

Below are some commonly asked questions that fire applicants have about the testing process. The top entry-level authors in the country (Capt Bob Smith, Steve Prziborowski, & Brent Collins from Don McNea Fire School) have offered their insightful to keep you motivated through every step in the hiring process. The first page lists all topics included; after scrolling down, you will find each question answered by our entry-level experts.

Good luck!

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1. Take Any Test You Can!

You've got to be kidding me!

I've talked to three candidates this week who had the opportunity to take some killer entry level tests. They didn't take these tests. When I asked why? They said, I don't want to work there, or that would require me to move and my wife won't go, or I'm waiting for the only department I want to work for now, or I only test in this region. Don't tell me how bad you want this job and then give me one of these stupid excuses.

I have several candidates who have gone out of state to take tests in preparation for the "City they really want". Guess what? They get offered jobs. How difficult would it be for you to turn a badge down? Guess where they live and work now? And, it's a lot easier to get a job once you have one. I know one candidate who went all the way to Wyoming to get his badge. Now he's testing back in his own State of Washington.

Understand the more tests you take, the better you will be at taking tests. Then, when the one you really want comes along, you're dialed up ready to nail that badge.

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

2. Are there any easy fire departments to join?

There are no easy departments to join; if there were, there would be people already in those positions. Even the departments in B.F. Egypt (technical term) parts of the state do not have easy ways to get on.

Most of the small departments in the state are maybe even more difficult because they require you to typically have not just EMT, but paramedic and a state firefighter 1 certificate as well as other requirements. Why? Because they have to and can't afford to send you to an academy. While they may get less applicants, they typically have higher standards. In short, there are no easy departments to get on. Trust me, if there were, I would know about them, and everybody else would.

Now is a critical time for you if you want to get focused. You are at that stage where you will either give up or dig your heels in for the long haul. 20 years old is not old, and in some ways, is too young to get hired in many departments (even though we can't discriminate on age and typically don't know your birth date or age until you're hired). Now is your chance to finish your two-year degree and get some more qualifications under your belt (2 year degree, 4 year degree, paramedic, bilingual, etc.), some quality volunteer experience in ANY field - even non-fire, and most importantly - SOME LIFE EXPERIENCE.

Don't take that the wrong way - that is what most oral boards and departments see in young candidates, that they probably don't have much (if any) life experience. I mean showing responsibility, having a good solid track record at work, etc.

How many tests have you taken now? Are you scoring in the top 1%? Are you getting chief's interviews every test? If you are not, then you really need to also spend time working on ALL phases,

especially your weaker phases of the hiring process.

Just some thoughts, hope they help. Don't get discouraged - why let someone else get your badge?

THANKS!

Steve Prziborowski, Captain
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More Helpful Advice

There are no "easy" departments to get hired on, especially not the small ones. If anything, it is easier to get hired on the large County and/or city departments as they hire so many candidates.

People believe they can get all of their fire science education including the academy, AS degrees etc. and take a job on a rural department until they get hired on their dream department. Good idea, however, these departments have already hired out of the area candidates who took a job from a local who was perhaps less qualified but would have stayed. Departments are wise to this tactics, as they have lost "qualified" candidates back to their home cities.

There is no easy way to get hired on a fire department. While a rare few may "luck" into a job, the vast majority of candidates spend years pursuing their goals. While some go about it in the wrong fashion (my opinion), most take years and a tremendous amount of sacrifice to get hired.

Many of these candidates could get hired much sooner if they understood the testing process. Many focus more on going through the motions of getting qualifications and certifications instead of learning about the testing process. By default they stack so much stuff on their resume they ultimately get hired. Ironically, the person sitting next to him in the academy doesn't have half of the "qualifications" and didn't make half of the sacrifices that said candidate did. He worked smarter, not harder!

Bad stuff on applications

If you do not include information that is asked on an application and it is found out later, you are out of the process! Almost everyone at sometime has problems. It's how you put them on the application, background forms, and present them in an oral that makes the difference. A reasonable explanation is what's important.

Many candidates strain their relationships, marriages and finances and do various jobs trying to get the badge. This is understandable with the right explanation. The oral board seldom knows this information (this is usually covered in background), unless it is an area that is listed on the application, i.e. driving record, arrests, etc.

I served 5 days in Santa Rita Prison for drag racing at age 18. Yes, I put it on my application. Because if you don't and they find out, you're gone. In my oral board, I was asked about this. I told the panel, "Since that incident, I have been in the army, married, have children, and have been on my job for 9 years. I was a stupid kid. The situation hasn't occurred again. It's hard to believe this really had happened. One of the captains asked, "Mr. Smith are you trying to get go around this problem and ignore it?" Here's the Nugget answer: I said, "No. If I was trying to do that I would have never put it done on the application." He was done with that question.

When I got my results for that test, the number placement wasn't on the notice. When I called, personnel told me, "Well, Mr. Smith, you're number one. Not only are you number one, you're five full points ahead of number two!" It was having a reasonable explanation prepared in advance that becomes your "Nugget" answers that makes the difference.

That question and the "Nugget" answer helped me, not hurt me. It catapulted me past the other candidates at light speed, and did indeed help me get my badge!

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3. Am I too young to get hired??

Getting Hired DOES Happen!

David wrote:

To all of you out there who think you're too young to get hired, guess again. My Dept. is in the process of hiring a candidate who is 20 yrs. old. This individual has a FF Academy and an EMT-B card and that's pretty much it. Mo medic cert., volunteer time, reserve time, nothing! However, I had the pleasure of sitting on the oral board for this candidate and I must say I was truly blown away.

We were handed a very simple one-page resume which was easy to read and not time consuming. I was very impressed by the maturity, honesty, and basically just the overall likeability that this candidate was able to show us. The candidate had definitely practiced and been coached on the oral board portion of the hiring process which is the reason this person will soon be wearing a badge. It was also obvious that the candidate took everything very seriously and had well prepared for every aspect of the oral interview. Even though the only work experience this candidate spoke of was a part time restaurant job, he was able to use that to his advantage during the interview.

The candidate moved on to the Chief's interview and must have done incredibly well because he is soon to start our academy. This is not a fluke or a one-time thing, it happens all the time! Great mentors in this forum such as Captain Bob continually pound into you guys that the interview is everything and he is absolutely right! Don't sell yourself short when it comes time to take advantage of a golden opportunity. Visit the stations, research the city and the dept., get a nice suit, do mock orals, ask for help, or whatever it takes. I hope you guys feel some inspiration from this because it is true and it does happen. Good Luck!!

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4. Should I move my family to an area I want to test for?

Do yourself and your family a big favor. Don't even think about moving until you get the invitation in writing that you have the job. Never move away from family, friends, support and established connections thinking that will improve your chances of getting a badge. If you need an academy check out the home study program at www.trainingdivision.com

This is not the first time I've seen this question. A candidate is invited to the chief's oral. He just knows they want him. He gives notice at his job, his apartment and finds a new apartment for the city he is being considered for. He starts packing. After the chief's interview he is notified to complete the medical, given the date for the academy, uniform fitting and then the psych. He flies down to complete these items in two days. He goes by with his wife to check on the new apartment, flies home and waits for the mover to show up the next day.

Don't touch that dial. There is something wrong with the psych interview. It comes back inconclusive. They want him to retake the psych. But the movers are on their way. I can taste that badge. I know they want me.

A medic candidate moved his family from southern California to Seattle, so he could be in position for the next test. Although he made the list, he was going to have to wait until they got down to him. In the mean time the pressures built up at home, he lost his house in California to foreclosure, and got in a heated argument with his wife. The police arrived and arrested him for domestic violence. This at a time when he was in background for the next academy. Everything came to a full halt. Fortunately, in the state of Washington, if you complete the counseling and probation program and it's your first offense, you can appeal the court to remove the charge. Now a year later, this has been done. The Seattle list he was on expired. Now it's back to square one.

5. How do I prepare for the CPAT?

CPAT

Here are some valuable tips for CPAT from Tom Dominguez and Reed Norwood:

The secret to passing the CPAT is to be in shape with a high cardiovascular fitness level and to know the techniques. The average time is between nine minutes and ten minutes, twenty seconds. Try to think of the CPAT (or any agility) as a marathon where you are trying to complete the event instead of going for the record time. You can burn out if you are going for time no matter how well in shape you are.

Most people who fail the CPAT fail the first event (Stair Climb/Stair Stepper), or run out of time during the last event (Ceiling Breach). People who run out of time at the breach and pull lost a few seconds at all the prior event stations because they PAUSED to THINK of how to do the event or PAUSED or SLOWED down to catch their breath.

#1 Stair Climb: No matter how hard you train for the stair stepper, your legs are going to be like rubber after you get off the machine and start pulling hose. The recovery time for rubber legs depends on your fitness. Even still, rubber legs or not, you have to get moving and keep moving, and stay moving! If you stop at anytime during the events, the clock is ticking and you are losing time.

The tendency is that as you start wearing down on the stair stepper machine, your pace and stride will change and that will affect your balance. As you lose your balance, you start to wobble and the momentum of the weight on your body increases the swaying. As the distance of the sway increases, you will make a natural grab for the handrails. Grab the rail (more than twice?) to many times and you are disqualified. Instead of “grabbing the rail”, use the back of your hand and push your self back. Adjusting your stance and concentrating will help you avoid the “wobble”. Just like wearing a SCBA, you also have to concentrate on your breathing.

#2 Hose Drag: As soon as you step off the stair machine, turn and face the line that takes you to the hose pull. As soon as the proctor takes the two sandbags off your shoulders, get moving! Pick up the nozzle and shoulder the hose and GO! This is not the time to worry about those rubber legs or try to catch your breath. MOVE! Go as fast as you can. Step into the box, turn around, get down on one knee (being careful not to come down too hard and injuring your knee) and PULL the hose, hand-over-hand as fast as you can. That drum will give you some resistance when you turn the corner but if you’re going at a good clip it won’t be too difficult. You can breathe while hand pulling the hose.

#3 Equipment Carry: When you get to the saw carry, just do it! Face the cabinet and remove each saw one at a time. Now, turn around and pick up both saws. This will ensure that you have both saws touching the ground before you begin moving down the line.

#4 Ladder Raise and Extension: When you arrive at the ladder raise, get down, grab the rung and raise the ladder. You have to push the ladder up, rung-by-rung as fast as you can. Move over to the fly extension and just do it.

#5 Forcible Entry: Breathe, as you follow the line and pick up the sledgehammer. Start swinging as soon as you can in short choppy strokes. Departments may set the forced entry device at a level that fits their needs. When the alarm sounds, let go of the sledgehammer and move to the tunnel crawl.

#6 Search: Get in and get out! You may not move like a greased pig at the fair but you do need to move. One candidate wrote: Here is where I lost about 15-20 seconds. The event itself is pretty fun if you are not claustrophobic. Be aware of the obstacles inside. I could not figure one out, and I got disoriented and lost precious time figuring it out. Crawl fast as there are no abrupt edges that you’ll run into. All the walls are tapered so as long as you keep your head down you can fly through. Doing the practice “run-throughs” will take away all doubt of what and where the obstructions are in tunnel crawl. Always remember to stay right, and come back to your right after an obstacle. The event is shaped in a horseshoe, so there are two right turns. This can be a good time to catch your breath as well in preparation for the dummy drag.

#7 Rescue: At the dummy pull, size up where the handles are before you get there. Grab them and get going. You may feel the burn in your legs but don’t stop. It saps your strength to have to get the dummy moving again each time you stop. When you reach the barrel, do not make the turn until the dummy’s knees are even with farthest side of the barrel. If you try to pull the dummy around the barrel any sooner, it takes more energy and it will take more time. Get over the line and let go of the dummy and get to the ceiling Breach and Pull.

#8 Ceiling Breach and Pull: This is the event where folks run out of time and fail the CPAT. Grab the pike pole and step in. Start pushing and pulling with all you got! If there’s a D-handle on the pike pole put a hand under it for increased leverage. Get a rhythm/fast pace going. An object at rest requires energy to get it moving. An object that is moving requires less energy to keep it moving. If those ceiling hatches are not making lots of loud noise, you are not working very hard. You can buy yourself

some time here that you may need to finish the CPAT in time.

Follow the instructions of the proctor! The proctor will either tell you where the line is or point to the line you are to follow. People have been failed for not following the right line to the next event. If you were to pause five seconds at the start and stop of every event, or to stop and breathe or think about each event, you can lose about a minute and a half of precious time. Once this time is gone, you cannot get it back.

You can over train by carrying extra weight in your backpack while you train for the stair stepper. Seventy-five pounds on your back places a tremendous amount of stress on your ankles, knees, hips and back. Practice the event as you are actually going to do it. Work out at the same pace and distance as the actual stair event. The stair stepper event (as are most of the CPAT events) is based on cardiovascular fitness and endurance. It is expected that you will be anaerobic and that is what the CPAT is attempting to do. While strength is required, you don't need to be an Olympic weight lifter.

CPAT

Here are two link resources to gain information on the CPAT:

<http://www.phoenix.gov/FIRE/recruit.html>

<http://firepat.mtsac.edu>

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6. What are the characteristics of a successful firefighter?

- maintain effective working relationships with superiors and subordinates
- get along with others
- stay calm; handle stress
- use common sense
- listen to others
- be flexible
- be self-motivated
- be decisive
- counsel, support and be empathic toward others
- work under stressful conditions
- maintain emotional control
- do repetitive tasks
- work with little or no supervision
- take charge when needed
- determine priorities
- have a good sense of humor
- accept constructive criticism from others
- be resourceful
- handle critical decision-making under life-threatening conditions
- perform complex tasks under life-threatening conditions
- work under tight time frames

- deal with critically injured/ill people
- perform tasks requiring long periods of intense concentration
- perform under unpleasant circumstances or in traumatic situations
- work as a team member
- maintain a positive attitude
- enthusiasm
- honesty
- initiative
- innovativeness
- judgment and common sense
- stability
- willingness to be patient, non-judgmental and accepting of other people
- desire to serve and help people regardless of who they are, where they are and what their beliefs are
- demonstrate a genuine caring attitude toward all people
- must have an awareness and understanding of differences between different cultures
- have an optimistic attitude and believe that the best outcome will occur in emergency situations
- driven by strong values and ethics along with an awareness to act upon those values and ethics
- willing to put the best interests of the organization above personal interests or differences
- be able to function as a member of a team

7. What kind of job security does a firefighter have?

One of the things that we discuss in our seminars and talks to prospective firefighters is the job security the position of a firefighter offers for yourself and your family. Did you know that 99.7% of all firefighters ever hired are never laid off? In today's changing economic situation, how many jobs can boast that statistic? How many people do you know that have been working for a company for 10, 15 or 20 years and suddenly the company is bought out and their job is eliminated? Once you have worked hard to obtain this job, it is yours for a lifetime. You have financial security, medical benefits for you and your family, an early retirement plan – these are all benefits that not many jobs today can offer. The average firefighter salary range is \$50,000-\$65,000 with hospitalization and a retirement plan after 25 years of service or the age of 48. How many people do you know who can retire at the age of 48? Most people have to wait until they are in their 60's before they can think about retiring comfortably.

8. What is a firefighter's work schedule like?

The work schedule of a firefighter consists of two 24-hour days per week, for an average of 8 days per month. With this schedule, a firefighter has an average of 5 days off per week. Listed below you will find an average month's schedule for a firefighter, with the days in red being scheduled workdays and the other days representing days you have off during the month.

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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

Normally every 3 weeks, a firefighter is given an additional day off. We use Thursday, the 13th, as an example for this month's schedule.

Because of the many days firefighters normally have off during a month, many firefighters maintain a second job to supplement their income. Many firefighters easily can make as much money on their day off as they do on the job as a firefighter. These second careers consist of salesmen, ambulance drivers, accountants, landscapers, contractors, attorneys – you name it, a firefighter does it on their day off.

9. What can I expect on a firefighter written examination?

Today's written examination commonly consists of approximately 150-200 multiple-choice questions. The subjects for the written examinations could include any of the testing subjects listed below:

- Reading Comprehension
- Human Relations
- Problem Solving
- Judgment
- Math
- Memory
- Charts
- Inductive Reasoning
- Deductive Reasoning
- Visualization
- Verbal & Listening Comprehension
- Spelling
- Verbal Reasoning
- Oral and Written Communication Information

The key to scoring well on the written examination is preparation. There are not many candidates who can walk into a written examination and score high on their first attempts without adequate preparation. You need to practice. What do we mean by practice? By taking practice examinations. It is like studying for any other test you have taken – you need to adequately study and prepare. The competition for a firefighter position is intense.

When you take a firefighter examination, you are ranked on the eligibility list from the higher score to the lowest score. Obviously, you want to be at the top to dramatically increase your chances of moving onto the other parts of the testing process. The more you study and prepare, the better your score. Like we said before, you have to want it, and wanting it means you will put the required time in to adequately studying and preparing. During your preparation, you need to fine tune the areas where you are consistently weak until you feel confident walking into an examination knowing that no one can beat you.

The key to your success on this portion of the hiring process will be how much time you put into preparing for this important first step. You can do it – you just have to want it!

10. What is included in the medical exam?

The medical exam itself is nothing to be afraid of. It will be just like any other thorough physical exam. The doctor may be on the staff of the hiring agency or someone outside the department with his or her own practice, just like your own doctor. Your blood pressure, temperature, weight, and so on will be measured; your heart and lungs will be listened to and your limbs examined. The doctor will peer into your eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, and conduct a thorough medical exam. You'll also have to donate some blood and urine. Because of these tests, you won't know the results of the physical exam right away. You'll probably be notified in writing in a few weeks, after the test results come in.

Drug Testing

A test for use of illegal drugs can be administered before a conditional offer of employment. Because firefighters have to be in tiptop physical shape, and because they are in a position of public trust, the fire department expects you to be drug-free. Indeed, you may have to undergo drug testing periodically throughout your career as a firefighter.

11. How do I locate firefighter exams?

- We suggest you subscribe to your local newspaper – even if it means subscribing to more than one if you city has several major papers. The Sunday edition's help wanted ads is the most important – it will usually include examination test dates and information. In addition, the sports section sometimes carries examination information. Your local library will also carry the current newspapers.
- There are also Internet subscription services that will provide information on examinations given across the country. Your investment in this type of service can be from \$3.00-\$9.00/month. Both www.firehouse.com and www.firecareers.com are excellent sources of information on firefighter examinations.
- Try to keep a current list of cities giving examinations. Once a municipality gives an examination, an eligibility list is established and remains current for 1-2 years. If you know an examination is given annually, make a note on your calendar so that you make sure you don't miss an application deadline.
- Many major municipalities have a recruitment unit. Click on the link below for a list of 150 major fire departments across the country, along with their addresses and phone numbers. You should contact these departments and ask to have your name placed on their

recruitment list to be notified of examination dates. You will usually be notified at least 2-3 weeks before the application process.

- Some departments have a volunteer program. We strongly suggest that you join this group if it is available in your community. This will give you valuable insight into the department and personnel. Most volunteer problems are part of smaller departments – no major departments have volunteer programs.
- Many times, colleges that offer EMT and paramedic certification programs will post examination announcements on their bulletin boards. If you are enrolled in such a program, make note of this information. If not, visiting colleges and locating these bulletin boards will help you obtain as much information as possible.
- If you have the time and resources, we suggest that you make telephone calls to various departments. Ask them when their last examination was given and when the next examination is anticipated and make note of this information. A municipality may tell you that an examination will be given in September, but it may actually be given in July or August. You need to follow up with the Personnel Department to find out the current information on an examination. Departments with Fire Training Academies may also have examination information available.
- There are also numerous fire magazines that will publish entry-level examinations given across the country. You may subscribe to these magazines or you may find them at your local library.

12. How do I become an EMT?

Emergency Medical Technicians (known as EMTs) are trained to provide emergency care, including ambulance services. Peoples' lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care of EMTs. Incidents as varied as automobile accidents, heart attacks, drownings, childbirth, and gunshot wounds all require immediate medical attention. EMTs provide the vital attention as they care for and transport the sick and injured to a medical facility.

In an emergency, EMTs are typically dispatched to the scene by a 911 operator and often work with police and fire department personnel. Once they arrive, they determine the nature and extent of a patient's condition while trying to ascertain whether the patient has preexisting medical problems. Following strict rules and guidelines, they give appropriate emergency care and, when necessary, transport the patients.

At the medical facility, EMTs help transfer patients to the emergency department, report their observations and actions to emergency room staff, and provide additional medical treatment.

