

The following are entry level articles by Capt. Steve Prziborowski:

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SO, YOU WANT TO BECOME A FIREFIGHTER PART 1

On one hand, becoming a firefighter is not an easy task. On the other hand, it is not impossible or out of reach to become a firefighter, if you have properly prepared yourself. Remember, life is about choices. Only you can make the difference in your life and what you make of your life.

Becoming a firefighter is something that many people start out pursuing. Unfortunately the majority of those people probably never achieve their dream of becoming a full-time, paid firefighter. Why is that? I believe there are many reasons why people never achieve that dream, and I plan to discuss those reasons so that you can never find yourself in the position of saying, "If only I had tried harder, if only I had not done that stupid thing that prevented me from getting hired, if only I had better prepared myself; I might have become a firefighter." The list goes on and on.

Why do some people that set out to become a firefighter, never achieve that dream?

Here are the top 5 reasons I believe that keep people from obtaining their dream of becoming a firefighter:

- It never truly is a dream
- They do not take the hiring process seriously
- They are unable to admit their own weaknesses or take constructive criticism
- They continue to make excuses why they are not getting hired
- They give up

Let me now go into some details on each of the above reasons, so that you can hopefully prevent yourself from being in that position someday.

Reason #1: It never truly is a dream.

To become a firefighter, nobody says that you have to have wanted to become one since you were a little child. While that makes for an interesting story during an oral interview, it is something that is almost unrealistic.. I bet every department has excellent firefighters that only became interested in the career while they were in their adult years and learned of the position after hearing about what a firefighter does from a friend or relative, or from a firefighter at a recruitment drive. What I am getting at is that I believe it doesn't matter how long you have wanted to become a firefighter; what matters is how serious you are about becoming a firefighter, and how much you make that into a dream. Anyone that has a passion for something and is able to show their enthusiasm and sincerity, is going to have a better chance at succeeding than someone who is just going through the motions, or not taking every day as an opportunity to get closer to achieving their dream.

Reason #2: They do not take the process seriously.

Becoming a firefighter is not something you can expect to become when you only take a couple of tests per year, when you do not make the attempt at updating your resume at last once a month, or when you do not live, eat, and breathe the entire process. I believe it is a full-time job just getting a firefighter position. You truly need to be in it for the long haul. When candidates first start out, they usually appear to be very motivated. At some point, many of them get sidetracked and lose their focus. They find a significant other. Their significant other they presently have is not prepared for what they are actually getting themselves into, having to wait a few years for you to get hired. They find out it is not what they truly want to do. They get discouraged after taking a couple of tests and not doing so well. They find it difficult to get the necessary education and experience to succeed due to family commitments. The list goes on and on.

You must be continuously be thinking about creative ways to improve your resume on a monthly basis; whether it is obtaining another certificate, performing more volunteer community service hours, or completing another fire related class. Live, eat, and breathe the entire process. Those that take the process very seriously, and make a sincere and dedicated effort at becoming a firefighter, stand an excellent chance when compared to those that do not make the effort to learn everything they can about the field they want to get into and spend the rest of their lives doing.

Reason #3: They are unable to admit their own weaknesses or take constructive criticism

Irregardless of what your mother might tell you, we all have weaknesses (including yourself). That is why we are human beings. We are not perfect. As soon as you admit that and start becoming aware of your weaknesses and the areas that need improving, you are showing your maturity and ability to grow – both personally and professionally.

Start taking accountability and responsibility for yourself in everything you do, including when you are in the process of becoming a firefighter. This includes knowing and admitting to your weaknesses and shortcomings. If you always think you are the one that is correct and do not need to change the way you are doing something, approaching something, or interacting with someone, then you will limit yourself in regards to personal development and career

development.

If you are not able to take constructive criticism during the hiring process, how are you going to succeed as a firefighter? Being a firefighter subjects someone to criticism their entire career; during the academy, during probation, during the promotional process, as a firefighter, as an officer, as a public servant, etc. Like it or not, we are in the public eye and are always subject to criticism. If you cannot take it now, and learn from your mistakes and correct your weaknesses, how are you ever going to grow, mature, and better yourself as a fire service professional?

Remember, if something isn't working the first time, how many times do you have to do the same thing over and over again before you realize you might need to move on to plan b, or plan c? I know it is one thing to try something that doesn't work the first time, and then try it a second time. After about the third time, you need to step back, regroup and look at some alternatives. I am amazed at the people that just keep on doing the same things (without trying something different), and then wonder why they are not getting hired. "If it isn't broken, don't fix it," is a phrase you should be thinking of. If you're not getting hired, then you need to fix something or change something, or just try something different (because something is broken)!

Reason #4: They continue to make excuses why they are not getting hired.

While on vacation this year down in Southern California, I met a guy who was working at this fire museum as a volunteer while also working as a paid-call firefighter and trying to become a full-time paid firefighter. We started talking about the local big-city department. I had asked him if he worked for that department since he was working in their museum. He told me no. After a little conversation, he started making excuses about why he had not been hired there. He started going into how the department had "lowered their standards," had hired "unqualified individuals who didn't deserve to be hired," and then went on how he was "getting passed over and discriminated against because he was a white male." Out of curiosity, I asked him why he thought he was better than those candidates who had been hired. He went on to say how he was a Firefighter-1, he was an EMT, he had been a volunteer and paid-call firefighter for almost six years, that he had paid his dues, and so on.

Now ten years ago, I might have actually had some sympathy for him. Instead, I asked him, "Have you thought of going to paramedic school?" He said he shouldn't have to. I then asked him if he spoke a second language. He said no. I then asked him what he had done volunteering in his community besides firefighting. He said nothing. I asked him what his short range, medium range, and long range goals were in regards to becoming a firefighter, of which he answered "I'll keep on plugging away until I get the job, somebody will eventually hire me." Now I don't know about you, but I don't want to go through life without a specific game plan of what to do or a road map of how to get there. Will he ever get hired? Good question. Maybe he will get lucky; maybe he will never achieve that dream. Until he changes his way of thinking and stops making excuses for what he cannot do as opposed to making plans for what he can do, he will probably not get too far.

Reason #5: They give up.

Remember, once you give up at something – you never have the chance to find out if you ever could have accomplished what you originally set out to accomplish. How long does it take to become a firefighter? There is no set formula or time frame. What works for one person, might not work for another. I truly believe there is a firefighter position for everyone out there who does not give up at obtaining their dream. Some might get the badge on the first test while others might have to take 50 to 100 tests. Some might only spend less than a year at the process, while others might take 3 to 7 years to become a firefighter. If you put 100% into becoming a firefighter, and make it a full time process by living, eating, and breathing your dream, then your odds get better and you might have a chance of obtaining that badge in 2 to 5 years (which I think is about the average time frame it takes to get hired in today's job market – assuming you are putting everything you have into becoming a firefighter).

A friend of mine was recently hired by a neighboring department. He had been testing for 13 years! Could he have been hired earlier? Of course he could have. He had just fallen into the trap of feeling sorry for himself, not believing in himself, and committing some of the other nine reasons why people never achieve their dream. While he got his dream job, had he stuck to a plan and maybe been more serious about the overall process, he would have obtained his badge many years ago and not had to deal with all of the stress of not achieving his dream.

Candidates ask me what are their chances of actually getting hired. I tell them it is not a simple answer. No one can guarantee their getting hired. However, if they never give up and they continue preparing themselves in every possible way, continue improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities every chance they have, and keep focused, they stand a really good chance at getting hired. Does everyone get hired? No. But those that stick it out stand the best chance. I've know many people that have been hired after having tested for over ten years. I've never known anyone to get hired once they gave up their dream and stopped trying to become a firefighter.

If you truly believe that becoming a firefighter is a dream of yours, then by all means pursuit that dream! Many people talk the talk, but how many actually walk the walk? It is not easy becoming a firefighter. However, if you realize that you must be in this for the long haul, that it might take you a few years, that it is a full-time job just becoming a firefighter, and that you need to not find yourself falling into one of the top 5 reasons why people never achieve their dream of becoming a firefighter, I sincerely believe you will be on your way to achieving your dream!

SO, YOU WANT TO BE FIREFIGHTER PART 2

Getting hired as a firefighter is not a simple process. It is not as easy as going down to your local fire station, filling out an application, and getting told to report to duty the next day. While that may have occurred in some departments many years ago, it doesn't quite work that way today. It actually can take a great deal of research to find out which fire departments are accepting applications, and what their testing process entails. Becoming a firefighter is not easy, but if you spend some quality time researching the position and the entire testing process, your chances should increase greatly at obtaining that badge you have been coveting.

When I started taking firefighter tests, I figured all I had to do was keep my eyes on the Sunday newspaper and subscribe to one of the services that send you postcards when departments are testing. That was a good start; however, I soon learned there was more to it than that. While there are many people that just do those two things (which are actually good things to be doing, don't get me wrong), I think you can greatly increase your chances by searching or investigating as many (if not all) of the following things as you can:

1. **Newspapers:** Over the last ten years, I bet I have seen less than 100 fire departments actually listing their job openings in the local newspapers. Because of that reason, don't spend all of your time just waiting for a position to appear in the paper. If a fire department is going to advertise, it will usually be in the Sunday paper of a major city. If you go to the local public library on Monday morning, you can usually find many of the major nationwide newspapers there to view, free of charge. Another place to check for major city newspapers is large newsstands and major bookstore chains, which carry a large variety of newspapers and magazines.
2. **Internet subscription services:** There are numerous subscription services available on the internet that will provide nationwide testing information for under \$100.00 per year. Not a bad investment when you think of it. I suggest not relying on just one service, but to subscribe to multiple services. I used to subscribe to two different services and found out the true value to having not one service, but two. Some services find out testing information before the others do, and vice-versa. Originally I had only subscribed to just one service. After talking with friends that subscribed to different services, I discovered that each service had their own benefits to offer, and that they complemented each other.
3. **Firehouse.com website Jobs section and firecareers.com :** In addition to the above internet subscription services, here is another valuable service that promises to advertise positions nationwide while also giving valuable information in the way of articles from various fire service professionals around the country.
4. **Networking:** By having a network of friends that are all taking firefighter tests, you will hopefully hear of a testing opportunity and then pass it on to the others. If you know of a testing opportunity, share it with your friends. You will then hope they do the same for you at some point. Remember, you're competing against the other candidates in some capacity, but

you only truly compete against yourself. You are the one that has to perform throughout all phases of the hiring process.

