# Firefighter to Supervisory Fire Officer Transition Plan

# August 2019





# International Association of Fire Chiefs Company Officers Section

## **Executive Summary**

This white paper document provides guidelines and best practices for the individual who desires to promote to the position of company officer. Content included in this document results from the experiences of current/former company officers in both the United States and Canada. In addition, the NFPA 1021 (Fire Officer I/II) standard is used to provide relevant suggestions for individuals electing to move into an entry-level supervisory position.

The company officer position is one of the most important in the fire service. This individual is the connection between line personnel and upper management. In many organizations, this role is often described as being an extension of the fire chief position while still being part of a company/crew. Preparation for this position includes formal education, on the job training, participation in a mentor/mentee relationship, and using NFPA 1021 as a foundational pathway.

While this document does not provide full assurance that an individual will serve with a high level of competency and success in the position, it does serve as a good tool for preparation purposes. The successful company officer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a consummate student of the profession, and is constantly seeking new innovative ways to enhance his/her skill set.

#### **Contributors to the Document**

Although this document was developed by the <u>IAFC Company Officers Section</u>, it is a collaborative effort from many fire-rescue and affiliated members, whose rank vary from company officer to fire chief. Sincere thanks are given to all who helped develop, review and revise the document. The following is a list of participants.

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#### Intended Use and Design of the Document

The *IAFC Firefighter to Supervisory Fire Officer Transition Plan* is intended to aid fire and rescue organizations and their personnel with successfully transitioning members into this important rank. This document is intended to serve as a toolbox to organizations, training staff and new officers to guide position growth. No two fire and rescue organizations are identical, so a toolbox approach that allows organizations to choose and customize their own processes is a best practice.

When designing a new officer-transition process, the fire and rescue organization must solicit input and collaborate with the key players in the organization—both company and chief officers with various years of tenure in rank. The goal of preparing new company officers is to arm them with the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to excel in their new rank.

#### Legal Disclaimer

Many laws and regulations exist at the local, state/provincial and federal levels related to employment and promotion. This document cannot account for every existing law or regulation affecting any given fire and rescue organization. It is advised that any attempt to enact a new company-officer training program within a fire and rescue organization review the requisite skills listed in <a href="NFPA 1021">NFPA 1021</a>, <a href="Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications">NFPA 1021</a>, <a href="Standard for Fire Officer Profes

## The Role of the Company Officer

The supervisory fire officer is the first-level position in the fire-service organization who is tasked with supervision responsibilities. This individual is typically responsible for managing a crew of individuals designated as a fire company. In this document, the supervisory fire officer is a lieutenant or captain. His or her responsibilities generally fall within the following areas:

- Administration
- Facilities
- Apparatus
- Operations
- Training

In the administration realm, duties include record keeping, managing projects and completing daily paperwork specific to an organization. Operational duties include providing general direction and orders in the hazard zone, using the incident command system and overseeing one or more resources at the scene of an emergency.

The supervisory fire officer plays a pivotal role in the development and sustainability of his or her subordinates. This is satisfied through daily company-level training and participation in reoccurring training at the battalion level.

Finally, facility and apparatus responsibilities include ensuring the upkeep of these two essential resources and using the proper reporting procedures when repair or replacement is needed.

NFPA 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications, identifies specific standards for the Fire Officer I and II levels. Standards include:

- Supervising and directing a single unit
- Instructing members in operating procedures
- Responding to alarms for fire, EMS and hazmat incidents
- Assuming command at an incident
- Overseeing routine and preventive maintenance
- Evaluating member performance
- Reading, studying and applying department procedures
- Determining cause and origin
- Participating in the department's inspection program
- Performing pre-incident planning activities

Specific local responsibilities for the supervisory fire officer can be obtained through the agency's human resources (HR) department.

See Appendix A for complete list of NFPA 1021 Fire Officer I and II Standards.

## Job Performance Requirements and Behavior-Performance Dimensions

Here is a list of the NFPA Fire Officer I/II job-performance requirements.