EMT Basic (also known as EMT I) represents the first component of the Emergency Medical Technician system. An EMT I is trained to care for patients at the scene of an accident while transporting patients by ambulance to the hospital under medical direction. An EMT I has the emergency skills to assess a patient's condition and manage respiratory, cardiac and trauma emergencies.

The EMT Intermediate (EMT II and III) have more advanced training that allows the administration of intravenous fluids, the use of manual defibrillators to give life-saving shocks to stopped hearts, and the applications of advanced airway techniques and equipment to assist patients experiencing respiratory emergency.

Working conditions: EMTs work both indoors and outdoors in all types of weather. They are required to do considerable kneeling, bending, and heavy lifting. Many people find the work of an

EMT exciting and challenging and enjoy the opportunity to help others. EMTs employed by fire departments work 40-50 hours per week; those employed by hospitals frequently work between 40-60 hours per week; and those employed by private ambulance services work between 45-50 hours per week.

Training and other qualifications and advancement: Formal training and certification is needed to become an EMT. All 50 states have a certification procedure. To maintain certification, EMTs must register usually every 2 years. In order to register, an individual must be working as an EMT and meet continuing education requirements. Basic coursework typically emphasizes emergency skills such as managing respiratory trauma and cardiac emergency and patient assessment. Formal courses are often combined with time in an emergency room or ambulance. The program also provides for instruction and practice dealing with bleeding, fractures, airway obstruction, cardiac arrest, and emergency childbirth. Students learn how to use and maintain common emergency equipment such as backboards, suction devices, splints, oxygen delivery systems, and stretchers. Graduates of an approved EMT training program who pass a written and practical examination administered by the state certifying them with the title of Registered EMT Basic. This course is also a prerequisite for EMT Intermediate and EMT Paramedic Training.

EMT Intermediate training requirements vary from state to state. Training commonly includes 35-55 hours of additional instruction beyond EMT Basic coursework.

Job opportunities: Employment needs for EMT is expected to grow faster than the average of all other occupations through 2012. Population growth and urbanization will increase the demand for full-time paid EMTs, rather than for volunteers in a department. In addition, a large segment of the population – the aging baby boomers – will further spur the demand for EMT services as they become more likely to have medical emergencies.

Opportunities for individuals will be best for those who have advanced certification such as EMT Intermediate and EMT Paramedic as clients and patients demand higher levels of care before arriving at the hospital.

Where can you find training to become an EMT? Almost all community colleges and some state colleges and hospitals offer training for Emergency Medical Technicians. This is usually a 3-month course that can be completed as part of other curriculum at a college.

13. How do I become a paramedic?

Peoples' lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care of Paramedics. Incidents as varied as automobile accidents, heart attacks, drownings, childbirth, and gunshot wounds all require immediate medical attention. Paramedics provide the vital attention as they care for and transport the sick and injured to a medical facility.

In an emergency, Paramedics are typically dispatched to the scene by a 911 operator and often work with police and fire department personnel. Once they arrive, they determine the nature and extent of a patient's condition while trying to ascertain whether the patient has preexisting medical problems. Following strict rules and guidelines, they give appropriate emergency care and, when necessary, transport the patients.

Some paramedics are trained to treat patients with minor injuries on the scene of an accident or at their home without transporting to a medical facility. Emergency treatment for more complicated problems is carried out under the direction of medical doctors by radio, preceding or during transport.

Paramedics provide the most extensive pre-hospital care. In addition to carrying out the procedures described above, paramedics may administer drugs orally or intravenously, interpret electro cardiograms (EKGs), perform endotracheal intubulations, and use monitors and other complex equipment.

Working conditions: Paramedics work both indoors and outdoors in all types of weather. They are required to do considerable kneeling, bending, and heavy lifting. Many people find the work of an EMT exciting and challenging and enjoy the opportunity to help others. Paramedics employed by fire departments work 40-50 hours per week; those employed by hospitals frequently work between 40-60 hours per week; and those employed by private ambulance services work between 45-50 hours per week.

Paramedics held about 265,000 jobs in 2004. Most career Paramedics work in metropolitan areas; there are many more EMTs and Paramedics especially in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas.

Training and other qualifications and advancement: At the Paramedic level, the caregiver gives additional training in body function and learns more advanced skills than an EMT. Education for a Paramedic requires the individual to graduate from a school and take the National Registry EMT Examination to become a certified EMT/Paramedic. Extensive related coursework and clinical and field experience is required. Due to the longer training requirement, almost EMT/Paramedics are in paid positions rather than being volunteers. Refresher courses and continuing education are available for Paramedics at all levels.

Job Opportunities: Employment for Paramedics is expected to grow faster than the average of all other occupations through 2012. Population growth and urbanization will increase the demand for full-time paid Paramedics, rather than for volunteers. In addition, a large segment of the population – the aging baby boomers – will further spur the demand for Paramedic services as they become more likely to have medical emergencies.

Where can you find training to become a Paramedic? Almost all community colleges and some state colleges and hospitals offer training and certification to become a Paramedic. This training usually consists of between 750-1,500 hours of classroom and field instruction. Reaching this level will require a lot of sacrifice and studying on your part, but becoming a Paramedic will increase your chances of becoming a firefighter.

Approximately 10-20% of all fire departments across the country now require their fire applicants to become Paramedics even before they take the examination. Remember – you must first become an EMT before you can go on to become a Paramedic.

14. Should I get my paramedic certification or my two-year degree first?

I'm interested in becoming a firefighter and I happened to read the letter, "You Want To Become A Firefighter, Should You become a Paramedic?" Should I get my two-year degree in Fire Technology first before becoming a paramedic? Should I get my EMT certificate before getting into a paramedic program?

We strongly recommend that if you are deciding between a 2-year degree and your paramedic certificate, that you work towards your paramedic certification. Many municipalities are currently requiring applicants to either be certified paramedics or to be in paramedic school to take the exam. Your goal is to have the credentials that cities are requiring to be able to take the examination and to put yourself in a position to be hired. Less than 1% of municipalities across the country require you to have a 2 or 4-year degree to take a firefighter examination.

15. Should I become a Paramedic?

I am currently in paramedic school but not enjoying myself at all. I want to become a firefighter and everyone says the easiest way is to be a medic first. My concern is that, while I enjoy the idea of saving lives through my knowledge of paramedicine, I don't really want to be a medic. Am I wasting my time? Should I put my effort into getting into a fire academy and looking for jobs? (I'm 33 and have a BA and a Masters Degree, so it's not like I am an 18 year old with no life/work experience.)

Answer:

Firefighter or Fire/medic? Should you become a paramedic to get a firefighter job?

No, it's not a day at the beach to become a medic.

You do understand that there are up to 800 candidates for each firefighter job, know you would have to spend about a year getting certified and it will be the toughest thing you have ever done.

Know that 80% of the job offerings now are for fire medics and up to 75% of our calls are EMS related anyway.

You're the energizer bunny who will keep going and going and going when others would stop. Know that if you are a medic taking a regular firefighter entrance test you will probably get a better shot. You won't be happy until you can puff your chest out with a badge and have people wave at you in the jump seats, carrying on a family tradition. You want that shift work with great benefits that go way into retirement, a career position with chances of advancement.

You will have the opportunity to use the education and experience you have acquired. To work for a department that offers you everything a firefighter hopes for. Calls that cover anything from air, land and sea. A place where you can't wait to get back from your days off. You will be able to go from one call to another to another on a busy rig. Riding big red! Believe me there is nothing like it.

I know you will hear that if you really don't want to be a medic don't just do it to get the job. That all you really need is your EMT to get hired. But, if you answered yes to the majority of the above there is no doubt where you will be the happiest.

Because unlike a regular entry level test where there are up to 800 candidates for each job, there are only 20 candidates for every fire medic job. It is by far your fastest way to the badge.

Your degrees might never place you in a better position than gaining that medic cert.

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dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

More helpful insight...

The main reasons a paramedic license will help you are:

1. Supply versus demand. There are not that many medics compared to EMTs. If a department holds a test and just requires an EMT certificate, they may get over 1,000 applicants. If they instead require paramedic (not in medic school), they'll probably get less than 100.
2. Many departments (especially in the S.F. Bay Area) went ALS about 10 years ago; this is requiring them to hire paramedics on a continuous basis, especially since many departments don't allow (or require) medics to stay medics once they promote to Engineer or Captain or BC.
3. Some departments prefer to hire medics, even if they only have EMT vacancies. Why not? I bet you if I were a fire chief and I offered a medic a job as a FF, but told them I only had an EMT position available, I bet most would take it. Why? Many folks who go to medic school (right or wrong) only go to become firefighters and would probably drop the medic license in a heartbeat. Now, take it a step further. I the Fire Chief offer the medic a job as an FF/EMT, agree to pay your medic CE costs and tell you I will pay you the 10% medic bonus when I use you as a medic (vacation, sick days, etc.), I bet medics will jump on that.
4. It is cheaper for a department to hire a medic than put you through medic school. Put the school costs aside, that is minimal. Now I hire you as a FF and I have to put you through medic school. You're probably not working as a FF for 6 months to 1 year. That whole time I'm paying time-and-a-half to cover your spot. That's where the cost comes in. Most Northern California Departments do it this way. My understanding of many Southern California Departments is that they will put you through medic school after probation (LA County, Long Beach, etc.). Just all depends on the labor-management agreement that was worked out.
5. There are still many departments, especially in CA that are still BLS. Eventually, there is a good chance they will go ALS. Even if they don't go ALS, I bet they still would like to hire medics, just to have the level of training if they do go ALS, to have someone with a higher level of skills to do EMT recertification, coordinate their EMS program, etc.

Just some ideas off the top of my head.

Beyond the above, don't go to medic school just to get a FF job. The citizens and the department deserve much better than that. They deserve folks that want to be medics and have their heart in it. If you go to medic school, have the thought and intention that you may have to be a medic for your whole career (some departments require you to sign 5 year or longer contracts to stay as a medic once they hire you).

If you don't want to go medic, so be it. Good for you. You can still get hired as a firefighter, without a doubt. Instead, make sure you get your 2-year degree in fire technology, your EMT (that is just the bare minimum to stand equal to your competition). Then look at maybe becoming bilingual, having an awesome track record at volunteering, getting a 4 year degree, and just being so unique that you stand above the crowd. Obviously it is the oral board that typically gets you hired, so make sure you

have that portion dialed. You don't need the best resume to get hired, you just need excellent oral board skills (problem solving ability, oral communications, decision making, interpersonal skills, etc.).

Steve Prziborowski, Captain
www.chabotfire.com

16. Volunteering while in school

Being a volunteer can help or destroy you! Candidates want the opportunity to be a volunteer as a way of showing interest, gain hands on experience, have something to put on their resume and can say in their oral they have been a volunteer. Often they don't know the culture, politics and etiquette.

You will make an impression becoming a volunteer. Good or bad. Because of the politics something could happen that could ruin any chances you will ever have as a firefighter. And the big problem is you will never know what or who badmouthed you.

I've seen this happen far too much. Candidates wait years trying to become a paid member of their volunteer department or candidates like yourself want to be a volunteer as a stepping stone to a full time position and they have been marked because of some incident they don't even know about that will keep them badge less.

Have you ever listened to wind chimes? One hangs in our back yard. It contains 6 chimes. When there is not much breeze, only one chime is heard. It's a constant monotone gong, gong, gong, gong. When the wind changes direction ever so slightly all-6 chimes begin to play a melody.

It would only take you a short time as an oral board rater to hear the same constant drone when too many candidates use a flat monotone voice. It sounds like they were giving a patient assessment, sounding like the gong, gong, gong, blah, blah, blah of the one lone wind chime.

Then a candidate, who knows what the panel is going to hear out of his mouth, because he has prepared with a tape recorder, sits down in the hot seat and comes out swinging. Hitting all the notes, with the necessary timing, inflection, enthusiasm and volume polished. Just like the slight increase in a breeze to activate all the notes on the wind chimes, if candidates only knew it would only take a few minor changes to orchestrate their interviews closer to their badges.

It doesn't take long on a phone conversation with a candidate to realize why they are having problems.

A recent candidate had such a monotone voice I asked if he knew? He said yea, but that's just my voice. I told him I didn't believe that for a second. What can I do about it? I've been testing where I can for four years, going to school and work as a federal firefighter.

Trying to get on his turf, I asked him during a coaching session what do you do with your time off? What are your interest, hobbies? What really rings your bell? Nothing seemed to work to break his monotone voice.

That was until a few days later I get a call from an energized candidate. I didn't recognize the voice. Yes, it was Mr. Monotone. He told me he didn't realize how bad it was until he listened to the tape recording of his coaching session. He said, "Man I sounded retarded. I can't believe how much stuff I left out. How many times I said "What Ever" and other stupid pause fillers I didn't know I was using."

The mystery of why this super qualified candidate could not get hired was solved by listening to a tape of what the panel had been hearing for four years.

You too can create the winds of change that can turn things around and ring all the chimes; coming out of the fog with the chimes that turn into tones dropping and you're moving towards the rig on another call. The fifth call in a row. It started at shift change. You haven't had a chance to stop for anything more than to restock and get the rig ready for another run and not getting anything to eat. You're not hungry anyway. Because you're working with a crew where the red-hot captain tells dispatch you're available from the scene you are on so you won't miss any calls. You're living the dream of a lifetime. Riding big red. The monotone voice a distant memory.

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17. Veterans Taking Entry Level Tests

I often hear comments like this one where seasoned firefighters test for entry-level positions for another or larger department:

I have been in the fire service for 20 years both volunteer and full time. Last year I had to relocate across the state, leaving my full time ff/pm position. It took me 10 years to get that job as a white male - Now I'm looking over here and have been passed over several times for the younger people. I have all the credentials and the certs and still - I've been passed over! I think the testing should be thrown out if you have been working in this career for over 5 years, let's look at the resume and past employers!

The biggest problem I've seen on oral boards with these seasoned veterans is they can't place themselves in the position they are applying for; that of being a snotty nose rookie. They try to hammer the oral board with their credentials thinking the board will just hand them the job. Their oral board's skills are rusty and antiquated. It's hard for them to remember how it was to be a rookie.

It's not the younger candidates that are keeping them from getting the job. It's them! Presented correctly, there is no way a younger candidate can match their personal life and firefighting experience. This is a delicate balance here. You must be humble, place yourself in the rookie position and build a natural bridge to the oral board panel. Without this bridge, you're dead meat. This is not easy for many seasoned candidates. An attitude adjustment is needed. Attitude is a small thing that can make the big difference. Remember the position you're applying.

The seasoned veteran candidate can roar past any of the other candidates if his attitude and game plan is in place.

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18. Paramedic to Fire/Medic

If you're taking a firefighter/paramedic interview understand we are looking for firefighters first! You can hurt your chances if you don't let them know your first love is to be a firefighter. Too many paramedic candidates push their desire for the medic end of the job. Who's sitting on the board? Mostly Fire officers.

Understand that the burn out period for a paramedic is five years. Then, many medics try to get on fire departments. This has caused problems in the fire service because the paramedics come from a position of doing things on their own in the field. They have problems with the chain of command system on the fire job. Not wanting any more of these problem children, departments try to determine in the oral if the candidate has the heart of a firefighter first.

A way to approach this is to convey your first love is to be a firefighter, but because 80% of the job offerings are for fire/medic it was a career path that offered the best change to become a firefighter.

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19. Student Loans

Many institutions don't list or qualify as eligible education institutions when it comes to federal financial aid or financially eligible/accredited programs or vocational schools (let them tell you no before making assumptions).

Most private institutions do have a particular bank that is utilized by their students; you may want to get in contact with them. Although student loans through banks can be at a higher interest rate, they're still at a lower rate than credit cards.

One candidate wrote: I went through Wells Fargo PLATO loans. . I got a great rate and it was very east and quick to get the money. Of course, it all depends on your credit history. It's also good to have your credit cards just in case since there are so many things you get nickel and dimed by in school.

<http://www.wellsfargo.com/student/loans/undergrad/career.jhtml>

Another candidate wrote: I highly recommend trying FAFSA first it's the cheapest route. By utilizing FAFSA I was able to get Pell grants, the BOG (waives tuition) and still use my GI Bill.

Still more: If I had attended an eligible program, and received the appropriate 1098-T form at year's end, I could have deducted up to \$4000 off of my 2005 Adjusted Gross Income tax filing.

Another way to get in an academy is through <http://www.trainingdivision.com> This is a home study program that you can complete on line at your time schedule and then go to Texas for the hands on 2-3 week completion to obtain your certificate. Cost? About \$2,800.

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20. What is in the heart of a firefighter?

What is at the heart of a firefighter? What sets the firefighter apart from all others? And what brings us together this evening?

A firefighter's heart is the heart of compassion. It is a heart of giving. But Peace Corps workers are compassionate and giving.

It is a heart that wants to save lives. But surgeons do, too.

It is a heart with a yearning to produce meaningful acts on behalf of society. And yet, social workers want this, too.

The firefighter's heart fills itself with raw courage at the very moment when courage is most needed, a heart that will make the ultimate sacrifice to do the right thing. But so, too, is it with our bravest soldiers.

It is a heart that accepts the burden of an entire community in its worst moments, a heart that says, Yes, I will take your burden on my shoulders-I will, in all humility, be your hero. But heroes come from the unlikeliest of places, sometimes from outside the fire service.

The firefighter's heart is willing to place on the body incredible physical demands, but surely no more so than an Olympic athlete.

So what is it? What makes the firefighter heart different?

It's hard to crystallize a metaphor that approximates true "firefighter-ness" in the barest terms, but I think maybe we know what it is deep down, and that is why we share these moments this evening, not just to congratulate the new crop of leaders in the fire service - you - but to share, in a show of solidarity, what really binds us together, what links the souls of firefighters gone before us with the firefighters present and firefighters yet to come.

This is not some editor's exercise in words. This is not Fire Philosophy 101. This is about the center.

We must find the center, all of us. In this self-discovery, we find the energy for future actions of greatness. And it is in our future actions, true to the center of this business, that we do the greatest honor to the brave people of the fire service who sacrificed their lives doing what you are about to do. We must honor them through our own daily actions. To do otherwise would be to diminish the greatest of traditions, gained from the blood, sweat, and tears of your predecessors.

You respond to all types of emergencies. You are Joe Citizen's 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week emergency store. Your sirens will wail in the day and in the night. You are the ever-present community security blanket.

But even beyond this, what sets you at the highest level of giving and self-sacrifice and courage and duty and lifesaving is the fact that you perform your duty in the most uncontrolled environments known to man, where lives, including your own, are in the balance and time is of the essence. What sets you beyond law enforcement and the military and the social worker in this regard is the simple fact that you can't talk down, or negotiate with, or smother with kindness, a fire. You are dealing with an enemy that cannot reason and has no conscience. You are dealing with an enemy that only you and no other group-no other group-can deal with.

And the public expects it of you. The citizens expect you to control the uncontrollable, this terrible thing that has no reason, no soul, no conscience. They are counting on you--and no one else--in their darkest hours. This is the sacred trust. This is from where your essence springs.

We are all just passing through this life. We are hearts and minds on a huge and unfathomable continuum. How will you leave this for future generations? In this life, as you graduate today, you become caretakers of the sacred trust. And that is immensely important to the world.

By becoming a firefighter, you have assumed your place as a caretaker of the noblest of traditions. You are the new caretakers.

This unspoken understanding transcends all geographic and natural boundaries. It transcends all personal differences. It is our uniting force. It is what makes a firefighter call another "brother" or "sister" and why those words mean something different-something more-when spoken from firefighter to firefighter than is the case with anybody else in society.

It is what makes duty, honor, and self-sacrifice not the esoteric concepts of an idealized yesterday but, rather, an unchangeable way of life, today.

And so we honor you, the graduates, this evening, not just because you passed a curriculum but because it is now your honor and privilege and responsibility to live out the sacred trust and, in doing so, do your part to preserve and move forward the great fire service.

But it is not easy. Nothing good ever is. To be a caretaker is a great responsibility. You can't take a break from it. You can't go on vacation from it. Tonight, you enter the ranks of a service that will define you, and you it. Now it is part of you-forever. How will you accept the challenge that lies ahead? How will you fulfill your role as caretaker of the sacred trust?

Yes, tonight formalizes your acceptance of the responsibilities that come with being a caretaker. Now you are responsible for doing everything humanly possible to see to it that, while exercising your sworn duty, not only you come home after shift but so, too, your brothers and sisters come home with you.

You have accepted the responsibility to be the best firefighter you can be. Anything less is a betrayal of yourself and, more importantly, this service. This is not a job. It is a calling. Act like it.

