

# **Preparing the Next Generation of Fire Officers**

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A research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

3 February 2019

## Certification Statement

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## ABSTRACT

An organization's leaders are essential to its existence. Leaders provide supervision, guidance, motivation, and direction. The problem that Truro Township Fire Department faced was that personnel had been promoted into leadership positions and did not possess the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to be initially successful. The department had not adequately defined the officer positions or the required knowledge, skills and abilities for the position. There was also no professional development plan in place to offer guidance to the next generation of aspiring officers. The purpose of this study was to identify the most critical leadership dimensions of a successful fire officer. This was done by utilizing a descriptive research method. The research questions this study investigated were:

1. What are the necessary core competencies for a successful fire officer?
2. Are there any standards or criteria that define the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities required for a successful fire officer?
3. What are other fire departments doing to train their prospective officers?
4. What programs or courses are available to develop these competencies?

The data for this applied research project was collected through internal and external fire department surveys which asked the respondents to rank the crucial personality dimensions of an officer, the most time consuming daily tasks performed, and the usefulness of other fire department's professional development plans. The survey results identified several important areas of officer development that needed to be addressed through training. The recommendations provided a procedural list for designing and implementing a plan to meet the challenge of professional development.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

A fire department's ability to survive and evolve is entirely dependent on the leadership of its members. In the book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Dr. Maxwell states, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." (Maxwell, 1998) It is vital that fire departments prepare their members for leadership positions. Presently, there is no officer development plan in place to train or prepare personnel for leadership positions at the Truro Township Fire Department. Recently there have been several incidents, such as public complaints, poor incident documentation and poor assessment center scores, which have highlighted this fact. The problem this study will address is that Truro Township personnel have been promoted into leadership positions, but time in grade has shown that they do not possess the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities that the position requires of them. This has caused concern within the fire department administration as to abilities of the officer corps to meet the current and future challenges of the department. In the next eight years, the fire department can potentially lose nearly all of its current officers to retirement. Along with that, they will lose over 200 years combined on the job experience. This means succession planning is important, but developing a plan to educate and train the future generations of officers is vital.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the most critical leadership dimensions required for a successful fire officer. The information obtained can be used to design an officer development plan for the Truro Township Fire Department consisting of specific

courses, literature, and formal education classes that are designed to development these dimensions.

### **Research Questions**

The research method being utilized for this study will be the descriptive method. The research questions this study will investigate are:

1. What are the necessary core competencies for a successful fire officer?
2. Are there any standards or criteria that define the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities required for a successful fire officer?
3. What are other fire departments doing to train their prospective officers?
4. What programs or courses are available to develop these competencies?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Truro Township Fire Department (TTFD) is a small suburban fire department that is located on the far-east side of Franklin County, Ohio. The fire department was established in 1937 as a single station and volunteer department, but grew quickly into two stations by 1959. Six full-time firefighters were hired in 1970 to provide 24-hour coverage (Truro Township , 2017). The present-day staffing is now seven times what it was in 1970. There are 13 personnel assigned to each of the 3 shifts. Each shift is comprised of 10 firefighters, 2 lieutenants and 1 battalion chief. TTFD has 4 administrative positions, comprised of the fire chief, assistant fire chief, fire inspector and an EMS coordinator, that are assigned to a 40-hour work week schedule. The total full-time staffing level is currently at 43 personnel. The daily department staffing is also augmented by part-time firefighters, which can range anywhere from one to two per day. The fire department serves a population of approximately 35,000 people (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Along with providing fire and emergency medical services to the residents of Truro Township, the fire department also provides services to the City of Reynoldsburg and the Village of Brice. The fire department responds to approximately 7,500 calls for service each year. This is a daily average of 20 emergency responses per day.

A looming problem that the fire department will face within the next five years will be potential retirements of its senior officer's corps. Over three quarters of its current officers will be eligible for retirement within five years and nearly all of its remaining officers within the next eight years. This forces the fire department to begin its succession planning now, but the department has not taken the steps necessary to prepare the next generation of officers. There is no succession plan in place and there is no plan to develop these prospective officers.