- General knowledge of the following:
  - o Organizational structure of the department
  - o Geographical configurations and characteristics of the response district
  - Department's budget process
  - o Information management and recordkeeping
  - Current trends, technologies and socioeconomic and political factors that affect the fire service
  - Cultural diversity
- HR-related knowledge in the following areas:
  - Evaluating member performance during emergency and nonemergency periods
  - Federal, state and local laws
  - o Principles of supervision
  - Basic HR management
- Knowledge of community and government relations in the following area:
  - Community demographics and service organizations
- Inspection and investigation-related knowledge in the following areas:
  - Common causes of fire
  - Fire growth and development
  - o Policies and procedures for calling for investigators
- Knowledge of emergency-service delivery in the following areas:
  - o Elements of the local emergency plan
  - Pre-incident planning
  - Basic fire-protection systems
  - Basic water supply
  - Size-up elements
  - Incident command system
  - Scene safety

The term *job dimension* is an overarching term that describes one or more skills needed to perform in a position. In the fire service, job dimensions are usually discussed while preparing for a promotional exam and during yearly performance evaluations, if applicable for the local agency.

To become and remain a high-performing company officer, applicable job dimensions should be practiced and refined constantly. At its core, understanding and applying job dimensions while performing the role of a supervisory fire officer leads to success on many levels.

These are general core behavior and performance dimensions:

- Adaptability/flexibility
- Conflict resolution
- Creativity
- Customer service
- Decision-making and decisiveness
- Emotional maturity
- Independent thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Job knowledge
- Job preparation
- Judgment
- Oral communication skills
- Organizing and planning
- Persuasiveness
- Problem solving
- Sensitivity
- Supervision
- Teamwork and cooperation
- Written communication skills

See Appendix B for a definition of each dimension.

#### **Education**

At the firefighter level, professional development is primarily garnered through constant exercising on the training ground. This leads to proficiency in the core skills expected at this rank. When an individual is preparing to become a company officer or is currently in the position, training and education should expand beyond the training ground.

In the 21st Century fire service, formal education is swiftly moving away from something nice to have to a necessity. In the educational arena, regardless of degree type, the student hones specific skills that are essential to the success of the supervising officer—success that extends to the company, battalion, department and organizational levels.

Through a collaboration with several institutions across the United States, the U.S. Fire Administration established the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education initiative (FESHE). The mission of FESHE is to establish an organization of postsecondary institutions to promote higher education, and to enhance the recognition of the fire and emergency service as a profession. Based on the FESHE model, several institutions have developed degree-track programs specifically for fire and EMS personnel.

Commonly, individuals will ask if there is a specific field of study that they should pursue. The short answer is no. Regardless of the chosen major, the attainment and refinement of requisite soft skills is the same. These soft skills include:

- Working in teams and small groups
- Collaborating
- Researching
- Analyzing and making inferences from data
- Decision-making
- Oral and written communications

The benefits of enrolling in a degree program designed specifically for fire and EMS responders include:

- Working with others in the same profession
- Participating in assignments and activities that are germane to the profession
- Networking
- Converting theories into practical uses for the adult learner who is also a practitioner

In many agencies, having a degree is a requirement for participating in a promotional process or being promoted to a supervisory position. For those who have never attended college before, the two best initial tasks are to talk with an admissions counselor at a local college, university or online program and to talk with others in your organization about school choices and degree types.

For individuals who are seeking an additional degree, talk with senior officials in your organization on the best degree options that fit the future needs of the profession. Additionally, the various online fire and emergency service communities serve as an additional outlet for soliciting information on relevant degree options.

For more information about professional development in the fire and emergency service, visit <u>USFA.FEMA.gov/Training/ProDev</u>.

## **Credential Programs**

*Credentialing* is attaining an educational degree or achieving a professional qualification associated with a particular profession. It is the hallmark of dedication and professional development against the back drop of a rigorous set of activities.