When I was testing, there was a group of about four of us that were doing as much as we could to better prepare ourselves for becoming firefighters. We would share information, trade off commuting to tests, commuting to visit fire stations, commuting to classes, etc. Besides gaining quality friends that will hopefully last a life time, we were all benefiting by learning something from each of us, based on our successes and failures.

5. Taking fire courses at the local community college or seminars offered through fire associations: Most, if not all of the fire instructors are still working in the fire service. Many of them are aware of testing opportunities and share them with the classes. You also get a chance to network with other candidates, and best of all, increase your education level while adding something beneficial to your resume. Many of the Fire Technology programs have bulletin boards that post jobs or training opportunities that you can view.

6. Fire trade publication classified sections: Fire service trade publications, such as Firehouse Magazine, occasionally have entry-level firefighter positions advertised. Subscribing to many of these publications not only educates you on the past, present, and future of the fire service, but also exposes you to any available positions that might be advertised.

7. City or County Human Resource / Personnel Offices: Many people are not aware that the fire department themselves are usually not the one that puts on a firefighter examination. It is usually the city or county human resource or personnel office. The names "human resource" and "personnel office" are usually synonymous. Every city and county has an office with either name that handles the testing for all of the city or county agencies within that jurisdiction such as the fire department, law enforcement, public works, recreational services, etc.

The fire department usually informs the human resources (H.R.) / personnel office that they need to hold a firefighter exam and then it is usually scheduled around all of the other examinations that are occurring.

8. Fire Departments: Besides contacting H.R. / Personnel departments, you should be contacting each fire department individually. Why? Because some fire departments like the one I work for don't utilize the County Personnel department for testing. We have a Personnel Services Manager who is in charge of testing and recruitment. That is probably a unique situation you will encounter. Most fire departments utilize the HR / Personnel offices for testing. It gets back to always having a back-up plan. Don't rely solely on the information you were given by the H.R. / Personnel office. Things can change at the drop of a hat. As soon as I got off of the phone with the H.R. / Personnel office, I would contact the fire department themselves to see if I received similar information or conflicting information. Either way, I would thank the individuals for their assistance after taking down the information they provided to my questions.

While all of the above mentioned items are all of value when it comes to finding out who is testing, contacting each human resources / personnel office AND fire department directly is

probably your best method of finding out who is testing!

Remember what I talked about in part 1: You must be in control of your own destiny! Don't expect to rely on others for information! If you do, you might miss out on that important test you have been waiting for!

While all of the above items are extremely important at assisting you in finding out which fire departments are currently testing, I sincerely believe the most important item is to do your own research and actually be proactive in your search. All of the above items, with the exception of # 7 & #8, directly contacting the human resource / personnel office and the fire department, are being reactive. Why? Because you are sitting back, waiting for someone to give you some information. That is not necessarily bad, just not the way you should go about achieving your dream of becoming a firefighter.

I think of items 1 through 6 as "back-up plans" to assist you in finding positions. Back up plans are necessary for almost everything we do in life, especially when it comes to achieving the dream of becoming a firefighter. I think of it the same as being similar to you making a copy of that important document (such as a job application), backing up that computer file that keeps your resume handy and up to date, or just keeping various financial records, documents, or valuables in a safety deposit box away from your residence.

I discuss how you can be proactive in your research at finding out which fire departments are testing, and what specific information you should be obtaining when you are performing your research. Go to "how do I find out what departments are testing"

To better organize all of this information you are going to be soon obtaining, I recommend getting a binder with some blank paper. This will be the storage location for the information that you obtain during your research. If you are extremely computer literate, then by all means feel free to develop a spread sheet or data base of some form or fashion. However, I prefer the binder because you can keep it with you at all times since it is portable. Future articles will go into other items that you can carry with you inside the binder to assist you with achieving your dream of becoming a firefighter!

Keep on believing in yourself and your abilities and don't lose focus on your most important goal – becoming a full-time paid firefighter! There is a badge out there with your name on it. No one is going to hand it to you or lead you to it. It is up to you to go out there and find it. If you don't, somebody else will!

YOU WANT TO BECOME A FIREFIGHTER - SHOULD YOU BECOME A PARAMEDIC?

Becoming a firefighter is not an easy task. Thousands of people lined up to take a test for a fire department that was only going to have a couple of job openings over the life of the list (if even that sometimes). I remember it so clearly. 3,000 people for one job. 5,000 people for 10 jobs, 4,000 people just so a fire department can establish a hiring list (but with no anticipation of hiring anyone). The list goes on and on. It was very intimidating at first seeing all of those people lined up and realizing I had to compete against all of them. It took me a while to figure it

out, but I eventually did: I wasn't competing against them, I was competing against myself! I had nobody to blame except for myself if I did not get hired.

It did not take long to realize that those departments that were requiring candidates to be licensed as a paramedic (which more and more departments were starting to do in the early 1990's), even in the Bay Area, were getting less than 100 applicants every time they tested! Some departments were getting less than 50 applicants, and some as few as 10 to 20 applicants! If I really wanted to increase my odds of getting hired as a firefighter, I needed to become a paramedic.

When I began the process of becoming a firefighter, most of the firefighters I talked to all advised me to just go to the community college that has the fire technology program, and then get your EMT and your Firefighter 1 academy certificates and that should be all you need to get hired. Well, I soon found out that what worked had for them when they got hired, was probably not going to work for me; I was going to do that and more! When a buddy of mine graduated with our four-year degrees from the local State University, we knew we wanted to become firefighters and started to draw out our plan of action after having conversations with various firefighters.

We knew that we would have to get our EMT certificate and Firefighter 1 certificate as soon as possible, so that we would be able to take more entry-level firefighter examinations (since that is what many of the Bay Area agencies were requiring to test). We knew we would also need to get our two-year degrees in Fire Technology as well, to help show our commitment to the fire service as well as our motivation. Our four year degrees were something we were proud of, but we also knew that some candidates did not have that level of education and we did not want to stand out too much and be considered as "over-educated" college boys that wanted to go straight to fire chief after probation.

That is why we knew we also had to get our two year degrees in Fire Technology. We also knew that if we didn't get hired after receiving our EMT and Firefighter 1 academy certificates that we better bite the bullet and go to paramedic school. Obviously we were taking every test we qualified for and hoping we could get hired without becoming a paramedic. Not that we didn't want to become paramedics, we didn't want to endure another year or more of intense schooling. Don't get me wrong, it's not that we mind running EMS calls, however given the choice, I think we both would rather fight fire than run EMS calls (and that is probably true for many candidates that end up going to paramedic school).

This is where the problem begins for many future paramedic students. Many of them (like myself) go into paramedic school thinking it will be a quick and easy ticket into the fire service. Yes and no. Yes, your odds will greatly increase at getting into the fire service because you are a paramedic. No, because many students that go into paramedic school know that it is an easy ticket and do it just to become firefighters. I was one of those people. I went to paramedic school to become a firefighter. I will admit it.

However I soon realized that I wasn't going to get spoon fed the information and that I was going to have to work at becoming a paramedic. When it was all said and done, I still feel that

paramedic school was tougher than going through and completing my four-year degree at California State University at Hayward! It was especially tough because I did not have a lot of experience working as an EMT to fall back on. I had no past experience working on an ambulance and I think it really hurt me and made me work harder than I probably should have. It makes sense now, when I look back at the situation: how did I expect to be a good paramedic, if I had never learned to become an excellent EMT? We're taught to crawl, and then walk. It was like an amateur athlete competing in a triathlon without ever becoming an excellent swimmer, bicyclist, and or runner! Think of paramedic school the same way. Did I complete it? Yes; but it wasn't easy.

When I started paramedic school it dawned on my very quickly that I had to become a paramedic because I wanted to become a paramedic, not because I wanted to become a firefighter. I had to acknowledge that while my ultimate long-term goal was to become a firefighter, for my short and medium range goals, I needed to work at being the best paramedic I could be. After talking to many paramedics and nurses that work in the field as preceptors in both hospitals and on ambulances, I started to realize that there was a significant failure rate when going through paramedic school, and that many of the students failed during the field internship phase.

Further investigation led me to understand why students were failing. Many of them had never worked as an EMT, and/or on an ambulance! Besides not having the prior experience, paramedic students were also at a disadvantage because many of the preceptors were sick and tired of students becoming paramedics just to become firefighters. They wanted people to be like they were when they were going to paramedic school, which was working at becoming the best paramedic they could be when they ultimately worked for the private ambulance company (because that is where most of the paramedic jobs were). In some ways, I can't blame the preceptors for not wanting to take students without EMT experience, or being even harder on them for not having EMT experience.

I had started out in paramedic school like many students probably do. I had thought I could "skate" through the class work, get the license, get on a fire department, and do what I had to do to get by until the ambulance arrived or I didn't have to be a paramedic anymore. Reality soon set in after talking to many working firefighter / paramedics and private ambulance paramedics that advised me that I better become a paramedic because I want to, not because I have to. There was too much at risk if I didn't have my heart into it. It did not take much to lose your paramedic license (versus your EMT certificate); giving the wrong medication, not giving any medication, giving too much medication, not placing the Endotracheal tube in the right place, and the list goes on and on. All of those things could lead to losing my license. Well, I'm not a genius, but I did see that if I did not complete paramedic school, or lost my paramedic license because of one of those above mentioned items, I would probably never, never, get another job as a paramedic or firefighter. I didn't like that thought. There is too much liability and at stake for a paramedic to be doing what they do if their heart and soul is not into it.

Also, I started seeing that many fire departments required their paramedics to be paramedics for a set number of years: 3 years, 5 years, 10 years, their entire career, until they promote,

etc. I had to take a long look at the situation. Could I be a paramedic and be miserable at it for the next 30 years (because I did it just to become a firefighter) or could I make the best of it and embrace it and make the best of it? I chose to make the best of it and embrace it philosophy and I am glad I did. If I truly wanted to be a firefighter, but I had to be a paramedic for my entire career? Yes; because my ultimate goal was to be a firefighter. Not everyone is willing to make that commitment.