There are four different officer ranks that are recognized at Truro. These positions are fire chief, assistant fire chief, battalion chief and lieutenant. TTFD has a policies and procedures manual (PPM) that identifies these officer ranks at the fire department, but it offers little information regarding the requirements for the position nor does it provide any guidance for personnel aspiring to become an officer. Furthermore, these policies have not been revisited to ensure their relevancy in over 18 years.

The department's promotional testing for a lieutenant consists of a written knowledge test with the six highest scores proceeding on to an assessment center. The assessment center measures the overall personality dimensions of a candidate as they rate to the required dimensions of a successful officer. These personality dimensions range from written and oral communication, organizational skills, temperament, and the candidate's ability to manage a fire scene. The candidates at Truro that were being tested did not demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), as identified in NFPA 1021 *Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, necessary for immediate success in the position. (National Fire Protection Association, 2014) It was also revealed, through questioning, during the internal interview process that the candidates had not adequately prepared themselves for the position being tested. The majority of the candidates had not attended courses or trainings outside their initial fire officer courses nor had they spent time on any self-development skills. Furthermore, these candidates had done nothing to maintain the skill sets that they acquired in their fire officer trainings. If this candidate were to be promoted they would be forced to play catch up by reacquiring the skills necessary for the position. This, in turn, can potentially stall the progress of the department by costing valuable time in retraining and this time is now paid at higher rate.

The fire department has established certain positions designed to help develop the personality dimensions of its members by giving them responsibility within the department. The positions include building maintenance, vehicle maintenance, EMS supply officer, SCBA maintenance, fire hose maintenance. The positions require the members to learn about operating budgets, administrative paperwork and develop written communications skills. All of which are some of the necessary KSA's that will be required of them later in an officer's position.

The lack of KSAs has also plagued the current shift officers by leaving them ill prepared to handle the requirements of their positions. Some of the officers do not currently demonstrate the written and verbal communication skills that are expected of the position. The administration has cited, on several occasions, their frustration with incomplete shifts reports, fire reports and inadequate documentation of EMS reports. There have also been incidents that have occurred within the fire station that were handled improperly. The incidents were not documented nor were the proper authorities notified. These deficiencies have caused the administration to question the overall effectiveness of its officer corps. In an attempt to address this concern, by balancing its strengths and weaknesses, the administration recently transferred several of its officers to different shifts.

The shift officers are not alone in their struggle; the battalion chiefs are also suffering in their administrative abilities. The new battalion chiefs have little to no experience in the areas of budgeting, policy development, human resource management or conflict resolution. There have been no courses or trainings offered in data entry, word processing or Microsoft Office; all of which are necessary skills for an administrative position. The lack of KSA's in this area can lead ineffective management techniques and longer working times.

TTFD currently has an annual Fire and EMS Training Budget of \$50,000 however, there is no list of suggested courses for its personnel. The choice of courses or trainings is always left to the individual firefighter's discretion. This usually means training courses are chosen at random without any assurance as to the validity or benefit for the fire department. This absence of a defined professional development plan leaves the fire department wondering about their "return on investment."

In addition to the annual fire and EMS training budget, there is another \$15,000 set aside for college tuition reimbursement for the full-time employees. The college tuition is paid yearly with a maximum of \$3,000 per individual per calendar year. The fire department values education and encourages its members to attend fire and EMS trainings, but there is no written educational plan to follow. Therefore, the firefighter is free to choose his or her own course of study. Here again, the fire department is funding education for the members and potentially getting no benefit in return.

The fire department also provides monthly in-service fire and EMS training to the on-duty crew. These trainings are conducted by in-house instructors or contracted agencies from the outside. However, these training topics have been limited to those only necessary to maintain their state fire or EMS certifications and offer nothing relating to professional development training. This is another opportunity for the fire department to develop the KSA's necessary for current and prospective leaders.

