tone for the future leaders in the fire service, and that's when we have to question; are those individuals the leaders we want to lead the fire service into the future?

### Discussion

When an individual enters into the work force they are faced with many questions. One of those important questions is, what do I want to do? As with most of us when we graduated high school, our counselors helped prepare us to be able to answer that question. For many of us the idea of helping our community and family was on top of the list. The fire service gives us the ability to check off both of those boxes. However, growing up we watched television programs such as 911 and Emergency which painted a different picture than what truly happens in the fire service. For potential candidates coming into the fire service today the big money movies and television programs once again show them a different, or in some cases a fairy tale, of what our job truly entails.

Regardless of the reason, the individual chooses the fire service we have to be prepared to assist them and answer any questions or fears they may have, in most cases the sooner the better. Therefore we have to have an idea of what these firefighters are thinking about, what fears or concerns they may have, and how as leaders we address those fears. In some cases we may already be too late due to the television shows and movies, and the picture they paint with their

firefighters running into a fake building, with fake fire and pulling the victim from the depths of hell. Reality check, not everything we see on television or on the movie screen is real!

As leaders in the fire service we need to be prepared to answer the questions that surface during their probationary period. Additionally, we need to be able to address any fears or concerns they may also have during their fire service career. As stated before, the sooner we address these issues the sooner the firefighter will feel comfortable and be able to do their job. Failure to identify or address these issues will only build a barrier in that firefighter and may even prevent them from continuing in the fire service.

The first question of this research project asked what is expected of our new firefighters. Those individuals entering the fire service aren't being hired to clean the station, wash the trucks, or, in some cases, play checkers. We are hiring them to provide medical services, extricate victims from tangled wrecks, extinguish fires, or lend assistance to those who seek information or ideas about a subject that no one else will help them with. Having a clear and concise mission statement for our department should provide a map of what will be expected from our new firefighters.

Nevada fire department's mission statement is, "to protect lives and conserve property by minimizing the frequency and effects of fire, disasters, hazardous materials incidents, and other like occurrences, within the scope of available resources"(Nevada Fire Department [NFD], 2002). Ft. Scott fire departments mission statement is, "The mission of the Fort Scott fire department is to preserve life, property, and environment" (City of Fort Scott F.D., 2011). The final department chosen to participate in this project involved the Neosho fire department, and their mission statement is, "The mission of this department is to assist people through: Prevention, Planning, Education and Action. We pursue this mission with determination and

resolve with emphasis on dedication, compassion, and constant improvement” (City of Neosho, F.D., 2011).

Each of the three departments selected have different minimum requirements for employment. As mentioned previously, NFD requires a minimum of firefighter one and first responder, with a preference of firefighter two and EMT (City of Nevada [NFD], 2009). Ft. Scott requires firefighter one and two along with EMT, with one exemption; if the candidate doesn't have EMT they are given a year to complete and receive the certification needed (City of Fort Scott F.D., 2011). Neosho fire department has a minimum of firefighter one and two with a first responder; again preference is given to EMT (City of Neosho, F.D., 2011).

All three fire departments have a six month probationary period which is the cities minimum time frame. If the candidate doesn't successfully complete their orientation program or if the fire chief or training officer feels that they need additional time they maybe allowed that time. On the other side of the coin are those employees that aren't making the cut, in most cases those individuals are released from duty to pursue other career options.

Each department had a specified orientation program for their organization. After examining the two that were submitted to me, and then consulting with the fire chief of the third department it was remarkable how closely all three programs resembled each other. This similarity played a vital part in the development of the orientation guide that is being proposed in this project. Along with the similarities of their orientation program, the services provided by each department also mirrored the area we serve and what is expected of our citizens.

Finally all three departments work a 24/48 hour shift schedule and have approximately the same number of staff members. Other than NFD which operates out of one station the other two departments staff two fire stations. Even though some of us would do this job for free, each

of the three cities are paid every two weeks, and also receive a very lucrative benefit package including: health insurance, life insurance, retirement plans both contributory and non-contributory, sick time, vacation time, and holiday pay.