One preceptor told me, "When you start your field internship, you should be able to hit the ground running as a safe EMT, and a beginning paramedic. I first test you on your basic EMT skills to confirm your competency, and then let you start adding your paramedic skills. The last thing I want to be doing on your first few shifts is to be teaching you how to use a gurney or how to use your EMT skills that you had never used before (outside of the classroom). That takes up valuable training time that we don't have to spare." I couldn't agree with him more. Because of the glut of EMT students without experience, I could see how many of the preceptors were getting frustrated, not wanting to take students without experience, not wanting to pass them because they weren't even competent EMT's, and how students were failing their internships.

I didn't want to be one of those students! I had too much invested in becoming a firefighter to let this happen. I think I could have eventually been hired as a firefighter had I not completed paramedic school. However, I do know it would have taken me a lot longer than it actually did.

Here is how becoming a paramedic (and attempting to be the best paramedic I could be) worked for me. I took the test for the department I presently work for twice (once every two years). Both times, there were about 3,000 people testing for about 10 or so jobs. Both times, the department held a random lottery to reduce the numbers. Both times I was not selected in that random lottery. Both times, the department hired a fair amount of volunteers. Then, a miracle (for me) happened. The department was planning on providing paramedic services and needed to hire 11 paramedics. I got a letter in the mail one day stating that information, but I figured I didn't have a chance because I wasn't a volunteer there and because they were probably still going to have a lottery. Boy was I wrong. I found out there were less than 100 applicants that had even kept their contact information current and bothered to send copies of their paramedic licenses in.

They invited us to go to a physical ability test (because all original 3,000 or so had taken the written examination a year or so prior), and then if we were successful in that phase, to an oral interview. I still wasn't getting my hopes up. That was until I showed up at the physical ability test and found out there was about 70 candidates that had showed up. I further found out a few days later that only 60 went to the oral interviews. 60 people for 11 spots? Got to love those odds! I especially loved those odds since I was one of those lucky 11 individuals to go to the recruit academy. All because I had made the effort and sacrifices to go through paramedic school. Yes, it cost me about \$7,000 in tuition and books, as well as an undetermined cost of lost wages (because I could not work that many hours - I wanted to focus on paramedic school), but I easily made that up in my first year or so on the department. Money well spent, I might add.

Even now, becoming a paramedic is almost a sure way (I say almost because nothing in life is guaranteed and you can't count your chickens until they're hatched) onto the fire department. If you are willing to make a sacrifice for a year or so, spend the money necessary to get you from start to finish, dedicate yourself to becoming the best paramedic you can be, understand that you might have to be a paramedic for the duration of your employment with a fire department, then you significantly increase your odds of becoming a full-time firefighter. You make the choice; there is no one to blame but yourself if you never achieve each and every one of your dreams over the course of your life time!

I am not trying to tell you what to do. Your choice of becoming a paramedic or not becoming a paramedic is one only you can make. Either way, you have to live with your decision for the rest of your life. Do what you have to do to get what you want out of life. Just remember that if you do decide to do something and your heart and soul is not 100% into it, you are setting yourself (and your employer, and the public, and your co-workers) up for FAILURE! You need to do your best and set yourself up for success - the people we provide service to deserve nothing less than the best!

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHICH FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS? PART 1

Phase 1: Developing your firefighter candidate research binder

Finding out which fire departments are accepting applications can be a very challenging task. I've heard too many candidates that have missed out on the chance to put in their application to become a firefighter with their dream fire department because of a lack of preparation on their part. For some reason or another, they had not done their homework and relied on one of the seven "reactive" methods of finding out which fire departments are accepting applications that I had discussed in the previous article.

There different ways you can be reactive in regards to finding which fire departments are accepting applications, and I touched on how you can be proactive. Remember, those reactive methods are not a waste of your time or money. They should be considered to be another "tool in your toolbox" to assist you in your pursuit of becoming a firefighter. If they were a waste of time or money, I would not have mentioned them. I do consider those reactive methods as "back-up plans."

I want to stress the importance of not relying just on one method of finding out which fire departments are accepting applications; but by actually having a game plan that will guide you from point A to point B, and so forth. Becoming a firefighter is rarely accomplished without an action plan of goals and objectives to get you there. You wouldn't set out on a cross-country trip without a road map, would you? Why should this process be any different?

WHY DO THIS?

The reason you are doing this is to start your own data base of fire departments within your geographical region. It is going to be your template for conducting future research. This list will

become your "Master List" of fire departments that are found within a 50 mile radius of your residence. Once you have completed the counties and cities that are within that radius, it will then be time to expand your search to the counties and cities that are within 100 miles of your residence, then 150 miles, and then 200 miles. I would also suggest listing "big-city or large fire departments" that are out of the 200 mile radius. The reason why is because it might be worth your time and effort to drive or fly to take a test that is 500 miles away if there are plans to hire a lot of firefighters, open up new fire stations in growing areas (e.g., the Las Vegas or Phoenix Metropolitan areas).

HOW THIS CONCEPT WILL BE BROKEN UP:

Phase 1 - Developing your firefighter candidate research binder

Phase 2 - Organizing your firefighter candidate research binder into chapters

Phase 3 - Obtaining the necessary information for your firefighter candidate research binder

GETTING STARTED:

To be proactive, it is going to take some time and some energy, and I suggest you start by doing the following items:

I. PHASE 1 (Developing your firefighter candidate research binder)

A. Obtain the necessary tools and equipment.

To do this properly, you will need the following items that are available from any office supply store (you might even already have them):

One two-inch binder

Blank ruled paper, 8 1/2" x 11"

Section dividers

Pens / pencils to write with

B. Get a map of the state you live in and any adjacent states.

First of all, if you are not already a member of an automobile association like AAA, I would highly suggest becoming one. Besides providing road service to you (which might come in handy with all of the driving you are going to start doing in your pursuit of becoming a firefighter), they also usually provide maps free of charge.

Start out by penciling in a dot, which will designate where you live. Then take a ruler and go up to the legend that tells you how many miles each inch equals. This is the time to find out how serious you are with the testing process - how much you are willing to do, or how far you are willing to go to get a badge. Find out how many inches equal 50 miles, 100 miles, 150 miles, and 200 miles. Once you have that information, start drawing a circle around your residence (the dot you initially penciled in) to designate a radius of 50, 100, 150, and 200 miles around your residence. This is how you are going to start your search.

C. Start with the 50 miles that are closest to your residence.

On a piece of paper, write down each of the counties that are within that 50 mile radius, starting with the one you live in and then working outwards. On another sheet of paper, write the name of the county, and then list each city that is found within that county (alphabetical order) on the left side of the page. On the right side of the page, write the words "Fire Department." Then go to the next closest county, writing the name of that county down in addition to each of the cities found within that county. Do this for the 50 miles closest to your residence.

D. What your information will look like:

For example, I live in Santa Clara County. I would write the following information down in the following format:

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

CITY:

FIRE DEPARTMENT:

Campbell
Cupertino
Gilroy
Los Altos
Los Altos Hills
Los Gatos
Milpitas
Monte Sereno
Morgan Hill
Mountain View
Palo Alto
San Jose
San Martin
Santa Clara
Saratoga
Sunnyvale

Take the next closest county and do the same. There about seven other counties that are within 50 miles of my residence. Guess what, I would need to then list out those seven other counties and include every city or town found within those counties.

NOTE: If you notice, there is a blank to the right of each city underneath the words Fire Department. This information will be covered later.

In the next article, we will continue onto Phase 2, where we will discuss actually putting together the separate chapters of your binder to make the most out of your research to insure

you are properly preparing yourself and using your time wisely!

Until then, good luck, and keep your head up - there is a badge out there with your name on it. It is up to you to find it!

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHICH FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS. PART 2

In the last article, I discussed Phase 1: Developing your firefighter candidate research binder. This is critical because you want to have testing information at your fingertips and not have to wait for others to tell you which fire department is accepting applications. You should still be paying for a service to notify you of firefighter job openings as a back-up plan; but this research binder will put you in charge of your own destiny!

IS THIS A WASTE OF MY TIME DOING THIS?

First of all, it is not a waste of time. Think back to the need to be proactive. Do you want to be in charge of your own destiny, or do you want someone else to be? I would rather have myself be in charge. That way, I have no one to blame but myself. Also, think of it as a way to educate your self in your local and regional geography. Testing to become a firefighter took me to places I probably never would have ventured to otherwise, and it really educated me as to what cities and counties are within the State of California. Remember, knowledge is power. You never know when that information might be useful in the future. By building this data base now, it will help narrow your focus in the future, thus allowing you to save time and also concentrate on other areas.

The best way to be proactive is to do your own research. In the last article, I showed you how to start your research by getting a binder, and blank sheets of paper. I had you start by drawing a 50 mile radius around your residence, and then 100, 150, and 200 mile radius markings around your residence. I then had you list out county-by-county, each city that was within that county, within the 50 mile radius closest to your house.

Now we will continue developing your testing data base to assist you in finding out when a fire department will be accepting applications.

You will end up with a binder having 3 Chapters as follows;

Chapter 1 - Fire Departments: County-by-county

Chapter 2 - Fire Departments: City-by-city

Chapter 3 - Action plan / to-do list

II. PHASE 2 (Organizing your firefighter candidate research binder into chapters)

A. CHAPTER 1: Fire Departments County-by-County.

Label your first section Chapter 1. This chapter will contain information on the cities within each county, and who provides the fire protection services. We now need to find out which Fire Departments are providing service within each county. How do we do this? We start by going to the local library. Every public library I have been to has a section of phone books, from the local area, throughout the state, and nationwide. Find a comfortable table and get the phone books from the first county you are going to research.

Let's say your first county is Santa Clara County. In the front of most phone books are the blue pages, which are the government pages. Each city and county has listings in the blue sections, and is listed alphabetically. Here is where you will need to look, city by city, for the words fire department. If there is a fire department in that city, you will usually find the business phone number, in addition to the address of their headquarters.

