

Fresh heirs

Anticipating a wave of retirements, this department started up a professional-development program that encourages personnel from firefighters through captains to prepare for positions one or even two steps above their current ranks.

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What are we in the fire service doing to assist the development of people within our organizations? Are we successfully developing our future leaders?

The Farmington Fire Department has recognized the necessity of providing employee development and leadership training, outside of the traditional promotional process, for all levels of the department. Our results so far provide some insight into two aspects of addressing these needs: first, a system to provide for employee development, and second, the style of leadership an organization needs so it can cultivate a pool of potential successors to its leadership positions.

Should we remain transactional, just letting the traditional promotional process run its course? After all, the system of appointing personnel to positions of responsibility within a department, after they meet the seniority requirements and score high enough on a written exam, has served us for years.

Should fire departments sit back and wait for a leaders to arise from the rank and file, or instead take a transformational stance and start developing personnel to become successful leaders? Fortunately, perhaps, the antiquated system of developing leadership skills within the fire service, "give them the ball and see where they run with it," was a painful process for all involved. The investment we make now in the growth of fire personnel will pay off handsomely when it comes time to select those who will lead us into the future.

A work force "baby boom"

Farmington's situation is unusual, in that the city and its fire depart-

ment grew tremendously in the mid- to late 1970s. During an economic boom, largely due to oil and natural-gas drilling, the department expanded from two fire stations and about 50 budgeted positions, to five stations and more than 100 positions.

Over the last 20 years, both the local economy and the fire department have stabilized. The department currently provides fire prevention, fire suppression, basic non-

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transport EMS and hazmat response to a community of about 40,000 people, out of five stations, with 65 budgeted positions.

While the large number of new hires in the late 1970s built a young department at that time, it also created a situation in which a large number of retirements will be taking place over a short period. Most of these retirements will be from the department's administrative level and officer ranks. We anticipate that between now and 2002, 22 positions will be eligible for retirement: the chief, deputy chief, three battalion chiefs, the fire marshal and assistant fire marshal, four captains, four lieutenants, and seven engineers (driver/operators).

If all the eligible members take their 20-year retirements over that eight-year period, 61 promotional opportunities will open up. The senior staff, all of whom had been

promoted under the old "trial-and-error" method of providing managerial and leadership training, agreed that the department needed a new system to provide management skills and leadership development throughout the department.

Recognizing this need, in late 1992 we instituted the "Acting In Capacity" Certification Program. The objective of this program, which was developed and administered by Deputy Chief Bill Robertson, is to provide a continuing method of identifying and training personnel who are highly motivated and have demonstrated the ability to assume the responsibilities and perform the duties of higher ranks within the department. "Altering the traditional hierarchical organizational structure of a fire department is a difficult task," Robertson explains, "but one that must be done."

AIC requirements

The program allows for employee development, provides a starting point for continuing leadership training and diagrams a well-defined career path. AIC was also designed with the performance standards developed by the NFPA's Professional Qualifications Committees in mind.

The program starts with AIC Certified Engineers. To enter the program, a firefighter must be on permanent status (off probation), with a minimum of one year's service.

The training criteria for AIC Engineer consist of 80 hours of education, equally divided between academic study and practical application, covering accepted hydraulic principles and department SOPs, in addition to driving and pump training. An additional 20 hours of study is required for aerial apparatus operation. Completion of the National Safety Council's "Coaching the Emergency Vehicle Operator" course

and a passing grade on a written exam are also required.

The next step is the AIC Lieutenant position. The qualifications for entry are that the employee holds the permanent-status rank of engineer, or have been an AIC Certified Engineer for a minimum of two years.

AIC Captain is next in line and requires that an employee be a permanent-status lieutenant, or have been an AIC Certified Lieutenant for a minimum of two years.

AIC Battalion Chief is the last step in the program at this time. To enter this section, an employee must be a permanent-status captain, or a permanent-status lieutenant holding AIC Captain Certification for a minimum of two years.