With the looming retirements on the horizon, the absence of a professional development plan for its officers means that the fire department will likely be stalled as an organization based on the past experiences. The newly promoted shift officers, battalion chiefs and administrative

officers will, again, be forced to learn their new positions and acquire the skills necessary to become successful. Therefore, the potential impact this study could have on the Truro Township Fire Department is far reaching. By designing a professional development plan that clearly defines the prerequisites and educational needs of the current officers along with those of aspiring officers the fire department will not only prepare them for the next level, but ensure the continued growth of the department. This will not only benefit the firefighters, officers and fire department by ensuring the next generation of officers will not suffer from this present lack of preparedness, it will also benefit the citizens of Truro Township, the City of Reynoldsburg and the surrounding communities that the fire department serves.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review will identify courses, trainings and literature that are available for professional development. It will also identify the common leadership dimensions that are necessary for success as a leader. The sources in this literature review came from personal interviews, personal development literature, recognized national standards for fire officer development and the websites of professional organizations.

Leadership is important to the fire department not only on the fire ground, but around the fire station. In his Executive Fire Officer Research paper, *Developing Company Officer Competencies for the Eules Fire Department*, Jeffery Morris likens a shift commander to the band conductor. Even though they do not play an instrument, they must know how everything works together. (Morris, 2016)

In the book, *First, Break All the Rules*, the authors studied several successful companies and determined that employees are not influenced nearly as much by the job benefits or perks as

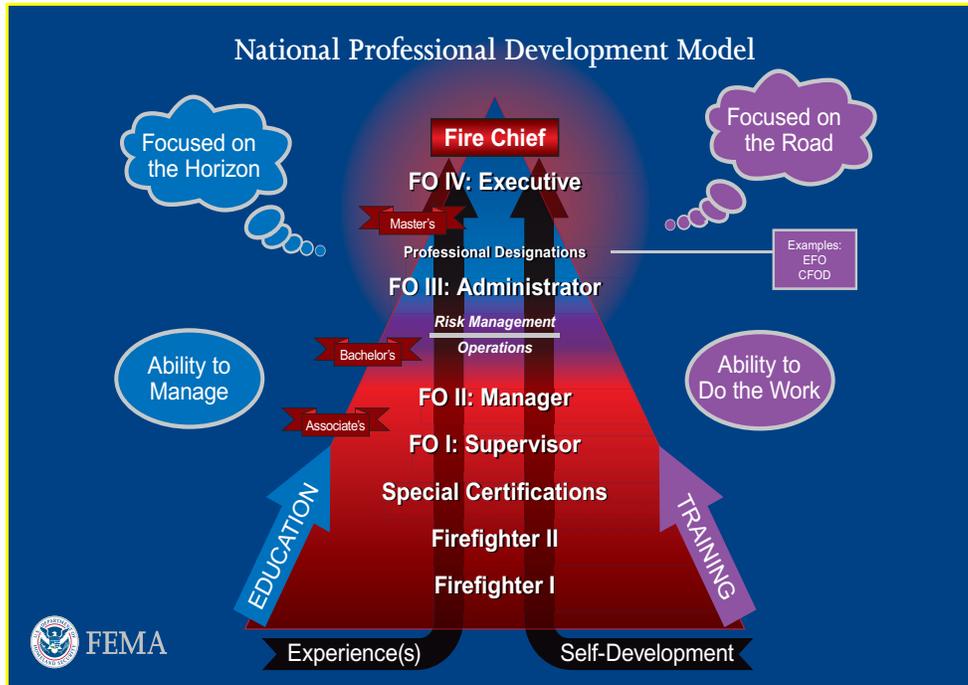
much as they are managers. Their studies found that managers are the reason for job satisfaction, but the opposite is also true. Dissatisfaction and increased employee turnover were directly related to management. (Gallup, 1999) The value of having well-educated and capable fire officers in place cannot be overemphasized. An article on the *All Risk Training & Safety* website stated this regarding a fire officer's roles and responsibilities: "The modern fire officer faces many challenges in today's fire service. An increase in demand for services and at a lower cost, an increase in responsibilities, adherence to governmental mandates, recruitment and retention, today's fire officer must possess certain skills and personal qualities. These skills should include verbal and written communications, technological ability, organization, time management, relationship building and planning. The modern fire officer is not only the leader on the fire ground, he or she must be a leader to their subordinates, a liaison to the city council and available to the public." (All Risk Training & Safety, 2014)