For example, the City of Campbell is covered by the Santa Clara County Fire Department. The address and business phone numbers are listed there. Now on your sheet of paper that you have started by listing the name of the county and the cities within that county, to the right of the City of Campbell, write Santa Clara County Fire Department in the space under Fire Dept. In the blue pages, if you continue to the City of Cupertino, you will see they are also protected by the Santa Clara County Fire Department, so put the same information in the space provided. Gilroy is your next city, and they have their own fire department, so write Gilroy Fire Department in the space to the right. Let's assume we've gone through the phone book for the whole county, and that here is the information we have discovered:

In theory, you should have anywhere from one county up to maybe 15 counties (or more, depending on how ambitious or motivated you are) listed in alphabetical order in Chapter 1.

Santa Clara County

CITY:

FIRE DEPARTMENT:

Campbell

Santa Clara County Fire Department

Cupertino

Santa Clara County Fire Department

Gilroy

Gilroy Fire Department

Los Altos

Santa Clara County Fire Department

Los Altos Hills
Santa Clara County Fire Department

Los Gatos
Santa Clara County Fire Department

Milpitas
Milpitas Fire Department

Monte Sereno
Santa Clara County Fire Department

Morgan Hill
Santa Clara County Fire Department

Mountain View
Mountain View Fire Department

Palo Alto
Palo Alto Fire Department

San Jose
San Jose Fire Department

San Martin
South Santa Clara County F.P.D. / CDF

Santa Clara
Santa Clara Fire Department

Saratoga
Saratoga Fire District / Santa Clara Co. Fire

Sunnyvale
Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety

B. CHAPTER 2: Fire Departments City-by-City

Label the second chapter of your binder, Chapter 2. Now that we have found out which fire departments are in the county, we can now narrow our research down. Based on the Santa Clara County example above, I will start with the Santa Clara County Fire Department. Why? Because if you notice, they provide service to the cities/towns of Campbell, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, and portions of Saratoga. I can just write Santa Clara County Fire Department on the top of the page and list the cities that they provide services to. That way, I don't have to phone each of those cities individually, I can

just contact the Santa Clara County Fire Department. Now you can write out individual pages for each city or fire department, but I would suggest creating a template (or using the sample I have provided), making copies of it to put into chapter 2.

NOTE: The testing process for firefighters for most county fire departments is usually done through the County Personnel / Human Resource offices, just like with municipal fire departments. However, in the case of Santa Clara County, the Fire Department Personnel Office handles the testing process.

Because you will be listing fire departments in various counties, I would suggest separating this Chapter with dividers of the Counties that you are concentrating on, in alphabetical order. For example, since I live in San Jose, I would initially concentrate on the following counties: Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, San Francisco, San Benito, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, and probably Marin. That is a lot of different counties. Putting them in alphabetical order with a divider, starting with Alameda, would make my life easier. Then within each county, I would list the fire departments in alphabetical order.

Here is a sample form I suggest that you use. I feel it covers a majority of the information that a candidate would need to be one of the best prepared candidates.

SAMPLE FIRE DEPARTMENT INFORMATION TEMPLATE

Fire Department Name: _____
Headquarters Address: _____

F.D. Website Address: _____
Business Phone Number: _____ Year established: _____
Cities / Communities served: _____
Population Served: _____ Square Miles: _____ I.S.O. Rating: _____
Level of EMS provided: _____ ALS Engines? _____ ALS Trucks? _____
Ambulance Transport provided by: _____
Dispatching services provided by: _____
Total Calls last year: _____ EMS: _____ Fire: _____ Other: _____
I.A.F.F. Union Local #: _____ Name of Union President: _____
F.D. Budget: _____

APPARATUS

of Stations: _____ # of Engine Companies: _____ # of Truck Companies: _____
of Ambulances: _____ # of Rescue Companies: _____ # of Battalions: _____
of Haz Mat units: _____ Other specialized equipment: _____

Apparatus Manufacturers Used: _____

STAFFING (Personnel on each type of apparatus)

Engines: _____ Trucks: _____ Rescues: _____ Other: _____

Minimum # of personnel on duty each shift: _____

PERSONNEL

Total # of personnel: _____ # of uniformed: _____ # of civilian: _____

Fire Chief: _____

Deputy Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Assistant Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Division Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Battalion Chiefs: #: _____ Suppression: _____

Administrative: _____

of Captains: _____ # of Lieutenants: _____ # of Engineers: _____ # of Firefighters: _____

Volunteer or Reserve Firefighter program? _____ # of Vol / Res FF's: _____

Requirements: _____

Their role: _____

of Fire Prevention Bureau personnel: _____ Fire Prevention positions: _____

Fire Investigation duties handled by: _____

Public Education duties handled by: _____

WAGE & BENEFIT INFORMATION

Type of Retirement System: _____ Retirement Formula: _____

Retirement contribution: Paid by Department? _____ Paid by employee? _____

Medical Benefits: Paid by Department? _____ Paid by employee? _____

Entry Salary: _____ Top step Firefighter Salary: _____ Years to top step: _____

EMT incentive? _____ Paramedic incentive? _____ Uniform Allowance? _____

Other specialty pay: _____

Type of shift worked: _____

Vacation days: _____

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION:

Personnel / Human Resource Office:

Address: _____ Phone: _____
_____ Job Line: _____

City / County web site: _____

Utilize Cooperative Personnel Services (CPS) or Firehire for testing? _____

Testing process consists of (check all that apply): written test: _____ oral interview: _____

Physical ability test: _____ Background investigation: _____ Chief's interview: _____

Medical Examination: _____ Polygraph: _____ Psychological Examination: _____

Other: _____

Minimum Requirements for firefighters: _____

Last tested: _____ # hired off last list: _____ Next test? _____

Present vacancies: _____ Projected future vacancies: _____

Length of Academy: _____ Length of probation: _____

MISCELLANEOUS

Major Target Hazards:

Type of area served by the fire department:

Future stations planned?

Future projects planned by the department? _____

First alarm assignment: _____

Second alarm assignment:

Third alarm assignment: _____

Busiest Station: _____ Busiest Unit / # of calls last year: _____

KEY POINT:

I would suggest making multiple copies of this form, punching 3 holes in them, and placing the blank copies in Chapter 2 since these will be your worksheets when you contact fire departments and personnel departments.

Feel free to modify this template as you find necessary. You may even think of many other relevant items to include when doing your research.

NOTE: If you would like a copy of this in Microsoft Word, email me at sprziborowski@chabotcollege.edu and I will email you a copy.

In the next issue, I will discuss how to obtain specifically obtain the information that is expected to be placed into each of the blanks on your fire department information sheet. That article will cover Phase 3: Obtaining the necessary information for your firefighter candidate research binder.

I will also discuss the last chapter of your binder, Chapters 3. Chapter 3 will be your action plan/to-do list so you can plan ahead and make notes to yourself as part of your action plan.

Until then, keep plugging away - there is a badge out there just for you!

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHICH FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS. PART 3

To actually do some research on when a fire department will be next accepting applications, where do you start? I believe you should do an all encompassing approach that will include using the internet, calling up the fire department headquarters, calling up the city personnel department, stopping by a fire station, and stopping by the City Hall (or other similar administrative offices of the municipality, county, state, or federal agency you are applying for).

In the last article, part 2: Organizing your firefighter candidate research binder into chapters, I discussed how to organize your binder into a user-friendly tool that will greatly assist you in finding out which fire departments are accepting applications.

I provided a sample template to use that contained information on a fire department that I felt will be very relevant and useful in performing your research. You probably saw that template and asked yourself, "How am I going to obtain all of the necessary information?" Obtaining that information will be the focus of this article. Think of yourself as a detective trying to piece together a crime. Instead, you will be piecing together the pieces that will complete the puzzle of pursuing your dream of becoming a firefighter!

I. OBTAINING THE NECESSARY INFORMATION FOR YOUR FIREFIGHTER CANDIDATE RESEARCH BINDER.

If you are thinking that you are getting in over your head, then sit down and take a deep breath. Rome wasn't built in a day, and odds are you are not going to become a firefighter in a day either. Patience is a virtue. All of this research you perform now is going to be valuable information that will assist you in some form or fashion. Where do we start? Now that you have this nice binder, what are you going to do with it? Hopefully use it! There are many ways you can obtain information to "fill in the blanks." Here are my top choices to assist you in the process of filling in the blanks for each of the fire departments you are planning to research (remember we are using the template I showed you in the last article, or something similar):

Firehouse.com website Links page. If you haven't discovered this valuable tool yet, you are

definitely missing out on an incredible resource. On the U.S. Fire Department's section alone, there are thousands of links to both volunteer and paid fire departments. I haven't found too many major departments that are not already listed. This is the first place I would go.

Searching the Internet. If you can't find what you're looking for on a website links page such as firehouse.com, you can use a search engine such as google, yahoo, alta vista, etc. Those would all be excellent choices. Once there, you would type in such specific words as City of Oakland or Oakland Fire Department. Personally I would start off with the City web site first. Why? Because that is usually the easiest to find, and they also have links to City Departments such as the Fire Department and Personnel / Human Resources. Once at the City web site, I would bookmark the City web site for future access, and additionally bookmark the Fire Department web site. That way I would have both to reference from.

Directly accessing the City website without using a search engine. I'm not sure if most people realize this about the Internet, but it is actually set up in a user-friendly format. By user-friendly, I mean that you can type in a set order of words to get you where you want to go, and it will usually work. For example, say I want to access the City of Sunnyvale website. Yes, I could use a search engine. Another easy way would be to take a shot at directly accessing it by typing in <http://www.ci.sunnyvale.ca.us> and guess what? It takes me right to the city website!

Take a look at that link I just typed. After the two forward slashes, you see the www, which stands for world-wide-web. Many Internet sites start with www. After the www, you see the .ci - which stands for City (if it was a County, you would use .co). After the .ci, you see the name of the city. If the city had two names (such as Union City), you would try <http://www.ci.union-city.ca.us> (using a dash between the two names). After the name of the city, you see a .ca - which is the two-digit designator for a state (every state has a two-digit designator). After the .ca, you see a .us - which stands for United States.

