

Essays on Recruitment and Retention for the Fire Service



Robert P. Avsec  
Executive Fire  
Officer

## Introduction

Volumes have been written about how to improve the fire service. And there's good reason for it; lives depend on us getting better. We can lump these challenges into two main categories: those that can be improved by engineering or technology, and those that can be improved through behavior changes.

A walk through any firefighting museum or any fire tradeshow floor is proof enough that the engineering and technology part, while amazing, is the easier of the two to solve.

The ability to recruit and retain top-tier firefighters has been and remains one of those more difficult areas to see marked improvement. Make no mistake, the fire service already draws incredible talent. But the challenge is to better identify those with the best potential for reaching great heights and for falling to great depths. The challenge is also to develop and keep the great firefighters within the service and within the department.

Technology for communication and testing can help, but it really comes down to assessing, predicting and modifying human behavior. And of course, the need to improve recruitment and retention is not a fire service exclusive. The halls of business wisdom have forever echoed the phrase: "Our people are our most valuable resource." And that too is for good reason — for businesses, profit depends on having good people.

The cost of losing good people in the private sector is hard to measure. But one attempt at this measurement by the Center for American Progress looked at 11 research papers published over 15 years. That analysis concluded that losing one highly skilled person cost a business 213 percent more than one year of that person's salary.

It's not all that difficult to imagine things like line-of-duty deaths, injuries, near misses, property loss and equipment readiness being positively or negatively influenced by the caliber of firefighters on staff. Yet, a 213 percent impact is unsettling. I would love to see firefighter injuries and near misses drop by 200 percent.

More often than not we find ourselves linking recruit and retain, and not just because it has a nice ring to it. The two are co-dependent upon and subsets of one another.

Retention begins with the recruiting efforts. Bamboozling potential recruits, for example, about the expectations and benefits of the job will lead to high turnover and unhappy firefighters. Likewise, a department's success in recruiting will be reflected in its ability to retain its people, as the best candidates are going to do their homework on the department's culture.

Recruiting and retaining outstanding firefighters is complicated. And Chief Avsec's collection of essays on the subjects are neither the first nor the final word on it. It is an important, much-needed look at a complicated issue. And it is more than a series of alarm soundings; Chief Avsec provides some workable solutions from the field.

# Recruitment and Retention

It can seem the forces of nature are conspiring against recruiting and retaining quality firefighters. In the volunteer sector, increased training requirements, job and family demands and a weakening sense of community have pushed their numbers so low many departments are faced with merger or closure.

A slowly recovering economy has left deep scars on municipal budgets, which has pushed many career firefighters to jump ship for better-paying departments. And poor leadership is cited across the board as a top reason firefighters are dissatisfied with the job.

Despite all of this, the fire service can still attract the best and the brightest. Yet it is critical we do not take our eye off the need to improve this aspect of the service.

Technology and engineering can put a man on the moon and a TIC on your SCBA. But it can't fill your firehouse with great firefighters. That will take hard work, hard money and hard choices to move the ball farther down the field.

Chief Avsec's essay collection will help you gain that valuable yardage.

Rick Markley

Volunteer Firefighter Communications Director  
International Firefighters Relief Mission  
June 2017

## Preface

First of all, Thank You! I believe that your purchase of this book demonstrates: (1) you're a leader in your fire service organization (whether you have a rank or not); (2) you're a person looking to expand your body of knowledge; and (3) you care about your organization's ability to provide leadership and guidance to its people. The fire service needs people like you!

I'm a retired fire department battalion chief. I proudly served with the men and women of the Chesterfield County (Va.) Fire Department for 26-years. All told, I've spent 30+ years in the fire service and EMS. During that wonderful "1st career", as I rose through the ranks of the department I had many opportunities for personal and professional growth and development. Those opportunities included:

- Serving as an Advanced Life Support Provider, which included a stint as a back-up flight paramedic on a medevac helicopter;
- Serving on our Hazardous Materials Response Team, during which I earned my Specialist Certification;
- Serving as the department's EMS Director while a Captain;
- Serving as Co-Manager of our county's Emergency Communications Center (9-1-1) while a Captain;
- Serving as the department's Chief of Training and Safety Division while a Battalion Chief;
- Serving as an Operations Division Battalion Commander during several rotations; and
- Serving as a member of the department's Strategic Planning Steering Committee.

Since my retirement in December 2007, I've worked in several other capacities: Operations Chief for a private-sector ambulance service; as a Staff Instructor/Course Developer at the Georgia Fire Academy; and as a management consultant for a private-sector company with management services contracts with the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. All of which allowed me to continue to "broaden my horizons."

Since 2012, I've been plying my trade in my "2nd career" as a freelance writer beginning with the creation of my professional blog, Talking "Shop" 4 Fire and EMS. A couple of years later, I was recruited by Mr. Rick Markley to write articles on a monthly basis for the on-line trade journal, FireRescue1.com.

This book that you've purchased is composed of selected posts from my blog. In addition to my own original content, I've included selections from one of my most popular guest bloggers (Thank you!): Susanna Schmitt-Williams.

Once again, thank you for your purchase. I hope that our words help you to gain a better appreciation for what is necessary to be an effective leader in the fire service.