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is a nationally recognized organization that is responsible for developing standards in which the fire service uses as an operational standard nationwide. In NFPA 1021, *Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, they recognize four different levels of fire officer within the fire service today. They begin with Fire Officer I, which is the entry level company officer, and end with Fire Officer IV, which is the chief officer. Each of the different levels of fire officer require particular performance dimensions. NFPA 1021 identifies the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) in each dimension that are needed by the fire officer as they progress through their career. They list these dimensions which range from general fire service knowledge, human resource management, community and government relations, administration, inspections and investigations, emergency services delivery, and health & safety as areas that are vital for each level of fire officers to possess. There are even low-level

college courses recommended for today's fire officer. (National Fire Protection Association, 2014)

The Ohio Fire Academy (OFA), located in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, has developed Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II, Fire Officer III, and Fire Officers IV courses. These are formalized courses that address the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) required for each level of fire officer set forth in NFPA 1021. The candidates are then tested at the conclusion of each course to ensure subject competency. The OFA also offers other courses that aid a candidate in the area of professional development such as the Leadership I, II, and III series. These are a series of 2-day courses which expose the candidate to additional leadership skills necessary for today's fire officer. (Ohio.gov, 2018)

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) also recognized the need for furthering the education of today's fire officer. The IAFC has a book dedicated to the professional development of fire officers entitled, *Officer Development Handbook*. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010) In this book they too identify four developmental levels of today's fire officer. Their list includes Fire officer I - supervisory officer, Fire Officer II - managing officer, Fire Officer III - administrative officer and Fire Officer IV - executive officer. Unlike NFPA 1021, which simply lists the KSA's necessary of the position, this book offers guidance in the form of a professional development plan to aid the fire officer as they advance throughout their career. (Table 1)

**Table 1***IAFC Professional Development Model*

In a web-based article from FireRecruit.com, they stated: “The future of the fire service depends on the ability of the current leaders to develop future leaders. Many fire departments are forced to open up the promotional process to other departments and districts to try to find good leaders to fill vacant positions. This is especially true at the command staff level and fire chief level. This is often indicative of a lack of leadership training, development, and mentoring.” (FireRecruit.com, 2011) Therefore, having a professional development plan in place to educate and train their future leaders is essential for fire departments.

Battalion Chief Kenn Taylor (Taylor, 2018), from the Violet Township Fire Department, has developed a course tailored specifically for the newly promoted chief officers. Each newly promoted battalion chief sits through a classroom presentation that outlines the expectation and

skills necessary to be successful in the battalion chief role. Prior to their promotion, the prospective candidates also shadow current officers to learn the daily routine. They learn about the role and responsibilities of the position. They are also taught about the vehicles and equipment they will be using in this new position. The shadowing process allows the candidate the opportunity to gain valuable experience managing actual emergency scenes under the direct supervision of a veteran officer. These new officers are certified in the Blue Card incident command system that was developed by the late Phoenix Fire Chief Alan Brunacini. The Blue Card incident command system has proved to be very helpful in preparing an incident commander. There is an online course that participants must complete followed by a 3-day certification course. During the 3-day course, the participants manage fire scenarios ranging from a simple residential or a small commercial, to large industrial buildings providing an incident commander the opportunity to hone their skills. (B Shifter, 2018)

Firefighter Brian Barrick of the Columbus Division of Fire explained that their prospective officers are provided in-house training at their own academy. The Columbus Fire Training Academy also recognizes and teaches the fire officer KSA's identified in NFPA 1021 in a program similar to the OFA. Each candidate on the department's current promotional list is subject to attending their company officer course prior to being promoted. The officer course is designed to give these candidates the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) that they will need before acquiring the new position. (Barrick, 2018)