Although this is a brief overview of the three departments it does give us a good description of what is expected of our firefighters starting with our organization. There is one question we seem to forget to ask during their probationary period, do they have any fears or concerns about working in the fire service?

To start with we have to understand why each of us act or do the things we do. This includes what is important to us and why we have to have certain things in life. Maslow's, "hierarchy of needs" provides us a good road map of how each of us go through life and what is needed for us to grow. Made up of five categories containing: Physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), as leaders in our departments it is important to have a basic understanding of each category.

The bottom level of the pyramid contains our physiological needs including: food, water, breathing, sex, and sleep. For most of us this level is easy to understand, especially when it comes to the fire service. We need to focus on the four remaining categories of the pyramid. Safety is our number one priority in the fire service for both our firefighters and the citizens we protect. This category includes our personal security, financial security, health and well-being, and our safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts (Maslow, 1943).

Because most fire department's benefit package covers most of these needs we can usually check that box off. Our work schedule gives us the freedom to work a second job if we so desire. Another important benefit we receive is our health insurance, which covers the health and well-being aspect of our needs, as well as addresses the safety net against accidents/illness

(Maslow, 1943). However, because of the economic times we are facing, many of our firefighters may experience financial problems, thus creating another stressor on their work performance. Luckily for most of us our cities have in place organizations that could be contacted to provide those firefighters experiencing personal problems assistance.

As leaders in our department it is important to have an understanding of the services provided by EAP. The range of services provided by EAP professionals today include marriage and family problems, stress related problems, financial and legal difficulties, and psychological and workplace conflict (Employee Assistance Program [EAP], 2011). Having an understanding or knowledge of the services they provide will show our staff that we do care about their needs and subsequently address Maslow's theory.

The second research question asked each of the members if they experienced any fears or concerns during their probationary period. When the survey was distributed there were a total of 52 members located in the three departments, of those members 45 surveys were completed and returned, this represented an 87% response to the short survey. Question number six of this survey asked those respondents if they experienced any fears or concerns during their probation period. A total of 26 fears were expressed but it was decided on to address the top five fears. They included fitting in, what is expected of me, education, don't get hurt, and can I work a 24 hour shift.

We can all remember the first day we walked into our station, the butterflies in our stomachs, and the slight doubt in our minds as to whether we could do this job. The idea of fitting in was the one fear most of us can honestly say was on the top of our list. Depending on the leaders of your department you may have received help in addressing this fear. However, in many cases we were met with the attitude of, "You just need a thick skin since it is a cruel world

and you work in a stressful environment”. As leaders in the fire service it is important for us to educate ourselves on the differences between today’s new firefighter and those from 25 years ago.

Looking at the fear of fitting in, if we focused on Maslow’s hierarchy of need, the fear of fitting in could fall into several areas. The two areas that this would most likely fit it would include our need for safety and esteem. The third area that might fit some firefighters would be the love/belonging, which includes the friendship and family idea (Maslow, 1943). As we have seen and heard, many of our firefighters refer to each other as brothers and sisters, which lead many to believe that the fire service is an extension not a separate family.

Another tool we have at our disposal is the personality models available to us. There are many models and styles of how to identify one’s personality however for this research project the personality type theory from John Holland was chosen to be used. Holland proposed six basic career-related personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, (Santrock, 2008, p. 482).

In addition to the personal needs of our employees and their personalities, we need to understand how we learn as adults. *The Adult Learner*, lists six characteristics of adult learners and educational implications, (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 1998, p. 64-68). The six classifications on the list included the need to know, the learners’ self-concept, role of the learners’ experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and finally motivation. As leaders in our departments we can see several of these characteristics in our new employees the first day on the job. Having a basic knowledge of what is associated with these characteristics will allow the acceptance and progression of the probationary firefighter through their program.