You have accepted the responsibility of making your new organization better because you're in it. That requires character. Character matters. Virtue matters. Vows matter. Honor and integrity matter.

It comes with the territory, comes with being a caretaker of the trust.

But your responsibility is also a great gift. You have the future in your hands. You have in your hands the ability to strengthen the future of the greatest and noblest profession in the world. A great gift.

So I ask you, as you are here to celebrate your new beginning, never be deterred in your commitment to the sacred trust. There will be forces outside and even inside the fire service working against you. Be guided by what is right. Be guided by what it means to live the sacred trust.

Be a leader. Leadership is not a function of gold horns or silver bars. It is not won by promotion, but by development of character. Lead, but when you follow, follow in the footsteps of those who carry the torch of the sacred trust.

Train as if your life depends on it, because it does. Train for fire, your greatest enemy. Talk fire. Think fire. Live fire. Never become complacent, because there is not such thing as a routine incident until you're back in the firehouse, safe.

Become a thinking firefighter, remembering that safety is not a word, not a board or a tag or an OSHA regulation or an NFPA standard or a good intention-safety is a learned behavior, an action that springs from thinking firefighters who hold "the basics" close to them at all times.

Let us learn the lessons of those who have gone before us. They speak to us from beyond. And after we bow our heads for the 100 firefighters who die each year in the line of duty, after our prayers, let us come up swinging, aggressive in our pursuit of avenues that will support must be the first order of business in this fire service: to increase response effectiveness and make us operationally safer on the fireground. It is incumbent upon us to do so, as caretakers of the trust.

Having assumed the responsibility of caretaker, make it count. You can do no more, but you must do no less.

As an adopted son of the fire service, as a journalist fortunate enough to have been given the opportunity to study this business from the inside, I must tell you how proud and privileged I am to be associated with you, and how much I admire you. The heart of a true firefighter is the heart of greatness. A heart of greatness pumps within you, else you would not be here tonight, accepting your role as caretakers.

Welcome to the greatest service on earth. I welcome you, the new caretakers of the sacred trust. I wish you great success and happiness. God bless, stay low, and be safe.

Thank you.

21. What's it like around the station as a rookie firefighter?

Life around the station as a rookie

My typical day as a rookie starts off at 4:30 am waking up before the sun comes out. I rehearse my drill for the day prior to me leaving for work. I arrive at the gate of my station at 5:10 Am and open the gate, by 5:15 I enter the station and put up the 1st pot of coffee and proceed to the bathroom to change over into uniform, from there I go back to the kitchen put up the 2nd pot of coffee and proceed to the apparatus floor to get my PPE in line, from there I go to the front office where I check the

journal to see yesterdays activities as well as check the “new material” folder and the roster for the day. Now its about 5:35 and I go put up the flag and gather the newspaper and return to the kitchen and spread out the newspaper in sections on the table. I then empty the dishes from the washer and proceed back to the apparatus floor to check inventory on all 4 apparatus (truck/engine/pump/RA). Now it’s around 6:15 and Members on my shift are arriving as well as members of the off going shift are waking up. I make it a point to say good morning to every member on coming and off going. Now its around 6:25 and I go grab the other rookie so we can practice throwing every single ladder as well as donning our SCBA for time. Periodically between ladders I will go back into the kitchen to put up more pots of coffee. 7:15 a.m. I practice my daily drill with one of the senior firemen. 7:45 a.m. I proceed to the kitchen to prepare for lineup which entails cleaning up the mess that the senior firemen made from making breakfast. 8:00 a.m. lineup in the kitchen with all members of my shift to go over the itinerary for the day and discuss new material. 8:30 proceed to start housework; I always make it a point to be the first one in the bathrooms with my scrubber/bleach-water mix/comet etc. TIP: WHEN CLEANING THE TOILETS INSTEAD OF FLUSHING THE SOAPY WATER DOWN THE TOILET ONCE THEY’RE CLEAN, LEAVE THE SOAPY WATER IN THE BOWL, IT WILL SHOW THE MEMBERS OF YOUR CREW THAT YOU DID THE TOILETS. 9:30 a.m. members of my crew begin their daily exercise regiment, I on the other hand am throwing ladders, doing daily/weekly/monthly checks of our equipment or practicing for my drill. 10:30 a.m. off to the store to gather materials for lunch/dinner. While at the store I will be throwing ladder, giving mini drills on equipment, walking the roof, or something practical. 11:30 a.m. help setup for lunch. 12:00 p.m. lunch time, I am always the last to gather my plate unless ordered otherwise and I usually take the smallest portion. Even though I’m the last to sit down and eat, I’m always the 1st to get up and get in the suds. Do I eat so fast that I don’t even taste the food most of the time, answer is probably. I do dishes till the cook for the day calls for a “game for dishes” which entails some card or dice game where I will intentionally lose because at the end of the game do you think its good to see the rookie at the table while his captains are in the suds...HELL NO....After lunch I will help the A/O or other senior firefighters with projects that need to be completed around the station/apparatus. Around 2 p.m. I will give my drill in front of all 12 members of my station at once (this is the most nerve wracking part). Around 3 p.m. I will pull out the tool that I will have to give a drill on next shift and start playing around with it. 4:30 p.m. I will clean up the kitchen and help the cook if he needs it to prepare the meal for the night. 6:00 p.m. same routine as lunch, I’m the last to get my portion of food and the first to get done and then automatic in the suds. 7:00 p.m. I will help the A/O wipe down the truck and then help the both engineers wipe down both engines. 8:00 p.m. I will either pull out another tool to learn, throw some ladders, read the volumes, or prepare for my next shifts drill. 10:00 do a final cleanup of the station picking up any residual trash, doing the dishes again, inventory of the truck. 1:00 a.m. – 1:30 a.m. I finally go to sleep when the last member of my crew has gone to sleep. 5:30 a.m. the next morning I am up putting up the coffee, cleaning up, throwing ladders with the oncoming shift rookie. 8:00 a.m. I finally leave the station.

This is just a “rough base” of what to expect as a rookie around the station. Remember this daily routine doesn’t include all of the calls you run and the questions/tasks you are expected to know or perform when asked to about SOP’s or TOOL knowledge.

Oh yeah in addition the “GAMES” that the senior firefighters like to play with the rookie at whatever time of the day/night they please.

More advice

What you do when you first start out will set your reputation and follow you throughout your career. If you don’t start out on the right foot, they will show you the door. The crew already knows more about you before you show up than you think.

Use these standards during station visits, your interview process, and as a new rookie to demonstrate you already know what to do when hired:

You're a snotty nose rookie. Keep your mouth shut. Be cordial, friendly and humble. You have no time or opinion until you earn it. You can't force it. That will come with a lot of calls and a few fires.

Cell phones are causing problems for candidates and rookies. I can't believe the stories I'm hearing. Candidates are carrying their cell phones and pagers to written tests. A candidate was in a department academy and his cell phone starts to ring. He told the training officer, can you hold on a minute, I have a call. Yeah, right. The training officer told the class the next time he hears a cell phone go off, they were going to play who can throw the cell phone the furthest.

On an emergency call, the BC was trying to raise dispatch without success on the radio. The rookie took his cell phone, speed dialed dispatch and handed his cell phone to the BC. Cute? Smart? Innovative? That's not the reception he received.

Rookies are carrying their cell phones and pagers on duty. Their phone rings, they answer it and go right into cell yell with their friends and relatives. Wives, girl friends and dysfunctional others call all day long with important stuff and to do pillow talk.

Cell phones are ringing in locker rooms. Some try to be cool by putting their cell phones and pagers on vibrate or stun. Even though they might not answer them when they go off, they still pick them up to check the caller ID or the text message. Then when they think no one is looking, they slip off and return the call. THIS IS DUMB! These are not part of your emergency issue.

This will not get you off on the right foot. Big clue here. Leave the electronic leashes off and in your vehicle, along with your piercings, until a time where all your duties are complete. No matter what you might think and how friendly everyone seems to be, you are being watched! It could hurt you big time. If you have an emergency situation, ask your officer if you can carry your phone because you are expecting an emergency call.

Call your new captain before your first shift and ask if he wants you to bring anything in. Bring a peace offering of donuts and desert your first day. Homemade is best. Arrive early and ask the off-going firefighter what you should know at that station. Your new captain should meet with you to outline his expectations. If not, ask him.

Unless you're told differently, put up and don't forget to take down the flag. If the phone or the doorbell rings, make sure you're the first one running to answer it. There will be certain duties on each day of the week. Tuesday could be laundry day, Saturday yards. Keep track. Stay busy around the station. Always be in a clean proper uniform. Always be ready to get on the rig and respond.

Check out the gear on the rig each morning. Make sure the O2 gauge and the reserve bottle shows enough to handle a long EMS call.

Firefighters usually have "their" place to sit at the table and in front of the TV. Don't hog the newspaper. The off-going shift has the first crack at the newspaper. You probably have probation tests.

Don't park yourself in front of the TV; you have a test coming up. Stay busy. No matter what the atmosphere, you're being watched.

Although you might be a good cook, don't volunteer to cook until asked or rotated in. Make sure your meals are on time. The old adage "Keep them waiting long enough and they will eat anything" doesn't apply here. Be the last one to serve your plate. Don't load up your plate the first time around. Wait to go for seconds.

Always have your hands in the sink doing the dishes after a meal. Be moving out with the garbage and mopping the kitchen floor after each meal. Learn how to help the officer complete response reports.

Don't tell jokes until you're accepted.

Don't gossip.

Don't play "your" music on the radio. Don't be a stupid generation X'er or Y'er and always ask why when told to do something. Help others with their assignments when you finish yours.

Ask how you're doing. Volunteer for assignments. Keep track of these to present at your evaluations. Don't start pulling hose and other equipment at a scene until the captain tells you.

Always get off the rig before it backs up. Stand to the rear side to guide the rig. Never turn your back on the backing up rig.

It's not uncommon to move to one or more stations during your probation. At your new station, don't act like you already have time. Unfortunately, you have to start all over again as the new rookie.

You will have an elated feeling rolling out on your first calls. There is nothing like it. It could last your whole career. Enjoy and savor it. You earned it. You're the last of America's Heroes.

I miss it.

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22. New Rookies tips for success

Just some ideas / thoughts to help a probationary firefighter succeed once they get accepted into the recruit academy:

1. Always have at least one pen on you at all times. You can't go wrong getting on of the pens and clipping it to your t-shirt collar. You'll need a pen for writing down information on calls and for taking notes. Nothing more embarrassing than having to ask someone to borrow a pen.
2. Always have a watch with a second hand and one that glows in the dark. Besides needing it for taking vital signs once you're on the line, it is not a nice-to-have, but a need-to-have. You'll never know when you will need it, but if you don't have one, it is pretty embarrassing having to tell the

person asking you to time something or what time is it, "I don't have a watch." Go to Costco (or a similar store) and buy a heavy duty, waterproof watch. I still have the same one that I bought in my academy 10 years ago, it works great.

3. Don't rely on your PERS (or other similar government retirement plan) to cover your retirement costs. As we are seeing now, our governor is attempting to alter/modify/delete our current plan. What we see today may not be the same when it comes time to retire. Continue to save, save, save for that rainy day.

4. Going with number 3 above, max out your deferred compensation plan from the first day you get hired. Once again, your government pension that you are promised upon retirement (which can be 90 to 100% of your last year's salary, depending on where you work), will look great the first five or so years after retirement, but it will not take long for that retirement paycheck to not look so good because of inflation, medical costs, and other related costs you will incur as you get older. Maxing out your deferred comp from day one is the smartest idea because you get used to not seeing the money. Trying to do it after you've been accustomed to a certain salary and way of life is almost impossible. Plus, understanding about how money and interest compounds/multiplies will make you want to do so as early as possible in your career.

I hear the same old complaints from our probies "I can't afford to put any money in deferred comp, I'll get to it later." Yeah right, you will. Denial is not a river in Egypt.....

5. Be nice to EVERY ONE you meet, whether they are in uniform or not. You never know who they might be and it is just the right thing to do.

6. Start learning the names and positions/assignments of all of the chiefs, all of the officers, and all of the firefighters that work in your new department. Why? Because it is the right thing to do and because you'll need to know them at some point anyway, why not start now? The sooner you start, the easier it will be, especially in larger departments. If you get hired by, say LAFD, with over 3,000 members, good luck. Do the best you can. Also start learning the names of the administrative personnel (secretaries, etc.) that you come in contact with during training, the hiring process, etc. They will assist you at some point in your career, start learning who they are, what they do, and how they can help you.

7. A good way to do number 6 above is to get a hold of a fire department yearbook (if that department has produced one) or some other document with pictures on it.

8. If you meet someone new for the first time (and there will be a lot of first times - you'll feel like an Alzheimer's patient for a while), take the time to extend your hand, shake their hand, and say something to the effect of "hello, my name is John Smith, I am one of the new probationary firefighters (or whatever your dept. calls you), I am pleased to meet you." Hopefully they will provide their name, if they don't, try to tactfully ask that question and then throw in something to the effect of "where do you work and what is your assignment." Some people might call that kissing butt, I think it is just common courtesy. Realize every department is different and this may not be accepted practice in some departments.

9. Realize that you will not have much (if any) available sick or vacation time. That said, try to keep the hobbies to a minimum that might injure you (skiing, motorcycling, snowboarding, etc.). If you don't have the time to use as sick leave, there is no requirement they have to keep your job. Wait the 12 to 18 months for probation to finish if you do something that has a high risk of injury.

Also, try not to plan any big trips. You won't have much vacation and some departments don't even allow trades or minimize trades for probies. In some departments, it is frowned upon for probies to take trades. Know your department's culture.

10. Learn as much as you can about your new department. Besides learning the names and ranks of personnel, learn about the history and about every possible thing you can. This information can be found out primarily just by showing interest and talking with the firefighters you work with. Most will love to talk about the history with you. Other good sources include department history books, yearbooks, the internet, a fire dept. museum (if they have one), each fire station itself, etc.

It seems to me that many probies don't seem to care about the history (or at least they don't seem aggressive in learning about the history) of a dept. these days. History is there for a reason - we can learn from history and it also helps you talk with and understand people since history is contained every day in our conversations in some form or fashion.

11. If it is appropriate in your dept., try to attend EVERY department function. These can include: Holiday parties, union meetings, barbeques, recognition dinners, retirement dinners, etc. This is a great way to meet more of the personnel you have not yet met, to meet some of the retirees, to learn more about how the department operates, and to just be more involved to your department.

12. When appropriate, get involved. Many departments don't allow (or like) probies to get involved on committees, etc., but that doesn't mean you can't start learning about the different committees so you can start planting the seeds for when you get off probation. We are all looking for our members to get involved in some form or fashion.

13. Always have a full set of spare street clothes in your car, as well as numerous pieces of dept. clothing. When I got hired, I purchased 10 t-shirts and 2 to 3 each of sweatshirts, sweat pants, sweat shorts, etc. You're going to get stinky and dirty, and you'll want a clean change of clothes since you might not be able to launder your clothes every night after the academy.

14. While you're driving to the academy each day, and going to lunch with your classmates (assuming your dept. allows that), don't drive with your blinders on. Start learning the streets, the target hazards, etc. What a great way to start learning your way around town. On that note, try to spend your money (food, gas, snacks, etc.) in the dept.'s jurisdiction. Besides having the money go back to the city (that you'll indirectly benefit from in the long run), you'll get to learn the areas. This will come in handy.

15. On the same lines of number 14, buy a street map of your new dept.'s jurisdictional boundaries. Mark each fire station on the map and include the assigned apparatus. What a great way to learn where each fire station is and what units are assigned to each station. This will be a necessity. The last thing you want to do is get your station assignment and say "can you tell me how to get there?" That doesn't make you look to good.

Also, take the time to highlight each main target hazard (schools, hospitals, shopping centers, large companies, major transit centers, city buildings, etc.). Besides having to respond to them on calls, you'll probably be tested on them as well.

Additionally, highlight the primary streets so you can start memorizing them. Then do the secondary streets, etc.

Keep this map with you at all times and then with you when you work at the stations to study.

16. Learn the address of each station (if you're hired by LAFD, good luck). This will teach you basic address schemes (such as odd numbers are on the north and east side of the street and even numbers are on the south and the west side of the street) of the city and will start you learning your streets (which most departments require and test you on). Once you learn the street name, learn the cross street as well. And then which way the numbers progress on the street.

Remember that it is tough to learn everything all at once. However, if you start small, at the time you get hired, and then think of it as "building blocks," you'll be surprised at how much you will learn and retain.

17. Always have spare money with you in case you forget your wallet. Try to keep a bunch of coins in your car, and also some small bills (in case you forget your wallet and need food, bridge toll, etc.). Go a step further and put some coins and money in a water tight container and carry it on your turnouts. This will be good once you get on line and are coming back from a 5 am run and you have just had your first trash fire and the captain tells you, "oh, your first trash fire? Perfect, you can buy us donuts." Instead of saying "can I borrow some money, my wallet is at the station?" You can say, no problem, I have money in my turnouts.

18. If you have extra uniforms, keep at least one shirt/pants in your vehicle in a secure space. Chances are you'll get the one you're wearing dirty at some point and need a clean set. Don't keep them visible because some thief would love to get their hands on it....

19. Always have a toiletries kit in your vehicle. I remember one probie asking me (when he was working at the station), "Cap, can I borrow your deodorant since I forgot mine?" I prefer the roll on deodorant and what do you think my answer was? NO!!! That's almost as bad as asking to borrow a toothbrush or towels. Oof.

20. Last, but not least (at least for now), if you are issued a probie binder to get things signed off in, make copies of it on a regular basis. One of our probies lost (actually his car was broken into and they took the book and some turnouts) his book a couple of years ago - the one that had almost 18 months of probie sign-offs completed. He did not have a copy in a secure location. He was dancing around for a while and quite nervous until he was told it was ok. This could have easily gone against him.

Hope that helps you be successful. I have plenty more ideas and I'll post them here as I get the time.

Steve Prziborowski, Captain
www.chabotfire.com

23. Station Visits - Is It Necessary?

Question:

I said that I would always visit a station when I heard a story of a guy who entered an interview and was ask did you visit any of our stations and get the information packet that admin made up? This sounded like a sure fire way to NOT be successful. But after testing a lot it becomes a serious pain in the butt.

I know I will catch a lot of flack for saying that. But think about it, if you take all the tests you can because you really want the job, you could potentially have to visit like 3 or 4 different departments in a month. And it is the same routine over time. Call admin for a stations #, then call the station and explain you would like to visit to ask questions on the dept/personnel/training/equipment.

And, you must not show up empty handed (unwritten rule). At my dept last time we tested we had people showing up left and right. Some brought stuff, some didn't. It really did not seem to bother anyone. This one guy in particular who sat down with us and really gave me a good feeling did not get hired. I doubt the oral board even had a clue that he visited the station and all the information he gathered did not benefit him because I saw the interview questions. So my question is this. Are we just like the Mayor running for office and trying to show our faces around and campaign??? What about the buddy system when visiting stations?? Is this looked upon poorly?? Thanks in advance.

Captain Bob's Reply:

Good Points

Yea, it's not a day at the beach. But, it can be used in part of your answer on what you have done to prepare for the position; that you have been by some of the stations and what you observed; enthusiasm, skills, dedication, willingness to be of service to those trying to become firefighters.

You can also learn something unique about the department that few if any of the other candidates can say in their oral i.e. did you know that San Jose has dry drum hydrants?

More than one candidate was stumped in their oral when they were asked, "Did you get by any of our stations and pick up the oral board packet?"

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24. Lateral

The biggest problem I've seen on oral boards with seasoned veterans taking entry level or lateral tests is they can't place themselves in the position they are applying for; that of being a snotty nose rookie. They try to hammer the oral board with their credentials thinking the board will just hand them the job. Their oral board's skills are rusty and antiquated. It's hard for them to remember how it was to be a rookie.

This is a delicate balance here. Leave your time and rank in your locker. You must be humble, place yourself in the rookie position and build a natural bridge to present your education, experience and integrity to the oral board panel. Without this bridge, you're dead meat. This is not easy for many seasoned candidates. An attitude adjustment is needed. Attitude is a small thing that can make the big difference. Remember the position you're applying.

The seasoned veteran candidate can roar past any of the other candidates if his attitude and game plan is in place.