It should be noted that NFPA 1021 is only the minimum standard for a fire officer. A comprehensive fire officer development plan should not only meet this standard, but provide additional courses or programs to exceed it. In the State of Ohio, the Ohio Fire Chief's Association (The Ohio Fire Chief's Association, 2018) offer the Ohio Fire Executive course

(OFE) which is a two- and half-year program designed to provide a higher level of education for managing, administrative and executive fire officers. The program provides the fire officer with the advanced knowledge and skills in the areas of written communications, budgeting, leadership, human resources, planning and research practices.

The National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, Maryland also has dedicated courses intended for the educational advancement of today's fire officer such as the Executive Fire Officer program (EFO). EFO is a four-year program with a curriculum designed to develop the leadership skills of the candidate. However, selection and entry into both the EFO and OFE programs require the prospective candidate to already be a fire officer, have several years of experience and have a solid educational background to be eligible.

Officer candidates can also seek leadership advice from the private sector to further their education. There are several leadership seminars and countless books that have been written on the subject of leadership and developing the essential traits of successful leaders. John Maxwell, the author of *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, explains this a little further by dedicating an entire chapter to each specific dimension he feels is necessary for effective leadership. Mr. Maxwell explains how an organization's overall effectiveness is entirely dependent on its leader's individual abilities. (Maxwell, 1998) The Ohio Fire Chief's Association offers a 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership 3-day course which has been based upon the book by John Maxwell. (Ohio Fire Chief's Association , 2018)

Stephen R. Covey significantly narrows Mr. Maxwell's work when he lists 7 traits of successful people in the book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Mr. Covey discusses each habit and how it should be applied in your daily life in order to be a more successful leader. Most notably in Covey's list is *Habit #5 Seek first to understand, then be understood*. Here he

discusses the importance of effective communications and how a leader can develop it by simply becoming a better listener. It is important to be empathetic to the sender and genuinely try to understand what they are saying. Listening is a valuable part of communications. (Covey, 1989)

The book, *First Break All the Rules*, by Gallup, offers management techniques that were based on years of research and countless interviews of successful managers. The book was written specifically for supervisory personnel who are engaging and motivating their employees directly within an organization. It provides the leaders with advice in dealing with difficult personality types to achieve maximum potential. (Gallup, 1999)

In Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, (Carnegie, 1936) he discusses the importance of having human relations skills. The guidance that Mr. Carnegie offers here may be utilized by leaders when directing or issuing orders. Rather than giving people direct orders and risking resentment later, he advocates allowing people to develop the solution themselves. The supervisor only acts as a guide by asking questions and influencing the process indirectly in lieu of giving direct orders. This gives the employee the feeling of ownership over the project and gains the valuable "buy-in" in the process. Carnegie also provides the reader with valuable human resource tips on how to deal with people, how to make people like you, how win people over to your way of thinking, and how to change people's minds in a diplomatic way. The Dale Carnegie Company offers several courses based off this best-selling book. The most notable is the self-titled Dale Carnegie Course which is an extensive course designed to further develop the human relations dimension of a leader (Dale Carnegie, 2018).

While Carnegie's approach would prove useful in the non-emergency environment, a fire officer needs to be familiar with several styles of leadership depending on the situation. A fire scene requires more of an autocratic leader as discussed in the International Fire Service Training

Association (IFSTA) book *Chief Officer*. Here we can see that a leader must be flexible in their style of leadership ranging from a Democratic style in the non-emergency setting to Autocratic style during emergency incidents. (International Fire Service Training Association, 2004).

