

The Station Ready Rookie

Every member of this department has received a copy of The Station Ready Rookie. While the focus of the book is to provide guidance to firefighters that are fresh out of the academy, reporting to their first assignment, do not immediately draw the conclusion that this book does not apply to you.

Some of our new members come to us with little to no experience working in a station with a crew. Many of our new hires and volunteers come to us with experience from other organizations. However, regardless of previous experience, as probationary members, you are new to this organization and will to show us who you are by the example you show. A reputation is a fragile thing. It can take considerable time to build a positive reputation and moments to damage it. We are all ultimately in control of our own reputation through our actions and attitudes. Words do not build a reputation, actions do.

Part-time and volunteer members will have less exposure to the organization than our full-time personnel, therefore it will take longer to build your reputation and to be introduced to our staff.

For our tenured officers and firefighters, you must ask yourself if you are being the example that will guide a probationary firefighter toward the attitude and behaviors that we wish to see from our people. Remember too that you are here to guide and instruct our PFFs in their skills as well as the culture of our organization. Do not be frustrated with a PFFs shortcomings if you have not told or shown that PFF what is expected. Never assume that they “should just know what to do”.

This book is also a great review for tenured personnel. It doesn't hurt to look back at these expectations and to ask how much of this do you still do today... and why would you stop doing these things.

The book is divided into 4 sections: At the Station, On Scene, Attitude is Everything, and Beyond the Job with 10 or so lessons within each section.

At the Station

1. Be Proactive: *Look for stuff to do and do it without being asked (especially the unpleasant stuff)*
2. Get Ready to Clean: *Our facilities and apparatus are here for the long haul, the best way to preserve it is to keep it clean. In MFR we have a cleaning schedule for the station and trucks. The schedule is just when we pay particular attention to those areas/items. If it needs cleaning, attention, restocking, refilling outside of that schedule you take care of it when the need is discovered.*
3. Know the Tools: *Handle, check, and operate the tools at your disposal. That is the best way to truly learn how to operate them.*
4. It is Your Equipment: *Check your own PPE every shift. Check your own SCBA every shift, Check your radio battery every shift. After every call ask – what did we use, what do we need to restock?*
5. Learn to Cook: *The kitchen table is one of the best places for a crew to bond and learn from each other and everyone's experiences. Cooking together and for each other is a great way to bring a crew together. Don't cook short – there should always be leftovers.*
6. Use Your Time Wisely: *PFFs have a lot to learn and study – none of it is on TV or social media.*
7. Be on Time (Early): *There is a saying that on time is late and early is on time. You should leave early enough to account for traffic and weather. You should arrive early enough to be mission*

ready before your shift starts (in uniform, cleaned up, shaved, PPE out of the rack and on the rig, and briefed by the relieved member).

8. Bring Money: *We work in job that can play havoc with our schedule – some days having a few dollars in your pocket may be just what you need at the convenience store after working a grass fire all afternoon.*
9. Look Like a Professional: *Start the shift clean, groomed and in uniform. Wear the issued uniform. For extended shifts, shower, groom, and put on a fresh uniform at least every 24 hours. Have some gum for those late-night calls.*
10. Get in Shape: *You signed up for a physical job. It is easier to stay in shape than to get into shape.*

On Scene

1. Learn Something on Every Call: *You will never know everything there is to know in the fire service. Learn something new every shift and from every call. After the call ask how and why.*
2. Take Responsibility for Your Own Safety: *Use your PPE and SCBA and keep them clean, stay fit – physically and mentally, wear your vest on roadways, use seatbelts every time, carry a light, watch your footing.*
3. Wear Your SCBA: *Clear air does not mean clean air. Confirm with atmospheric monitoring before coming off air in a structure.*
4. Smooth is Fast: *Manage the adrenaline rush and breath. Think through the task at hand. Know your gear and tools so well that you do not have to think about it – this level of proficiency will lower your anxiety.*
5. Do Not Freelance: *Stick with your crew. Stick with the plan. Freelancing can place a firefighter by themselves and working outside the plan – this is not good or safe for anyone.*
6. The Right Tool for the Job: *What tools should you have in your gear? What tool do you need to bring with you from the rig at various calls? Always have a radio and a light.*
7. Fight Fire Like You Have Been Trained: *Keep your wits, remember your training, and focus on your part of the job. Don't be overwhelmed by the chaos of an incident.*
8. Learn Building Construction: *Understanding building types and construction materials helps you to understand how buildings react to fire. This knowledge allows us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a building.*
9. Learn to Read Smoke: *The volume, velocity, density, and color of smoke can tell you where a fire is in the structure, what's burning, its size, and where it is going – all without seeing the flames.*
10. Get Ready to Drive: *Learn the territory (streets, building types, water supplies), learn how to handle an apparatus, learn how to operate the pump and all the equipment on the rig. Being a relief driver increases your versatility in the organization.*