There are two major credentialing organizations serving the fire service; one is based in the United States and the other in the United Kingdom. The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) is an American-based credentialing organization. CPSE offers credentialing designations in the following programs:

- Chief fire officer
- Chief EMS officer
- Chief training officer
- Fire marshal
- Fire officer

CPSE offers the following as benefits of a credentialing designation:

- Highlighting your professional growth
- Documenting strategies for your career enhancement and development
- Demonstrating your commitment to lifelong learning, skill development and community service
- Affirming your dedication to proficiency and delivery of all-hazard services to your community
- Improving your chances of being hired and promoted by identifying you as a candidate with superior skills, knowledge and leadership capabilities
- Fostering a source of pride for you or those in your agency you encourage to become credentialed

The second credentialing organization is the Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE). Founded in 1918, this UK-based organization awards grades of credentials to fire service professionals globally. In its most recent strategic plan, the IFE describes its aim as one of promoting, encouraging and improving the science, practice and professionalism of fire engineering. Its overarching strategies include:

- Facilitating awareness
- Fostering professionalism
- Increasing knowledge
- Providing independent leadership
- Promoting the IFE and organizational development

As part of their qualifications for one or more designations, both organizations require applicants to have a college degree. For more information on these two organizations, visit their websites at CPSE.org, ife.ca or, http://ife.org.uk/

#### **Promotional Process**

In many organizations across the United States, before being promoted to fire officer, an individual must participate in a promotional exam process. This process is commonly known as the assessment center—not a location, but a series of exams that candidates participate in.

The components and exercises are in line with what fire officers would perform in their daily duties. Components of an exam typically consist of:

- A multiple-choice written exam
- An emergency-simulation exercise
- A structured oral board
- A writing assignment
- A roleplay exercise

The components of an assessment-center exam are designed by in-house staff from the personnel department or through an outside test consultant. Regardless of who constructs it, the exam should follow parameters identified in the United States Department of Labor Uniform Employee Selections Guidelines. In Canada, content guidelines are covered by the Canadian Labour Program and by provincial (state) labor standards.

Best practices for candidates to increase success in the promotional process include:

- Establishing a relationship with a mentor or coach
- Taking on additional responsibilities within their organization that are outside the scope of the current rank
- Staying abreast on current trends and best practices in the fire service
- Participating in some form of ongoing continuing education
- Studying the desired officer position and affiliated dimensions
- Understanding the full scope of the job
- Obtaining and reviewing all items on the promotional-exam reading list

Successful candidates start preparing for the position early in their career; equally important, they are consistent and disciplined in the realm of being students of the profession.

See Appendices B and C for information and sources to better prepare for the assessment-center process.

## **Professional Development**

Attaining a supervisory position in the fire service represents one half of an individual's professional accomplishment; maintaining a high level of competency and relevancy completes the process.

Many fire service organizations have robust professional-development programs in place for their employees at all levels. In other organizations, the lack of comprehensive programs requires learners to seek support from outside their organizations. Earlier, education and credential programs were mentioned as essential to success for aspiring and current supervisory fire officers. Professional development can be described as ongoing training activities, continuing education and experiences.

In the firefighter and engineer/driver operator ranks, a heavy emphasis is placed on hands-on psychomotor abilities. Once someone transitions to the supervisory fire-officer rank, he or she must maintain those abilities while adding a diverse set of skills that can be best described as cognitive in nature. Examples of diverse sets of cognitive abilities include:

- Managing incidents
- Motivating subordinates
- Completing administrative paperwork
- Writing reports
- Delivering instruction
- Correcting performance and behavior deficiencies
- Setting goals for subordinates

In the domain of training, the aspiring/current supervisory fire officer should work with a mentor to help devise training strategies to assist with upward growth. Additional training strategies include:

- All-hazards ICS/simulation training
- Local government operations, specifically in the areas of budgeting, subordinate development and HR issues
- Software applications (Microsoft Suite)
- Data collection and analysis
- Community-based fire protection and risk reduction

Under the category of continuing education, participating in coursework at a local college or university or the National Fire Academy or attending conference sessions are excellent examples for promoting professional growth as an aspiring or current supervisory fire officer.