The second fear expressed during the survey was the question what was expected of me. It's safe to say that most of us had an understanding of what firefighters did. Other than the obvious job duties there are many untold services we provide that aren't listed in the job description. The need to know is one of our characteristics as adult learners we need to meet. As stated in the "Adult learner", we need to know why we need to learn something before undertaking that task (Knowles et al., 1998).

To help ease this fear most fire departments have an orientation program that all firefighters complete during their probation period, it's important for us to explain to them exactly what's going to take place during that time frame. The one thing we don't want to do is shut them down. We need to listen and ask them for feedback during this time to ensure they are receiving the training or education they need to address this fear.

Motivation is other characteristic adult learners have and will respond well to if approached properly (Knowles et al., 1998). Why is motivation important? The answer contains two parts. The first part is that the more they are motivated the quicker and more efficiently they will be able to do their job. The second part addresses the idea of promotion in the fire service. There will be firefighters who won't accept this challenge, but it should be a priority of the leaders to challenge their members to accept the responsibilities and progress up the ladder within their department.

Education and experience will finish up addressing the fear of what is expected of me. One of the easiest ways to gain experience is doing the task over and over. Another piece of advice we fail to mention or pass on to our new firefighters is the idea of watching others on the fire scene. Their successes or failures can assist with the experience factor during their probationary period. As stated before most departments require a substantial amount of

education in addition to the basic firefighting skills. The more education our firefighters have the quicker they adapt to the fire service.

This leads us into the third fear expressed in the survey which involved education. There aren't many professions that a person could just walk into without some formal training in that subject matter or even a college degree. Looking back at the history of the fire service in the United States in New Amsterdam, the Dutch colony that became New York City, in 1648 (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 20). Insurance companies recognized the need for an organization of individuals to respond to their clients to provide fire protection, thus keeping the replacement costs down for their company. Those early firefighters were hired to strictly protect their client's property compared to today's firefighters who are asked to do so much more.

Starting with our minimum job requirements of firefighter one and two, in most cases this is taught over a sixteen week period at many local colleges. The idea of providing emergency medical services has spread through the fire service like a wild fire. Therefore we are requiring our new recruits to either have EMT when hired or they are given a specific time frame to obtain the certification. Departments that provide 24 hour EMS may require their employees to obtain the paramedic license to work the ambulance.

Other certifications available to our departments include fire inspector, fire investigator, instructor, rescue technician, fire officer 1 & 2, hazardous materials operations and technician (Missouri Department of Public Safety, Fire Marshal Office, 2011). In addition to the state certifications available to us the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) offers a variety of professional qualifications standards. A few of those that are offered include NFPA 1003: standard for airport firefighter, NFPA 1002: standard for fire apparatus driver/operator, NFPA 1051: standard for wild land firefighter. NFPA 1021 addresses those qualifications for the fire



officer which addresses the four levels of fire officers: first-line supervisor, midlevel supervisor, manager, and executive officer (ICMA, 2002, p. 157).

In late 1998, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) initiated a program to certify chief officers. This program is designed to set a criteria that a candidate must meet, the certification process is extensive and thoroughly professional (ICMA, 2002, p. 157). Another program available to those interested persons is the Executive Fire Officer program through NFA. Both of these programs are highly recognized as needed certification in order to ascend to the rank of fire chief.

The last item that we need to look at is the numerous college degrees available to us in the fire service. Several universities through their extension departments, offer online courses in a variety of fire science subjects. Other universities require residence for candidates seeking to obtain a two or four year degree (Bush & McLaughlin, 1979, p. 12). In addition to the basic degrees students of fire science can, through further training and formal education, qualify themselves for other opportunities such as becoming a fire protection engineer (Bush & McLaughlin, p. 13)

As we see, there are plenty of opportunities for those individuals who wish to promote themselves and gain the education to assist them with addressing that fear of education. As leaders in the fire service it's our responsibility to provide this information to our new members. One way for this to be accomplished is having the training officer sit down with each member and put together a training "map" for their fire service career. After they start the trip we need to check on them periodically to ensure they are keeping on track. This will also show them that we do care if they succeed in the fire service.