Attitude is Everything

1. Take Pride in Your New Career: *Take pride in every aspect from your role as an emergency responder to the quality of your work cleaning the bathroom.*
2. Learn the Rules: *Every department has formal (written) and informal (unwritten) rules. Know the department rules, policies and best practices. Ask and be observant in learning the unwritten rules.*
3. Respect Your Elders: *You can learn from the experience of the senior members around you. Address officers by their title.*
4. Listen More Than You Talk: *Remember you are the new person – trying to impress everyone with how much you know will not impress anyone.*

5. Do Not Be Afraid to Ask Questions: Ask about things you do not understand. Ask why things were done a certain way (after the incident or once the work is done). Ask "how am I doing?". Your crewmates want you to ask and they want you to know the answers.
6. Learn from Your Mistakes: You will make mistakes – own them, admit them, don't make excuses. Learn, correct, move on, never give up.
7. Train: You will never run enough calls to learn what you need to know – you must train.
8. Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Remember, as a new member you are building a reputation. Don't tell us – show us your character and commitment. Don't sit back – volunteer – go first.
9. Watch for the 10/20 Syndrome: Don't be 10 months on the job and act like you've been around for 20 years.
10. Leave Your Opinions at Home: You must prove yourself and earn respect with your crew before your opinion will be valued.
11. No Temper Tantrums: Don't let the teasing and testing of your crewmates get under your skin. If they like you they will pick on you. You should worry if they don't bother.
12. Not the Military, but it is Close: We have a chain of command. You should take questions and concerns to your officer. The officer will take matters that need to go higher to the Chiefs. Make sure you understand the orders you receive. Get clarification if you need it. Don't question why in the midst of carrying out an order. Get it done and report back. You can respectfully ask why later.
13. Learn to Love EMS: We are medical responders. It is a huge part of our mission. Master your medical skills. Treat your patients with respect and dignity – always. It does not matter if you think it is an emergency or not. It does not matter if they are nice or not.

Beyond the Job

1. The Malady: Firefighters have a higher risk of contracting several types of cancer. We must limit our exposure to the toxins we encounter as much as possible. PPE must be cleaned after being in an IDLH (immediately dangerous to life and health) atmosphere, switch to your clean hood when your primary hood is contaminated, Use personal wipes on your face, neck hands, wrists while on scene, shower immediately when returning to the station after a fire, put on a fresh uniform.
2. Your Mental Fitness: We see and experience a lot of things in the fire service that can impact our physical and mental health. Critical incident stress and PTSD is real and can affect anyone – it is not a sign of weakness. We have free resources available through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for those in need. Watch out for your brother and sister firefighters and speak up if you are suffering.
3. Pitfalls of the Profession: Firefighters have a higher rate of substance abuse than the general population. This department has a zero tolerance policy on substance abuse, but if a member comes forward with a problem without an on duty incident occurring, the department will work with the member to get help. Take the CAGE test on page 100 of the book.
4. Where to Draw the Line: Hazing is not tolerated. However where is the line between good-natured pranks and hazing. It is not a clear line and is often affected by perspective. Any type of sexual or physical assault or violence should be both reported and prosecuted. Each member (including new members) need to decide where that line is for you personally and make it perfectly and unmistakably clear to your crew.
5. N.O.W. (No Opportunity Wasted): There are tons of opportunities to learn in the fire service. Strive for personal and professional development at every turn. Seek classes, certifications, online training, conferences, and/or college courses that enhance your education in the fire service.

6. Stay on the Rise: *Identify your weaknesses and look for opportunities to strengthen them. Find a mentor. Never stop improving.*
7. You Only Get One Career: *Most firefighters only get one change at being a rookie – that reputation will follow you after that. The fire service is a smaller world than you realize.*
8. More Than Just Fighting Fire: *Remember that firefighting is only one part of the mission of the fire service. We are the catch-all public safety agency. When the public has a problem and it doesn't need a cop, you send the fire department. EMS is a major part of our mission. We are also involved in hazardous materials, code enforcement, public education, investigation, and public relations to name a few. Embrace and accept the full menu of services we offer or you run the risk of having an unhappy career waiting on the 10% of the time we fight fires.*
9. Get Out of the Firehouse and Get Involved: *Be engaged with your community. Be open to talk to the public, answer their questions, and show them the work we do. Something as simple as having someone at the rig to give tours and answer questions while at the store makes us approachable and personal to our community.*