Last, fire service personnel typically associate the word *experiences* with structure-fire responses and the frequency of them. These types of experiences are definitely

learning opportunities when they present; however, valuable experiences extend beyond the borders of structure fire responses. If the opportunity presents itself, aspiring and current supervisory fire officers should take a 40-hour assignment within their organizations. In the absence of a 40-hour assignment opportunity, transferring to a different battalion is another example of an additional experience. In many cities and counties, each battalion has its own uniqueness and different set of challenges. In some cities and counties, a broad-based leadership academy is offered; this too is a valuable opportunity for learning.

Collectively, different experiences push people outside of their comfort zones. They lead to a richer understanding of the fire service, its role within a government structure and how the supervisory fire officer serves as a high-level influencer.

# Appendix A NFPA 1021 Fire Officer I and II Standards

#### Fire Officer I

- Supervises and directs the activities of a single unit
- Instructs members of the company regarding operating procedures, including duty assignments and giving special instructions when fighting fires
- Responds to alarm for fires, vehicle extrications, hazmat, EMS and other emergencies as required
- Assumes command of emergency scenes per the incident command system, analyzes situations and determines proper procedures until being relieved by a higher-ranking officer
- Oversees routine and preventive maintenance and makes periodic inspections of their assigned apparatus
- Receives direction and instruction from the fire captain and battalion chief regarding station operations, grounds and building maintenance, and overall fire scene action
- Provides training to crew members
- Evaluates employees' performance and conducts performance reviews
- Reads, studies, interprets and applies departmental procedures, technical manuals and building plans
- Completes and maintains manual or computer records and prepares necessary reports on incidents, accidents and personnel training
- Performs prefire planning activities, including touring and studying businesses for physical layout, possible hazards, location of water sources, exposure problems and potential life loss
- Conducts occupancy inspections
- Determines cause and a preliminary origin of fire
- Participates in planning, prepares and delivers various public-education programs regarding fire prevention and safety and conducts tours of the fire station is required
- Assists in fire safety inspections of public and private building property
- Participates in and oversees the periodic inspection and testing of equipment
- Works directly in firefighting activities; utilizes tools, equipment, portable extinguishers, hoses, ladders and so on
- Takes appropriate action on the maintenance needs of equipment, buildings and grounds
- Supervises and performs maintenance and cleaning work on fire equipment, buildings and grounds

#### Fire Officer II

- Supervises and directs activities of a multiunit station
- Completes employee performance appraisals
- Creates a professional development plan for members of the organization
- Leads water rescue, hazardous materials, or other special teams as assigned
- Ensures the safe and proper use of equipment, clothing and protective gear and enforces departmental policies
- Participates in the formulation or evaluation of departmental or agency policies as assigned, implements new or revised policies and encourages team efforts of fire personnel
- Participates in the formulation of the departmental budget and makes purchases within it
- Develops emergency incident operations plans to require multiunit operations
- Prepares written reports so major causes for local service demand are identified for various planning areas within the service area of the organization

# **Appendix B Performance and Behavior Dimensions Definitions**

#### Adaptability/Flexibility

The extent to which candidates can adapt to changing environments and conditions.

This also includes a willingness to change approach or beliefs in order to accommodate new information or conditions. Related to this is an openness to change and the ability to incorporate new ideas, even when those ideas may conflict with previously held ideas. Candidates who are strong on this dimension are often comfortable simultaneously holding and dealing with conflicting ideas.

#### **Conflict Resolution**

The extent to which candidates can identify both individual and organizational conflicts and effectively work toward resolving those conflicts.

Supervisors and managers must handle all kinds of conflict, from a disagreement between two subordinates to conflict between organizational divisions, within the community at large, or even between expressed values and organizational or personal demands. This dimension does not suggest the avoidance of conflict (although in some occasions that may be appropriate), but rather, the ability to anticipate, confront and resolve the variety of conflicts that can occur.

#### Creativity

The extent to which candidates look for innovative alternatives, explore new methods and ideas and develop new combinations of existing knowledge when problem solving.

This is a vital quality in today's supervisors, managers and executives. This performance dimension includes the ability to find creative solutions to the problems with which candidates are confronted. Strong candidates can see things from new perspectives and give a fair hearing to the ideas of others. Candidates who are strong in creativity are also typically willing to take risks and adapt quickly to changing situations.