I'm at the City or County website, what do I now do? Go directly to the Personnel / Human Resources section. This can be found usually by looking under CITY DEPARTMENTS or JOBS or EMPLOYMENT or CITY HALL or something similar. Once there, this section will allow you to see if there are firefighter vacancies. Chances are, there are not. That's ok, you shouldn't have gotten your hopes up - you are in this for the long haul, and are using this information to better prepare yourself. If you happen to find a fire department is testing by chance, then consider yourself lucky. Besides current job openings, you can see if they take interest cards (which allow you to be notified when they are recruiting for a certain position, such as firefighter). You can also copy down their address, their business phone number, their 24-hour job hotline, and any other information you feel valuable. **DON'T FORGET TO BOOKMARK THIS PAGE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE!**

After visiting the Personnel / Human Resource section, what information should I obtain next? Now it is time to navigate to the FIRE DEPARTMENT portion of the website. Most fire departments have websites, and they can usually be accessed in the same fashion as the Personnel / Human Resource office. Just go under CITY DEPARTMENTS or PUBLIC SAFETY and click on FIRE DEPARTMENT. Some fire departments have a wealth of information to offer (such as the one I work for (<http://www.sccfd.org>) and some have a one-

page home page that lists virtually no information that it makes you wonder why they even bothered. Some websites will allow you to complete much of your template just by visiting the website. **DON'T FORGET TO BOOKMARK THIS PAGE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE!**

What happens if I still don't have all of the blanks of my template filled in? I would suggest stopping by the fire department headquarters, since they will possibly have brochures or other information to provide you with, as well as knowledge of when there might be another firefighter examination. They might even have a person in charge of recruitment you could talk to or a firefighter working at the headquarters who could answer some of your questions.

How do you find out where each headquarters is located? Remember back in phase 1, I discussed that in the front of most phone books, there is a blue section that is reserved for governmental agencies, such as fire departments. Most libraries have phone books from around the United States for you to view.

When you first sat down to begin developing your binder at the library researching information out of the "blue pages," hopefully you took note of the fire department headquarters address and phone number. That will save you time. Once at fire headquarters, I would ask them if they could give you a list of addresses for each of their fire stations (many times you can download this information from the fire department website). I would also ask them for the business phone numbers of the fire stations so you could call the station Captain to set up an appointment. I would also ask them such information as:

Do you know when you are going to test for firefighter again?

When did you last test for firefighter?

How many firefighters did you hire off the last list?

What are your qualifications to take the firefighter test?

Do you take interest cards?

When should I contact you to find out more information?

Headquarters was helpful, but I still haven't obtained all of the necessary information. Now it is time to start visiting fire stations. Hopefully you have called to make an appointment, and are not just dropping by. Most firefighters are usually eager to talk to future firefighters, but not necessarily at a moment's notice. Most firefighters usually have busy schedules during the day in between running calls, and you stopping by might not always be at the best time. Even if you weren't able to make an appointment (because you didn't know the phone number), I would suggest stopping by a local pie shop and bringing a nice pie (homemade works too). This is to thank them for taking valuable time away from their duties, and ask them if you can talk now, or if it would better, could you set up an appointment for another time or day. That would usually work. Bring your binder with your template and be ready to fill in the blanks. Don't overstay your welcome and thank them on the way out.

Keeping track of information and your progress. - Many times, you will need to use multiple ways to fill in the information for each fire department. It might require you to visit city hall, visit a fire station, view their website, and maybe phone the fire department headquarters. Just like

you want to back up any important computer files, or leave copies of valuable documents in a safety deposit box, I would think you would want to keep track of your progress.

A good way to track your progress is by using the fire department information templates you have already produced for each fire department. Since the backs of those pages are probably blank, here is a good location to list such information as:

Date you visited or phoned

Method of contact (phone, in-person, website, etc.)

Information you obtained

Person(s) you spoke with (you never know when you might need to talk to that person again)

When to call back or stop by again (this information would then be transferred to Chapter 3, which consists of a month-by-month calendar to list your action plan / to-do items)

II. CHAPTER 3 - ACTION PLAN / TO-DO LIST

Don't think you're done now! Just because you have filled in the blanks doesn't mean you can stop! Consider this a work-in-progress! Now that you have obtained some valuable information to assist you in the process of becoming a firefighter, it is time to put that information to work. In the previous two articles, we discussed the first two chapters of your binder:

1. Fire Departments: County-by-County
2. Fire Departments: City-by-City

We will now discuss Chapter 3, which is probably the most important chapter of your binder! Why? Because this is where you are going to set yourself up for success by planning out a course of action to find out when those fire departments you spent time researching, are going to accept applications again!

Here is where I would put 12 blank pieces of paper - one for each month of the year. On the top of each page, I would write out each of the 12 months in order, starting with January. If you have a calendar program on your computer, or have enough computer skills to get you in trouble, feel free to make a calendar that way. Otherwise plain paper will work.

Here is where you will make any notes to you of importance. Items I would include here would be tentative or actual dates of any phases of the testing process I might be involved in (written exam, physical ability exam, oral interview, etc.) and any information that I think would be important to act on either within that month or on a specific date. You will find that when you call a personnel office to ask them when they will be testing next for firefighter, a lot of times they will tell you "not now, however, why don't you call us back in March." That would be something important to list on the March page, to insure you don't miss out on a valuable opportunity.

This section can also be used for tracking any goals or objectives you might have, whether it is recertifying your EMT, renewing your CPR, applying for paramedic school, completing your two-year degree, etc.

CONCLUSION:

If you think this is a waste of time, then so be it. This method worked for me, and I truly believe in being proactive in life, especially when it comes to controlling your own destiny and plotting out your course of action to get you through life. Nobody is going to lead you by the hand when it comes to getting that firefighter badge. It is a very competitive process, and many candidates get discouraged and never achieve that dream. Don't let yourself become one of those. A little research now will go along way in the future.

An important thing to remember is that researching fire departments is not just to let you know when they will be accepting applications. It is to better prepare yourself for oral interview questions such as how have you prepared yourself, why do you want to work for our fire department, what do you know about our fire department, etc. If you have done your homework, then you are going to have more ammunition to better answer the question.

I hope you found the concept of developing your firefighter candidate research binder to be of benefit. Until next month, keep plugging away. Remember that there is a badge out there just for you!

HOW TO BEST PREPARE YOURSELF TO BECOME A FIREFIGHTER

This article is going to focus on how you can BEST PREPARE yourself for the position of firefighter. Remember that the competition is very tough and you have to be able to show why you are the best candidate for the position. 3,000 people competing for 10 positions don't leave you with many margins for error. Think of the process of becoming a firefighter as survival of the fittest (or best prepared).

There are many ways you can prepare yourself to become a firefighter. Remember that you want to be UNIQUE in a positive way. You are truly competing against yourself, not the other candidates. The more you can prepare yourself, the better chance you stand at getting that badge! People ask me what classes to take to become a firefighter. My answer is that there is no "cookie-cutter" way to become a firefighter. What works for one person, might not work for you.

Many students just want to get the bare minimum, which I feel is an EMT certificate, a firefighter 1 academy certificate, and maybe a certificate of achievement in Fire Technology. Many just finish the academy and don't bother to complete the remaining three or four classes for their certificate of achievement. All of those qualifications should not be your stopping point; they are actually your starting point!

Why is that? Because look around at the competition. It seems like everyone has an EMT certificate, a firefighter 1 academy certificate, some fire technology classes, etc. Do departments require all of those things to take the test? Some do, some don't. Some require EMT certification or Paramedic licensure to take the test (bare minimum requirements). Some require one or both of those plus a firefighter 1 academy or firefighter 1 certificate. Some just

require you to be 18 years old and have a high school diploma or GED. Think about it - if everyone has the bare minimum requirements or a notch above the bare minimum, what is going to separate you from them? WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE COMPARED TO EVERYONE ELSE?

That is what I want to concentrate on with this article. Personally, to compete in today's entry-level firefighter market; you should strive to obtain the following items (not in any particular order):

EMT certificate - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!

Paramedic License - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!

CPR for the Professional Rescuer (American Red Cross) or CPR Healthcare Provider (American Heart Association) - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!

Firefighter 1 Academy certificate

Firefighter 1 State certification

Volunteer experience - I don't care what type of experience, just do something and do it well! Here is a great way to do something unique. People are always looking to become volunteer firefighters. That is great, but here you can really shine if you find some unique way to serve your community. I would suggest trying to have non-fire related volunteer experience to prove that you are "well-rounded." If you can also get volunteer fire experience, do that in addition. Besides trying to become a volunteer firefighter, contact your local fire department and see if they have volunteers in other areas of their fire department (as opposed to fire suppression) such as in administration, fire prevention, haz mat, training, etc. Many candidates don't realize the importance of a well-rounded background.

EMT experience on an ambulance or in a hospital (full-time or part-time) - Firefighters respond to over 60% EMS calls in most jurisdictions. Do you think departments want inexperienced EMT's? Also, if you want to go to paramedic school, you usually need EMT experience.

Ambulance Driver's License - If you want to work with a Private Ambulance Company in California (such as AMR), you will need an ambulance driver's license. It is available through any DMV office. Full-time firefighters working for a fire department that provides ambulance transportation services do not need ambulance driver's licenses. Each state might have different requirements relating to this area, so be sure you are aware of what is available to you.

Specialized Training Certificates - If you live (or want to work) in California, examples include Public Education 1, Fire Prevention 1A, 1B, and 1C, Fire Investigation 1A and 1B, Auto Extrication, Rescue Systems 1, Confined Space Awareness & Operations, Swift Water Rescue, Hazardous Materials First Responder - Operational, Decontamination, Technician, or Specialist. These are classes certified through such agencies as the Office of the State Fire

Marshal or California Specialized Training Institute. If you live outside of California, there are similar classes available (they might have a slightly different name) through the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Bilingual Ability - If you don't presently speak a second language, immediately attempt to do so. Many departments give preference to bilingual candidates when hiring and some departments in Southern California (Santa Ana F.D., Garden Grove F.D., etc.) require EMT, FF-1, & a fluency in a second language just to take the test! Some people think they have to speak Spanish to be bilingual. While Spanish is an excellent second language to learn, there are other languages. A good friend of mine speaks Russian. How many other candidates speak Russian? Probably very few. Does that make him unique in a positive way? YES! He might be the only person on the Stockton Fire Department that speaks Russian (as opposed to a number of firefighters that speak Spanish).