Robert Avsec

Cross Lanes, WV  
March 2017

## Why Did You Want to Become a Firefighter?

By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer



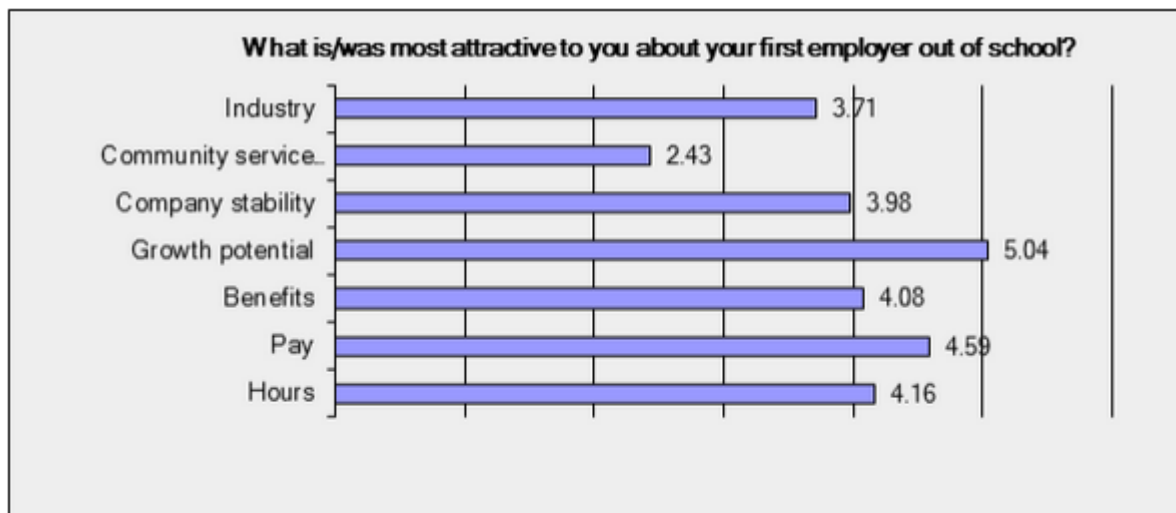
That question has been around for generations, no? As leaders in Fire and EMS organizations, do we truly know the answer for ourselves and others in our organizations? If we are to continue to recruit and train and retain the individuals necessary to adequately staff our organizations in the coming years, perhaps we would be better served to ponder the question. More so, what are the expectations of the next generation of firefighters?

Recently, I came across an article posted on LinkedIn by Candice Crane entitled, [How Millennials \(don't\) Use Social Media](#). Ms. Crane is a Talent Acquisition Manager with Greensky Credit in the Atlanta, Georgia area. Ms. Crane had conducted a study recently on the impact social media and employment branding have on recent college graduates. She set out to answer two questions:

- How do recent college graduates use social media to identify opportunities?
- How are recent college graduates influenced by a company's employment brand when looking to join an organization?

I would suggest reading the post as its contents have, I believe, great relevance to our future recruiting efforts in Fire and EMS. The following graphic really caught my attention:

## Recruitment and Retention



When asked to rank the choices above, growth potential, pay and hours were ranked in the top 3. Industry and community service rounded out the bottom two.

Growth potential, pay, and hours are “biggies” while industry and community service, not so much. Isn’t that interesting? What does that mean for us as leaders in the Fire and EMS world? Here are a couple of quick thoughts:

### **Growth Potential**

“Paying one’s dues” as the primary means of advancement in our organizations will continue to go the way of typewriters, hardline telephones, and dirty turnout gear. We must attract educated young people who are willing to learn about our profession if we are to meet current and future challenges. To do that we’re going to have to leverage new educational technologies and methodologies to properly prepare young people for greater responsibilities early in their careers rather than later.

[See Related: Job Hopping Is the ‘New Normal’ for Millennials: Three Ways to Prevent a Human Resource Nightmare](#)

If our military forces can teach young people how to be good front-line leaders in months, why should it take years on the job before we feel our younger people are ready to lead teams or participate in making meaningful contributions to the organization in other ways?

### **Compensation (Pay)**

Nobody says it’s going to be easy. Firefighters in many areas have always struggled to be paid commensurate with what they provide to the community. More fire departments need to “up their game” when it comes to informing and educating the people in their communities—perhaps even before getting to better compensation for the individual—of how the services they provide improve the quality of life in the community.

## Recruitment and Retention

Now, more than ever, it's time for fire departments to rebrand themselves. Let's take a page out of the book of corporate America when it comes to rebranding. Replace the name **fire department** with a new and more descriptive moniker, e.g., **Hazard Prevention and Control Department**, staffed by **Hazard Prevention and Control Technicians**. The goal of any company that successfully rebrands itself is to have the customer "forget" the old company and embrace the new one.

It's a reality in the working world that there are [fewer potential employees coming into the workforce](#) than ever before and the competition for them is only getting more competitive. If the fire service is to successfully compete for the educated workers that it needs to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, it's going to have to become more competitive on the issue of pay.

### Hours

But actual pay is not going to be the only issue. Departments must become more creative and imaginative in how they can provide various forms of compensation that are valued by the incoming generation of employees and members. Tuition reimbursement to further their education, family health and wellness programs, childcare services, etc., are just some examples of what should be "on the table" for future discussions.

