

Company Officer 101

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As a company officer, one of the earliest things to accomplish with each individual firefighter on your crew is to have a one-on-one meeting and ensure they fully understand what your expectations are. After this is accomplished, you sit down with the entire crew and discuss the goals and vision and invite them to weigh in on what the team can do to meet those objectives. Getting their buy in, listening to their thoughts and ideas, and allowing them to be a part of the team direction is a recipe for success. But, none of this works if you don't start at the beginning - expectations.

We'll assume the firefighter sitting in your office already knows what the minimum standards are they are expected to meet at an organizational level. What they don't know, until you tell them, is what it is that *you* expect from them every shift. Some of the things you should discuss are the most basic items that you assume everyone already knows; be on time and prepared for the day, complete a thorough rig check, provide high quality customer service, etc. By letting them know that the simple things, as well as the more complex issues, are important to you then it becomes more important to them.

When your firefighters have a clear understanding of their expectations, there is less potential for problems to arise. Your crew will operate with a clear vision and what it takes to keep the team successful and operating like a well-oiled machine. If a situation occurs where the expectations are not being met, sit down in private and clarify the issue. It's possibly something as simple as a misunderstanding or as easy as a minor "course correction." Regardless, hold them accountable for what is expected of them.

This is an essential responsibility of a company officer but its only half of the recipe for success. You need to know what each firefighter expects from you. The most common answer you're likely to hear is, "support me in my job functions and give me the tools I need to be successful." Whatever their expectations are, pay attention. You have to give loyalty before you can get it. They need to know that you are working for them and their best interest. They want to be successful and be a part of something bigger than themselves, but its up to you as the company officer to lay the foundation.