Clean driving record - This includes no accidents and no traffic tickets. Why is this important? At some point, you will be driving fire apparatus. If you have proven yourself to be a driver with accidents and traffic tickets on your record, how are you going to prove you're going to be an excellent driver that the public and your crew demands and deserves? Nobody is perfect. If you've had issues in the past, now is the time to prove to the fire departments that you really want to become a firefighter and that you've turned your life around. I wouldn't want someone that can't drive his or her personal vehicle safely, driving our crew around the city in our \$300,000 fire engine!

Excellent Physical Fitness - If you don't have a physical fitness routine now, you need to get one! Pair up with a buddy or two and get a routine. Preferably you are able to get guidance from a professional on what to do and how to do it to obtain the maximum results. Weight lifting alone won't cut it! You need to have a combination of aerobic activities, cardiovascular activities, and muscular / strength-building activities. Don't forget your diet!

Memberships & Affiliations - Start getting involved in the Fire Service. What are you waiting for? There are organizations you can join as a student that will give you more insight on the career you plan to spend the rest of your working years in (at least I assume you do). Many of these organizations provide a monthly newsletter. Examples include:

State Firefighters Association

International Association of Arson Investigators

National Fire Protection Association

National Association of EMTs

Being a member of various fire-related organizations is another way you can be unique, while also educating yourself on the fire service.

Fire Service / EMS Publications - There are many of them that you can use to better educate yourself on current trends in the fire service. Some of the best choices include:

Firehouse Magazine

Fire Engineering Magazine

American Fire Journal

Journal of Emergency Services Magazine (JEMS)

Firehouse Magazine even has email update services (free of charge) where they send you daily fire service related news updates.

NOTE: I've had entry-level firefighter oral interviews in the past where they asked me what are some current trends in the fire service. Because I was a subscriber to the above publications (and others), I was able to talk about the information (such as current fire service trends) that is contained in each monthly issue. Doing so showed the oral panel that I was motivated at keeping myself up-to-date with the fire service, and I was willing to invest in my future.

Now I apologize if I discouraged any of you after looking at that list. If anything, I hoped I motivated you to strive to be the best you can be! Don't think you have to get every one of those items done to become a firefighter. Some get hired with very little (or none) of the requirements and some have almost all of the requirements. **THERE IS NO GUARANTEED FORMULA ON BECOMING A FIREFIGHTER!** I'm just trying to give you suggestions to help guide your way. Remember, having some of the above requirements might allow you to take the test (minimum requirements) or compete with the other candidates.

If you cannot sell your qualifications or market yourself properly, you're not going to get the job! Just because you have it on paper or have done it in the past, doesn't mean you can communicate effectively what you have done. That communication is done in the oral interview, whenever you encounter a person related to the organization you're attempting to get hired onto, on your application, and on your resume (if you're allowed to turn in a resume).

SUMMARY: The information contained is my opinion, based on my experience and education. Remember the saying about opinions, they're like stomachs (I know I changed the word that usually goes there) - everyone has one! There are many right ways to do something. Not just the way that a firefighter told you, whether they are your neighbor, your friend, or a relative. Remember that what worked for that person getting hired, might not work for you. They did something right to get them their badge. Respect their opinion and listen to what they have to say.

I CHALLENGE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU TO FIND OUT AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT BECOMING A FIREFIGHTER! I am a resource to you, just like many other firefighters or ex-firefighters are. The information I provide you with is for you to use, as you feel appropriate.

YOU CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM EVERY FIREFIGHTER OR EX-FIREFIGHTER. Talk to as many people as you can to get information on becoming a firefighter. That way, you will not get locked into just "one person's opinion." Remember - you are in control of your own destiny! What you make of your life is up to you and the effort and hard work you put into getting what you want.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE FIREFIGHTER JOB FLYER

Have you ever read a firefighter job flyer and wondered what certain items meant and how (or if) they actually applied to you? If you have, you are probably not alone. The real key is what you have done to educate yourself about all of the portions of a firefighter testing process, the actual job description of a firefighter (for that specific department), and the wage and benefit packages that are being advertised for the specific position you are applying for.

INTRODUCTION

When I turned in my first firefighter application, I really didn't spend a great deal of time evaluating the job flyer. About the only things I looked at were the minimum requirements (to make sure I was able to take the test), and the final filing date (to insure that I got the application in on time to be considered). It didn't take me long to realize that there was a great deal of valuable information to be found on the job flyer. Information that could actually assist me in preparing for the department's testing process (including the oral interview), as well as educating me in how fire departments differ from each other based on their makeup, demographics, wage and benefit packages, and testing processes.

What type of information does the job flyer contain and why is it important to you, the firefighter candidate that is aspiring to work for that department? Here are some of the main points to a job flyer and why you should pay attention to them:

Job Title: This is the exact title that the agency is recruiting for. This exact title should go in the objective portion of your resume (the first heading underneath your personal contact information (name, address, and phone number)). This title will also be required for the application. Make sure you are familiar with that job title. Countless candidates come by the fire station and say they are testing for the firefighter position. Well, our entry-level position is actually Firefighter / Engineer (each company has at least two Firefighter / Engineers who rotate driving and riding backwards), not Firefighter. By calling the position by the wrong name shows me that you have not done your homework.

Overview of the position / job description: Make sure you know what the basic duties of the position are so you know what you are getting into and will be expected to do. If you are asked the question "Tell us about the duties of a firefighter for this agency," you can quote information from the job flyer (hopefully you also did more research such as stopping by fire stations and talking with the firefighters, visiting the web site, etc.). For those of you that are Paramedics, here is an important section. Many departments that provide ambulance service to their community expect the newly hired firefighters to work on the ambulance or keep their paramedic license for so many years. This is the section that might explain any such duties or expectations. Don't wait until after your hired to say, "Nobody ever told me I was going to have to spend the majority of my time working on the box (ambulance)."

NOTE: I would always attempt to get a full job description for every position I was testing for. Many times, the job flyer only has an abbreviated version. Go to the Personnel / Human Resource office and ask them for a copy of the full job description. They are expected to have

job descriptions for EVERY position in EVERY department, from the top to the bottom.

Overview of the department / community: Many job flyers include basic information about the fire department and the communities served. Here is the start to your research that you can build upon. Many oral panels ask the question "Tell us what you know about the fire department and/or the community." Well, here is your starting point.

Minimum Qualifications (to take the test or remain employed after getting a job): These items can vary from department to department. Some departments only require a candidate to be 18 years old and have a high school diploma or G.E.D. Others may require a candidate to be at least 21 years old, be a paramedic with at least two years of paramedic experience, and also have a state firefighter 1 certificate.

KEY POINT #1 - Make sure you meet the minimum requirements or your application will usually be rejected. If you don't meet the minimum requirements, take note of what you do need to take that test in the future. Those are things you should be striving to obtain!

KEY POINT #2 - If there are minimum qualifications to take the test, does the application state that you are to provide a copies of those qualifications with your application? If so, follow those directions or your application may be rejected. I've heard too many candidates say they were rejected because they didn't include a copy of a certain certificate. Don't let yourself fall into the same trap - set yourself up for success by reading the job flyer and highlighting things such as what copies need to be included with the application.

Final Filing Date: This is probably one of the most important things to note. Highlight this date and time. I've heard too many candidates say "I thought they were still accepting applications" after the filing period had ended. Note this date and put it in your calendar. You should actually turn that application in a.s.a.p. Some departments (like the one I work for), actually use the date that the application was filed as a tie-breaker in case of a tie score on the hiring list. Why sit on it and take that chance? Also, some departments only pass out a certain amount of applications and accept a certain number back. I've seen filing dates as saying "Friday February 20 (or until 500 applications have been received - whichever comes first.)."

Application Filing Location: Some departments allow you to mail in your application, while some say you can drop them off in person at a certain location, on a certain date, and/or during a certain time frame. Some departments also only allow the person putting in the application to turn in the application. So before you have your friend or loved one drop it off (and have to face the rejection), read the fine print and follow the directions. I would always suggest going in person because then you know it was received.

Wages and Benefits: You are usually not in the position to pick and choose between fire departments. If you are not already a full-time firefighter, there is virtually no reason why you shouldn't be taking every test you qualify for and then accept that first job offer. However, you still need to be aware of the wage and benefit differences between departments. Some of the wage and benefit issues you should be aware of are as follows:

1. Salary - I can't think of anyone that becomes a firefighter to get rich. Don't get me wrong, I believe I am well compensated for the work I do, and it allows me to lead a comfortable life. Regardless, you need to be aware of salary issues. Every now and then I hear candidates say that they wouldn't work for a certain department because they don't pay that well. If you don't have a job, are you really in a position to say that? I don't think so. Also, why are you becoming a firefighter - because you really want to do the job, or because you want to make great money? I know many firefighters that work at great departments for less money than they could make at not-so-great departments. To them, a great department might mean a high call volume or high fire volume.

Salaries can be deceiving. Many departments start out their recruits at a little over minimum wage. One person told me they wouldn't work for this one big city because they only paid \$2000 per month, and they couldn't afford that. I then asked if they had read the job flyer or done any homework. They said no. I told them to not believe everything they read. Yes, that department only pays you \$2000 per month during the four-month recruit academy (many departments pay a lower wage during the academy because you really haven't proven yourself yet and because they can). Upon completion of the academy, that department then bumps you up to the range of \$5000 per month (step 1 firefighter), and then once a year from that date you complete the academy, you are eligible to receive "step" raises to a top firefighter salary of around \$7000 per month.

If you're not familiar with the term "step raise," it is a civil service term that most (if not all) fire departments use. Most departments have anywhere from five to seven steps. So, day one on the job (usually after the academy), you start at step 1, one year later you're at step 2, two years later at step 3, then finally four years later, you max out at fifth step. From there, the only way to get raises are to promote or if there are annual cost-of-living wages. Hopefully you see how that \$2000 per month turns into \$7000 per month within five or so years. Don't be deceived by what might just be academy pay or first year pay. If you are that concerned about salary, look at how much you top out and how long it takes you to get there.