I think this says it all:

It was five years ago that I first visited www.Firecareers.com It was how I found and landed my first job at a small career department, and served for four and a half years. The entire time I wanted to make the lateral move to my hometown dept.--a larger city, more opportunities, Paramedic and tech. rescue opportunities...But I was a bone head. I thought because I was already on the job elsewhere, I could waltz through the process, and to some extent I did--all the way to the Chief's interview twice, but never got the call. Laterals, my advice to you is this: we are our own worst enemies...you think you are a good judge of your interview skills, trust me you're not. Don't be a bonehead like me and go through the process twice before getting help from professionals like Captain Rob and Captain Bob at www.eatstress.com Think this is some baloney sell-out advertisement? Well, all I can say is after five years of trying, my recruit academy starts in two weeks. You be the judge.

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25. What if you don't Pass the Medical?

Pre-employment medical examinations must comply with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and in California with the California Fair Employment Act Section 7294.0(d) of title 2 of the California Code of Regulations states:

(2) Where the results of such medical examination would result in disqualification, an applicant or employee may submit independent medical opinions for consideration before a final determination on disqualification is made.

What this states is that if you have not passed a medical or psychological test that was part of a medical, you should be given the chance to obtain a second opinion. Cities and agencies might not be aware of this law. Most people are unaware that they can appeal the decision.

Candidates will say they don't want to pursue this option because it might ruin any chance that this city might call them back in the future, or will cause problems applying to other agencies. Although the way to law is written, you can qualify for a list on an agency over and over again, UNDERSTAND that if you are eliminated from the process because of a medical or psychological test this agency will NEVER consider you again! The time to act is now! And, there are no black lists out there of those candidates who try to get a position that is rightfully theirs.

If you take advantage of the law and have a qualified attorney represent you in obtaining a favorable second medical or psychological opinion you could be reinstated. Do not attempt this without an attorney. Attorney Claudia Baldwin 510-536-3500 has helped several candidates who have had problems in this area.

If you are trying to get a second opinion on a medical, get a recognized expert in the field you are contesting. When my Son Rob was taking his medical, the blood work turned up some questionable numbers. We obtain an appointment with the leading blood specialist in the San Francisco area. He

determined that the numbers were caused by a recent flu episode. He wrote a letter that cleared up the issue and Rob went on to get his badge.

This is how this process can work. A psychologist just re-evaluated a candidate for an agency that did not pass his first psychological test. This doctor found him suitable for the position.

If you were conditionally offered the position on passing the medical and your second opinion fulfills that requirement then you are entitled to the job. Not just to be put back on the list. They have to give you your badge! Several of our candidates have done just that.

The defense rests!

Getting the job of your dreams is like winning the lottery!

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26. Pre-Existing Problems

If you have a pre-existing medical problem or a serious issue in your background, do yourself a favor and find out early if it will interfere with getting a firefighter job.

All too often I receive calls asking "What do I do now?" These candidates have spent time and money gaining education, experience and put their life's on hold trying to get this job; when they have an pre-existing medical problem or traceable background problem that would keep them badge less.

Situations like not just one but two DUI's. Knee surgery with scars. Back surgery that would show in an X-ray (yes, they are going to X-ray your back) and/or be part of your records with your doctor and insurance company.

Take the poison early. If you have the slightest concern for a medical problem, have the leading expert in this field of medicine (no, not your family doctor) evaluate your condition. If they feel you're fit for duty, have them give you a letter.

If you have a DUI, an arrest or other black mark on your record, see if it can be expunged (Sealed). For other potential problems in your background, have a brief reasonable explanation of the situation.

You don't want to be like a candidate who called last week who had a pre-existing medical problem. They called him Friday for a medical Tuesday. Monday was a holiday. He had kept his head in the sand in denial when he knew the medical call was the next step. He didn't have many options prior to his medical.

The time to find out is now; before you're going for all the marbles.

Author: futureff

Subject: re: expungement

Capt. Bob is right. I had a DUI, had it expunged and am going through backgrounds right now. My background packets states list all convictions, however, do not include convictions which have been expunged. So it pays to do the leg work and clean up your history. Good luck to you all.

P.S. When records are expunged, they are not sealed. The only way one can have his/her conviction(s) sealed is if the conviction(s) happened when that person was under the age of 18 when the conviction occurred. Even when the conviction is expunged, you still have to disclose the conviction; however, you need not disclose it if the application/form/packet specifically states expunged convictions need not be listed. Trust me, I have done a lot of research on this issue.

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27. Recommendation Letters

Question: Will it help to present letters of recommendations from prominent people, such as a former police chief or my Priest or other firemen in the area? Will it carry any weight at all?

Reply: On most oral boards, the raters are from other departments. It is my experience that although the raters might thumb through and glance at any attached documents they seldom if ever read them. And come on, if you're going to attach a letter of recommendation, its not going to say anything bad but only glowing words about you. Save a tree, the raters will not read these volumes. Don't send us on a treasure hunt to find your great stuff.

I'm a one-page resume guy for entry level without a cover letter, not in a binder or folder. Do not give us a book. We will not read it. Write it believing the raters won't go past the first page. You can put any supporting details, documents, certificates and if it will help you sleep better and letters of recommendation following the first page. Keep it simple.

Question: If you are going to attach any letters of recommendation following the first page how many is appropriate. I am thinking maybe two. I realize that there is a very good chance they won't read it but wouldn't it still look just a little better to have a couple of them?

Reply: How about none! Again, I'm a one page stand alone resume guy. Don't give me a book. And, if you have already listed your education, experience and certs on your application and resume, why do you need to attached them; unless they were requested or you're going to a chiefs interview where there is more time with each candidate.

Many entry level and promotional candidates have told me they were complemented on having just one, as in one page only, resume.

As you know everyone becomes an expert on these issues. They will fill you head with all these crazy

ideas and stuff. And because "They Said" (I've been trying to find "they" for 30 years) you needed to have all that extra stuff or the other candidates are going to get ahead of you. So, how is all this extra stuff going to help you, really? Keep it Simple.

From interview rater Captain Steve Prziborowski:

I'm with Captain Bob on this one - leave them at home! Personally, letters of recommendation really aren't worth much because it is very easy to get them (in my opinion and experience) and they're like a verbal recommendation of someone. Many times, people will say how great you are either to get rid of you or because they really don't know the true you.

On an oral panel, they don't have the time to look at them either. Every oral panel I have been on (on either side), there has usually not been much room for the rater's to utilize. There is usually a cramped table space with enough room for a rating sheet, and then maybe your application and/or resume, that's it.

You're getting graded at the oral for things you say, not for things that are written down. Remember if you don't say it, you probably won't get full credit for it. Dimensions you're getting graded on during oral interviews include oral communication, NOT written communication.

If the rater's are reading your paperwork, they're not listening to you - and that can be bad (remember if you didn't say it in the oral, you're not going to get full credit for it, even if it is on your resume). Having to read your resume and application while trying to make notes and comments on your rating sheet and keep their ears open to make sure you say all of the key phrases, buzz words, etc. is challenging enough. Throwing more paperwork in front of them (letters of recommendations, certifications, etc.) just convolutes the issue.

About the only time to include a letter of recommendation might be during the chief's oral (even that is an iffy time). Personally, if I was a chief, I really wouldn't put much weight on a letter of recommendation (and I know many chiefs that agree with me).

In my opinion, letters are letters. Whether they are from your boss, a friend, an acquaintance, etc. Whether they are saying how awesome you supposedly are, how great you performed at an event, etc.

Extra, unnecessary paperwork, that just takes away from what you're being graded for. During a background investigation, unless they ask for it, I wouldn't provide it. The background investigator has enough to deal with than have more paperwork.

28. Don't Ever Say Pay or Benefits!

Most of us, if not all of us want to become firefighters for the same reasons: good money, good benefits, good work schedule, job security, etc.....

To those of you that have scored a 95+ on an oral: Have you ever answered the above to the famous oral question: "Why do you want to become a Firefighter" and actually receive a good oral score using an answer of pay or benefits?

For a lot of us this is the number one reason, however we might not feel comfortable saying this.

Anyone who has the nerve to give any answer of pay, benefits or work schedule is committing instant suicide!

It's an unwritten law. We know it on the oral board, but don't tell us. Sitting on a board, I can't believe candidates would still say those things. You're stepping on a land mine here. If anyone has received a good score from that answer, it was a fluke.

It's better to use your own signature story of what sparked interest to be a firefighter. That is an answer they have never heard.

One of our candidates gave that answer about pay and benefits during coaching. He had great credentials; had taken over thirty tests. We suggested he not use that answer and some others. Three days later, he took his oral on the last Stockton test. He got his best score and position ever. Guess where he works?

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29. Using Humor in an Interview

Unless you're a humorous person, don't plan on laying something funny on the panel. I've seen people that weren't funny to begin with try to include humor in a presentation. It bombed. How would you feel in that situation if the room went dead silent and everyone just stared at you? What if this humor was your opening statement?

This happened to Ted. He said it threw off his timing and confidence and he really never recovered. If something funny happens naturally during your interview or presentation, that's a gift. Don't plan on it happening.

You sure don't want to have this happen in your interview.

Along with answering the questions correctly and having enthusiasm, it is important to keep a smooth flow during your interview. We have all been at a party where a group of guys are standing around telling jokes and laughing. Then somebody says something that doesn't quite fit and the mood is gone, there is that uncomfortable silence.

One of the places I have seen this is when someone is asked a question like, "What if you are on duty and a co-worker smells like marijuana smoke?" The candidate, thinking he will get extra points for being innocent, says, "Well, I don't know what marijuana smells like." Then there is that uncomfortable silence. You see, the oral board wanted to find out how the candidate would handle a drug problem in the work place. Now they have to explain that he does know what it smells like, and pick back up with the interview. But he never regains the smooth flow.

Another candidate, when asked if he had anything to add, or any questions for the panel, said "I just wanted to know if you could think of any mistakes I might make in training, after I get hired, so I can avoid them?" This was met with the opened mouths of the interview panel, they didn't know what to

say. He had taken an excellent interview and just flushed it. The last impression they had of him was that he might be kind of goofy.

In both of these situations, the person had done something they thought would make them stand out. Well it did, but not the way any of us would want. Don't try any funny stuff in the interview. It is just too hard to recover if it goes bad.

The best way to keep a smooth, steady flow is to practice, talk into a tape player, talk in your car on the way to work. Do mock interviews. Jump at any chance you have to be speaking your stuff. Get to the point that it is like pushing play on a tape player.

So when you go in for your next interview, you can relax and be yourself. Getting to the point that your script is so well memorized, that there is no way you could forget any of it. It can make a big difference. Even if they don't ask all of the questions you have prepared. It is just the way you carry yourself when you know you have done all you can to be ready. It is a great feeling.

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30. Multiple job offers

As tough as it is to get this job, candidates don't believe me when I tell them they could expect multiple job offers. It's not uncommon to get two job offers. It is my opinion and experience to go forward with both (no don't let them know of each other unless they ask) and make the final decision as the process unfolds. Make sure you have the job offer in writing in you hot little hands before you make your decision. Don't be surprised if both departments send you to the same psych doctor.

You never know what's going to happen in the hiring process. Follow each job offer until the end of the process. If you like one department better and tell the other one goodbye, what are you going to do if the one you likes doesn't hire you?

One candidate got 3 job offers in 8 days. He went forward in all 3, then made his decision.

More helpful advice...

How would you like this dilemma?

Captain Bob,

I have followed some of your advice on past bulletin boards and agree with you completely on all aspects of the fire service.

Here is my situation: I applied for and was accepted to paramedic school a month ago. I am now three weeks into class of a 10 1/2 month course. I am very excited about the opportunity of becoming a fire medic. I have 5 years volunteer experience and have a FF 1 certification.

And now, I am #1 on list for a job as a Firefighter and in the psychological and medical phase. All I have to do is pass these simple procedures and I will be offered the job. Do I take the job or pass on the opportunity and finish school? Any advice or insight would be helpful.

Reply:

You're probably going to medic school to become a firefighter, right? Then, take the job offer NOW!

The week my Son Rob was to start Daniel Freeman paramedic program, he was offered a job. He took the job. He has never regretted it.

BEWARE! The psychological is not a simple procedure! Over forty percent of candidates fail the psych. Don't take the psychological until you read our Special Report "Conquer the Psychological Interview".

See if you can put your medic program on hold. Once you get off probation you can complete the program. Your department might pay the cost.

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

31. Review exams

Hello, I currently live in Northeast Ohio and have been taking fire tests around this area. I was wondering if you had any information on looking over the exams after I take them. I notice that some cities will let me review the exam I have taken and some do not. Can you provide any insight into what I should do?

If you have the opportunity to review your exam, we absolutely recommend that you do so. This will give you insight into your weak areas so that you can focus your studies on those areas. In many states, there are 2 or 3 test consultants giving examinations and the same exam is given time and time again. Anytime you have the opportunity to review your exam, take it and learn from it.

32. Need some advice about joining the military

This is a tough one, any help would be greatly appreciated. I am 25 and just recently got hired as a part time firefighter with a small bay area fire department, I have my E.M.T, FFI academy and some other certs as well. I love the fire service, I know this is what I want to do as a career, but I also have always wanted to be in the military. My question is this, would I be stupid to give all this up and put it on hold for three or four years to go join the military? By the time I got out I would be 28 or 29, I know that's not old but would everyone else be passing me by in those three or four years? I'm not sure what to do, I feel pulled in both directions. I know that there are a lot of wise people in here that could maybe shed some light on the subject. Thanks for the help in advance.

Helpful advice

1. If you want to be in the military, the time is probably better NOW than later in your life.
2. Put yourself at 50 years old (I know, hard to do for all of us, including myself) - if you choose NOT to go into the military, and become a firefighter instead, will this decision to not go into the military be something that you are going to be regretting for the rest of your life? Are you going to be second-guessing the decision not to do it? If so, that might help.
3. Yes, you could put off being a firefighter for 4 or so years. Getting hired in your early 30's is not that uncommon and not that impossible to do. If you have a clean military record, and stay up on your oral interview skills, testing skills, EMT skills, etc., then you can probably still remain very competitive upon completion of the military and look like a valuable commodity to a department.
4. Here is the part that really needs to be considered. Are fire jobs going to be more plentiful in 4 or so years? Hard to say - I don't think there are necessarily going to be more jobs. With budgets the way they are right now, most departments are doing their best to stay afloat and keep what they have (as opposed to adding more staffing, stations, etc. - very few, very few communities are able to do this now and I venture that won't change in 4 or so years). That said, now is just as good as a time as any to get hired as a firefighter.

Getting hired now will mean 4 more years of seniority. Also, if the Governor does what he wants to our pension system starting in 2007 (I know, that plan might change), anyone hired after that date would not have the same pension that we are afforded today (and hopefully will keep until death do us part). Now, if he is successful with messing with the pensions of future firefighters, that does open the door to mess with our current system in the future as well. Then we're all in the same boat potentially.

Another item to think about is lost money. When I say lost, I mean in 4 years as a firefighter, you'll be making say an average of \$50,000 per year without overtime or not being a medic (I know, I'm being very conservative and not taking into account total compensation). I'm just trying to pick an easy number. I know you won't make that much in the military. Now life is not about money as much as it is happiness. In the 4 years you're a firefighter, you might be able to afford a house (assuming you don't have one now) or at least be able to save a good amount towards a down payment. Being in the military won't allow you to do that (yes, you may get special benefits to buy a home, but I'm not an expert there).

Education wise, if you don't have your 2 year degree in fire completed (which I hope you're aspiring to do to make yourself competitive) by the time you go in, it will be tough to complete while in the military and the requirements may even change by the time you get out.

Anyway, that's about all I can think of for now, hope it helps. Good luck in whatever path you decide on!

Steve Prziborowski
www.chabotfire.com

33. Background Investigators

The following information was posted on a firefighter bulletin board. The author is unknown. The information is not verified. Use it only food for thought:

To those curious to know if we background investigators share information the answer is yes. It does depend on the individual agency however.

Some have strict guideline as to what information can be shared with other investigators. Our purpose as background investigators is to gather information on a potential firefighter, "good" and "negative" information.

A good aggressive background investigator will dig deep into a candidate's life and look for things to disqualify a candidate. We as background investigators want to eliminate the "BAD SEEDS" before they get into a fire department.

This does not mean that a firefighter candidate has to lead the "Perfect Life", just don't do anything stupid to get yourself in trouble.

Remember to use your best judgment when completing a background packet. If you do not put that you were backgrounded for another agency and the investigator finds out, you will definitely be disqualified.

Captain Bob's reply:

To my knowledge, there is no black list that would reveal if you had a background with another department and failed. However, most credit reports show who has made an inquiry on your report. These reports aren't usually obtained by the city though, but by another company on the cities request.

I'm not sure I would list a department that I was DQ'd in background. I wouldn't want to give them ammunition to shoot me with again. Why create the trail?

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

34. Background Questions:

Two years ago I had a background with LBPD. Is the LA city Fire going to be able to view my LBPD background? Do I have to tell them about LBPD? I'm a little concerned with conflicting statements because of the time that has passed!

I'm often asked this question. To my knowledge there are no secret lists or resources agencies can find to know whether and or when you have ever tested. This goes for the psychological test too. If you don't volunteer and create a trail, it's highly unlikely they will ever know. Besides, they're too busy and have too little personnel to go into that depth.

"Just because you're paranoid . . . doesn't mean they're not after you."

Volunteering Information:

Follow the bouncing ball:

Tom, was being considered for the hiring process in a large county department. I told him if he was going to have to take the physiological test to contact me first for coaching. He didn't. Tom called devastated with, "What do I do now? I'm out of the process. I asked him if he had thought out his questions before he had volunteered information. He said he had not. I asked him why he hadn't called me before the test. He said, "Things were going so great I didn't think I needed your help." What do you think now Tom?

I told Tom that we don't just concentrate on preparing candidates for the job oral board interview. We are a resource to get candidates to the badge. We shorten the learning curve in every portion of the testing process. We provide the **Secret Nugget** information for the **best** book for the written test, physical agility programs, audio and video tapes from our seminars and coaching by phone on how to "Conquer the Job Interview", background checks, and yes now the all important psychological test. Tom said, "They let me shoot myself in the foot." I said, "No Tom, you shot yourself in the foot." Even golf professions get lessons to keep their game sharp.

Tom was hired by another department who didn't give a psych test. After one year, he had the opportunity to test for the department he had dreamed of working for. He came in for a tune up coaching session and made the cut for the job pending the medical that included a psychological evaluation. He panicked. He obtained our "Special Report on Conquering the Psychological Interview". With coaching, he realized the mistakes he made on his first interview.

As he entered the room for his interview after the written portion of the psyche test, he sat in one of five possible chairs directly across from the psychologist. He put on his game face. The doctor had him fill out a personal family history and release forms for other information. He asked him if he would be willing to take a polygraph based on his information. Some psychologists will do this to intimidate you into giving information you do not have to share.

No matter what you sign, understand if it was not listed that a polygraph will be part of the hiring process, they can't demand that you take one. Especially if everyone else is not going to take one. Just go along with the drill.

Tom was honest to a fault in this first psych interview. Like most firefighter candidates, they want this job so bad, they will tell the psychologist anything they want to know. Big ERROR!

He knew now not to volunteer any information that would be ammunition to shoot him with. He didn't list or say anything about his crazy family of origin, questions like "any of your parents have a major illness", or toss out anything that could allow the interviewer to get his foot in the door to again take him out. There are no halos over fire engines, but you had better be squeaky clean.

All the psychologist is trying to determine is the profile that is created by written test. Tom's interview was short this time. This concerned him.

Tom is 36 years old. He called that he passed the psych test and just accepted the job for the city he thought would never come his way. His extended family had rushed over while he was talking to me on the phone. I could hear the champagne corks popping. Tom was crying like a baby. So was I.

It doesn't get much better than this.

Ask Tom if it's worth it to do it the proven way.

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35. Credit checks during background checks

Credit Checks - Background

Credit is just one of the areas you're evaluated on in background, like your driving record, drug use, medical, etc.

It's often not the problem but how you write out an explanation for the background. Most candidates turn themselves inside out when a simple explanation is often all that is needed to resolve most of the situations.

You're in the hiring process. Let's take it one step at a time. The badge is there. There is only one person keeping you from getting it . . . It's YOU!

"Some times I think my mind would kill me if it didn't need me for transportation."

It's not the items of concern, but the when and why. Like most candidates that enter the hiring process, they get hyper vigilant and the voices of panic and guilt start running around in their heads.

For other problems and misdemeanors, has the problem happened since?

Was this a financial problem? When did these incidents happen? If it was a financial problem, what was your financial situation then? Are the accounts current now? Of course the best course of action is to maintain a good credit rating.