Much has been written recently about the negative impact of the traditional 24-hour shift on firefighters, particularly regarding sleep deprivation. The 24-hour shift also has a significant impact on family life, especially for parents with younger children where childcare is so important with both parents working in many cases.

Fire service leaders, along with other stakeholders such as firefighter unions, must aggressively seek out good reasons **why** new scheduling schemes are needed rather than **why not**. The newer generation of workers is coming with an expectation of a good work/life balance and they're going to go into careers where they believe they can have that. Can we really afford to keep offering a "one-size fits all" approach to staffing our organizations?

### Industry and Community Service

Just how appealing are we portraying a career in the fire service to be? A rising awareness for the risk of cancer from firefighting? Departments embroiled in sexual harassment and job discrimination lawsuits? Fire department leaders and employees engaging in poor behavior—and in too many cases, illegal behavior—that besmirches not only their departments and communities, but also the service in general?

How many young people are going to be attracted to the fire service in the future? How many parents—particularly those who have daughters—are going to want their offspring to pursue a fire service career?

Many of us became firefighters because we wanted to help people and/or make a difference in our communities. How many members of the up and coming generation of workers in the United States have a similar mindset, particularly when many of them have been raised by "helicopter parents" who've not instilled a "service before self" attitude in their children? How do we market a service industry like ours to such a target population?



## Transition for the Future of Fire and EMS

**By: Chief Susanna Schmitt-Williams, Guest Blogger**

*So I'm back from a couple of weeks of R&R with Mrs. Avsec at Massanutten Resort outside of Harrisonburg, Virginia in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley. I'm sitting at my computer getting ready to write this week's blog post when I get an e-mail message from one of my favorite—and yours, too, from the number of views and shares her posts get—Guest Bloggers, Chief Susanna Schmitt Williams. But before I move on to her piece, allow me to give you a bit of context for her blog. From Chief Schmitt Williams' e-mail message:*

My high school [Philadelphia's Central High School] is a public high school, however it accepts students from Philly and the surrounding areas. Interested students have to take an entrance exam and are selected based upon prior academic history, entrance exam scores, and community activities. It is a very competitive process to be accepted at Central.

My purpose in the article was to recruit fellow geeks into our profession and discuss why we needed them and their thought processes in fire and emergency services. Most of the students that graduate from Central go on to careers such as doctors, lawyers, judges, professors, etc. High \$\$\$ professions. Those of us that go on to public services are few and far between.

Without further ado, I give you Chief Schmitt-Williams!

## Profession Seeking Central High Graduates

During my time at Central High School in Philadelphia, PA, as a member of Class #252, I was preparing to enter the career field of education. I was committed and ready to embark on a lifelong career of educating our future movers and shakers in this world.

After I graduated Central, I attended and graduated from Temple University and began my career teaching kindergarten. It wasn't until three years into teaching that I realized I was in the wrong profession.

The career I transitioned to from education was not something I grew up wanting to do. It was not something my parents encouraged. It was not something my friends brought to my attention as a career choice that matched me. To tell you the truth it wasn't even something I realized I *could* do!

What I found in my transition is a career that requires tremendous physical fitness in both strength and cardio, being able to think on your feet, working well under extreme stress, the ability to always work as a member of a team, and a desire to provide one of Maslow's basic needs for humanity – to aid my fellow citizens in feeling safe in their communities.

It is a profession that, for promotions to executive officer positions, requires the aforementioned skills plus a broad range of additional talents:



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- Dynamic and charismatic leadership;
- Analytical and strategic thinking;
- Excellent communication skills (both written and verbal);
- A willingness for lifelong learning;
- Political acumen;
- Budgeting skills;
- Project management skills;
- Human resources management skills;
- The ability to “think outside the box”; and
- A commitment to teamwork.

My profession is currently going through an evolution. It was once perceived as, and sometimes unfortunately still is viewed as, a stereotypical “blue collar” job. The impression being that all it entails for one to be successful is that you be a “chest beating, knuckle dragging” Neanderthal. Nothing could be further from the truth these days.

My profession, if you read most career announcements for those positions such as the one I hold, require:

- A bachelor degrees with masters preferred;
- Fifteen to twenty plus years of experience in the profession;
- Multiple industry specific certifications; and
- A requirement to complete an extensive and exhaustive assessment center.

This is a far cry from where my profession was twenty years ago where typically whoever had been with the organization the longest was promoted to the chief executive officer. However, my profession is still evolving from where it was in the past and has yet to establish its new identity, determine where it is going, and what it will look like moving forward. We are at a dynamic place in my profession. It’s an exciting time.

We desperately need more people like Central graduates. Persons who have the ability to see why diversity is critical to success, why hanging on to traditional archaic methods will drive an organization to extinction, and why arguments backed up with empirical data trump emotional arguments in securing needed resources. Central graduates have the needed leadership traits for my profession.

You will need to start at the bottom as the rookie and work your way up to leadership positions. That’s just the way my profession is. Even with all the knowledge and degrees in the world you cannot walk into a leadership position in this profession, that’s very rare. Trust me, you’ll need the experience where the “rubber meets the road” to truly understand how to lead organizations in my profession. It’s that balance of experience, education, and knowledge that makes for the truly great leaders in my profession.