The next fear listed was the idea of not getting hurt. There is no real guarantee that this won't happen at some point during our career. This is a dangerous job, and there are many hidden dangers. We can however make sure that our firefighters are given the best training possible as seen with the previous examples of the education available to members of the fire service.

Another tool available to us is the safety triad. It is made up of three key components: procedures, equipment, and personnel (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 111). Although not all fire departments have or utilize SOG's or SOP's, this is one thing we can provide to our members to assist them in making sound fire ground decisions. Having these resources available should cut down on some of the dangers we may face while performing our duties. Those departments that aren't utilizing SOG's need to ask themselves why? And then get busy and change their attitude.

The second part of the triad addresses the equipment aspect of our job. As we have seen over the past twenty years the advancement of the tools we use have been considerable. Starting with our apparatus, the enclosed cabs have hearing and visual advancements, as well as easier and more versatile operations compared to the open cabs of earlier years. The improvement of our personal protection equipment (PPE), self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), even including the station uniforms we wear every day. As seen in the education and training areas NFPA has constantly reviewed and changed their standard for the equipment listed above when necessary.

For our equipment to be safe it must be inspected and maintained. As firefighters who depend on this equipment to do our jobs, it usually falls on us to handle this aspect of our job. Some departments may appoint a maintenance officer to oversee this program; however it is up

each of us to see that anything broken is fixed or replaced. Failure to this could result in accidents or injuries or in some extreme cases death. As stated before, we lose approximately 100 firefighters each year in the United States. Fifty-four percent of all firefighter fatalities occurred while performing emergency duties, with only three deaths involving vehicle collisions (U.S. Fire Administration [USFA], 2011).

The last component of the safety triad involves our personnel themselves. There is a reason that we set minimum requirements for promotion within our organization. It doesn't mean for those individuals not meeting the minimum requirements that their input isn't needed. But we have to rely on our promotional process to put the most qualified members in the command staff to allow good solid decisions to take place on the fire ground. There will always be individuals that will accept the challenge of becoming a leader while others will do their part by having a good attitude, paying attention to their health, and finally setting an example for the other firefighters to witness (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2004, p. 116).

The final part of not getting hurt will depend on the crews comfort ability with each other. Since most of us are assigned to shifts, we may need to spend more time and effort to build up this component to our satisfaction. The sooner we feel comfortable with our co-workers, the quicker we will build a team. Teamwork is a vital function in the fire service, and can't be overlooked; firefighter safety is dependent on the efforts of everyone.

Fifth on the list of fears was the idea of working a 24 hour shift. For most of us when we started in the fire service this type of schedule appealed to us. Then as we grew and so did our families the idea of being gone for 24 hours at a time proved to be a challenge

Located in the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is family and friendship (Maslow, 1943). It is important as leaders to understand and recognize any issues that surface

with our probationary firefighters. Being gone from their families for 24 hours at a time, will surely become an issue at one time or another during their career. Because of their work schedule they may miss numerous school functions, family gatherings or celebrations, church functions, and personal activities. Having a solid foundation of support function established at home will allow our probationary firefighters the ability to do the job they were hired to do.

This truly is a personal fear and although there are a few things we can point out that may assist our members they will ultimately be the one who decides on how they handle it. If it starts to impede the performance we may need to refer them to EAP, and allow them to use their education and skills to address this personal fear.

The third question during this research project asked, how their departments addressed those fears they had upon entering the fire service. Survey question number seven asked if they felt those concerns were addressed by their department. Thirty-one surveys stated that indeed their department did try and address their fears during the probationary period. A total of ten surveys stated no help or assistance was given to them during their probationary period, with four surveys leaving this question blank.