A divorce can cause havoc in many areas of your life. The goal is to be able to demonstrate a plan that you have it under control to be resolved. Having 3 accounts still in trouble will not look good. You see the chief doesn't want a collection agency showing up at the station or attaching your wages. Declaring bankruptcy can create more problems.

Certainly an unexpected job loss is a reasonable explanation of why your credit went south.

Many candidates live on a shoestring trying to gain the education and experience to get this job. A couple of 60 days late can be explained if you were between jobs.

One of my candidates had some outstanding bills. In his current background check he told the investigator how he was resolving the problem. The investigator told him if he cleared them, he could go forward in the process. He did. He went forward in the hiring process.

Another candidates credit was not good, but his explanation was he wife had returned to college for her teaching degree. She had recently graduated, got a good paying job and the turn around had been made.

Question: I have a background check in the future. I do not have a criminal record nor have I gotten a

ticket for the last eight years. I did have a credit card company cancel my account due to late payments. This debt was passed over to a credit collection agency which I paid. I also have some late payments with my health insurance. Living in the Silicon Valley can hit your pockets hard ya know what I'm sayin!!! Does this hurt me in any way???

Reply: Again, you know the background is coming up at some time. You want to know what your credit report says about you. More than 30% of credit reports have errors. A recent check on mine revealed addresses I have never lived at, wrong birthday, job experience and some of my sons credit.

Health insurance payments do not show up on credit reports. The best way to find out about your credit is request a free copy from one of the 3 major credit bureaus. Here are the bureaus:

Equifax Credit Information Services

Box 105518

Atlanta, GA 30348

Phone: 877-463-5505 (for Credit Report orders) Phone (800) 685-5000
(for disputes)

Experian

Box 949

Allen, TX 75013-0949

Phone: 888-397-3742 (for Credit Report orders)
Phone (800) 583-4080 (for disputes)

Trans Union Corporation (TUC)

P.O. Box 1000, Chester PA 19022

Phone: (800) 888-4213 (for Credit Report orders)
Phone (800) 916-8800 (for disputes)

If there is anything on your report that is not right, you can dispute it. The disputed company has 30 days to respond. If they don't, they will take it off. Many don't respond. If you still have a problem with an item, you can add a 100 word statement explaining why to your credit report.

Mailing in your application, background info, etc.

Ok – You're testing for a FD. And you need to mail them anything in a timely manner (application, background info., certs, etc..)

Anytime you send something in the mail, you need to use a zip code, right? Here is the secret the post office wish more people knew...

All 5 digit zip codes have a four digit extension that goes on the end. That's right and it takes the post office longer to process your outgoing and incoming mail without it. They have to stop, look it up, punch in the full code, mark it on the letter, then process.

Example- Typical zip code- "91234". With the plus four - 91234-4389. The last four numbers breaks down your street and even what side of the street the mail is to go to.

Basically, it stream lines the process down to the wire. So just by adding those last 4 numbers, your mail (application) will move faster and less likely to get lost. (And we don't want that.)

36. Preliminary Background Questionnaire

So you take an on-line Preliminary Background Questionnaire (PBQ) and when you try to continue it flashes PERMANENT DISQUALIFICATION! or, There Could Be a Delay in Your Background. What happened?

Well, you probably answered correctly or incorrectly yes to a question that had a threshold that was an automatic disqualification. You still might not be out of the woods on some of your answers. They could come back to haunt you later in the process. Make sure you go back and double check your answers. You would be surprised what percentages of candidates are being disqualified from this process.

The Preliminary Background Questionnaire is designed to eliminate candidates early on in the hiring process before they spend lots of time and money on those who they would tank later.

There is no question that candidates should lead their lives as if their future consideration of being hired as a firefighter depended upon it. This is not the first department to include in the background packet that a poly may be used to verify the information you submit.

I get calls on a regular basis from candidates that say the background packed and or investigator told them a poly would be given to verify their information. My first question, "Was it listed on the job announcement that there was going to be a poly?" No. If it was not included in the job announcement and or they are going to give a poly to everyone else, that would be tough to do. It's not uncommon for a background investigator or psychologist to say, "Will you submit to a poly to verify your answers? Or, a poly could or will be given at the end of the process." As of today I'm not aware of any test where the candidates were held hostage with the threat of a poly being given, when it was not included with the job announcement, and they had to take one. Not one. I know of candidates who were turned down and wanted to take a poly to prove they were telling the truth and they couldn't get one because they would have to give it to everyone else. Pinocchio why is your nose is getting longer.

Threshold

So where's the threshold? Did you answer yes to a question on drug use? How many times? Answer yes to a question on how many times you had drank more than the legal limit and drive?

So what do you do?

Learn from you're experience. Before you submit future on-line or hand out printed forms double check your answers for errors and think twice before you step on any land mines that could take you out of the process.

What others are doing?

I finally figured out that if I listed those things that happened in my life a long time ago I could be eliminated from the process. I asked myself if I didn't tell them, how would they find out? Steve

This PBQ nailed me the first time I answered yes that I tried cocaine 3 times 20 years ago. I didn't have a chance to give an explanation as I have had sitting down with a background investigator. Dennis

Last test I filled out the Preliminary Background hand out. I answered yes to the question have you ever had sex with a minor. I was rejected, even though I wrote a half page explanation that I was 18 in high school and my girlfriend was 17. Thinking about it now how would that ever find this out? I'm now 27, no longer live in that state, and have no idea what happened to my girl friend. I can't imagine how they would find her and if they did can't imagine she would tell them out of the blue we had sex when she was at age 17. Andy

Why did I tell them I smoked pot 20 times 10 years ago in England? We're they going to fly over there and find my old friends? Dan

Captain Bob I really enjoy receiving your emails and am looking forward to the LA City application process. My question for you is in regards to the "Bad Stuff on Applications." I have your book and other materials in which it states, "Do not open a can of worms." However, in this email it states that "If you do not include information that is asked on an application and it is found out later, you are out of the process!" Which is the correct way to go?

For instance, I got into a fight as a youth (17 years old) protecting my brother and had to go to court where I was found not guilty and had to perform community service. Since it was almost 10 years ago and I was a minor, is this something I should disclose on the application? That is the only instance where I have any possible mark on my record, including traffic citations (or lack of). Thank you in advance for your time, Rob

Although juvenile records for minors are generally sealed, the question asked if you ever; yes or no? I would put it down. If you put no and it is revealed later, you could be out of the process. This is something that should have no affect on you being hired by a department. What is most important is that you have a reasonable explanation of what happened and the court found you not guilty.

Which is the correct way to go?

Both are covered in the book. First of all what I was referring to is if there is no trail, in other words who can they talk to who would know this information? If there was an arrest, a court appearance and community time there is probably a record of that somewhere. Then why open a can of worms by creating one. Volunteering information that was not requested eliminates way too many candidates.

As one candidate wrote: As for Backgrounds, they tell you to be honest. But sometimes being honest can bite you in the ass. When a Background is being conducted the only obvious things they could find out are things like your driving, criminal and credit history. Don't be stupid and write down references that hate you. I've known some good people that should be fireman/cops but get disqualified for being too honest.

You're a free agent. Make sure you prepare for the hiring process in a way that will best put you in a position for a badge. Steve

I can't tell you what to do. I present the facts and you get to decide.

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37. Beware of the Questionnaire!

When you take the written portion of the psychological test, it sets up a profile. Then interview with the psychologist is to verify the profile and match it to the desired profile to be a firefighter. The wheels can start coming off your wagon during this interview.

Before the interview, the psychologist will often have you fill out a personal family history and additional information form. He can use this information as ammunition to shoot you with. Ironically, the psychologist doesn't always have your background information, or because of time doesn't look at all the information. He relies on the form you fill out. This is why it is so critical that although you want this job so bad, not to create trails where you don't have to.

Unfortunately, if you have a DUI or other mark that can be found you have to put it down. At that point you want to work on a reasonable explanation of what happened, what changed your behavior and who you are now. Practice this explanation with a tape recorder until you have it condensed.

If you have a DUI, it will be a challenge but not impossible to get a fire job. Many psychologists look at any possible addiction to interfere with the pressures of the job. One of our candidates went through drug rehab 5 years ago. Using the above paragraph formula, he passed both the psychological, poly and was hired in Colorado.

If you occasionally drink alcohol and got drunk on your birthday and at a barbecue last summer is one thing. But if you're getting hammered a couple nights a week and on weekends will raise some questions. Please think first if the doctor asks the question how many drinks would you have at a party and still drive home. Anyone who might answer maybe two could send a message that they will drink and drive. No department wants their firefighters being nailed on drunk driving charges. Responsible people arrange for a designated driver

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38. Are Corrective lenses allowed?

Are corrective lenses allowed? I have very mild nearsightedness. I have been wearing contacts for 8 years without any problems. Would I need to get corrective surgery? I have been thinking about it but I am not eligible yet because I am not 25. LAFD says you need 20/40 in the better eye.

Is that with corrected lenses or without?

The NFPA recommendation (NFPA 1001. Specifically, look at 2-2.7.1 "Eyes") was 20/30 corrected and 20/100 uncorrected but it does get waived with soft contacts. Also FYI they did change this recommendation to 20/40 last year so you should be ok. If you have any questions check with NFPA. Also the dept. has to right to set whatever standard they want like some have 20/20 and that's it but most follow NFPA's recommendation.

39. Eye Surgery

These questions below were posted on the PFF Bulletin with the following responses. You can check out more information concerning eye surgery on the Food and Drug Administration web site @ www.fda.gov/CDRH/LASIK

If you're considering eye surgery you should know that more than 5% of patients have problems with night vision, results that don't last and vision worse than before the surgery.

You need to check out the web site www.surgicaleyes.com put up by a firefighter who had the surgery then had to quit because his eyesight fell before safety standards.

What are the current attitudes regarding corneal surgery to correct poor vision? My eyes suck, to speak plainly. I'm considering getting laser eye surgery to correct the problem. Do departments consider that "corrected" eyesight? As in, "Candidate must have no worse than 20/70 vision, uncorrected, in either eye."

In general, do departments consider eyes modified by corneal surgery "corrected" or "uncorrected?" Have any trends been noticed?

I'm just looking for how departments are tending to receive candidates who have had the surgery.

Thanks!

Author: Bill

Subject: Corneal surgery

I can't speak for the fire service generally but I can tell you about my cities' attitude on this subject. As a member of my locals' negotiating, team I participated in securing an eye surgery benefit as part of our last package.

The city agreed that good vision is an important safety issue and that turnout times, (particularly at night) could be enhanced by less reliance on lenses. On that basis they agreed to pay 80% of the cost of corrective surgery for the employee only.

More input:

My personal opinion is go for it. I had RK seven years ago and it was the best money I've ever spent (Lasik wasn't an option then). Another FF on my dept. had the same surgery just after I did. Much later a FF had lasik.

My depts. position on anything of this nature is as long as the doc clears you to come back to work there is no problem. I personally always had concerns about contacts, I felt that I didn't want to put a piece of plastic on my cornea, go interior on something and even have the possibility of having it permanently fused to my eyes.

Beyond the job, just the change it makes in day-to-day living is worth it.

Still more:

Subject: laser surgery

I can't comment on what stand a department may have on surgically corrected vision but I can comment on my own experience. I had Lasix last fall, I was like 20/200 before the procedure, I am now 20/15 in my right eye and 20/18 in my left. It was the best \$3200 I ever spent. I would recommend it to anyone.

Signed Seeing Well

Another:

Subject: Lasik procedure

I had Lasik in June of last year, and it took like charm. I was 20/100 in one eye and 20/150 in the other. Now I am 20/20 in both, best 3600 bucks I spent. No departments have had any problems with my surgery just as long as it was longer than 6 months ago to prove the procedure took.

I was never dqed in any processes, they just told me to come back for re-evaluation at 6 months past surgery, and I still passed at that time too.

Finally:

Author: eyes

Subject: go for it!

There were two guys in my academy (paid-new hires) who had their eyes done. The stipulation was they had to be 6 mo post op. to make sure the correction took. i.e. the lens didn't loose shape after laser surgery. Good luck with your pursuit.

Author: Lori

Subject: Lasik Surgery

I had both of my eyes done on 11/15/99. Both eyes were -11.5 which I believe is the equivalent of 20/1150. Lasik usually isn't performed on eyes worse than -12 (20/1200).

You could say I was an extreme case. The day after the surgery I had 20/30 vision in both eyes and subsequently have improved to 20/25 in each eye. I couldn't be happier -cost: \$3,900. I'd certainly recommend it but would encourage individuals to read up on it, research it and definitely check out more than one doctor who performs the surgery. Good Luck!

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40. Not a Regular Job Interview!

Many regular job and corporate interview candidates like the following are stunned and baffled why they don't have high scores on their firefighter interviews.

Captain Bob:

I just received my oral board score for the City of Glendale. The score did not represent how I felt I did during the interview. This is a big problem for me because I now realize that I DON'T KNOW what the board was looking for. I make presentations for a living, so I felt confident in what I did to prepare. I was sure that I just about nailed it. I've always been competitive about what I set out to accomplish, using every tool that I can utilize to reach my goal. Sir, I would greatly appreciate your training to help me be the best that I can be at the oral boards.

I've been preparing for these orals for months and felt extremely prepared. I don't want to waste another oral board without knowing that I've done all that I can to be the best candidate possible. Thank you for your time Sir.

Regards, Fire Recruit Jeff

Another

Capt. Bob:

After my interview rejection an east coast city last week, I sent a letter to the D/C thanking him for the opportunity and telling him I'd appreciate any feedback from the interview. Well - he was honest - he indicated he wanted me to keep testing & interviewing, but wrote that I:

- talked too much & over answered the questions
- talked too fast
- some of my answers were based on book knowledge (?)

Also - as I mentioned I approached this like I would a corporate interview (BAD IDEA) and I tried to 'close' them at the end - they asked if I had any closing questions (jeez I wish I read your web site before going in) and I opened my big stupid mouth to say 'I kept your rejection letter from last year (I actually showed it to them - this was my second time interviewing) and it mentioned that candidates had failed to prepare and properly sell themselves to the board. I've been working to improve myself in these areas for the past year - have I properly done this?'

The D/C mentioned in his letter back to me that, 'I don't think that showing the letter I mailed out last time was the best thing you could have done. It was as if you were showing it off and showing us that you still had it.' I need to keep my d*mn mouth shut and just answer the questions. Live and learn. I look forward to getting your package. Stay safe Dave

Reply: You're not alone here. You have discovered like many other's that a fire department oral board is different than anything you have encountered. Too many candidates beat their heads against the wall for years getting to the point where you are now.

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41. Oral Board Skills: Are you prepared?

I've been on over 100 oral boards. Believe me too many candidates fall short. They think they can wing it. They have firefighter friends that have given them mock orals. Their friends can't bring themselves to tell them how bad they are. You know other candidates who have all the answers. If they had all the answers, they would already have the badge in a city that paid well.

I know you have been number 3 in Seattle, in the top 5 at Ontario, made the cut on the CPS test, waiting for the next call from LA City, and tested in Portland, Chicago, Stockton, Dade County and passed the tough physical agility test in Phoenix to go onto the oral. If you're a medic, you had the advantage of taking more tests.

You have every degree, certificate and merit badge you can get. A volunteer, paramedic, education, and great experience. But you're still the brides maid. You don't have the badge. The guy you thought was the village idiot went through our program and has his chest all puffed out with a badge.

NO! You're probably not ready. You've been driving and flying all over the country collecting frequent flyer miles, putting careers on hold, ruining relationships, running out of money and hope, and haven't figured out that with all your education and experience . . . the rubber meets the road in the oral board. If you can't pass the Job Interview, You don't get the Job! This is where you putt for dollars. Even golf pros take lessons.

Haven't you been beat up enough yet? We would you like to work with you to turn things around? It's been said that when the student is ready to learn, the teacher appears. Are you at this point now? In the articles to follow, we want to help you shortened the learning curve to the closest point between you and the badge.

Ready? OK, here we go. Keep you hands and feet in side the ride at all times:

What are you actually doing going to an oral board? If you answered: selling yourself, making a good impression, and, yes, don't forget to ask for the job are good. But, what you're really doing is auditioning for the part to be a firefighter, engineer, inspector or officer. Just like the part in a play. Do you know your lines? Do you know your part? If you went down to a local college to audition for a part in the community play, you have to know your part and lines wouldn't you? Right? It's the same thing in an oral board. You have to know what you're going to say before you sit in the chair.

Does a Broadway play start on Broadway? Of course not. It starts in Iowa, Miami or Connecticut. They take it on the road to try it out, work out the script, refine and polish it up. If they create enough interest, sell enough tickets and get great reviews from the critics, they make it to the bright lights of Broadway. It's the same in getting ready for your oral boards. You have to take this puppy on the road to get ready for your oral boards. You have to get your script down. A script about you, not a clone of someone else. Then, you practice, practice, practice. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse until it becomes second nature to you. Once you do this it will be in your subconscious. That's where the magic takes place.

Some will say this will be "canned". No, it sure will be planned though. Success is where preparation meets opportunity. The harder I work, the luckier I get.

Here's how it works:

Dear Captain Bob, My name is Jason and I want to take this time to say, THANK YOU! I recently tested for the City of Denver. The written test was the first step in the process and over 2,100 people showed for the test. As I waited outside the building, I thought to myself, "Do I really have a chance at getting a job here. I have worked in the fire service for the past eight years (7 years as a military firefighter and 1 as a paid in NM).

This was going to be a challenge for myself. I received the results for the written and I passed. Come to find out 1,400 people failed that test. They took 757 people to the oral boards. I didn't fare so well in Colorado Springs oral boards last year. I ranked something like 173 out of 250. That's when I contacted you for advice. After being in the fire service for eight years, I thought I knew everything needed to be hired. Something went wrong and I wanted to know what it was. As you took the time to speak to me you noticed a few things wrong right off the bat. You pointed them out and I never even knew they existed.

I ordered your audio/video tapes right after our conversation. I studied them in and out, used a tape recorder, and practiced, practiced, practiced! I found out quickly what I didn't know. I went to the oral boards prepared. I as I walked in they stated 757 people were going through the boards. I tried to remain positive and just present my package. I was in and out of the interview shortly. I walked to the car and my wife asked how it went. I said, good but I'll find out in two weeks.

Yesterday, I went to the post office to get my mail and there was the letter from the City of Denver. I was too nervous to open it. Finally I decided it was time, my rank was 14th out of 757. I couldn't believe it 14th. WOW my total score on the board was 100.0000%. I ACED IT!!!!!! I immediately called my wife at work with the good news. She cried. So I want to say THANK YOU CAPT. BOB

42. Should I use a tape recorder?

I received a call this morning from one of my candidates. He has made it to a few oral boards and one chief's oral without success. In just a few moments I was aware of something critical. Then I asked him if he were using a tape recorder to practice? Like most people, he hemmed and hawed and finally said, "Well, no. But, I'm thinking about it."

Even though he bought the audio/video tape program that hammers and hammers the point home that you have to use a tape recorder and hear how you sound. He still didn't get the message. His answers were garbage. I don't get it. You folks want this job so bad you say you will do almost anything ethically and morally to get it. I guess that doesn't include using a tape recorder to get your timing, inflection, volume, where to cut out material, and find out if you really sound like Donald Duck. You need to get married to your hand-held tape recorder. You need to hear what the oral board is going to hear from you. It's the closest distance between you and the badge you're looking for!

This is usually a guy thing. Guys think about their answers in their head and write them down. Then they think their answers are going to come out of their mouths like magic in the oral. Trust me, after being on over 100 oral boards, they don't!

Let me tell you how critical this really is. If you're not using a tape recorder to practice, practice, practice, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse and over learn your material until it becomes second nature to you, YOU MIGHT AS WELL NOT SHOW UP FOR THE INTERVIEW. YOU ARE WASTING THE ORAL BOARDS AND YOUR TIME! Seek out another career. Understand you still have to interview there too. The above San Diego candidate has already lost some great opportunities. Had he been faithfully using a tape recorder to prepare for his oral boards, he probably could have had a badge already.

Some will say, "Well, if I practice it too much it will sound canned." NO it won't! It sure will be planned though. Practice makes permanent. "Luck is where preparation meets opportunity." One practice session with a tape recorder is worth 10 speaking out louds. After practicing, you will get to a point where your answers will get into your subconscious. That's where the magic begins. You can't be fooled.

Everyone has butterflies in an oral board. The trick is getting all the butterfly's to fly in the same formation that can make the difference. Practicing will remove up to 75% of the butterflies. You want the other 25% to carry you through the interview.

Be advised that your competition knows the value of using a tape recorder. They are catapulting past you if you're not using one too.

