



## TRISHA L. WOLFORD, FIRE CHIEF ~ 100 DAY PLAN<sup>5</sup>



### Considerations starting the job:

- Assess the department – existing leadership, culture, etc.
  - Talk to as many people as you can... Look, listen, ask questions, open doors and look inside (keep asking why)
  - Learn where the informal power appears to be inside the department
- Determine/develop the vision you see for the agency and sketch out the plan
  - Do things really need to be changed or just nudged? Be careful not to fix something that is not broken
  - What leadership style(s) do you think will be successful?
  - How do you see the organization in 3-5 years?
  - What steps will you take to get there?
- Prepare yourself
  - Be honest about your ability and energy to deal with the upcoming challenges
  - Are you able to take bold action? Will you be afraid of a decision or taking a position that would get you fired or censured?
  - Is your family supportive?
  - Are you fit emotionally or physically?
  - Clarity of authority:
    - The Fire Chief should have full authority and responsibility to perform all functions necessary to completely and fully administer the department in accordance with the directives and policies of the department. The Fire Chief shall have exclusive authority to hire, organize, discipline and fire any personnel necessary to carry out the business of the department.
    - The County Executive, L1563 President and the Fire Chief will be considered critical stakeholders in major decisions.
- Be cognizant of the following realities:
  - You will be accountable for the sins of your predecessor, accept it
  - Understand that the Fire Chief role is vastly different than any other position in the organization. Don't think you understand it until you do it
  - No matter who you are or what your gifts are, sooner or later those strengths will be exploited and your limits pushed. It's the nature of the beast
  - You will face a period where your desire to do the job is low when compared to all the stressors (The "is it worth it" phase). If you don't feel this eventually, you're probably not listening enough to the organization (and yes, it's worth it)

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<sup>5</sup> Resource provided as sample for readers with permission from Chief Trisha L. Wolford Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Fire Department.

## The First 20 Days:

- Be visible. Connect with people
- Communicate my message to key teams (Executive, Management, Labor, Leadership, Sworn, Civilian, Community)
  - Values – What is important to me and why is it important?
  - Expectations – Myself, County Executive, CAO, Council Members, L1563 President, COS, AC, DC’s, staff, field personnel
  - Vision – Where is the organization and community headed?
  - Share the big picture plan:
    - Move at a speed the organization can handle
    - Keep the view at a 30,000-foot level
    - Let the specifics become my team’s ownership
    - Communicate and be transparent
  - Identify my challenges – what will be difficult for me? (be human and realistic)
  - Identify the current “NOW” issues. What will I tackle immediately?
    - Minimum staffing?
    - Pay?
    - 911 communications combine?
    - Driver only response?
    - Morale?
    - OCS?
  - Communicate personally to all levels, don’t immediately expect your message to be delivered effectively
  - DO NOT DO YOUR STAFF’S JOB! If people want change, they need to see the right person
  - Protect the early adopters of your vision – make it OK to get on board
- Introduce yourself to everyone
  - Make it personal. Let them know who you are and what you stand for
  - Have enough time and have extra time
    - Build a matrix to reach every shift at every station, civilian employees, shop, communications, training, IT, HR, payroll, EMS, logistics, FMO
- Internal Review
  - Review Organizational Chart and position descriptions
    - AC, COS, DFC’s, DC’s, etc.
  - Internal & External work flows
  - SOP’s / R&R’s
  - Contracts / MOU’s
  - Budget
    - Dig deep into the details... are we sustainable?
    - Do we have sufficient financial controls, checks, and balances?

## The Next 80 Days:

- Schedules meetings:
  - Directors of other County departments
  - Annapolis, BWI, Fort Meade, Naval Academy - Fire Chief's
  - Police Chief
  - Medical Director
  - Council Members
  - Labor Leaders & Volunteer Chiefs
    - Give them a chance to learn things and weigh in before the general population – Don't surprise them
    - Treat them with respect and give them a chance to be a partner
    - Listen to them carefully, thoughtfully, and establish a routine meeting time – keep the meetings even if you think you have nothing to talk about
    - Realize that past relationships may cause your efforts to take longer than you anticipate or want – be patient
  - Legal
    - Interview and select (if possible) your union legal representation
  - Regional Fire Chiefs
  - Educational facilities: AACC, MFRI
  - Hospitals: AAMC, BWMC, St. Agnus, SOMD
  - Community open forum
  - Media
  - Neighborhood leaders
  - Safe Communities Committee
  - Sheriff
  - Mayor of Annapolis
  - Governor
- Work closely with the County Executive, Council and other department heads
  - Build a relationship of trust with the County Executive; learn his style and his plan for the community and the citizens
  - Be a team player
  - Learn how he perceives the Fire Department, what he knows, what he doesn't know and what he needs to know
  - Learn how other Departments view your department: What is the history?
  - Meet with Council. Respect the relationship the CE has with Council – Do not compromise the CE's situation
- Listen, Listen, Listen. Take notes. (likes and dislikes)
- Focus on the future, not the past
- Celebrate the wins – be mindful of the culture that currently exists
- Broadcast your failures – be honest about what isn't working well in your plan and tell them how you are adjusting
- Make it OK to fail but NOT OK not to try
- Keep the membership informed on a regular basis - consider pushing out a message by video, newsletter, closed social media, etc.
- Build Fire Chief Stakeholder Board