Question number eight asked them to provide a brief example of how their department assisted them to try and overcome their fears. The top four responses included training, experience, co-workers, and leadership. The other side of the coin was question number nine, which asked them if their employer didn't help did they feel that there was something they could have done. Although this question is a direct reflection of those who felt as if their employer dropped the ball, not many responses were given. However, of those given, it appeared that communication and not listening to the employee was their biggest complaint.

The fourth research question asked what responsibilities did department leaders have in addressing or probationary member fears? Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organization and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions, (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 13). Keeping this idea in mind as leaders in our organizations we have to be able to identify those members experiencing any fears or concerns.

Technical and adaptive are the two types of challenges our members may face during their careers. Adaptive challenge is the gap between the values people stand for and the reality that they face, (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 303). The definition of a technical problem is a problem that can be diagnosed and solved, generally within a short time frame, by applying established know-how and procedures. Technical problems are amenable to authoritative expertise and management of routine processes (Heifetz et al., p. 307).

Heifetz & Linsky place these challenges into two categories, “what’s the work” and “who does the work”? Under the technical challenge, the answer to “what’s the work”, is the ability to apply the current know-how, authorities are the ones “who do the work”. The adaptive challenge of “what’s the work” includes learning new ways, and the people with the problem “do the work”, (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 14). “The single most common source of leadership failure, is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems” (Heifetz & Linsky, p. 14).

Because every employee is different and life affects us in different ways having a basic understanding of the two challenges will allow us provide some guidance to our staff when needed. As leaders, there are two challenges we should be able to meet: (1) manage yourself in that environment and (2) help people tolerate the discomfort they are experiencing, (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 28). Most of us have, at one time, worked for or spent time with a supervisor that

didn't seem to have an understanding of these challenges. These are the leaders who need more training on being effective leaders.

Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles, (ICMA, 2002, p. 233). We set the tone for our departments, its imperative we identify those individuals needing some extra guidance in carrying out our mission statement. With a successful outcome with that employee others will see our desire to see our members excel, additionally they will seek out help from us if we show that we do care. There may come a time when we won't have the answers to their obstacle, and when this situation arises it is important for us to know those professional organizations that handle these cases. In addition to providing them another avenue for help we need to provide them with the utmost secrecy while they deal with their fears.

Finally we need to continue our education and training with the new ideas that surface from time to time in the fire service. With the different types of personalities in our department to the citizens we may come into contact with, we need assure our employer that we are watching out for the organization. Those leaders, who don't attend seminars, leadership classes or just seek out new information available to us, will eventually hurt the organization. Furthermore they will set the tone for the future leaders in the fire service, and that's when we have to question; are those individuals the leaders we want to lead the fire service into the future?

### Recommendations

Because the fire service is such a demanding profession we need to focus on those changes that have taken place over the last fifty years. One of the main changes in the way we do business is shown in our ever changing mission statements. We are asked to do much more

than put out fires: EMS, hazardous materials incidents, specialized rescue incidents, public education, building inspections, and fire investigations just to name a few. With the added responsibilities we have had to adjust our minimum job requirements for those wanting to join the fire service.

Gone are the days when you submitted your application to the fire department and hope they gave you a chance. Now we require our ideal candidate to possess numerous educational certifications such as firefighter one and two, EMT, and in some cases a minimum number of college credited hours. These minimums are just so they can apply, with no guarantee they will receive a testing date. Which brings us to the next step in the hiring process of a series of tests, including written and physical agility? If successful up to this point you are then subjected to oral review boards, which can also have a multiple step process.

For those candidates who are allowed to step into the station as a probationary firefighter their journey is just beginning. The long list of probationary requirements and the time frame they have to complete them will keep them on their toes. If they stay focused and handle the challenge they have a chance to join the ranks of professional firefighters.