43. What are the 5 nuggets for successful job interviews?

Simple Tools to Uncomplicate the Process

1. The job interview is like auditioning for a play. Do you meet the minimum requirements? You must know your lines for the part.
2. To learn your part, make an outline why you want this position, what you have done to prepare, why do you want to work for this agency, etc. It must be about you; not a clone of someone else.
3. The outline will become your script to audition for the part. Practice, rehearse, and over learn the part with a tape recorder until it becomes second nature to you. This will help prevent stage fright.
4. With tremendous enthusiasm, use your new role to capture the first 32 seconds of your audition. This creates its own energy. Use the six steps in answering the questions.
5. Don't reiterate in your closing. Use only the key points not already covered in your script. Without being boring, tell the interviewers how you really want the job and with your qualifications hope to be considered for the position. Make a cordial ending. Then, shut up and get out the building.

44. What are the 6 steps in answering an oral board question?

You should have a script that you have rehearsed with a tape recorder of anticipated questions by the time of your oral board. At the interview use these six simple steps in answering an oral board question:

1. **Actively listen to the entire question.** I have seen candidates stop listening when they think they already have the answer. They don't. Listen!
2. **Make sure you understand the question.** If not, have the question repeated or rephrased.
3. **Pause and gather your thoughts.** It might seem like an eternity, but pausing is an acceptable tactic to show interviewers you are paying attention. During the pause, you can figure out the root of what they are asking.

4. Ask the question or make the statement to clarify the question. The question might be, "You see your partner pick up something at an emergency scene, what are you going to do?" Taking the question down to its basic form, what is the issue? Stealing. Then, formulate a simple answer. For example, you might say, "I would ask, 'Is that yours?'" The board is going to tell you that he is taking it, but you already scored the points. After asking the question, you determine your partner is stealing, then what do you do? Since stealing is an ethical issue and he won't put it back, you might say, "Why don't we go the our supervisor?" Why? Stealing is against the law.

5. KISS. Keep it simple sweetie. Don't start a soap opera. Most candidates complicate the process. They intellectualize their answers, run past the question, decide an answer before hearing the entire question and fail to understand the process.

When my son, Rob, was interviewing for his entry-level position for a large department, he was asked, "You have just finished your interview and go outside and find a man down on the sidewalk. What would you do?" He answered, "I would go up and say, 'Buddy, are you all right?'" The raters threw Pens and Pencils in the air and said, "Someone finally got the answer right. For three days, job candidates were saying things like "Activate the 9-1-1 system" and "I know CPR."

6. Deliver the Nugget answer with enthusiasm! Your personalized Nugget answer will set you apart from the clones.

A word to women. You have the advantage of bringing more feelings and emotions to your answers at an interview. Be careful can't be like a conversation with your girl friend. You have about 20 minutes to give complete but concise answers. though. I've had women at interviews start talking and it was like going on a journey. There seemed to be no final destination. Most men on the panel were not packed for the trip.

Subject: Another success story

Dear Captain Bob,

I am writing to thank you again for your Oral Interview Program. I sent you an e-mail after my first interview outlining how much your program had improved my presentation. At that time, I mentioned that decisions were not expected until July. To my surprise, 8 days later I received a call from personnel. Could I attend a chief's oral next week!! I was 1 of 30 to be called in for 23 jobs.(The first interviews involved 900 candidates). My first thoughts were "stay on that winning pony". After the chief's oral, the good news kept coming. I got the call 2 days later with a conditional offer of employment! The background and medicals were done the following week. My most recent phone call came yesterday. I heard the words I have been working towards for six years- Congratulations, you have been accepted as a probationary fire fighter!! Uniform and equipment sizing is set for Saturday, can you attend? I can't stress enough how much your program helped me. I will be sure to recommend you to anyone I can.

Thanks again!

Brian

45. What do I wear to a job interview?

I had a candidate tell me he went to an interview wearing a tie, suspenders and no jacket. I asked him, "Who did you think you are, Larry King?" I asked him if they called him back for a chief's interview? No. The defense rests. McFly?

The strongest non-verbal statement you can make in the oral board is what you wear. It is time to step up and make the investment.

Men: Do wear a wool suit in dark blue or gray. Pinstripes are fine, but avoid brown, black, or high fashion brightly colored suits. Sport coats or blazers are out, so is polyester. Tie should be in a solid color such as navy, red, maroon, or yellow stripe, or paisley print. Wear a white or off white, or pale blue long sleeved shirt in cotton or a cotton blend. Starch it no matter what the instructions say. No patterned shirts!

Don't: wear casual or novelty watches, too much jewelry, monograms, religious, political, or fraternity affiliation accessories. Beards are out; mustaches are a gray area. When in doubt, shave it off.

Women: Do wear a tailored business-like suit or dress with a jacket not overly feminine. Choose suits in conservative solid colors such as gray, navy blue, black, beige, or camel with conservative hemlines. Natural fibers, such as wool or linen, are your best bets; most synthetic blends, no matter how attractive, give off a whiff of the bargain basement.

Always wear stockings in natural shades. Avoid dark colors with light colored shoes. Always carry a spare pair.

Don't: Wear anything flamboyant, trendy, faddish, low-cut, too tight or short, or otherwise provocative. You are not trying to make a fashion statement, but trying to get a badge! No heavy perfume, ankle bracelet, stockings with patterns, lace, bold colors, or seams; sandals, very high heels, unusual colors, or casual styles. Ladies: hair up; no bangs falling into your eyes or face.

Don't ever wear slacks, even pantsuits. I had a female who was a paramedic who had been trying for 5 years to get on the fire department. She just missed the cut at Contra Costa County. She was tired of being the bridesmaid. I asked her what she was going to wear.

She said she always wore a pants suit. I convinced her it was time to step up and make the investment. She showed up for coaching in a \$650.00 tailored (Killer) wool suit.

I showed her in 10 minutes on the video the mistakes she was making in her presentations.

She called me two weeks later on her birthday, that she had received her notice that she nailed that job in Oakland. She now has the job of her dreams.

I've been coaching firefighter candidates for over 28 years. You may have great credentials, but if you can't pass the job interview, you don't get the job.

46. Stories make the point

Events like Detroit's Devils Night can be a great example how to use your personal life experiences in answering questions in an oral board. Although the following is from a promotional interview, it might spark a personal experience story you can use in your next oral.

Steve was going for his third engineer's test. Even though he had the knowledge and acting time experience, he hadn't made it high enough on the previous lists to get the badge. When asked questions, he would just give the standard technical answers. Everything changed when he stated caboozing signature stories as part of his answers.

Steve was a firefighter in Arizona. He had also been a firefighter in Detroit. You've heard of Devil's Night during Halloween? Steve had worked many a Devil's Night attacking a fire, picking up and moving to another fire. I asked him if he had ever used these stories in his answers during testing. He said, "No." I marvel why candidates have these great "Nugget" treasure stories that no one has ever heard. These stories can demonstrate their experience and they don't use them.

During his next engineers test, Steve was asked if he were fighting a fire and was given an order to pick up and move, how would he do it? He told the panel how he would do it technically and then took the panel on a Detroit Devil's Night recreating the magic, excitement of the actual events when he had to pick up and move all night. Steve couldn't believe the difference in his testing score. Firefighter's love firefighter stories. He was confident and conversational because he was on his own turf. His signature stories. His own experiences. Oh, by the way, Steve got the badge this time!

47. Miracle oral board tool

Everyone has butterflies in an oral board. The trick is getting all the butterfly's to fly in the same formation. Practicing will remove up to 75% of the butterflies. You want the other 25% to carry you through the interview.

What tools can you use to practice and rehearse your oral board answers? Right, a video camera. You need to see how you look in action. But you are trapped with a video camera. Mirror? Sure standing in front of a mirror is good. But you are missing the most valuable tool of all. A hand held tape recorder.

I received a call from one of our candidates. He has made it to a few oral boards and one chiefs oral without success. He has been invited to the San Diego oral board and wanted to set up a private coaching session. In just a few moments I was aware of something critical. Then I asked him if he was using a tape recorder to practice? Like most people (99.7%), he himmed and hawwwed and finally said, "Well, no. But, I'm thinking about it."

Even though he bought our Entry Level audio/video tape program that hammers and hammers the point home that you have to use a tape recorder and hear how you sound. He still didn't get the message. His answers were garbage. Many applicants want this job so bad they will do almost anything ethically and morally to get it. I guess that doesn't include using a tape recorder to get your timing, inflection, volume, where to cut out material, get rid of the an's uh's and other pause fillers. Or to find out if you really sound like Donald Duck. You need to get married to your hand-held tape recorder. You need to hear what the oral board is going to hear out of your mouth. It's the closest distance between you and the badge you're looking for!

What is the first thing a candidate says when he hears his voice on a tape recorder? Yep. That's not me. Yes it is McFly. You need to get married to a hand held tape recorder and practice with it everywhere you go.

This is usually a guy thing. Guys think about their answers in their head and write them down. Then they think their answers are going to come out of their mouths like magic in the oral. Trust me, after being on over 100 oral boards, they don't! The brain and the mouth don't work that way.

Try this. Take some 3X5 cards and write down your oral board questions. Practice your answer with the tape recorder. If you hear something you do not like when you play it back, turn over the 3X5 card and write it down. The next time you go after that question, turn over the card first and see what you don't want to say.

Let me tell you how critical this really is. If you're not using a tape recorder to practice, practice, practice, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse and over learn your material until it becomes second nature to you, YOU MIGHT AS WELL NOT SHOW UP FOR THE INTERVIEW. YOU ARE WASTING THE ORAL BOARDS AND YOUR TIME! Seek out another career. Understand you still have to interview there too. The above San Diego candidate has already lost some great opportunities. Had he been faithfully using a tape recorder to prepare for his oral boards, he probably could have had a badge already.

Some will say, "Well, if I practice it too much it will sound canned." NO it won't! It sure will be planned though. Practice makes permanent. "Luck is where preparation meeting opportunity." One practice session with a tape recorder is worth 10 speaking out louds. After practicing, you will get to a point where your answers will get into your subconscious. That's where the magic begins. You can't be fooled.

We think practicing with a tape recorder is so important; we will not do private coaching with a candidate if they aren't using one. It is a waste of our time and their money.

48. What can I expect in the final interview?

I am scheduled for my final interview with the board of chiefs next week!

I'm not sure what to expect...my buddy on the job there says I shouldn't worry...I will do fine. Still, can't help to have a little anxiety! Don't know what they'll ask me and all that...

I will know for sure if I have the job after this interview, and could start the academy as soon as the 1st of August!

Any last minute words of advice??

Helpful insight

Even though this is for all of the marbles, don't panic now!

Questions: I am very excited, and very nervous at the same time. You see I just got the phone call for a Chief's oral. Just when I was starting to get familiar with the regular oral interview, it is now time to learn something new! They only gave me a day to prepare. Do you have any pieces of information that might help me? Will the structure be the same?

Should I be studying anything? The city? The organization? IFSTA? Or is this more of a get to know you type of interview? To see how you will fit in. Any advice you might have will help. Thanks for your efforts in helping make people's dreams come true! — Jeff

Many candidates start to panic when they are notified that they are going to a chief's oral. They think they have to reinvent themselves. Reinvent the wheel. WHOOAA! Understand what got you there. You are only going to the Chief's Oral because of the great stuff you already used in the first oral.

You're riding the winning pony. Don't switch ponies. You're coming around the club house turn, you shoot out from the back of the pack, go to the whip, you're on the winning pony, you're friends and family are on their feet in the stands cheering you on and you ride her home for the badge.

Too many candidates switch ponies because "They said". I've never been able to find out who "They" are. If you do not continue to use the good stuff that got you this far, you could drop out of the race. This is a new arena. Candidates who are going to the chief's interview start talking to their friends. They convince them that they need to do something more. By the time of the interview, they're a wreck. It's not them going into the interview. A clone of someone else. The badges are often given to other candidates.

The chief's interview is open to any type of questioning. They are really trying to find out more about you. How you're going to be as a firefighter for the next 25+ years. Do you fit their culture? We like to hire candidates that are themselves on purpose in the interview. Someone who has a personality and is conversational. Are you that person in an interview?

Stan was going to our departments Chief's Oral. He made an appointment to come by our station. While there, he asked what more he could do to make it over the top. I told him he was riding the winning pony and not to switch during the home stretch. Three months later I was down at the training center where they were training new recruits. I saw a familiar face. I said, "Stan is that you?" He said, "Yes, I rode that winning pony all the way in!"

Saddle up and ride to glory.

49. Buttoned

Captain Bob,

I have a question in regards to the interview. I am currently getting ready to graduate the Fire Academy on January 18, 2003. The Academy is conducting mock interviews for the Cadets. I was wondering going into the interview with a suit on, do I unbutton the jacket, leave the jacket buttoned, or remove the jacket and place it on the back of the chair?

I would appreciate it.

Reply:

Good question. Never, ever take your jacket off, even if it is 120 degrees and the panel has theirs off. You are not Larry King. How do you normally wear your jacket buttoned or not? Do it that way. You could go in with it buttoned and then unbutton your jacket after hand shakes but before you sit down. But, you might forget in the excitement of the moment. So, go in the way you would feel most comfortable.

This from Tom:

A while back, I had a hand crew test where the interviews were held within minutes after completion of the agility. The agency expected dripping wet and smelly candidates. I took along my suit and a few towels and I found a hose bib and washed up as best I could.

I put my suit on and went into my interview. As it turned out, the interview panel was most surprised that someone would wear a suit for a hand crew job. Needless to say, I got the job offer!

From time to time, I take classes held at various fire agencies. When those agencies are holding interviews and I am there taking a class, during breaks, I still see numerous candidates showing up in Levis, Dockers and shirts with no ties. No point in shooting yourself in the foot! The moral of the story is ALWAYS wear a suit! Wear a suit for any interview, no matter what the title of the position, unless you have been instructed otherwise. Best wishes.

Then this from Tofu:

There's nothing quite like the look on a candidate's face when he enters the "holding pen" room where everyone waits to be called for their turn to interview, and realizes that he's the only one not wearing a suit.

Don't be that guy.

From Wingnut:

LOL!! I was "that guy"!!

I prepared so hard for my interview that I totally forgot to ask people what to wear. I just assumed slacks and a dress shirt would work. Wearing a suit never even crossed my mind!

Turns out, I was the only one in the waiting room not wearing a suit!! Everyone else was so GQ that I felt like I was sitting in a room full of investment bankers. I could tell everyone was looking at me like there was one less candidate to give them competition.

To make matters worse, my interview was rocky, and one of the captains proceeded to grill me relentlessly, and guffawed at all my responses. In the following two weeks I was convinced I failed. But I got the call in the end! I start soon.

I wouldn't recommend that to anyone. It was definitely a psychological disadvantage to walk into a room full of slick candidates and then have to walk into the interview with an air of confidence. It was even worse waiting for the results thinking that I blew it by not wearing a coat and tie.

Reply from Captain Bob:

Candidates will tell me that I don't have a suit or the money to buy a nice suit for my oral board. My advice - rent one and look and feel like the professional you want to be.

From Anna:

Captain Bob,

You say women should wear a business suit, but not a pantsuit to their oral interviews. What's the difference? During some coaching for interviews with a very 'oral board successful' Captain friend of mine, I was told to never wear a dress to an interview because it makes women appear too feminine. So, I have always worn a black pantsuit to my interviews and people have always said that I have looked very professional. Is it hurting me? Thanks for your help! Anita

Reply:

It's your choice, but I believe it's hurting you. You want to use everything to your advantage. When a woman walks into an oral board wearing a smart business looking dress, it changes the dimension of the interview; trust me.

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

50. Watch Out For the Free Advice

Well, it finally happened; after all these years of hearing things firefighter candidates have said in interviews, that some expert has told them was the right thing to do, I hear it first hand. I was sitting in the office of the fire station where I was working; the engineer's son had a friend testing for our department and he wanted him to talk to our firefighter, the newest guy on.

I'm sitting there, and from the other room I hear him recommend that this guy tell the board that he wants to be a firefighter because the pay is good and there are lots of days off. Now I'm waiting for them to laugh, and tell him they're kidding. It doesn't happen. The engineer has been on for 26 years, and hasn't had an interview for 19 years. The new guy was a lateral medic, and didn't have much of an entry interview. So I can see how this poor guy can be thinking, he's in a fire station for the department he's testing for, and he's got a guy with many years on, and a guy who was the last one hired. He must be getting the straight scoop. He was getting the exact opposite. He had signed up for the "How To Fail An Oral Board" class, and he didn't know it.

As I walked into the room, I couldn't let this go, the new guy was telling him that a good weakness to share with the board is that you're a perfectionist. Now I've worked around perfectionists and it's no walk in the park, they think they don't do anything right, and neither do you.

The candidate was Hispanic, and I asked him if he spoke Spanish. He told me he spoke a little and could understand a little more. I asked him if that might not be his weakness, that while he spoke some Spanish, it needed improvement. He bought some language tapes on the way home from the station, so he could demonstrate he was doing something to fix the problem.

Now I find myself arguing with the new guy about what the best response is to why you want to be a firefighter. His theory was the board really wants to know why you want to be a firefighter. Trust me on this one, We Don't Care if you like the hours, pay, and status the job will bring you. You need to tailor your responses to match what the board is looking for, not what you feel, save that for your girlfriend. But you can take those things that motivated you to become a firefighter, and make a beautiful response to this question, and then it's your story.

I worked with this same guy, the expert new guy, again the other day. I mentioned to him that I thought his responses were about the worst I'd heard. He said, "Yeah, I've always been lousy at oral interviews." I asked him why he was giving advice and he said, "Well, everyone keeps sending people to me because I'm the new guy, so I figured I'd try to help." I told him he was, if anything hurting their chances, not helping, and he agreed.

Know this. There are people out there who know they're bad, but will still give you advice because you asked.

51. What do I wear to the polygraph?

Tom had a hand crew test where the interviews were held within minutes after completion of the agility. The agency expected dripping wet and smelly candidates to interview. He took along a suit and a few towels and found a hose bib and washed up as best he could.

Tom put his suit on and went into the interview. As it turned out, the interview panel was surprised that someone would wear a suit for a hand crew job. Needless to say, he got the job offer!

Tom said, "From time to time, I take classes held at various fire agencies. When those agencies are holding interviews and I am taking a class, during breaks, I still see numerous candidates showing up in Levis, Dockers and shirts with no ties. No point in shooting yourself in the foot! The moral of the story is ALWAYS wear a suit!

Wear a suit for any interview, no matter what the title of the position, unless you have been instructed otherwise."

There's nothing quite like the look on a candidate's face when he enters the "holding pen" room where everyone waits to be called for their turn to interview, and realizes that he's the only one not wearing a suit.

Don't be that guy.

I was "that guy"!! I prepared so hard for my interview that I totally forgot to ask people what to wear. I just assumed slacks and a dress shirt would work. Wearing a suit never even crossed my mind! Turns out, I was the only one in the waiting room not wearing a suit!! Everyone else was so GQ that I felt like I was sitting in a room full of investment bankers. I could tell everyone was looking at me like there was one less candidate to give him or her competition.

To make matters worse, my interview was rocky, and one of the captains proceeded to grill me relentlessly, and guffawed at all my responses. In the following two weeks I was convinced I failed. But I got the call in the end! I start soon.

I wouldn't recommend that to anyone. It was definitely a psychological disadvantage to walk into a room full of slick candidates and then have to walk into the interview with an air of confidence. It was even worse waiting for the results thinking that I blew it by not wearing a coat and tie.

Reply: Candidates will tell me that I don't have a suit or the money to by a nice suit for my oral board. My advice. Rent one and look and feel like the professional you want to be.

"Nothing counts 'til you have the badge . . . Nothing!"

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their

dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

Do not, repeat, DO NOT go to your polygraph without first getting the program from www.polygraph.com.

This program covers both poly and VSA.

52. My Polygraph results were inconclusive

Inconclusive Results

Often candidates are eliminated through the poly with inconclusive results. Not that you failed, but it's the same as you did. Why is that? You didn't fail and you didn't pass? Your results were inconclusive. You still don't go forward in the hiring process. I think the problem again is candidates need to prepare for the poly the same as with any segment of the hiring process.

Randy had the same problem. He took the poly and the evaluator eliminated him with inconclusive results based on his use of pot within the last five years. He swore he had not. Yea, right you say, but that's his story.

So, Randy jumps on the Internet and found www.polygraph.com and www.passapolygraph.com He educated himself on what to expect. He took a poly for another agency and passes with flying colors even that inconclusive area about pot. He's been a great firefighter and just got promoted to engineer.