The training criteria for AIC Lieutenant, AIC Captain and AIC Battalion Chief consist of a cumulative syllabus. AIC Lieutenant Certification calls for:

- 112 hours of academic and practical training that comprises IFSTA's "Company Officer" manual and workbook (10 hours),
- A review of the department's SOPs and the city's rules and regulations, administrative regulations, and safety manual (six hours),
- A study of incident command system concepts (eight hours),
- Serving as a trainee under the supervision of a permanent-status lieutenant (24 hours),
- Practical skill application, under actual fire conditions, at the fire training tower (eight hours),
- Application of fire prevention duties (24 hours), and
- Successful completion of an approved leadership course (32 hours), such as the National Fire Academy's Leadership I, II and III field programs; leadership courses offered by our community college; or other classes deemed applicable by the department's senior staff.

Additional training qualifications for AIC Captain Certification include all of the items required for AIC Lieutenant, plus an additional 56 hours of learning, comprising:

- IFSTA's "Chief Officer" manual and workbook (eight hours),
- Serving as a trainee under the supervision of a permanent-status captain (eight hours),
- Successful completion of an approved leadership course (16 hours), and
- Serving as a trainee under the supervision of a battalion chief (24 hours), for a total of 168 hours of training.

AIC Battalion Chief Certification standards call for 40 hours of training in addition to the AIC Captain requirements:

- Successful completion of a Total Quality Management or Management by Responsibility course (16 hours),
- Serving as a trainee under the supervision of a permanent-status battalion chief (eight hours),
- Fire prevention administration (eight hours) and
- Attending City Management Group meetings (eight hours), plus
- Completion and evaluation of an assigned special project (no set time assigned), for a comprehensive 208-plus hours of instruction.

For the TQM/MBR requirement, members can take a Management by Responsibility course offered by the city's personnel department several times each year. While we're always on the lookout for a TQM seminar specific to the fire service, many courses sponsored regionally by private-sector management-training groups would be suitable. The "TQM in the Fire Service" seminar Motorola is putting on at Fire-Rescue International 94 would definitely meet the intent of this requirement.

Written exams are given on various aspects of the training, and passing grades are mandated for certification. Updating and critiquing of the training criteria are essential. "Since the start of the program," Robertson says, "the training

criteria have continuously been reviewed and revised, and to keep the material on the cutting edge of information and technology, it is anticipated that this will be a continuing undertaking."

Having the AIC program in place for each of the ranks allows a certified person to fill a position, on an as-needed basis, and eliminates having an employee step out of the dark and take on additional responsibilities without any formal training. The program also lets members see what each of the various positions is all about, and can help them decide whether they want a particular job, before promoting into it.

"Finding ways to practice being a leader can help you develop the skills necessary to lead others more effectively. Much of the preparation for promotion in the fire service really focuses on job expertise. You learn about raising ladders, tying knots, stretching hose, ventilation, forcible entry and hundreds of other physical skills. Little or no attention is paid to the psychological skills required of leaders."

Caulfield, p. 189

At one time, it was commonly believed that leadership couldn't be taught. (See sidebar.) Today we

Leaders are made, not born

"Leadership skills were once thought a matter of birth. Leaders were born, not made, summoned to their calling through some unfathomable process. This might be called the 'Great Man' theory of leadership. It saw power as being vested in a very limited number of people whose inheritance and destiny made them leaders. Those of the right breed could lead; all others must be led. Either you had it or you didn't. No amount of learning or yearning could change your fate."

Bennis and Nanus, p. 5

"Perhaps it was the military that first investigated this problem. With the massive increases of personnel when we were on the brink of a major war, sufficient numbers of leaders simply did not exist. They had to be trained. This wasn't so simple at first. The military couldn't afford management without leadership in a shooting war. After considerable investigation and soul searching, Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, chief of naval operations, publicly stated: "I concur that we can take average good men and by prop-

er training develop in them the essential initiative, confidence and magnetism which are necessary in leadership. I believe that these qualities are present in the average man to a degree that he can be made a good leader if his native qualities are properly developed. Whether or not he becomes a great leader depends upon whether or not he possesses the extra initiative, magnetism, moral courage and force which makes the difference between the average man and the above-average man."