Two recommendations surfaced during this research project. The first recommendation is to implement a human resource section into our orientation program. Allowing the firefighters to express any fears or concerns about the job will allow us the ability to address them in a more professional manner. Additionally, having some resources available for us to discuss with them that others have felt the same way will show them that we do care. If we aren't able to address those fears we will then be able to provide them other resources that will be able to help, such as our EAP programs.

The second recommendation would be to continually evaluate our probationary period program. As we've seen in the history of the fire service things change. If we don't stay ahead of the game we will be right back to where we started. Advances in technology and educational programs allow us to better train firefighters to make quicker and safer decisions on the fire ground and around the station.

Reflecting back to when this project started, there were several key points needing to be addressed. The first point was to address any fears or concerns firefighters may have experienced during their probationary period. If those fears were expressed did we as leaders assist those firefighters with answers or solutions to their problems? Finally, if we don't have the tools to assist them, we need to be able to point out organizations that have the training and education to help them with those concerns. The bottom line is this, if we don't show them we care about their success, we may lose a good firefighter due to our failure!



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Appendix A

Fire Department Survey

1) Which fire department do you represent?

Nevada F.D. \_\_\_\_\_

Neosho F.D. \_\_\_\_\_

Ft. Scott F.D. \_\_\_\_\_

2) Years of service with that department? \_\_\_\_\_

3) Total number of years in the fire service? \_\_\_\_\_

4) Current rank within your organization? \_\_\_\_\_

5) How long have you held that position? \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

6) When starting with your current department were there any concerns or fears you may experienced during the first six months of service? Please list the top five and provide a brief explanation of why you felt that way.

A) \_\_\_\_\_

B) \_\_\_\_\_

C) \_\_\_\_\_

D) \_\_\_\_\_

E) \_\_\_\_\_

7) Do you feel those concerns were addressed by your department during your probationary period? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

8) If you answered yes to question #7, please provide a brief example on how that was accomplished. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9) If you answered no to question #7, do you feel there was anything that your employers or leadership staff could have done to address those fears or concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

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10) Focusing on your current position within the organization do you still have those same fear/concerns you experienced when you started? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

11) If you answered yes to question #10, please provide a brief example of how they are similar to when you started?\_\_\_\_\_

12) If you answered no to question #10, was there anything you did to overcome those fears?

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13) Do you feel there was anyone in your organization that assisted or helped you overcome those fear/concerns? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

14) If you answered yes to #13, please give an example on how they addressed or accomplished that feat.\_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix B

## Complete list of fears

<u>Fear</u>	<u># of Votes</u>
1) Don't get hurt	6
2) Can I do the job?	4
3) How would I take orders?	1
4) What if I fall off the rear of the truck?	1
5) What would my first fire be like?	3
6) Will I make it off the probationary period	2
7) Can I work a 24 hour shift?	5
8) What about my family while I am gone	1
9) Can I work at a car accident	1
10) Fear of the unknown	1
11) Advancement-EMT etc....	5
12) Education	7
13) Speaking in front of people	1
14) Working holidays	1
15) Pay	2
16) Running the shift (officers)	1
17) Don't screw up	4
18) Union issues	1
19) Fitting in	11
20) Volunteer to full time	2

<u>Fear</u>	<u># of Votes</u>
21) What is expected of me	9
22) Physically and mentally fit	1
23) Lifestyle of a firefighter	1
24) Call volume	1
25) Private or fire district to city fire department	1
26) Safety	1
27) No fears listed	6

Appendix C  
Orientation Program Guide

Nevada Fire Department  
New Employee  
Orientation Program

Proposed spot for F.D. Patch or emblem

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Hire: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Scope and Purpose:** The orientation program will familiarize newly appointed firefighters with Nevada Fire Department SOG, apparatus and equipment. It will also evaluate the appointee's knowledge and skill in firefighting, rescue and EMS. It is important that all new members of the department receive the orientation training as it will familiarize them with common practices and knowledge that senior members of the department take for granted and help to make each new member an integral part of our firefighting team soon after they come onto the department. Each item must be validated by the training officer when it is completed, as indicated by their signature and date in the appropriate locations. The completed checklist will be presented to the fire chief for their review and approval, when so approved a copy of this guide will be placed in the probationary firefighter personnel and training file.