Specialty pay: In addition to the base salary, many departments pay extra money for any degrees you might possess (2 year, 4 year), certificates you might possess (EMT, Paramedic, Haz Mat Technician / Specialist), second languages you might speak, and so on. This extra pay can be up to 40% extra, on top of your salary. Do the math, it can truly add up. If the top step is only \$5000, and you add 40% to that, you get an extra \$2000 per month. Some departments pay a lower base salary (with a number of ways to receive specialty pay), while others pay a higher base salary (with very few ways to earn specialty pay). Either way, when you make a comparison, make sure you are comparing apples to apples.

2. Vacation leave: All departments offer some form of paid vacation. Usually anywhere from a few shifts up to 15 or so shifts per year, depending on length of service.

3. Sick leave: All departments offer some form of sick leave. Not that you should be planning on sick during your probationary year, you should be aware of the length of time available to you in case of illness or injury.

4. **Holidays:** As a firefighter, you're going to work holidays. While you usually don't get overtime for working holidays, you do usually receive some form of compensation such as extra time off or additional pay throughout the year.
5. **Tuition reimbursement:** Many departments offer a form of program so you can attend training classes or complete your degree and receive all or partial reimbursement.
6. **Medical Plans:** Most fire departments pay for an employee and their immediate family to be covered by medical insurance. Know the different plans available to you. Some bay area cities don't actually pay for an employee's medical insurance. Instead they provide a higher base wage and deduct a certain dollar amount every paycheck based on the plan you choose. Why is this beneficial? Because if you have a spouse that has a better plan, then you might be able to get on their plan, and have that money you would have used, go towards your salary!
7. **Retirement Plans:** Most fire departments do not participate in social security. Instead, they usually either offer a state or city administered retirement plan that allows you to retire after so many years of service, and receive a certain amount of money based on your total number of years of service. Many fire departments pay your retirement contribution, while others actually deduct the amount from your paycheck. Before you think that is bad, think again. The department I work for deducts my retirement contribution every check. To offset that payment, we are paid a slightly higher base wage than other similar local departments that have their department pay the retirement contribution. It allows me to retire out at a higher rate than if the department paid my retirement contribution. This is the same concept as if I paid my own medical benefits (as mentioned above).

NOTE: The main thing to be concerned about regarding retirement plans is if you plan to leave a department for another. Make sure that other department has the same plan, because if it does not, you may not be able to transfer that service credit (and thus, work more years before you can retire in the new system). This is especially critical if you plan to move out of state, because there might not be any reciprocity. If you're planning on moving out of state, it is probably best to do it when you have very little time on the job (and won't be out too much if you lost anything) as opposed to when you are half-way through your career.

Testing Process: Most job flyers give you an idea of what the testing process will consist of. Sometimes tentative dates are listed as well, so that you can plan ahead and make sure you are available (or do not plan anything else on that day, or plan to get the day off if needed). **KEY POINT - Do not believe everything you read. Almost anything can (and will happen).**

I've heard candidates say that they didn't take a certain test because they were going to be out of town, or had some type of conflict with the tentative dates that were listed on the flyer. That is ridiculous. Are you 100% positive that they will keep that date? **NO!** Take the time to complete the application anyway. You might get lucky by them changing the date for some reason. If the dates then stay true to what was printed, then so be it. All you are really out is the time it took to fill out the application and the effort you made to get it. I would rather take that chance than miss out on a job opportunity because I believed what I read or what I heard.

Typical testing process components include: -Application review -Written Test -Oral Interview - Physical Ability Test -Chief's Oral Interview -Background Investigation -Medical Examination - Psychological Evaluation -Polygraph Examination

SUMMARY

The firefighter job flyer should not be looked at as an unimportant or useless batch of information. Take the time to read the ENTIRE job flyer and you can only benefit from the knowledge you obtain while doing so. Knowledge is power, and you never know when you might need to use it or show that you have it! Proper planning and preparation can only lead to one thing - success!

15 TIPS TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING THE JOB APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

Many of us probably cringe at the thought of having to provide a resume, or update a resume for an upcoming interview or application process. Producing and keeping your resume updated don't have to be that difficult or stressful. A properly prepared resume can distinguish you from other candidates as well as showcase the knowledge, skills, and abilities that make you the best fit for the position.

MY BASIC RESUME TIPS:

1. Keep it to one (1) page – unless you are competing for a chief officer position (and you have over 10 years of specific experience to the field you're applying for) you don't have that much that can't be squeezed onto one page. If it can't fit on one page, it probably isn't important enough or relevant enough to be on there. When I took my Captain's oral interview, I had a one-page resume. It was tough to squeeze everything on there (and have to leave things out), but I made it work. I received a 100% score on my oral interview, so I guess a one-page resume didn't hurt me.
2. 12-point font size is suggested for text. I've seen ones that are in 9-point and 10-point font (as well as 18-point font). 12-point font size is standard for text – anything smaller and people are going to strain their eyes, anything larger is going to be obnoxious. Usually the people reviewing your resume are not just fresh out of college. They usually have some experience behind their belts and with experience comes declining eye site. How are you going to keep someone's attention if they have to strain to read your writing?
3. Keep it short, sweet, to the point, and leave plenty of open space to distinguish between things you want to stand out. If you're writing more than two to three lines of text in a row, it is going to read like a paragraph. People reviewing resumes usually don't have time to read novels – they want one to two lines that are separated by open space, maybe accented with bullets or other objects, and pleasing to the eyes. Think about if you hand out an updated resume when you walk into the room. If you write paragraphs, there is the tendency they will not see key points (because all the words blend together after a while) and that they will miss

things. Even if they had the time to review the one you turned in with your application, they usually don't have more than a minute or two to read it – that is why it is important to be short and sweet, making things stick out and be noticeable.

4. Make sure you keep it from being BORING. (Many resumes are plain, difficult to read, and will put the reader to sleep). Use type sets such as uppercase, sentence case, bold, underline, italics, in addition to just the plain old regular computer print. Alternating type sets will help the reader distinguish and pick out certain things about you and what you have to offer, while also ensuring that certain things about you are highlighted.
5. If you're not updating your resume at least once a month, you're probably not doing as much as you can to prepare yourself to become a firefighter. Updates can include additional education or training, another relevant certificate, more hours of community service / volunteer time, etc.
6. If you are going to bring a resume to the interview (updated resume or initial resume), I would suggest bringing at least seven (7) resumes with you. I had an entry-level interview once with seven oral board members. Talk about intimidating. Most oral boards usually only have three to five members on them, but how would you feel if you only had five resumes and there were six people in front of you? What are you going to do now? Only pass out five of them and leave one person in the cold? How do you think that person is going to score you? I bet you would be embarrassed and it would potentially make you so nervous that you screwed up that you would not do as well as you should.
7. DO NOT LIST: "References available upon request." It is a waste of space and I've never had any department ask me for references at the time of application or while you're going through the entry-level process. If they want references, they'll usually ask you as a part of your background investigation paperwork. It might work in the business world, but to me it is one line of text that can be used more wisely.
8. Stick to neutral colors – white, gray, beige, etc. If you want to stand out, having bright colored resume paper is probably not the best way.
9. Don't forget to list your name, address and phone number. A few years ago, we were looking at hiring some new EMT instructors at the college. One excellent candidate turned in his resume (no job application, just a resume as a screening tool). However, when I made an attempt to find a way to contact him to bring him in for an interview, I couldn't locate an address or a phone number. He had just put his name on the top of the resume and went into his qualifications.

The scary part is that he was already a Captain at his fire department. The only thing I can assume is that he used the same resume that he used for his Captain's promotional exam (even then that is risky because it bucks the normal trend). That is fine for his fire department because I think they knew how to contact him, but it was not acceptable to me because I did not have a way to contact him. He failed at making a positive first impression. Learn from his mistake.

10. Try to stay away from using abbreviations on your resume. About the only acceptable abbreviations are EMT, CPR, or the State you live in. Why is that? Well what might be an abbreviation of one word might be the abbreviation of another word to someone else. In the medical field, PE can stand for patient exam, pulmonary edema, or pulmonary embolus. Not that you're probably going to list PE on your resume, but I think you get the point.

Think about who might read your resume – it might not just be a fire service professional. Folks from the H.R. / Personnel department might be the ones reading it (or screening it) first or during an oral interview, and you can't expect them to know fire service abbreviations. Also, many departments have a citizen from the community on the oral panel. Do you think you're going to score points if you're talking about things they are not aware of? Also, writing out words can be perceived as being more professional or mature.

11. The only name, street address (2544 Jones Street), zip code, and phone numbers that should be on your resume should be your own! Do not list names of references (I've seen that done) or names of supervisors. You know my opinion on listing references. As for names of supervisors, that information will be going on the application. Another problem with listing names on your resume is that not everyone you list is going to be well liked.

I realize the oral board is supposed to be objective – not subjective. However, if you list the name of a reference on there that might not be a "quality reference" in the eyes of the evaluator (oh yes, it is a very small world); you put yourself at risk of getting the maximum points. I know that subjectivity is not supposed to occur in the oral board process, but it is almost impossible to eliminate bias and personal opinions in the testing process.

12. If you're going to list email addresses on your resume, avoid ones such as or OaklandRaidersRule@whatever.com Oh yes, I've seen many similar ones. I am not here to judge folks on their hobbies, personal lives, or professional sports team choices. I am just offering the suggestion that you might want a more "professional sounding" one such as your first and last name. I know we're supposed to be objective, but put yourself in the shoes of a fire chief reviewing resumes of candidates they plan to hire as firefighters for the next 30 years, representing their community and their department. Just like cars and the clothes we wear can be an extension of our personalities and attitudes, so can email addresses.

I have no problem with the Oakland Raiders. But what if the person reading your resume is a 49'er fan and hates the Raiders? Or what if you are a female on the oral panel reviewing resumes and you see a LadiesMan@yobaby.com I know we're not supposed to be biased, but can you blame them if they are? Also, for those of you with aol.com email accounts: if you have a "member profile," I would suggest reviewing it to make sure you would not be ashamed if a fire chief that was looking to hire you saw that profile. I make the EMT students at the college provide a resume to me and every now and then, I go check to see if they have a member profile, and there are always a few students that list things that would probably be found to be "unprofessional."