You’ll see things ordinary people don’t in this profession. Things that make you go home at night and hug your family a little tighter because you can’t put into words what you experienced that day. You’ll see both the best and worst in humanity, sometimes in the same day, but at the end of the day you will have helped people through the worst day of their lives.

# Recruitment and Retention

In my opinion, there is no better profession than the one I have found. It is more than a career; it is a family, a brotherhood/sisterhood, where your co-workers literally have your back. You train together, eat together and live together for your work day. Everything is completed as a team.

What profession has all this and needs Central graduates? It can go by several different variations of names: Fire and Emergency Services, Fire Rescue Departments, or Fire Departments. But I call it the “best job in the world.”

## About the Author

Susanna Schmitt-Williams is the Fire Chief for the Carrboro, NC Fire Rescue Department. With 18+ years of experience in the fire service, Chief Schmitt-Williams previously served as the Deputy Chief with the Jacksonville, NC Fire Department. She holds two Bachelor Degrees and a Master's Degree with a concentration in Fire Service Leadership.

## Want More Women in Your Fire Department?

By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer

Ask any fire service leader to describe the qualities of a good firefighter or officer and somewhere in their top four or five answers is going to be: A team player. Little wonder in that response, since we all know that the success of any fire department is directly a result of the quality of their teams:

- Fire companies;
- Medic units;
- Apparatus design committee; and
- Training committee, just to name a few examples.

All fire and EMS organizations are being challenged to not only recruit, train, and retain good employees or members, but also to find members that will help diversify their department and make it more representative of the community it serves. The challenge is particularly great to find women who want to become firefighters.

A study completed for the International Association of Women in Fire Emergency Services (iWomen) in 2008, [A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting](#), stated that nationally women only accounted for 3.7% of firefighter positions in the United States. (That's 11,000 women firefighters out of a total career firefighter population of 350,000 in 2008). I encourage you to read the full report using the link above. It's a real "eye-opener"; unfortunately, reading it today I get the feeling that number for women firefighters has not moved up very far in the past seven years.

### Up Your Recruiting "Game"

The U.S. Army needs more women and more women leaders as it prepares for the full integration of women into its combat operations, i.e., front-line positions, in 2016. In an article that appeared on ESPN's **ESPNW** website, [Why Does The Army Care So Much About Women's Lacrosse?](#), officials at the United State Military Academy (West Point) talked not only about the elevation of women's lacrosse at the Academy from club status to NCAA Division I status, but also the Army's philosophy concerning team sports and leadership.

*The Army believes there is a crucial relationship between those two things – an athletic background and being a soldier. As the military prepares to allow women on the front lines of combat in 2016, there is an immediate need for strong, tough women from within the Army's ranks. And, in a philosophy often mentioned on campus and believed by MacArthur himself, the Army believes athletes make better soldiers.*

Now that's interesting, right? So if you're looking for women who likely have what it takes to be a firefighter, you should head on down to your local college and start recruiting at women's sporting events, right?

Not so fast! Another interesting piece of information contained in the iWomen's study was that career aspirations of young girls are formed by the time they are **11-years-old**. You read that right. Behavioral research shows that by the time they begin their school years, young girls and boys already have some pretty "defined" ideas of what men and women can or cannot do, especially regarding jobs.

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“The same research, however, also indicates that those perceptions can be overcome through exposure to age-appropriate information and “hands on” experiences.”—Captain Jennifer Roman of the Madison (WI) Fire Department and one of the founders of [CampHero](#).

So perhaps you need to focus those recruiting efforts at youth sporting events for girls, and young girls at that. Because by the time they reach college-age they’ve already got that “mental picture” of what kinds of careers are for women—and that picture probably doesn’t include them wearing turnout gear.

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## CampHERO Teaches Girls "Can Do!"

By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer

Behavioral research shows that by the time they begin their school years, young girls and boys already have some pretty “defined” ideas of what men and women can or cannot do, especially regarding jobs.

“The same research, however, also indicates that those perceptions can be overcome through exposure to age-appropriate information and “hands on” experiences.”--Captain Jennifer Roman of the Madison (WI) Fire Department and one of the founders of CampHERO.

When Captain Roman joined the Madison Fire Department in 1988, women accounted for 15 percent of the total firefighters on the job in that department. Since then, that percentage has dropped to 11% (Nationally, women account for approximately 3 percent of the firefighter population in the USA, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).)

“As I had conversations with my female colleagues in Madison, and around the country, we agonized over this downward trend. We saw time and energy being devoted to recruitment efforts targeting women that were not being successful at attracting young women to our profession, a profession that we all loved.”

Roman, who earned her Master’s Degree from the University of Wisconsin, decided to delve into the world of research to see what she could find that might help develop a better approach at informing and educating girls and young women about career opportunities in the fire service. What she learned was:

- Before they even enter the school system, girls and boys already have been “socialized” by society as to what men and women can or cannot do.
- These perceptions by young girls can be overcome in their middle school years through well-designed “hands on” exposure to real world job tasks.
- The perceptions of high school age girls can be positively influenced through “face-to-face” interactions with strong role models.

With that information in hand, Captain Roman and her colleagues began work in 2011 to develop the framework for CampHERO. They partnered with their law enforcement and EMS colleagues in Madison to develop a camp for girls that would use age-appropriate learning experiences to “open their eyes” to fulfilling career opportunities available to them in the world of protective services (fire, law enforcement, and EMS).