The prospective leaders of today should not limit themselves to the fire service or private sector in their study of leadership dimensions. They may also look to the United States Military. The military understands the value and importance of leadership. It has spent a great deal of time and money educating its leaders. In an interview with Captain Travis Watson, United States Air Force, he stated that his officer career path began at Ohio University in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and took four years to complete, but there are other paths an officer candidate may chose. An air force officer may attend the U.S. Air Force Academy or they may attend Officer Candidate School (OCS), but the U.S. Air Force requires every candidate to have the minimum college level bachelor's degree to be eligible. He stated Air Force officers are also required to take continuing education courses throughout their careers. As an officer progresses in the Air Force, so do the educational requirements. Captain Watson had to attend a 6-week Squadron Officer's School to be promoted to captain, but says the Field Grade Officer's, such as a major, may be selected for Air Command and Staff College which is a 1-year program. A senior Air Force officer has to complete Air War College which is another 1-year program. Both the Air Command and Staff College and Air War College are considered Master's level programs. So, in the end, a senior Air Force officer can hold a bachelor's and 2 separate master's degrees. (Watson, 2018)

There have also been numerous books written on the subject of leadership by retired military officers like, *The Leader's Bookshelf*, by retired United States Navy Admiral James Stavridis. In his book, he lists 50 books on the subject of leadership that have been

recommended from high ranking officers in every branch of the military. These books range from historical fiction, non-fiction and military history. All of these are intended to assist in the developing of an officer's leadership dimensions. (Adm. James Stavridis, 2017) In the New York Times Best Selling book, *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* by Captain D. Michael Abrasoff (Retired), states when speaking about a leader, "Whether you like it or not, people follow your example." He also believes while great leadership is a rare thing, he feels that today's leaders can be both born naturally and developed over time. (Abrashoff, *It's Your Ship*, 2002) Retired United States Navy SEALs Commander, Mark Divine, writes in his book entitled *The Way of the SEAL* about techniques a leader can employ in problem solving by finding what he terms as a person's "Set Point". When faced with decisions, he advocates always knowing your "Why." A person should always understand why they are doing something, so all of the decisions that you make revolve around accomplishing your "Why" or purpose. (Divine, 2013)

Once a fire officer feels that they completed their fire training, formal education, and met all the fire officer requirements set forth by NFPA 1021, they may apply for what is known as professional credentialing. The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) offers fire officers who meet their qualifications the opportunity to become a professionally credentialed fire officer through the CPSE. This is an outward sign of your educational commitment to the fire service. (The Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2018)

In summary, the importance of leadership in the fire service cannot be overemphasized. As this review has found, there is no shortage of fire training courses, professional development courses, material or literature written on the subject of leadership and developing those leadership dimensions that may assist a prospective fire officer. It has also shown the need for a

candidate to pursue self-development outside the traditional fire service curriculum. It is clear that having an officer development plan is critical for a fire department to assist in developing its leadership.

## **PROCEDURES**

Descriptive research methodology was used in this research process. This survey was designed for and sent to veteran fire officers within the State of Ohio. The survey questions were also designed to focus on which tasks consume the majority of the fire officer's time and to measure which skills or dimensions that the respondents felt are most critical to an officer. The respondents were current fire officers or firefighters who were designated as in charge personnel. The information in this process was obtained through an internal survey questionnaire of the current officers at TTFD and an external survey of Ohio fire departments.

The survey questions were tested prior to administering to ensure the correct comprehension and accuracy of the data being collected. A sample population of six individuals with supervisory roles within the Truro Township Fire Department were chosen at random for the internal test survey. The external test survey was sent via email to Lieutenant Dave Carter at the Violet Township Fire Department for review.

There were two questionnaires developed for this research paper. The first survey was an internal survey (Appendix 1) sent to all of the officers at the Truro Township Fire Department with personnel management responsibilities. The positions that were surveyed were fire chief, assistant fire chief, two battalion chiefs and six shift lieutenants. The survey was also sent to the in-charge firefighters, which are firefighters who work in a supervisory role in the absence of a shift officer, which was an additional six firefighters. These surveys were distributed in person

to each selected individual. Only eleven surveys were returned within the allotted time frame. The survey consisted of seven questions. Three questions were designed to 1) elicit feedback regarding the most important functions of an officer, 2) functions that consume a majority of their time and 3) the most important personality dimensions of an officer. One question was subjective, simply requesting feedback as to which courses in their career have been most beneficial. The last question was a rank in order question that required the respondent to prioritize, 1 through 10, the personality dimensions of an officer that were taken from NFPA 1021. These surveys were distributed on July 05, 2018 and collected on August 03, 2018.