Cohen and Cohen, pp. 67-68

"Leadership can be learned. It can be learned from studying and observing leaders who are effective, and by putting into practice what is studied and observed."

van den Broeck, p. 1

"Formal training and education can help. Many leadership skills are successfully learned in the classroom. But training alone is insufficient. We also learn from other people and from experiences."

Kouzes and Posner, p. 277 FC

know this isn't true, and that some truly excellent leadership training is available in the fire service. A few that come to mind are the National Fire Academy field programs Leadership I and II, and resident programs such as Executive Fire Officer, or any of its component classes, as well as other programs that can be taught in-house, such as Emergency Resources' "Making a Difference: The Fire Officer's Role" series.

Transformational leadership

As fire service managers, we have an obligation to provide leadership training and develop our personnel. Finding methods to mentor these highly motivated employees should be one of our key career objectives.

Stepping outside the traditional process of promotional testing isn't an easy task or, at times, a popular one. Leadership training, networking, sharing ideas and studying methods used by other fire departments are all areas we must explore as we examine our communities' future fire protection needs, and as we think about how to cultivate our successors.

As we develop methods to encourage our personnel to grow, we must also explore our own leadership styles. Are we practicing transactional leadership by allowing things to proceed as usual, as long as no problems materialize?

Making the change to producing future leaders from within our organizations calls for transformational leadership, a style of leadership that is needed to motivate our personnel to do more than they expected they could. The transformational leader serves as an inspiration and heightens the motivation of personnel to succeed.

Successful leadership characteristics can be identified and studied. Fire departments that are interested in developing programs to address specific local needs should include certain system components, which apply to both career and volunteer organizations. A system that exposes employees to the concepts of vision, self-esteem, speaking and listening ability, and charisma, as well as personal and organizational values, is a must.

This system must also provide intellectual stimulation and motivation to those who are eligible to participate. It must be broad enough so that the process starts with personnel at the bottom of the organizational chart, and continues throughout an employee's climb up the ladder. Networking and information-sharing should also be addressed.

Another part of the structure needs to address basic employee development. Generate some type of in-house career-training program, beyond what is provided for the formal promotional processes, with an emphasis on leadership development and skills. This will allow for a pool of prospective promotional candidates who will be available to assume leadership roles for all positions within a department.

"Traditionally, the fire service professional has received the sum of his or her education, training, and experience within one organization. This has tended to institutionalize department procedures and prejudices, while excluding constructive ideas and innovations that may have been developed in another department."

Marlett and Walz, p. 450

Another measure that should be investigated is some way of identifying other fire departments that meet a definition of excellence and innovation, and allowing interested members to travel to those departments to observe their leaders and programs. This lets personnel examine different leadership styles in action and see how those observations can be applied to their home department.

Motivation

Personnel must also be motivated to participate in these types of programs. Farmington's AIC program has a number of encouragements built into it.

Besides the obvious edge that participants have in any promotional processes, AIC-certified personnel receive a technical-pay increase of \$25 a month. Other incentives include becoming eligible for acting appointments and the salaries associated with them, tuition reimbursement for classes that meet the AIC training criteria, and incentive pay for obtaining those college credits. At this time, 28 personnel have either completed or are participating in some portion of the AIC program.

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Educating current fire service managers to recognize the importance of providing leadership training throughout our departments, and the vision of how we develop those potential leaders, may well be the one of the tests for excellence, in projecting future fire service instructional demands.

"In the past, many fire chiefs had no training or experience in staff and business management, and did not know how to delegate responsibility. Changes in attitudes, plus newly acquired management skills, are rapidly compensating for past deficiencies, and many fire chiefs have acquired the management skills necessary to manage a complex organization. Considering that 20 percent or more of all fire department personnel are officers, there should be ample, technically qualified managerial help available, even in a small fire department."

Peterson, p. 9-52

As we move into the 21st century, we must ensure that our organizations have the needed leadership to carry out our missions and provide the high level of service our communities deserve. FO

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