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For technical expertise in developing the camp's objectives, Roman and her cohorts consulted with the subject matter experts in the field of leadership for girls, the Girl Scouts of America. Together, they developed the age-appropriate learning objectives and professional quality lesson plans for camp leaders to use with different age groups of campers (Grades K-1, Grades 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>, Grades 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, Grades 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, and Grades 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> ).

CampHERO welcomed its first group of girl campers in 2012. CampHERO has 190 total camper positions available based upon the available personnel for camp leader positions and physical facilities in the Madison area. That first year saw 75 percent of the K-1<sup>st</sup> grade slots and 100 percent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade slots filled. The 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade sessions had four participants in that first year and seven the following year. CampHERO 2013 saw a 40 percent return rate from the previous year's attendees.

Roman attributes CampHERO's early success to several factors. "We make it fun. We have the structure and guidance from working with the Girl Scouts in working with girls. And we have the most dedicated and passionate group of [camp leaders](#) and [sponsors](#) from across all of the protective services in Madison and the community," said Roman.

"We really try to focus on changing their perceptions about what girls can do in life, whether that's in protective services or any other endeavour as they grow up," said Roman. "I go back to the research. If society at large can have an influence on how girls think about their roles growing up, then perhaps we can become a positive force through CampHERO in shaping their perceptions about women in the protective services."

[Learn How You can Support CampHERO](#)

# Recruitment and Retention

## Junior Firefighter Camp is About More than Skills

By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer

Last week I went to summer camp—with about 125 young men and women who aspire to one day become firefighters.

My first trip to summer camp since 1975 was West Virginia University Fire Service Extension's 9<sup>th</sup> annual [Junior Firefighter Camp](#) held at the WV State Fire Academy outside of Weston, WV. This year's camp attracted campers from 12 different states—including Colorado, Arkansas, and Maine—as well as one young man from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

During this year's camp, these young people—ranging in age from 14-17 years old—had the opportunity over the course of four full days to learn about and engage in practically every task of a firefighter. If you missed the link to the website above, I encourage you to visit the [Junior Fire Camp](#) website and look over the impressive list of topics and tasks that were covered during the “long days and short nights” of Junior Fire Camp (And trust me, every one of those topics listed were covered. Oh, in looking at the list myself I see that two topics were missing—all first-year campers completed first aid and CPR training and received their cards during graduation!)

I found this camp, however, to be about much more than just teaching these young people fire and emergency management skills. There is a very large leadership and individual responsibility development component to this camp as well. And everyone gets a turn.

Each camper has an Accountability tag on a lanyard that indicates their name along with their battalion and company assignment, e.g., Jane Smith, Battalion 2, Engine 6. They are directed to have that accountability tag around their neck and visible whenever they are out of their assigned cabin.

They are also instructed to have a “buddy” whenever they are outside of their assigned cabin and any time they have to leave their company during the day, e.g., restroom breaks (their buddy can wait outside), going back to their cabin to retrieve something (like their accountability tag!), or going to get a piece of needed training equipment from storage. All of this is a bit of a “stretch” for teenagers (as I'm sure parents in the audience can appreciate), and it was quite remarkable to see how quickly these young people picked up on these personnel accountability concepts in just a couple of days.

Junior Firefighter Camp 2015 had five battalions of four companies each. On the first morning of camp after Camp Director Brian Grieco (a Deputy Chief with the Huntington, WV Fire Department) designated one camper from each company to serve as the Company Officer for that company. He then explained the procedure known as PAR (Personnel Accountability Report) and how each company officer would report PAR for their respective company.

During the course of the day, each company officer had the responsibility of knowing where their crew members were at all times and communicating with the instructors for each session on behalf of their company.



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At the end of the day when all companies assembled back in the assembly area, Chief Greccio would call for a final PAR. Following that, he directed all the company officers to step forward and face their companies at which time he would ask the companies, “Did this person do a good job today as your company officer?”

His question was followed by an ear-shattering “Yes, Sir!” (You get that level of sound in a metal-clad building, even with three overhead doors open!). At that time, the Chief would say to the company officers, “Job well done,” and direct the next person in line within each company to step forward and assume the role of company officer for the next day. (If you’re keeping count, that means that five individuals within each company had the responsibility for serving as their company officer during the five day camp).

And it doesn’t end there. On the final day of camp, the members of each battalion selected one of their own to represent them as their Battalion Chief (Quite an honor from one’s peers, no?). Then from those five battalion chiefs, the campers selected one of them to be their Fire Chief for the 2015 Junior Firefighter Camp.

How successful has the Junior Firefighter Camp become in nine years? Well if “satisfied customers” is any indication, the camp has become quite successful as one third of this year’s campers were the return campers who composed the companies of Battalion 5.

I would be remiss if I didn’t “give a shout out” to all of my fellow Instructor/Counselors who gave of their time (everyone is a volunteer) to help these young people learn and grow. Most of them are full-time career firefighters or officers (many of whom took vacation time to come to camp); many others are volunteer firefighters or officers who made an equally dedicated commitment to be there for “the kids.” They represented some of the best the fire service has to offer.