The second survey (Appendix 2) was intended for external fire departments. The survey was sent out via email link to fire departments only in the State of Ohio. These fire departments were selected at random to achieve a broad overview of professional development in every department. The fire departments responding to the survey all ranged in department size, demographics, and call volume. These fire departments also consisted of urban, suburban and small rural fire departments. The responding departments were all career or combination of paid and volunteer. Since NFPA 1021 does not differentiate between the requirements of a career and volunteer fire officer, volunteer fire departments were included in this survey. The majority of the departments were from northeast, central and southwest Ohio.

There were only 30 respondents to the external survey. The answers to the external survey can be found in Appendix 4. The respondents to this survey included several members with varying years of service, from various ranks, and from both rural and urban departments. The results of this survey will further assist the Truro Township Fire Department in designing their officer development plan by obtaining a 360-degree view of the current needs of other officers within the state.

The survey was made available through the SurveyMonkey.com website. The survey consisted of eight questions that were fill in the blank, ranking and short answer style. The respondents were asked if their fire department had a professional development plan in place; if not, the respondent could skip to a later question. One question asked if the professional development plan adequately prepared the new officer for the position. The respondents were then asked to rank in order of importance nine personality traits of a fire officer as identified by NFPA 1021. In another question, they were asked to identify which daily tasks consumed the majority of their time. The last question was subjective and asked the respondent to list any courses or books that they have taken or read that helped them in their professional career. The survey was administered from July 05, 2018 through July 31, 2018.

### **Definition of Terms**

Dimensions. One of the elements or factors making up a complete personality or entity (Merriam-Webster, 2018)

NFPA 1021. National Fire Protection Association Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications (National Fire Protection Association, 2014)

### **Limitations of the Study**

This survey was limited first by the small number of respondents to the survey. The internal survey only had 11 of 17 respondents accounting for a little over half of those surveyed. This is difficult to get an accurate reflection of the entire view. In the external survey, only 30 fire departments responded, this represents a small fraction of the fire departments in the State of Ohio. Again, with the limited size, the survey does not reflect the entire State of Ohio's opinion.

Furthermore, these were only fire departments within the State of Ohio and does not consider the national opinion.

Second, the fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions in the survey were subjective. These answers included personal opinions or biases towards certain courses or literature. Question 6, in which the respondent was asked to rank the personality dimensions of an officer, was also subjective and limited to only the dimensions listed. This was also the case for question 7 in the survey where the respondents were only given 5 tasks to choose from that consume their time during a shift. Last, in question 8, when asked to list which courses were most beneficial to the professional development of the respondent, several variables existed in this question. Since not every course listed is taught by the same instructor, in the same manner, or at the same training location, the curriculum taught and knowledge gained are inconsistent. The recommendations made about courses and books that assisted the respondent in their professional development may only be taken at face value.

## **RESULTS**

The end goal of this research is to design an effective officer development plan for the Truro Township Fire Department based upon the critical leadership dimensions that are identified in this survey. The current officers at the Truro Township Fire Department were asked the following questions to determine what core competencies the officers within the department felt were necessary for success. The responses listed will assist in prioritizing the important core competencies of leadership and then designing a professional development plan that addresses them.

The first question that this applied research project sought to answer was: What are the necessary core competencies for a fire officer? In question three of the internal survey the respondents helped identify these when they were asked: What fire department functions consume the majority of their time? (Table 3). The majority of respondents, 45.5%, indicated that administrative duties consumed the majority of their time. While 18.2% stated that emergency calls and human resources consumed their time, 1% of the respondents stated that training and team building were the largest parts of their days.