**Orientation Length:** The orientation program is structured in a short, extensive "Academy" style, last three weeks. The new firefighter must show competence or general knowledge in each item on the checklist with either an experienced firefighter or an officer, but final approval is given by the department training officer.

**Exception:** If additional time is needed or recommended by any of the staff involved in the training of the probationary firefighter the training officer will review and propose a time frame for them to be successful in this program.

#### I. Alarm Procedures

\_\_\_\_\_ Operations and functions of fire department issued pager.

\_\_\_\_\_ Paging procedures for various types of alarms.

\_\_\_\_\_ Response to the station for call back alarms.

\_\_\_\_\_ Apparatus response based on types of alarms.

\_\_\_\_\_ Nevada Fire Department radio procedures and plain text communications



II. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Proper donning and use of structural firefighting gear
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bunker gear laundering and care
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nevada Fire Department uniforms and department attire policy

III. **SOG's**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Explanation and overview of the SOG manual, policies, etc...
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regulations of department, including firefighter responsibilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review of city personnel code, Chapter 25 of the city code
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review of department SOG manual

IV. **Incident Command/Incident Management (ICS/IMS) and safety**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Explanation and overview of the Incident Command System
- \_\_\_\_\_ Evacuation signal and personnel accountability reporting procedures
- \_\_\_\_\_ The definition and use of the Chain of Command
- \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction to our mutual aid system with EMS, Law Enforcement and other

F.D.

V. **Map training**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Overview of city map and surrounding area
- \_\_\_\_\_ Practical exercise- fire department response area, both city and rural response.

VI. **Hazard Communications**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Explanation of the hazard communication policy
- \_\_\_\_\_ MSDS sheets for department and city buildings
- \_\_\_\_\_ Body substance isolation policy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify location of medical gloves, eye protection, and first aid kits, etc...

**VII. Self-contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Components of an SCBA
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inspection and safety checks on SCBA
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cascade systems-filling and usage of both stationary and portable
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review of donning and doffing methods
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fit tested
- \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency procedures
- \_\_\_\_\_ Basic search and rescue practical

**VII. Tools and Apparatus/equipment**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Hydraulic rescue equipment operation, use, maintenance policies and procedures
- \_\_\_\_\_ Air bag system procedures and usage
- \_\_\_\_\_ Use, starting, maintenance, and fueling of small tools and portable generators
- \_\_\_\_\_ Maintenance and care of all hand tools
- \_\_\_\_\_ Location of maintenance supplies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extrication practical
- \_\_\_\_\_ Equipment and tool test for all fire department apparatus

**IX. Station Duties**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Station cleanliness (SOG and department regulation)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Location of cleaning supplies

**X. Emergency Medical Services (EMS)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Location of medical equipment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Completion of CPR-PR along with familiarization of departments AED
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review of departments EMS response policy

**XI. Review of cities human resource options**

\_\_\_\_\_ Introduction to other firefighters in fire department

\_\_\_\_\_ Tour of city facilities and introduction of new firefighter

\_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor meeting to discuss expectations of department on them, also allows them to discuss any fear/concerns new firefighter maybe experiencing.

\_\_\_\_\_ Explanation of city benefits and other programs available to employees, EAP etc...

**I have completed the Nevada Fire Department orientation program, and all training has been validated by the training officer or his designee.**

Member Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**I have received and read the Nevada Fire Department SOG manual, and will comply with them to the best of my ability.**

Member Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reviewed/Approved by training officer:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Final approval by the Fire Chief:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Copies filed:**

Training \_\_\_\_\_

Personal \_\_\_\_\_