# Recruitment and Retention

## Engaging Our People in the Fire Service

By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer

How can we, as fire service leaders, become more effective in engaging our most important resource: Our people (After all, many fire departments list people as their most important resource, right?).



I recently saw this photograph posted on LinkedIn as a post advertising an upcoming webinar on the topic. This got me to thinking, how do the following relate to the fire service?

- Recognition
- Clarity
- Autonomy
- Stress
- Relationship
- Growth
- Fairness
- Workload

And how can we get better at using these concepts to encourage and engage our men and women in the fire service?

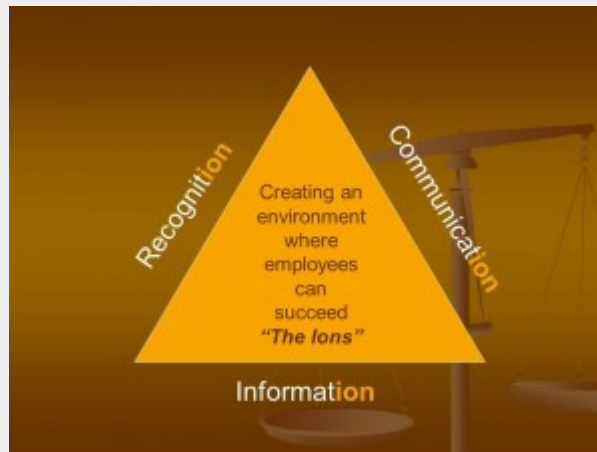
In an earlier post, [How to Create an Atmosphere that Supports Motivation in Your Department](#), I wrote of the importance of employee/member recognition as part of a triangle. Together with **information** and **communication**, this triangle comes together to create the right conditions that encourage the employee/member and the their individual level of motivation.

### Recognition

### Clarity and Autonomy

For me, these two are closely related. People—especially those who enter the fire service—generally want to be successful and feel like they are making a contribution to the organization. Lack of clarity from their organizational leaders, and especially their first-line supervisor, in the form of clear expectations can be a significant “roadblock” to their success.

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Those same employee/members want and need autonomy, which put more simply means, “Give me the training and expectations, give me the job, and then get out of my way and let me do the job.” People don’t like to be micro-managed. For more on this, check out, [Is it Responsibility, Authority, or Accountability?](#)

## Stress

In a recent post on FireEngineering.com, [The Heart of a Volunteer](#) (Don’t let the title fool you, the piece covers volunteers and career firefighters alike), a fire service colleague, Anne Gagliano, wrote:

Poor leadership is the *number one morale killer in the fire department*; it is worse by far than all of the stresses and strains of the job itself, *combined*.

How true! Several years ago, a student in a leadership class I was teaching and I had a short conversation during a break following the section I’d just covered about what makes a good first-line supervisor.

In a previous job, she’d gone to her supervisor—whom she liked very much—with a difficult problem. She said that she felt bad not being able to solve the problem on her own and having to take it to her boss; she expressed that sentiment after she told her supervisor what the problem was.

Know what her supervisor told her? How cool was that?

*“Don’t ever apologize for bringing a problem to me that you’ve been unable to solve. My job is to remove barriers that prevent you from doing your job.”*

## Relationships

I’m sure we’ve all heard this one before: People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Another important job as a leader is to develop and maintain good working relationships within your team. And that includes your relationship with your direct reports.

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Unforgettable bosses are human, and they aren't afraid to show it. They're personable and easy to relate to. They're warm. They realize that people have emotions, and they aren't afraid to express their own. They relate to their people as a person first and a boss second. On the other hand, they know how to keep their emotions in check when the situation calls for it.—Dr. Travis Bradberry

You don't have to be friends with everyone you work with, but you do have to be friendly. Get to know your people by taking a sincere interest to learn about them: who they were before they came to you; who they are today and what their aspirations in life are; what their family is like; and what their non-work interests are.

## Growth

Good people look for opportunities to learn and improve their job performance. Anne Gagliano again:



They seek extra training on their own time and on their own dime. They strive to improve in every way possible. They say to the officer, “Here I am; send me” when asked, “Who will do this unpleasant task?” They show up, ready to give their best to the department and the firehouse, day after day, year after year.

They're also looking for opportunities for advancement. Does your department have defined career paths for the different jobs within the organization?

If so, inform and educate your people about those career paths early in their careers. Help them to understand training and certification requirements and how to pursue them (and pay for them). Do what you can to support their attendance for training classes or their attendance at college classes, e.g., modifying work schedules or approving leave or traded time.

# Recruitment and Retention

## Fairness

Who doesn't want to be treated fairly at work or while volunteering their time for their community? As fire service leaders, a good start is to ensure that [departmental policies and procedures](#) are well-thought out, well written, and correctly communicated.

Following that, we must ensure that supervisors and employees alike know and understand those policies and procedures and the consequences for failure to comply. Those consequences must also be meted out fairly and equitably using [due process](#) and a system of [progressive discipline](#).

## Workload

A bit of “conventional wisdom” that appears in many management textbooks and classes goes something like this: 20 percent of your people will accomplish 80 percent of the work. Every manager that I've ever known has those couple of people who seem to get the bulk of the workload, especially the difficult or “dirty” jobs, because they “get it done.” And doesn't that make your life as a manager easier?