Do not, repeat, DO NOT go to your polygraph without first getting the program from www.polygraph.com.

This program covers both poly and VSA.

53. What do I do next after failing the polygraph test??

The first time I ever had contact and talked to Scott was 45 minutes after he got the call that he had failed his poly. Needless to say he was devastated. When I asked him what he had done to prepare for his polygraph he said he used the free information from some of the "experts" on this forum. Using those guidelines he said he went in and spilled his guts, just like going to confession.

Just a few minutes into our conversation he realized that he had become too familiar with the evaluator, got chatty, volunteered too much beyond what was requested, was really nervous but thought everything was going just great.

Scott wrote:

The next test I take, I assure you, I will be better prepared.

I believe Scott is only referring to understanding the process better. I'm a firm believer in preparing for every step in the hiring process before you get there.

According to Doug Williamson a 35-year veteran polygraph evaluator from www.polygraph.com "It is a very serious mistake to believe that you will pass your polygraph or CVSA tests just because you are telling the truth - they are not "lie detectors". Scientific research proves that simple nervousness will cause a truthful person to fail!"

I talked to Scott after he checked out polygraph.com. He realized he had not been as prepared as he could have been before his polygraph. If he had it to do over again he would have been better prepared in understanding the process before his evaluation and could have had a better opportunity of passing without compromising his truthfulness as others are referring to here.

Being prepared for every step of the hiring process before you show up will place you in a better position to end up wearing a badge than being caught flat footed wondering what happened when the career you have been intensely pursuing evaporates before you eyes.

I recently had a polygraph and it was the most stressful three hours I've had in a long time. I took Captain Bob's advice and learned about the polygraph and the process to be better prepared. We as candidates prepare for written, physical agility tests and interviews and making it to this stage of the hiring process is the exception. Why would a person not want to be as prepared as possible? I found the information I learned to be extremely beneficial and I was more at ease during the test than I would have been if I wasn't educated on the polygraph. I also feel that the person who administers the test has a lot to do with the results. I was lucky and had a competent operator. I would recommend to any candidate to learn as much as they could about the polygraph.

"Nothing counts 'til you have the badge . . . Nothing!"

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

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This program covers both poly and VSA.

54. Are Polygraph Tests Lying to Us?

This article is from the Baltimore Sun. It should give you an insight to the polygraph dilemma:

Tests: Mixed reading of Lee's nuclear secret data, federal employee opposition to taking lie detectors 'reignite' 80-year-old controversy.

When physicist Wen Ho Lee first denied leaking U.S. nuclear secrets to the Chinese, authorities from the Department of Energy in 1998 wired him to a polygraph to see if he was lying.

The Los Alamos National Laboratory scientist passed.

But when a polygraph expert from the FBI looked at the same test results later, he concluded that Lee had not told the truth.

How could the same lie detector test lead investigators to exactly opposite conclusions?

The case of Lee, who eventually pleaded guilty to one felony count of mishandling classified information, has left law enforcement experts trying to answer the same fundamental questions that

have existed since the invention of the lie detector 80 years ago: Does the polygraph actually work? And is it fair?

"It's reignited this smoldering controversy," says Steven Aftergood, a senior research analyst with the Federation of American Scientists in Washington. In an essay being published today in the journal *Science*, Aftergood argues that a new federal policy requiring nearly 20,000 employees of the national nuclear weapons laboratories to take lie detector tests is having undesirable effects.

The policy has lowered morale, Aftergood writes, and caused some of the nation's most gifted scientists to leave, and made it harder for the labs to recruit talented young researchers for the weapons programs. The use of the polygraph, he writes, "symbolizes the defeat of reason by the national security state."

Despite such criticisms, the use of the polygraph test is on the rise.

Congress banned private industry's use of lie detectors as a condition of employment in 1988, but they are routinely used for employee screening at the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and local police departments around the country. The percentage of law enforcement agencies using polygraphs for this purpose rose from 16 percent in 1962 to 62 percent in 1999, according to a survey by Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice.

There's also a growing market for polygraphs outside law enforcement. The American Polygraph Association, the largest polygraph accrediting and licensing organization in the country, reports that its membership has risen past 2,000 and is continuing to grow.

Private polygraph examiners handle everything from fishing tournaments to divorce cases. Winners of the annual Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament in Morehead City, N.C., for example, must submit to a polygraph before collecting any prize money (to make sure they haven't stuffed rocks in the gut of their prize catch).

Lie detectors aren't designed to detect lies as much as the subtle physical changes that may occur when a person tells a lie. The word "polygraph" means "many writings," and that is what the polygraph machine produces: lots of squiggly lines on a scrolling piece of paper.

The test works like this: A subject is seated in a chair. Two rubber belts are wrapped around his chest and stomach to measure breathing patterns. A blood pressure cuff is wrapped around an arm. A metal plate attached to the fingers measures sweat gland activity.

The polygraph examiner then asks the person a series of questions. Some of the queries are "control" questions unrelated to the matter under investigation but establish a base line of the person's blood pressure, respiration and perspiration. Other questions directly address the actions under scrutiny.

The examiner interprets the person's physiological response to each of the questions, as recorded on scrolling paper, to judge whether the person is lying. And thus the uncertainty about polygraph results: they are a matter of judgment. "There's no red light or siren that comes on when the person lies," says Milton O. "Skip" Webb Jr., president of the American Polygraph Association.

The roots of the modern lie detector stretch back to antiquity. Like modern methods, early techniques to ferret out lies often relied on the behavior exhibited by liars - sweaty palms, dry mouth, shifting gaze, racing

pulse.

In China, for example, suspected liars were fed a handful of dry rice. If they could spit it out, the thinking went, they were telling the truth. If the rice stuck to their tongue, they must have something to hide.

The modern quest to detect liars using technology began with Cesare Lombroso, an Italian criminologist who in 1895 published a book called "The Criminal Man" in which he described his efforts using an early instrument to measure changes in blood pressure to determine whether several criminal suspects had lied.

In 1915, Harvard psychologist William Moulton Marston picked up on these early studies and devised a primitive lie detector based on blood pressure. According to psychologist and polygraph historian David Lykken, it was Marston, a colorful P.T. Barnum-like character, who was among the first to realize the lie detector's commercial possibilities.

In 1938, Look magazine described how Marston sometimes used his lie detection techniques in marital counseling. He also showed up in full-page ads testifying to the close shave offered by Gillette razors: "New Facts about Shaving Revealed by Lie Detector!" (Using the pen name "Charles Moulton," Marston would also invent the comic strip character Wonder Woman, whose magic lasso could force those held to tell the truth.)

But John A. Larson, a Berkeley, Calif., police officer, is the person generally credited with inventing the modern polygraph machine. In 1921, Larson, who eventually became a doctor, devised an instrument that could simultaneously record blood pressure, pulse and respiration. Later tinkerers improved upon Larson's design by adding sensors to measure perspiration.

Over the years scientists have tried to determine whether the polygraph actually works. But accurate studies are hard to do. "The science is not solid," says Aftergood, in part because investigators can rarely learn independently whether a subject who passed a polygraph test was indeed telling the truth.

In some studies, volunteers are recruited to be pretend criminals and then subjected to a lie detector test. But the results of such work, critics argue, don't mimic reality. "It's impossible to make the stakes as high in an experiment as they are in real life," says Aftergood.

Still, proponents of the polygraph argue the device is accurate in better than 90 percent of cases, and note that it's not uncommon for other types of test results to be open to interpretation.

"Your doctor can have you take a chest X-ray and say, 'I don't see anything.' Then he sends it over to a radiologist and the radiologist finds something the first doctor doesn't see," says Webb. "Happens all the time."

But enough guilty people have slipped past the polygraph to have given law enforcement officials pause. Most federal and state courts do not allow polygraph results to be entered as evidence.

CIA employee Aldrich Ames, for example, passed lie detector tests despite selling U.S. secrets to the

Russians

for more than eight years. There's also a mini-industry of Internet sites and books such as "Deception Detection:

Winning the Polygraph Game" that purport to teach people how to beat the test.

"College students with 15 minutes of explanation can beat the lie detector," says David Lykken, a retired psychologist from the University of Minnesota. "Anybody who is working as a spy has been taught how to beat the polygraph." The advertised techniques range from curling one's toes to biting one's tongue during control questions to mislead the examiner.

Still, even critics of the polygraph acknowledge that it has led to admissions of guilt that they might not otherwise have gotten.

"The polygraph itself functions as a prop more than anything else," says Aftergood. "Yet, there are cases every year in which the prop works."

By Michael Stroh

Sun Staff

Originally published Nov 3 2000

55. Getting Passed Over?

Captain Bob,

I was one month from being hired for a notable fire department in Washington when I received a letter stating the I was NOT recommended for hire. I had taken the medical, psych, and turned in the background packet. I had been interviewed by the background investigator, with the opportunity to answer any questions about my background. I had even been fitted for turnouts! I received the letter and have been struggling to find out why. Let me give you a little background with me and this department.

I worked on their city ambulance, in the fire station for over two years with NO disciplinary actions for misconduct. I work for them as an administration Reserve Firefighter, after I had already passed my Chief's interview. The Captain calling all my references was one of my Station Captains while I was on the ambulance. So when I was failed out you can imagine my shock. No one could give me any answers. H.R. told me to call the two-division chiefs in charge of the hiring process. I called, left 3 messages with no response. I called the Captain that I had worked with and all he could say was that he could not say, on or off the record. Finally I called and left a message with THE Chief of the department. His representative called back and said that it was not my psych, nor my medical, and that something or a combination of things is why I was not recommended for hire. He said he could be specific. I want to know what recourse I have in finding out what it was that failed me. I don't want to keep running into the same wall with future departments. What do you recommend I do? The background was not that extensive. Just employment, friends/coworkers, old roommates, driving record (totally clean), nothing major. Any direction you could send me in the better. Thank you Kevin

Reply:

I'm sorry. Unfortunately there is nothing you can do to reverse what has taken place when you are in background or on probation. What ever the reason or reasons (you may really never find out) you did not meet the standards or culture of the department. Having the opportunity to be around a department, on an ambulance or a volunteer, where they can get to know you does not always work

in your favor. I know some great volunteers who are still grasping onto the dream that they will still be hired. But they have stayed too long at the fair and don't have a prayer of seeing a badge. They would have been better off testing as an unknown walk on. It's tough being a prophet in your own town.

You can become too familiar with the department and the personnel and unknowingly overstep the bounds. If you have not already established a natural bridge to be accepted some firefighters, without you knowing it, will react by tanking you. Yep, just like a bunch of old ladies. You will never know what happened.

“No good deed goes unpunished.”

New rookies can often make fatal errors in trying to be accepted or try to impress their fellow firefighters. They forget they are snotty nose rookies. You need to keep your mouth shut, be cordial, friendly and humble. You have no time or opinion until you earn it. You can't force it. That will come with a lot of calls and a few fires.

As Captain Paul Lepore so accurately put it:

Even if he or she is successful in the academy setting their true colors will come out during the probationary period. The firefighters in the station have a unique way of weeding out those that may not belong.

My best advice is to take a step back, lick your wounds, take responsibility for what happened, regroup and try testing for other departments. If you have been let go in probation or fired by a department, it will be difficult but not impossible to find a better fit; especially if you are a medic.

More:

Understand that the best way to get hired is to place yourself in a position where they can't go around you. If you have the attitude that the system is against you, that you are being passed over because of minority and women being hired, you are psyching yourself out.

If you have this attitude in your mind and your heart, it will be difficult to get hired. Because this will show in the oral board. It will show when you start to squirm during your answers on cultural diversity. Especially if there is a woman on your oral board panel. I've seen guys with great credentials get tanked here. Women have that sixth sense that can smell out a phony.

Haven't you noticed this in your relationships?

You can continue to piss and moan and focus on other reasons why you think you don't have the badge. In reality there is only one person keeping you from getting the badge . . . Believe it or not . . . It's you!

Stop looking in a magnifying glass at others' and start looking in the mirror at yourself.

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

56. Questions concerning strengths and weaknesses

First, I'm having some difficulty with the strengths/weaknesses question. I have come up with my strengths as being a very loyal person, very good integrity (I believe this is a HUGE character trait and live by it), a very hard working, dependable person that can bring a very positive attitude and work ethic to the department.

Now, for my weaknesses. I am by NO means a perfect person, I honestly do realize this, and it's not something I'm "psyching" myself up to think this way. But I'm at a jam for what to use as my low points. I have not had a very good driving past, however it is just that... a past. My last citation was just over 4 years ago, and I have not even been stopped much less ticketed since. I credit this to me deciding for myself, that this is crazy and I need to change my ways. Well I did that and it has definitely shown. Would this be a good choice to say?

Another I can name is my credit history. It's not great. On the flip-side of this, I am not in debt very much. (\$1500-\$1700). I know it's not petty cash, but I think it's a low amount to work at. I have also contacted a consolidation business to try and work out a plan with the companies to resolve all of it. Good to use or no?

I have never smoked a cigarette, try any drug whatsoever, and have a drink *very rarely*. That's the lifestyle and choice that I have been brought up and have chosen to continue on that way. Should I use this as a strong point?

I have written down in my notes, as maybe an answer to "why do you want to work at this dept?", that (at the risk of sounding clone-ish) this is my dream department... it is the only one that I have applied to since 2 weeks before finishing the fire academy.

This is without a doubt the department that I want to be a firefighter at. Keep in mind I have a little more to say to that question, this is just the point that I'm asking for some advice with. Is that something I should say? Should I just cross that out all together?

Another kind of broad question I have... rather than spelling out all of my answers that I have rehearsed, could someone shed some light on some of the more cliché answers (or clones as I have learned) that people tend to lose control of their interviews with? I don't think that I have used any in my answers; I would just like to see what some others' opinions are.

That's my big questions for now, I truly do appreciate the advice that you all take the time to give. It's a huge help when I'm trying to put together a "knock-out" interview.

Helpful insight

Now to my specific question(s)...

First, I'm having some difficulty with the strengths/weaknesses question. I have come up with my strengths as being a very loyal person, very good integrity (I believe this is a HUGE character trait and live by it), a very hard working, dependable person that can bring a very positive attitude and work ethic to the department.

Reply: Good

Now, for my weaknesses. I am by NO means a perfect person, I honestly do realize this, and it's not something I'm "psyching" myself up to think this way. But I'm at a jam for what to use as my low points. I have not had a very good driving past, however it is just that... a past. My last citation was just over 4 years ago, and I have not even been stopped much less ticketed since. I credit this to me deciding for myself, that this is crazy and I need to change my ways. Well I did that and it has definitely shown. Would this be a good choice to say?

Reply: No. This would only open a can of worms.

Another I can name is my credit history. It's not great. On the flip-side of this, I am not in debt very much. (\$1500-\$1700). I know it's not petty cash, but I think it's a low amount to work at. I have also contacted a consolidation business to try and work out a plan with the companies to resolve all of it. Good to use or no?

Reply: Nope. Another can of worms. Oh, yea this is the guy we want to hire who can't handle his finances and is already under the care of a consolidation company.

I have never smoked a cigarette, try any drug whatsoever, and have a drink very rarely. That's the lifestyle and choice that I have been brought up and have chosen to continue on that way. Should I use this as a strong point?

Reply: Why?

I have written down in my notes, as maybe an answer to "why do you want to work at this dept?", that (at the risk of sounding clone-ish) this is my dream department... it is the only one that I have applied to since 2 weeks before finishing the fire academy.

Reply: Clone

This is without a doubt the department that I want to be a firefighter at. Keep in mind I have a little more to say to that question, this is just the point that I'm asking for some advice with. Is that something I should say? Should I just cross that out all together?

Reply: Are you using a tape recorder to practice?

Another kind of broad question I have... rather than spelling out all of my answers that I have rehearsed, could someone shed some light on some of the more cliché answers (or clones as I have learned) that people tend to lose control of their interviews with? I don't think that I have used any in my answers; I would just like to see what some others' opinions are.

Reply: I'm not convinced that you're not already a clone like too many others. That's the problem. Most candidates don't realize it until it's too late.

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57. I have a Class C Misdemeanor Charge. What should I do?

I recently received a Class C Misdemeanor for Issuance of bad checks (2) that I used at the same place at the same time, the first check was for gas & the second was for a \$1.10 Powerade I bought after I went back in. It was totally unintentional just some lack of balancing my checkbook on my part. To make a long story short these checks were dated back in Nov. 2003 and just recently I found out about them. I had two warrants out for my arrest. I went to the Municipal Court, paid in full so I could get the warrants off my record. After paying, they told me that this is considered a Class C Misdemeanor. Will this ruin my chances on a background? Has anybody been hired with this charge/conviction on their record before? I've worked so hard to get where I'm at and still working. I've completed my B.S. degree in Fire Management, 2 A.A.S. degrees, EMT-I (attending medic school), currently a fire instructor at a DoD Fire Academy and volunteering for a local Volunteer Fire Dept. I've learned my lesson and am also planning on attending a check balancing class; I just hope this doesn't hurt me later. Any comments or suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Thank You.

Answer:

While I understand bouncing a check now and then (everyone has done it, myself included), I find it hard to comprehend how you never knew about it. The bank certainly would have sent you a letter. There is a \$25 bounced check fee (X2). I think there may be more to the story.

I would respectfully suggest you rethink what happened. Background investigators are skeptical by nature. I have a feeling you will have a difficult time explaining how you never knew. There are too many checks and balances (no pun intended) to notify someone when a check has bounced.

As a business owner I can tell you that the business did not try to run your check through on only one occasion.

58. What if I had a Domestic Violence Charge?

I have an issue that I am struggling with. When I was 18, I pushed my live in girlfriend down resulting in me getting a misdemeanor Domestic Violence charge. This was 6 years ago. Since then I was granted a 1203.4, dismissing my case.

I am always forthcoming about this and I disclose it on every application. It always comes up in my Captain's interview, although it has not affected me because during my captain's interviews, the captains always thank me for my complete honesty and candor, and I have even had captains tell me that they admire the fact that I have overcome that situation.

Here's the problem.

I have made it to a chief's interview my last 6 testing processes, and I am not hired yet.

I am convinced it is because every time during my chief's interview this comes up. Even though the chief(s) tell me this does not affect my chances of getting hired in any way, and again they tell me how much they appreciate my honesty and how they admire me, GUESS WHAT, they don't hire me.

Because I keep making the top 10 but not getting hired I am thinking of not disclosing the information on my applications, because, SUPPOSEDLY, a 1203.4 means you do not have to admit to a conviction.

I have talked with a background investigator who told me that not disclosing such a fact regardless of a 1203.4 would result in my removal from the process and that honesty is OF COURSE always the best policy.

SO, can anyone out there help me sort this out. DO you really think I am not getting hired because I have a conviction? I am just over reacting, and maybe I am close but it is just not my time? Should I not disclose the conviction anymore and wait till a background, and HOPE and PRAY they don't consider this LIEING?

Thank you to anyone who replies!

Answers:

You need to put it down because they will find it. Even if you have something dismissed it will show up as a dismissal. Check your record, and see how it shows up, it may not even be a problem.

That may not be the problem. I have worked with people in the past that had something they thought was holding them back, and that was not necessarily the problem.

The problem was two fold. First they were doing well enough to get to the chief's, but not well enough to get past it. Second, they were holding that problem in the back of their heads and it was affecting their performance. Some of them felt a great need to discuss this problem at every turn, and while people respected their honesty, they were bringing it up when it wasn't appropriate. For example, if you are in an interview and bring it into the discussion, it seems odd. As long as you have disclosed it where you were supposed to, you needn't worry about any other part of the interview. Usually things like that don't come to a head until the background interview.

Another Answer

Something to maybe take into consideration is this: Are you able to give a full circle explanation when discussing the situation? Without knowing all the details of what played out after the incident ['this is what I did and they dismissed my case'] OR did you go enroll in anger management-type classes to help curb your anger outbursts? Did you consider possibly going to speak at group settings [schools, help groups] regarding the topic at hand?

This is who I was, the event, the outcome, acknowledging your shortcoming, actually doing something about it [which shows you are accepting responsibility for your mistake and did something about it], and who you are/what you are doing now. That would be a full circle response into that unfortunate event.

Like Rob mentioned, it might not be the incident at all, but could be the " last straw " in a series of things in your background.

Lastly, is it possible to still hired after this event? Yes. Will it be easy? No, but it is possible. Distance will be your friend in this situation. Hope this helps.

Another Helpful Answer

This can be a tough one. It has been my experience with candidates that a domestic violence charge can be as tough as a DUI or worst. No chief wants one of their sworn members bringing light on their

department with this behavior.