#### **Customer Service**

The extent to which candidates can identify who the customer is, identify what that customer needs and desires, determine the role they can play in meeting those needs and desires, and, if unable to meet particular customer needs, seek others who can.

Most organizations place a high value on customer service. Members of effective organizations are expected to take a customer-service attitude toward individuals and organizations in the community and toward individuals and divisions within the

organization itself. Better candidates should demonstrate knowledge of and allegiance to the customer service ideology and have the ability to apply this concept appropriately.

#### **Decision-Making and Decisiveness**

The extent to which candidates do not shy away from making decisions and do demonstrate an understanding of when to make decisions alone, when to collaborate with their peers and when to pass decisions on to someone else.

Strong candidates have the self-confidence to defend good decisions and abandon poor ones, taking ownership of their decisions and accepting accountability.

#### **Emotional Maturity**

The extent to which candidates exhibit the ability to cope with unexpected change, recognize their own feelings and express them appropriately, control strong emotional responses and respond reasonably under stressful conditions.

There are both recognition and control factors that are at play with this dimension. A candidate needs to recognize his/her own emotions and feelings, the situational factors that are influencing those emotions and feelings, including the detection of the emotions and feelings of others. Furthermore, a candidate needs to be able to control his/her own emotions to most effectively handle stressful situations.

#### Independent Thinking

The extent to which candidates can present unique ideas and offer independent views and solutions.

A good organization desires to have people who can provide other points of view. In today's world, it is too risky for an organization to have only people who will agree with the conventional thinking on issues and never consider alternatives. This does not mean, however, that these are people who are unwilling to support the organization's decisions should those decisions differ from their own. Better candidates demonstrate the willingness to express their own beliefs and opinions. However, better candidates also stand by the organization's decisions, regardless of whether the final decision is their own or not.

Independent thinking should not be confused with stubborn thinking. This dimension also frequently encompasses administrative courage, integrity and honesty.

#### Interpersonal Skills

The extent to which candidates can establish and maintain cooperative and constructive relationships on an individual and group basis, consider the feelings and needs of others and respect the views of others.

Interpersonal skills include the ability to communicate and listen to others, disarm and set others at ease, consider multiple viewpoints and express sensitivity and concerns for others.

#### Job Knowledge

The extent to which candidates demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of policies, procedures and practices of the organization and position.

Job knowledge includes displaying an understanding of:

- administrative and emergency operating procedures
- mission and vision statements
- tactics and strategies for emergency scenes
- supervisory and management theories and practices

#### **Job Preparation**

The extent to which candidates have prepared for the job in question.

Such preparation may entail participation in classes or seminars, activities outside the normal work environment, professional affiliations, the obtainment of college degrees, and so forth. Job preparation also entails the candidate understanding the requirements and demands of the position. Such preparation is demonstrated when the candidate identifies what is needed in order to assume the position and what actions he/she has taken toward attaining those needs.

#### **Judgment**

The extent to which candidates weigh alternatives, including the cost and benefit of potential actions, and choose the most appropriate alternative.

Judgment should generally be logical and orderly.

#### **Oral Communication Skills**

The extent to which candidates can organize thoughts and express them in a clear and logical manner.

Oral communication includes the organization, clarity and conciseness of ideas and thoughts and the appropriate use of language. In addition, paralanguage (pitch, volume and tempo of speech) and nonverbal communication (posture, eye contact and body movement) can influence the effectiveness of oral communication.

#### **Organizing and Planning**

The extent to which candidates define the tasks and goals that must be accomplished, provide a framework or strategy for accomplishing them and establish a timeline for completion.

Whereas problem solving entails the identification and selection of a course of action, organizing and planning involves the means of actually putting the solution into action. Organizing and planning includes the prioritization of tasks, delegation and coordination of assignments, setting task goals and timelines, and ensuring objectives are met. These skills can often be seen in presentations that are well organized and logically communicated.

#### **Persuasiveness**

The extent to which candidates can communicate their ideas in a convincing manner, especially regarding obtaining buy-in from others for their ideas.