13. Don't list hobbies on your resume. You're not getting hired for your hobbies – you're getting hired for your knowledge, skills, and abilities (in addition to how well you perform throughout the testing process). Nothing says you can't talk about them during the interview, go ahead. To me it is a waste of space on your resume. Also, what might be a "cool" hobby to you (snowboarding, bungee-jumping, motorcycling, jet skiing, etc.) might not be so "cool" to the Chief Officer reviewing your resume.

Getting back to subjectivity – every fire department has probably experienced folks getting injured off-duty doing some of those "cool" things. The last thing we need is another injury that is just waiting to happen. Chief Officers are usually trained or educated in risk management concepts. Let me see, this candidate likes to jump from planes, race fast vehicles, etc... If they take risks off duty, they might do them on duty.... Don't let people's minds wander – they will go places you don't want them to go.

14. Have somebody else take a look at your resume to proofread it for errors or things that just don't make sense. Remember when you've been staring at your "masterpiece" for a while, changing things, adding things, etc., you are going to get tunnel vision and after a while, you wouldn't even be able to realize you had misspelled your name. Trust me, been there, done that, got the t-shirt. One misspelled word can be enough to have the person reading it convinced that you don't care about the way you present yourself.

15. Last, but not least, make a copy of every resume you ever turn in. You should be making a copy of everything you turn in to a department (application, resume, etc.) and keeping it in a file. Other relevant items to keep are the initial job flyer and any information you obtained in the process. Keeping a copy of your resume can jog your memory when you get that interview four years later (I was actually called by a department I had tested with four years prior, to see if I wanted to be considered for employment). I didn't go to the interview because I had already been hired in a "dream department." Imagine if I had gone to that interview and they had asked me "What have you done since the time you turned in the original application?" If I hadn't kept a copy of the application, I would have looked pretty stupid. If I had kept copies, I could have been able to say with confidence "Look what I have done since then," to show my motivation and drive towards becoming a firefighter.

SUMMARY

That is about all I have to offer in regards to producing the best resume you can. Use what you feel might benefit you. That first 30 seconds or so when you walk through the door to greet the oral interview panel are some of the most valuable seconds you will ever have to make a first impression.

Already having produced a quality resume prior to the interview (and having turned it in with your application) will help set the stage for your entrance into the room since the interview panel usually reviews your application and resume prior to interviewing you. It will also start you out on a good note, thus leaving a positive first impression. Even if you turn in your first resume at the time of oral interview when you walk in the door, or you provide an updated resume at this time, it is still counted as part of your "first impression time."

The bottom line is that you always need to have a resume ready to go at any given time. Keep it on your computer (backed up on disc) so that you can change the objective for every test you take, and be able to easily add the achievements you have accomplished since the last time you updated the resume.

JUST REMEMBER - YOU DON'T GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION!

25 REASONS TO HIRE YOU AS A FIREFIGHTER

The process to become a firefighter is very challenging and frustrating. I would venture for every person hired in the fire service there are at least ten that are not hired in the fire service. The number ten may be small and in reality the number is probably much, much higher.

However, that should not deter you from obtaining the career of your dreams. While it will not be an easy process to become a firefighter, it will sure be worth all of the time and effort you put into the journey once you receive that badge. It took me approximately four and a half years to become a firefighter, and it was time well spent. I could not think of anything else I would want to be doing with my life. For a 30-year career in the fire service, spending a few years trying to become a firefighter is the cost of doing business.

Does luck play a part in getting hired as a firefighter? Of course it does. However, luck is not the primary reason you get a job offer. To get that far in the hiring process, you must have first successfully passed all phases of the hiring process and also shown some promise that you would be a good return on a department's investment.

While this list is not inclusive, it does provide a good starting point of how to properly prepare and market yourself to a fire department that is looking to make a good investment and hire the best personnel to serve their customers.

Use this list not only when you are preparing to become a firefighter, but also while you are preparing yourself for each phase of the hiring process — completing the application, taking the written test, taking the oral interview, etc. — and while you are participating in each phase of the hiring process.

Here are 25 reasons to hire you as a firefighter:

1. You have significant formal education — a two-or four-year degree — in fire technology or a closely related field.
2. You have more than the minimum in the way of certifications and licenses. Having just the minimum allows you to apply for the position. Going above and beyond, and getting the certificates and licenses that are considered highly desirable will help set you apart from the other candidates.
3. You have an extensive, significant and diverse life experience background to offer.
4. You have an extensive, significant and diverse work experience background to offer.

5. You have an extensive, significant and diverse volunteer/community service background to offer.
6. You have excellent oral communication skills.
7. You have excellent written communication skills.
8. You have an extensive knowledge and understanding of mechanical ability.
9. You have a sparkling, cheery and positive personality.
10. You have a contagious enthusiasm in whatever you are doing or wanting to do.
11. You have an extensive and significant track record of being dependable.
12. You have excellent computer skills.
13. You demonstrate exceptional leadership ability.
14. You demonstrate the ability to get along with others.
15. You have a clean background to offer in the way of credit history, employment history, arrest record, and character references.
16. You have bilingual ability in any two languages, at least one being English.
17. You are physically fit and are able to demonstrate you lead a relatively healthy lifestyle.
18. You are capable of being a low maintenance employee for your supervisors. Someone that needs little direction or correction.
19. You demonstrate solid decision-making ability.
20. You understand the word integrity, and are able to demonstrate you have it.
21. You are able to demonstrate that you are a hard-worker, and someone that does not mind getting dirty and doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.
22. You have sincere and incredible passion for the fire service and for helping and serving others in time of need.
23. You have military background to offer and understand the chain of command and working in a paramilitary environment.
24. You are a self-starter and do not rely on others to tell you what needs to be done and when it needs to be done.
25. You demonstrate that you are unique in a positive way. Most firefighter candidates all look the same in regards to preparation, education, looks, etc. Be the one that stands out in a positive and unique way throughout the hiring process and you will rise to the top.

Remember, there is no "one-size-fits-all" formula to use to get hired as a firefighter. What works for one person may not work for another. What works in one fire department may not work in another. It is up to you to find out what works best for you and to stick with that course of action, ensuring that you are doing as many of the abovementioned items as possible to increase your chances for successfully becoming a firefighter. You can have the best resume in the world with the most qualifications, but if you cannot sell yourself, your knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as your qualities and traits to the oral board, you will never get hired!

MASTER THE FIRE SERVICE HIRING GAME

Whether you believe it or not, becoming a firefighter is in essence, "playing a game." I don't mean playing a game in a negative way, I just mean the whole hiring process can be considered a game. Don't take what I'm saying and think you don't have to take it seriously — that is far from the truth. You need to take the hiring process very seriously and realize it is survival of the fittest, so to speak. The best of the best will get hired, and the cream will rise to

the top. Each phase of the hiring process is a test that you must succeed at in order to continue to the next phase.

To successfully become a firefighter, it is paramount that you learn to master the game. If you can master the game, you are going to get hired. This is where most candidates fail — they do not learn how to master the game. They do not take the game seriously and they do not do everything in their power to be the best they can be at the firefighter hiring process.

Let's take a look at some ways candidates can master the fire service hiring game:

Know as much as you can about the department you are applying for.

Research is paramount when you are applying for a job, and can be done via the Internet — a city website, fire department website, International Association of Fire Fighters Union Local website for that department, via search engines, etc. — and in person by doing station visits. How can you expect to do well and get the job if you have not taken the time to research what you are hoping to get into?

Know as much as you can about all of the phases of the firefighter hiring process.

It amazes me how many candidates don't know what each phase consists of or expects of them. It is usually specifically stated on the job flyer what the different phases entail. If it is not, you can typically find that information by visiting a fire station, visiting the fire department headquarters, or contacting the personnel or human resources department. How can you expect to be successful at the process if you do not know what the different phases consist of?

Be able to successfully pass all of the phases of the firefighter hiring process.

Besides knowing as much as you can about the phases, you also have to be able to successfully pass all of the phases. I know many candidates that cannot even pass the written test. In most departments, the written test is usually one of the first phases of the hiring process. If you can't pass that, how are you going to get all the way to the final list?

Take every test you qualify for.

This helps you learn your strengths and weaknesses, so that you can hopefully capitalize on the strengths and improve on the weaknesses. Trust me, we all have strengths and weaknesses — the key is learning what they are so we can make the most of them. Taking every test you qualify for also increases your chances of getting hired — the negative part about doing this is if you are finding yourself at a certain plateau and you are going nowhere. For example, you have taken ten different firefighter tests and you have yet to pass one of them. Why did you wait until the tenth test before you realized it was a problem? Shame on you! You should have immediately realized it was a problem and started working on those perceived weaknesses that you encountered during that phase of the hiring process.

Don't wait until the last minute to prepare yourself!

Remember that you should always have the attitude that your dream fire department will be opening up their recruitment process tomorrow and that you will only have one day to apply. Too many people feel they don't have the time to prepare for an upcoming test, or they do not feel it is necessary to plan ahead. I remember having a firefighter ask me what books he should purchase for the upcoming captain's test — when I say upcoming, I mean that it was occurring in one month! After picking up my jaw from the ground, I tactfully told him which books he should purchase for the next test that will be occurring in about 18 months. With a puzzled look, he asked me "what do you mean?" I told him that there is no conceivable way he could read and comprehend a few thousand pages of material in one month. He could definitely read and comprehend the material in 18 months, and now would be the best time to start preparing for the next test. Needless to say, he did take the captain's test, but he did not do well enough to get promoted. The bad part is that he got very close to getting promoted — so close he could probably taste it. I venture this made him kick himself for not taking more time in advance to prepare. So close, yet so far away.

Treat everyone you encounter in the hiring process with utmost respect and courtesy.

Besides this being the way you should be treating everyone anyway and being the right thing to do, you never know when and where you will meet up with these folks again. Trust me, it is a small, small world out there. I used to love a sign I saw some years ago "be careful of the toes you step on today — they may be connected to the butt you have to kiss tomorrow." So true, so true.

You've probably heard the saying that "life is just a game." Yes, it is. Now take it a step further and realize that becoming a firefighter is also just a game. The key to your success is that you are able to master that game. Mastering the game will get you where you want in life, guaranteed. Follow the above mentioned steps and you will provide more focus to your pursuit of becoming a firefighter. Start taking control of your destiny, and do what it takes to be successful — only you can make the difference!

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