What many candidates don't understand is if the police show up on a domestic violence incident someone is going to jail. Once you've been arrested, even if the charge is dropped or expunged the arrest can still show up on your record and you have to explain it.

Where it can cause you big problems is in a psych test. The psychologist would have some direct questions that if you can't answer, you're toast.

59. Reckless driving citations

Well I have a question that hopefully someone here can answer. I want to get a reckless driving ticket off my record. Here are the details. I got the ticket my freshmen year in college, I was driving home for Christmas break at 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. in the morning on I5 in California. Anyone who's driven it knows the thing is for the most part a straight shot when you're in central California. And at that time in the morning, there's no one else on the road so I didn't realize how fast I was going because I wasn't passing everyone. I was just blasting the music to stay awake. How my Dodge Dakota pickup reached 102 mph, I don't know. I just saw the red flashing lights behind me, looked down at my speed and was speechless. I apologized to the officer and begged, but he wouldn't write me up for anything less than 100+. So at that speed (30 mph over the speed limit), it's reckless driving. I paid the fine and did everything correctly with the court. Now I work at an ambulance company as an EMT, but I can't drive the ambulance because of that ticket. I'm about three months shy of having a totally clean driving record for 4 years. That ticket is actually the only thing that is on my record at all. Is there any way to get this ticket off my record? Can I go to a judge and argue my case? The other reason to get it removed is that I'm looking to join a volunteer fire department and that ticket will most likely restrict me from any driving that I might otherwise have the potential to do there.

Helpful insight...

Life is all about accountability and taking responsibility for one's actions. We have all made mistakes. Lord knows I have made some HUGE ones. Where we lose credibility is when we do not accept responsibility for our actions.

I have cut and pasted a couple of your quotes below.

"I didn't realize how fast I was going because I wasn't passing everyone."

One can understand someone getting up to 80 or even 85 miles per hour. By the time the officer caught up to you and you looked at your speedometer you, by your own admission, stated you were going 103. Simply put; from the time it took for the officer to track you, light you up, you to realize he was behind you, and to look at your speedometer means that you traveled at this speed for a period of time.

"How my Dodge Dakota pickup reached 102 mph I don't know,"

I am confident that that old truck was rattling and shaking down the road. Again, it's hard to believe that you didn't know.

"Can I go to a judge and argue my case?"

What are you going to argue? Are you going to say that you didn't do it? Are you going to say the sentence was unfair? Or, are you going to say that this infraction is keeping you from something that YOU want?

I'm not passing judgment on your driving, rather the fact that you are not owning up to your actions.

We all make choices in life. In this case, your choice has come with consequences that are now affecting your career choice.

Society has much more respect for people who stand up and say they made a mistake. We have all done things that we would NEVER repeat, however, we are still accountable for our actions.

Bill Clinton and Martha Stewart are both recent examples of people who did not take responsibility for their actions.

Paul Lepore, Battalion Chief
Author

60. Phone Messages

Many aspiring firefighters live together with their friends to cut down on expenses and help pay for their education (paramedic, etc.)

We recently conducted a prep class in which an opening occurred and we called the first person on the waiting list. The message on the phone was "you have reached the house of Tim, Jim and Steve, we are unable to answer the phone because we are sitting around drinking beer and doing shots of Crown royal. Leave your name and number and where we met you and how drunk we were when we met you."

It might seem funny but, if that message was on the phone when a department called to bring you in for an oral interview or even a job offer what do you think the officer would do!!! That also goes for cell phone messages.

Our thanks go out to Capt Bob Smith for his article and insight. For more information on his book, [Becoming a Firefighter: The Complete Guide to Your Badge](#), and his entry level DVD/CD oral interview program that has helped thousands of individuals to get the job of their dreams (included in the Ultimate Firefighter Examination Prep Package), go to our entry level fireman test products page. Good luck!!

61. I am at a Loss of What to do Here

Q. I have been a volunteer firefighter for 3 years now. I only began seeking employment as a career firefighter 1 year ago so that I could finish my Bachelor's Degree. I have never had any problem passing written and physical exams, but am getting eliminated after oral boards. I am at a loss of what to do here. I feel that when I walk into the room, I am well prepared for my interview. Just recently though, I was thrown for a loop by a new oral board question I had never heard before. It was a series of question but I only had 30 seconds to respond. After that, I was cut off and read the next question. These questions ranged from how do you feel about working for a female lieutenant, to tell us what you know about our department. I fear that I lost points here because I could not get everything I knew out of my mouth in 30 seconds. I have studied everything about the departments

that I am interviewing with, yet still seem to fall short to get called back for further testing. Can anyone give me some advice on what I need to do to improve myself in this area? I would really appreciate it,

A. You're not alone here. Many tell me they felt like they have hit a wall and don't know what to do next.

This from oral board rater David White
Fire Captain/EMS Coordinator
Culver City Fire Department

I have sat as a rater on many, many oral boards. Sometimes a candidate will have good answers but the answers don't seem to be sincere. What I mean is that the answers don't seem to fit the candidate. Raters will hear the same canned answers over and over again. Sincerity (your words and feelings) is a dimension that though hard to quantify definitely comes into play when evaluated. Do your answers jive with your demeanor and application/resume?

There will always be a question you were not expecting. This is not deliberate - it just is. Know this from the start and don't be surprised when it happens. All raters have seen a candidate that was surprised by a certain question go into a high speed wobble and never recover.

If there are conditions to a question (30 seconds to answer a series) you are expected to meet them. You need to adapt. Be flexible and adapt. The answers need to be brief enough to meet the time allotted. If you don't then you will not score as well as those who did. Dave

As one candidate wrote:

I didn't realize how incredibly dead in the water I was until I realized that what I thought was unique in my oral boards was truly another fine example of a clone candidate.

Sadly, I know that there are thousands of other candidates shooting themselves in the foot, being difficult on themselves, telling themselves that they aren't cut out for the job because they've tested so many places and keep getting low on the list...or not getting on the list at all.

I FINALLY figured it out and got a job in a busy, full-time mid western town. All of my dreams have instantly come true. Paul

The secret is to personalize your answers so they represent you not a canned clone answer of someone else that's not you.

A. I'm assuming you are practicing with a tape recorder as Rob suggested.

It is unusual to have a format of answering a series of questions in 30 seconds. But if you had your base line of answers down you could easily condense the high points down to 30 seconds. What too many candidates do is try to answer the questions with a blue print when we just need a sketch. Try to give us a dump truck when we just need a trailer.

Yes, you can plan on being asked curve ball questions. It's sad to see candidates die a slow death when this happens. Often, it's a question you already have an answer for but it is disguised in one of a hundred different ways. Being able to remove the disguise, know what the question relates to, delivering your answer and a personalized life experience story of how you have already lived it.

You should seriously consider getting a coaching session. More on coaching here

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62. Creating Trails

I can't believe what many candidates reveal! Candidates often call me after going to an oral board, doing background checks or psychological interviews. They are concerned by some information have given. Often it is related to something from their past.

My first question is who besides you knows this? Who could they contact that could tell them this information? The usual answer is no one. This is my point.

Why do so many candidates create a trail that could open a can of worms keeping them from getting the job of their dreams? Especially if the department is not giving a polygraph test. Many feel they have to be honest to a fault to get this job. Candidates tell me, "They were hammering so hard I felt I had to give them something." Please spare me this part. Think twice before creating a trail that probably no one can find. Especially if it doesn't make any difference.

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Volunteering Information

A doctor who interviews a candidate that is open, honest, forthcoming, has common sense, and answers all questions probably considers them as O.K. But, many candidates want this job so bad that they will do almost anything to get it. I have been told what candidates have said during their interviews. I've asked, "How did you get these people to say that?" The answer was, we just asked them and they volunteered the information. Before you volunteer information, think before you speak. Present your ideas clearly. Don't ramble or chat. Be articulate. This is how you're going to be in the field. Believe it or not this is part of the job interview. You are making an impression of who you are going to be as a firefighter. Make sure you dress up and don't slouch. Be prepared to audition for the part of being a firefighter. Know your strong points. Be prepared to demonstrate you are a team player.

One of our candidates was going to a chiefs oral. He knew one of the questions was going to be, "Is there anything we should know about?" He wanted to say something about being eliminated from hiring by another department, because his polygraph was questionable about previous marijuana use. My question was, "What do you think your chances are of being considered by this department if you said that?" Not good was the reply.

My advice was this was not the time to bring something like that up. If anytime, it would be in the background check. Don't create a trail that might not be found. He didn't bring it up. It never came up with the background investigator. A polygraph was not given. I saw him receive his badge. This candidate was hired again by the department he really wanted to work for even after taking another polygraph. I witnessed that badge pinning too. The defense rests!

The following is from the 1832 badge in our program:

Hi Capt. Bob. I just wanted to let you know that I purchased your video some time back prior to Testing for a Colorado Fire Department. On August 8, 1999, I started the fire academy. I was one of 14 people out of 541 who tested. I think a lot of what helped me was the tapes I got from you. I have tested all over the country during the past 5 years and always came close but never got the "call ". I went in to the interview with a lot more confidence than in the past, and it worked! Well. Thanks again. Steve

Captain Bob's reply:

Half of the 14 candidates in that hiring were our candidates. How did they do it without all sounding like clones? We taught them to use their personal life experience!

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63. Getting Down to the Short Strokes

I get a sinking feeling and my heart goes out to those who call and say, what can I do now after they get eliminated once they get a conditional job offer. My question is why didn't you call me before you went on to the next step? Often the answer is well things were going so good I didn't think I needed any help.

One of those calls came from Scott asking if he had failed the poly would another department be able to find out about it? Why do you ask? Well, I got this call last week if I could come in the next day for the poly. Sure I could. Then things didn't go so well. Like what? Well, I copped to some things that did not have to and shouldn't have (Often, it can be what you say before or after you're hooked up to the poly that can take you out). I asked him why he didn't call me when he found out he was going in the next day? Well, things happened so fast, I didn't have time. I told him, you have enough time to call me now.

Just because you got a job offer doesn't mean you will get the badge! There are a lot of land mines that you need to prepare for when you get down to the short strokes after getting a conditional job offer. The badge is there. There is only one person that's going to keep you from getting it. It's you! Take it one step at a time.

It's more difficult to try and fight your way back in than being prepared before you take the next step for the psych interview, background, polygraph, and medical to gain a badge.

Bill had a job offer from the same department as Scott above. He called expecting an offer concerned about an investigation on a previous job that could cause him problems. We talked it out. Bottom line, he had a letter from the police department that he had been cleared after the investigation. He still had to put it down on the background investigation. That was landmine hurdle number one.

Bill called concerned as he left his poly. Even though he had been cleared the poly showed a strong reaction in this area. I asked him if he had brought the file on this situation with him? He forgot, but could get it faxed in 15 minutes. He went back in to show the poly investigator once he had the file. The investigator told him his file had gone on to HR.

I asked Bill if he knew who his contact was in HR? Yea. He tried to call her. No answer. Do you know where she is? Not really. But I think it's in the same building where I took the poly because it's the same phone prefix number. I could hear a voice in the background. I asked Bill if he had brought his wife Janice. Yes, Janice drove up with me. OK, take the file and your wife in and find your contact. I heard Janice in the background say, "I'm not dressed right. I'm wearing a sweat shirt." No worry. Just get in there.

Thirty-minutes later Bill called. They had gone into HR and asked for his contact. When Kathy came to the counter, she already knew what had happened. Bill presented the file. Then like magic it was like old home week between the HR contact Kathy and his wife Janice. He couldn't believe it. I told him that's why I wanted Janice to go in with you. You know how it is. Your wife or friend goes to the ladies room. Time passes. When she comes out all the ladies who were in the bathroom are now friends.

Kathy told him, "We'll get back to you." At 4:00 p.m., Bill called. Kathy called to invite him to the psych the next morning. I replied, "Yes, yes, yes! You dodged a bullet." He said, I still don't know if I passed the poly. Bill, they wouldn't be sending you on to the psych if you hadn't passed the poly! Be prepared though that this incident where you had been investigated will be on the front burner. Practice your answer with a tape recorder until it comes out sounding right. If the psychologist wants to expand the questioning on this issue, just be the broken record repeating your original answer.

Friday, 2:00 p.m. Bill called saying you were right, that issue was brought up. When I gave my reply to the incident the second time, the psychologist had a long pause and then moved on to the next question. I asked Bill how long the interview was with the psychologist? Fifteen minutes. Anything other big issues stump you? No. Well, Bill, it's my experience with an interview that short you passed. Welcome to the fire service.

Friday, 4:30 p.m. The phone rings. It's Bill. Hey, I've just been invited to an orientation with my wife next week. What does that mean? It means you better start packing and looking for a place to live. Enjoy your weekend.

This is just one story. Four more candidates who went through our program, were also helped through this departments hiring maze were at the orientation will Bill. I had placed some that were further along in this process with those who were behind them to give them a little more heads up on what to expect. Each with a different story, but they all made it. They were all EMT's that were hired to be paramedic interns. They're all in medic school now.

I love what I do.

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64. Have You Ever?

Captain Smith, After going through your program and a coaching session with your son, I am currently in backgrounds with 2 departments in Southern California and on the lists of 4 others. The background investigators for those two departments told me that they will both have psychological evaluations and one will have a polygraph. I want to make sure that I am prepared for these last phases prior to hiring. Your son suggested I call you for advice.

Thanks, Randy

After you have jumped through all the flaming hoops you don't want to be caught flat-footed for the remaining steps in the hiring process. It's 3rd down and 2 yards to go for the badge. You want to convert. You want to convert every step of this process the first time through the line, or you could be thrown for a loss, thrown in the penalty box, out of the game, and trying to fight your way back in.

You can spin this anyway you want. But ask yourself if you would you show up without preparing for the written? Not in shape for the physical agility? Have you discovered you just can't wing the oral? Then, why doesn't it make since to prepare for the remaining portions of the hiring process, the background, psych, poly and medical?

Don't be so naive to believe by the 4 inches between your ears you have an explanation that everything in your past will be overlooked, especially if it's something you weren't required to reveal in the first place. If you do, you might still believe in the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Come on in said the spider to the fly. Don't take the bait! It's not the department but the background investigators and the psychologist that could take you out. These people are not your friends. They are experts being paid to eliminate you from the process. The deck is stacked against you before you show up.

I get the calls when the background has not gone right for too many candidates. The first words out of their mouth when I pick up the phone is usually, "What do I do now?" I ask them two questions. First, were you honest to a fault leaving not rock unturned? Did you volunteer information that you were not required to give? They usually answer yes to both. Than that's probably why you failed. The defense rests.

A candidate just called and said the background investigator told him a poly would be given to verify his information. My first question, "Was it listed on the job announcement that there was going to be a poly? No. If it was not included in the job announcement and or they are going to give a poly to everyone else, that's BS. It's not uncommon for a background investigator or psychologist to say, "Will you submit to a poly to verify your answers? Or, a poly could or will be given at the end of the process." Are they ying? Yep. Wait a minute, I thought everyone was not suppose to tell the truth here? I'm not aware of any test where the candidates were held hostage with the threat of a poly being given, when it was not included with the job announcement, and they had to take one. I know of candidates who were turned down and wanted to take a poly to prove they were telling the truth and they couldn't get one because they would have to give it to everyone else.

They often say, I didn't think what I told them was any big deal, but some of those little things that I really didn't have to talk about amounted to causing me big problems in the process. As one

candidate said, "Hey, I'm not a bad guy. But I volunteered a little something here and then there. By the time they got done with me, they made me look like Charles Manson! "

I had a chance to work with a psychologist in preparing our Conquer the Psychological Interview Special Report. I couldn't believe some of the answers candidates tossed out in their interview with the psychologist. When I asked the psychologist how did you get them to say that? He smiled and said, "We just asked them." Wouldn't you want to be prepared so you wouldn't just blurt out something you were not required to say? Here is a segment of that report:

"Psychologists are given more power than they should," says Robert Thomas Flint, Ph.D., who sometimes did re-evaluations of potential peace officers and firefighters who have failed psychological tests. Although he tends to agree 40-50% of the original decisions were valid, he finds that another 30-50% of the rejected candidates are acceptable and can handle the job.

The psychological test is changing the fire service. Sure there are some folks who have a lot of baggage and shouldn't be hired. But most of the red-hot's, the backbone of the fire service, can't make it through the process. Surprisingly, the evaluations are based on the performance of those already in the fire service.

More and more agencies are using the psychological test in their hiring process. Psychologists are competing for this lucrative business and agencies feel they need this service to hire the right candidates. In one large department forty-percent of candidates were eliminated from the hiring process through the psychological tests. Fire administrations feel their hands are tied and get frustrated when they see that a high percentage of their superior candidates who were eliminated by their physiological test are being hired by other agencies. If the psych is so important why is it not used at all in Canada? Some departments who have been using the psych have stopped because of the candidates it was delivering.

Dr. Flint feels that the PhD has been watered down, i.e., many of graduates in the last ten years, and the psychologist too often paint by the numbers and disqualify a person because they might have an unusual background. These psychologists do not have an adequate background in the statistics and the research necessary to be fully competent in the use of tests with unusual populations. That is, they are trained in identifying problems in the general population but are less skilled in the identifying the strengths in special groups such as firefighters. They also tend to have difficulty incorporating unusual backgrounds into their reports. But, don't a higher percentage of those with a burning desire for this job fall into these categories?

Much of the problem falls on the cities themselves for not having control of the guidelines that the psychologists are using. Left on their own, psychologists will use their own devices to decide what to do, and this is not always related to the department's needs. If the guidelines are not well defined by the agency, then the psychologist might wash the candidate out for reasons not job relevant.

A large bay area city was a perfect example of this process. A member of personnel and a fire recruiter teamed up to upgrade the selection process and add the polygraph. Because of the cost of living this city was already pulling their hair out trying to recruit candidates, particularly medics. This new system only made the problem worst. Forty-two percent of the medic candidates and half the lateral candidates failed. Many of these candidates went on to pass other backgrounds, psych and yes, polys. In a conversation with the recruiter at an exhibition I said you sure are losing a lot of candidates. His reply with a sneer was, not the right candidates. Well, with a new fire chief, personnel director and firefighter recruiter they are trying to put the pieces back together.

According to Dr. Flint, too much emphasis is placed on the paper and pencil test. He feels strongly that unusual test scores should be evaluated in the light of the candidate's history. Very young candidates 21-25 often do not have enough history to refute problems suggested on the test. All candidates believe of course that they can handle the job, that they can meet any challenges, that they will hold up well at emergencies. The psychologist's job is to determine, as closely as possible whether those beliefs are sound. To give someone the benefit of the doubt maybe endangering them or someone else.

If a candidate can demonstrate that he has overcome areas of conflict that the written test reveals and his early history demonstrates, then the test interpretation should reflect that fact. The paper score then should be thrown out, not the candidate.

Those who are critical about what we are saying here probably have never gone through our program and usually don't have a clue what we do. I want candidates to be prepared for each step of the hiring process, where the land mines are and understand the ramifications of the information they present in the process.

You have spent all this time gaining education, experience and training to get this job. You finally get a shot at the badge. You get a conditional job offer. You're ecstatic. You call family and friends. You meet with the background investigator. You think he's your pal. You go for your psych. No big deal right? Then a letter arrives from the department withdrawing their job offer. You're stunned! There has to be a mistake. You want to talk to someone. You had the explanation you knew they would accept. No one will talk to you. You're out of the process. The reason? You walked in flat-footed not prepared for the remaining segments of the hiring process.

As one candidate wrote: As for Backgrounds; they tell you to be honest. But sometimes being honest can bite you in the ass. When a Background is being conducted the only obvious things they could find out are things like your driving, criminal and credit history. Don't be stupid and write down references that hate you. I've known some good people that should be fireman/cops but get disqualified for being too honest.

You're a free agent. Make sure you prepare for the hiring process in a way that will best put you in a position for a badge.

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65. Can you follow directions?

I have a friend who just coordinated a testing process for a department in Orange County. They were amazed at the amount of applications they received. The way they were able to cut the number in half was to specify on their job flyer that they wanted proof of driver's license, EMT card etc. The directions instructed the candidates to put them in a certain order.

Roughly one half of the applicants could not follow directions and were eliminated from the process. While candidates complained, the directions were very clear.

Ironically, two departments in Orange County followed the same template. What a simple, yet effective way to get the numbers down to a manageable level.

In our profession it is important that candidates be able to follow directions. This is a simple exercise in being able to do what you are instructed to do.

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