Well yes, but that's not really the point of your job, is it? Your job is to lead, guide and direct the talent (your people) given to you and create a high-performing team. Nothing can turn a top performer into a disengaged, aka, disgruntled, employee faster than for them to start believing that they're doing more work on a regular basis than a teammate in the same pay grade.

[See Related: Some Action Items for Reducing Organizational Risk in Your Fire and EMS Department](#)

## Thoughts on Firefighter Recruitment Media

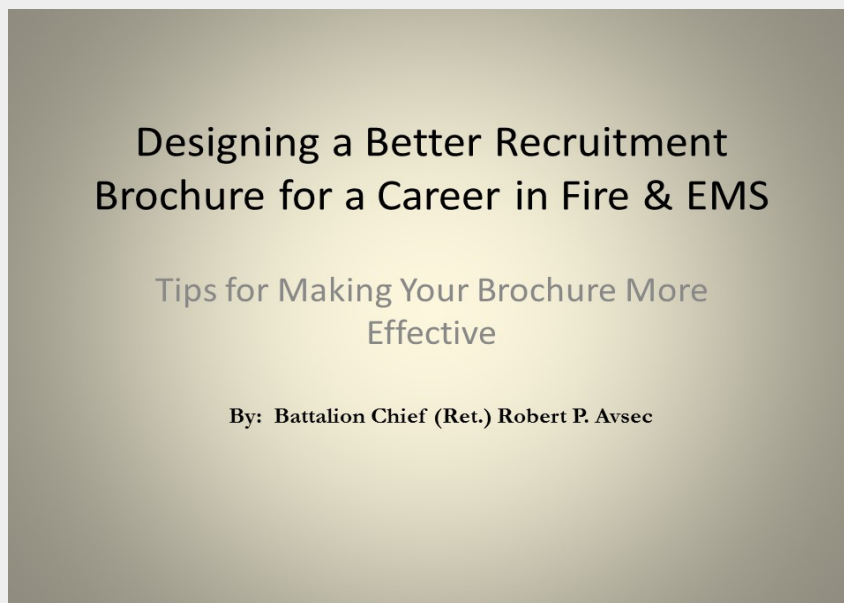
By: Robert Avsec, Executive Fire Officer

The job market, depending upon where your department is located, has become very competitive—for the employers. For volunteer departments, their very survival is dependent upon their ability to recruit new members to maintain their ability to provide services.

Recently, I was a vendor at the West Virginia Public Safety Expo in Charleston, WV promoting our product, the [“Fully Involved” Home Safe Teaching System](#). During one of my breaks, I stopped by the firefighter recruitment booth for the Charleston Fire Department and picked up one of their recruitment brochures.

Now I’m not “picking on” CFD’s brochure because I’ve seen many other similar to it over the years..I just happened to pick this one up at a time when my “blogging brain” was ready to engage the topic.

So I made up this short slideshow with some ideas on how their brochure, and any department’s that looks like it, can be improved to better attract potential employees or members.





# Recruitment and Retention

Do the ads we see on television for cars that ask a question like, **Do you make enough money to afford this car?** No, instead marketing and advertising professionals use sights and sounds that show us what our driving experience will be if we buy their car.

The front panel of a recruiting brochure is your “storefront”: when your brochures are on display it’s what your prospective firefighters or paramedics see first.

Don’t “waste the space” with passive photos that are not relevant to showing your prospects what their life will be like if they join your team.



**DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A**

**FIREFIGHTER PARAMEDIC?**

CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT IS NOW HIRING  
charlestonfire.org/site | employment@charlestonfire.org

Don’t use your valuable space for any text information that can be found elsewhere, e.g., you’re well-designed website or Facebook Page. (You do have a well-designed site and Page, right?)

Include the URLs for all pertinent websites and social media outlets for sure, but maximize the use of photographs of diverse groups of people doing the things your people do on and off the job.



**CFD IS NOW HIRING PARAMEDICS**

WRITTEN EXAM: May 27, 2014 - 5:00 PM - Charleston Civic Center, Parlor D

The Charleston Fire Department is looking for qualified women and men interested in an entry level position as a firefighter paramedic.

Our 24-on 48-off work schedule with a kelly day every 8th shift gives you a 5 day break every 21 days. The department seeks individuals dedicated to the safety of their fellow citizens, the protection of property, and a commitment to customer service.

If you are looking for an exciting rewarding career, and not just another job, we are looking for you.

Do you have what it takes to be in our "FAMILY"?

**APPLICATIONS**

All applicants must be a certified paramedic and be less than 36 years of age at date of application. Candidates must also take and pass a CPAT (Candidate Physical Ability Test) prior to employment, test dates to be after the written exam.

Applications will be given out beginning at 9 AM on March 3, 2014. Deadline to have applications returned is 4 PM May 12, 2014. Applications must be turned in at Charleston Fire Department Administrative Offices.

**APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT**

- CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT ADMIN OFFICES  
808 Virginia Street West, Charleston, WV 25302  
P: 304-548-8057, 304-548-8058
- CITY CLERK  
3rd Floor, 501 Virginia Street, E. Charleston, WV 25301
- CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT WEB SITE  
charlestonfire.org/site/category/employment/

**WAGES AND BENEFITS**

**FIREFIGHTER PARAMEDIC**

- STARTING PAY \$38,103.55
- ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE PAY \$2.50 per hour additional, while assigned to an ambulance.
- COLLEGE INCENTIVE PAY \$50 per month for each credit hour up to a maximum of 128 hours
- CLOTHING ALLOWANCE \$700.00 annually
- RETIREMENT Municipal Police Officers & Firefighters Retirement System  
www.wvretirement.com/949F83120F6b11200Description.html
- HOSPITALIZATION
- LIFE INSURANCE
- EYE & DENTAL INSURANCE
- PERSONAL DAYS
- CIVIL SERVICE COVERAGE
- VACATION 7-24 hour shifts per year
- KELLY DAYS 8 shift kelly day rotation (15 kelly days per year off)
- PAID HOLIDAYS
- ADVANCEMENT THROUGH PROMOTIONS
- ADDITIONAL TRAINING (i.e. water rescue, rope rescue, vehicle extrication, Haz-Mat, USAR, ACLS, PHTLS, PEPP, ITLS, AMLS)

**TEST INFORMATION**

The written exam will take place on May 27, 2014 at 5:00 PM, Charleston Civic Center, Parlor D

**ADDITIONAL EXAMINATIONS**

All applicants successfully completing the written examination for the position of Probationary Firefighter/Paramedic will be administered the following prerequisites.

- MEDICAL AND EYE EXAMINATION NFPA 1582 Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments
- DRUG TEST Technical analysis of a biological specimen to determine the presence/absence of specified drugs
- CANDIDATE PHYSICAL ABILITY TEST Testing the applicant's suitability for appointment. www.cfd.org/foia/index.htm
- BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION Verify all pertinent information concerning the applicant
- PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING Determine the applicant's suitability for appointment

**GENERAL INQUIRIES**

CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT  
808 Virginia Street West, Charleston, WV 25302  
P: 304-548-8057, 304-548-8058  
charlestonfire.org/site  
employment@charlestonfire.org

Want to see a good website? Check out [Seattle Fire Department's website!](#)



# Recruitment and Retention



## CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Charleston Fire Department proudly protects approximately 51,000 citizens who live within 33 square miles of the green hills and valleys surrounding the Kanawha and Elk Rivers.

Charleston is the Capital of West Virginia and is the State's largest, most populous city. Three interstates converge in Charleston: interstates 64, 77, and 79, linking the Midwest cities to those in the North, East, and South. More than 200,000 people commute daily into Charleston for work and recreation.

The department has an ISO rating of 2 and operates out of 8 stations. These stations house 8 engines, 1 tower ladder, 1 rescue, and 4 ALS ambulances that answer 911 emergency calls. The department also houses WV Task Force 1 RRT, USAR and Hazardous Materials Teams.



**Show your people.** And show a wide diversity of people in your photographs.

**Use photographs of your people** doing stuff on and off the job. Spare the fully equipped firefighter shots where your prospect can't see anyone's face.

You want your prospective employee or member to "see" themselves in those pictures and that's tough when all they see are white males. People connect with **"others who look like them"** and share their interests

## Photograph Suggestions

- Providing patient care
- Presenting a public education program
- Serving at a summer burn camp for children
- The annual "Fill the Boot" campaign for MDA
- Firefighter training (so long as faces are visible in the photograph).
- Firefighters checking a smoke detector with the homeowner in the picture

# Recruitment and Retention

## Golden Colorado Fire Department Volunteer Recruitment Video

Speaking of volunteers, here's a great recruitment and marketing video from the Boulder (CO) Fire Department, that I came across while researching this piece. As I wrote in the slideshow, your marketing materials should highlight your people and the great work that they are doing and this video certainly does that. "Hover" your mouse pointer to the left of the photo below and "click" to view the video!



Just as importantly are the testimonials from current members of all ranks within the department. (Marketing professionals are in agreement that testimonials from satisfied customers or employees are one of the most effective marketing tools available to an organization).

Looking for help in developing such recruiting media for your volunteer or career department, but don't have the people or funding to do so? Check out my recent blog on [Fire Corps](#) for ideas on how you can solve that problem.

## Austin Fire Department's "Firefighting Females"

Looking to bring more women into your fire service organization? Take a look at how the Austin (TX) Fire Department took their "mission" to a higher level by focusing on women in their department—there's the testimonial thing at work again!—in the following video. "Hover" your mouse pointer to the left of the photo and "click" see the video.



# Recruitment and Retention

## Make Sure You've Got a Good Website

Getting their attention and creating a desire to “use” your product are key tenants of marketing whether you’re selling soap or an opportunity to serve your community as a volunteer or career firefighter.

Check out the page on the Seattle Fire Department’s website. I think it’s a good example of the type of page that should complement your marketing materials with additional information. [Firefighter Recruitment Information](#)

Thank you again for purchasing this e-book! I hope that you've gotten value from reading these essays on Recruitment and Retention in the fire service. Be sure to check out my other e-book titles for fire service leaders:

- Essays on Diversity and Inclusion in the Fire Service
- Essays on Fire Service Leadership
- Essays on Educating the Public and Ourselves
- Essays on Firefighters and Post Traumatic Stress

All e-books are available at my Talking "Shop" 4 Fire and EMS blog, [www.fireemsleaderpro.org](http://www.fireemsleaderpro.org)