Supervisors and managers are frequently called on to sell ideas to others. The selling of ideas is based upon how well an individual can identify what is relevant to the person he/she is addressing and how well the arguments relate to those relevant matters. Supervisors and managers, particularly those at the middle levels of organizations, are frequently called upon to sell management's perspectives and ideas, even when they do not personally agree with such perspectives and when they know that their subordinates will not agree. As can be seen, being convincing takes perceptiveness, organization, conviction, and tact. Synonymous with persuasiveness is the ability to convince people. To be convincing, an individual has to be able to use knowledge because facts tend to be more persuasive than opinions.

#### **Problem Solving**

The extent to which candidates can critically evaluate a situation, comprehend the situation in its proper perspective, evaluate alternative solutions, consider the implications of problems and solutions and arrive at a sound decision.

Problems can vary in scope and complexity from day-to-day problems (such as rearranging staff assignments) to organization-wide issues (such as low employee morale).

#### Sensitivity

The extent to which candidates are perceptive to the needs, concerns and perspectives of others and effectively integrate those aspects of others into their thought processes.

Sensitivity is a perceptual and cognitive process which, for supervisors and managers, entails understanding the perspectives of others. This is often revealed in a person keeping subordinates and supervisors informed, understanding and genuinely

appreciating the input of others, being able to see things from other peoples' perspectives and similar actions.

Sensitivity to minority and gender issues, as well as customer service, are important elements included in this performance dimension. Empathy for others, as well as an understanding of others, is critical for effectiveness as a supervisor, and indeed, it is important in the evaluation of this dimension.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, please click on the following link: <u>IAFC</u> <u>Position: Diversity and Inclusiveness - Take Leadership All the Way</u>

#### Supervision

The extent to which candidates provide guidance and direction for subordinates and ensure high performance standards.

Supervision is distinct from leadership in that supervision primarily entails the direct administrative oversight of employees. Supervision includes setting goals for employees and evaluating performance, providing documentation, coaching and counseling employees, setting expectations, holding people accountable, and utilizing discipline and praise where appropriate.

#### Teamwork and Cooperation

The extent to which candidates demonstrate the ability to work well with others.

Teamwork and cooperation often involve the willingness to sacrifice personal desires or benefits for the advancement or betterment of the team. Those who are effective at cooperation recognize the desires of others, the goals of the team, and seek "win-win" solutions whenever possible.

#### Written Communication Skills

The extent to which candidates convey written information in a clear and effective manner, including effectively organizing their ideas, using proper writing mechanics (for example, grammar and spelling) and using an appropriate writing style.

Written communication skills do not include the substance of the written document per se, but rather how the information is conveyed. So, it is possible for a candidate to present an inappropriate or incorrect argument in a document and still display strong written communication if the argument is clearly written.

# **Appendix C Suggested Resources**

#### Assessment Center Resources

- Mastering the Fire Service Assessment Center by Anthony Kastros
- How to Excel at Fire Department Promotional Exams by Steve Prziborowski
- Preparing for Fire Service Assessment Center by Maher & Michelson
- ESCI's Critical Supervisory Skills in Fire & Rescue

#### Fire Service Related Programs, Courses, and Institutions

- Executive Fire Officer: <u>USFA.FEMA.gov/Training/NFA/Programs/EFOP.html</u>
- Managing Fire Officer: USFA.FEMA.gov/Training/NFA/Programs/mo program.html
- IAFC/FRI Officer Development program: <u>IAFC.org</u>
- National Fire Academy: USFA.FEMA.gov/Training/NFA
- Center for Public Safety Excellence: CPSE.org
- U.S. Fire Administration Professional Development: USFA.FEMA.gov/Training/ProDev
- International Association of Firefighters Programs and Services: https://client.prod.iaff.org/ - page=ProgramsAndServices
- National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Fire Service Resources:
   <u>Firehero.org/Resources/Department-Resources</u>
- International Fire Service Training Organization: <a href="IFSTA.org">IFSTA.org</a>
- International Fire Service Accreditation Congress: IFSAC.org
- Pro Board Accreditation: TheProBoard.org
- International Society of Fire Service Instructors: ISFSI.org