**Table 3**

*Functions that consume the majority of an officer's time*

Job Functions	% of Time
Emergency Calls	18.2% (2)
Training	1% (1)
Administrative	45.5% (5)
Human Resources	18.2% (2)
Team Building	1% (1)

Question seven of the external survey also asked: As an officer or in-charge firefighter, which of the below functions consume the majority of your time? The respondents here again stated that administrative work, 56.7%, consumed the majority of their time. Problem solving/decision making was next at 30%, followed by relationship building, 13.3%, and organizational planning at 3.3%. (Table 7)

**Table 7**

*Functions that consume the majority of an officer's time*

	Job Functions	% of Time
1.	Incident Scene Management	0% (0)
2.	Problem Solving	30% (9)
3.	Organizational Planning	3.33% (1)
4.	Relationship Building	13.3% (4)
5.	Administrative Work	56.7% (17)

In an attempt to further identify and understand the necessary core competencies at the Truro Township Fire Department, the internal survey asked two additional questions. In question four it was asked: What are the most important job functions that an officer performs? The majority of the respondents listed crew safety as the most important function that an officer performs. Others listed relationship building and problem solving, respectively, as what they felt were the most important job functions of an officer. (Table 4)

**Table 4**

*Important job functions an officer performs*

Ranking	Most Important Function
1.	Crew Safety
2.	Relationship Building
3.	Problem Solving

Question five of the internal survey was also specific to Truro Township and asked the officers: What do you feel are the most important personality dimensions that a successful officer should possess? The officers felt that relationship skills were the most important competency of an officer. (Table 5)

**Table 5**

*Important personality dimensions of a successful officer*

Ranking	Most Important Dimension
1.	Relationship Skills
2.	Communication Skills
3.	Problem Solver

Question seven of the internal survey asked: Rank in order the following personality dimensions of an officer from most to least important with 1 being the most and 9 the least. The respondents ranked positive attitude as the most important dimension and then communication skills at the top of the list. Problem solving and relationship skills both tied as the next most important. This was followed by incident management, time management, flexibility, organization/planning and least important was administrative skills. (Table 7)

**Table 7**

*Ranking of most important personality dimensions for an officer*

	Dimensions	Average Ranking
1.	Incident Management	5
2.	Problem Solving/Decision Making	3.09
3.	Flexibility	6.55
4.	Organization/Planning	6.82
5.	Time Management	6.27
6.	Relationship Skills	3.09
7.	Administrative Skills	7.66
8.	Positive Attitude	2.66
9.	Communication Skills	3.91

Question six of the external survey was a ranking question regarding the personality dimensions of an officer. It asked: Rank in order the following personality dimensions of an officer from most to least important with 1 being the most and 9 being the least. The respondents here ranked problem solving as the number one most important dimension for an officer. This was followed, in order, by incident scene management, positive attitude, organization/planning, flexibility, relationship building, oral & written communications, time management, and administrative skills. (Table 6)

**Table 6**

*Ranking of most important personality dimensions for an officer*

	Dimensions	Ranking
1.	Incident Management	6.67
2.	Problem Solving/Decision Making	7.34
3.	Flexibility	4.67
4.	Organization/Planning	4.93
5.	Time Management	3.89
6.	Relationship Skills	4.60
7.	Administrative Skills	2.77
8.	Positive Attitude	6.37
9.	Communication Skills	4.23

The second research question that needed to be answered asked: Are there any standards or criteria that define the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) required for a successful fire officer? This question was answered during the literature review when the necessary KSA's were identified and defined in NFPA 1021.

The third research question wanted to know what other fire departments were doing to train their prospective officers. This question was partially answered during the literature review during the interviews with Battalion Chief Kenn Taylor of the Violet Township Fire Department and Firefighter Brian Barrick of the Columbus Division of Fire.

In question four of the external survey it was found that the majority of fire departments had a fire officer development plan in place. The majority responding answered, Yes, 86.7%, that their departments did have an officer development plan. Only 13.3% answered, No, indicating that their departments did not have a plan. (Table 4)

**Table 4**

*Departments with an Officer Development Plan*

Yes	86.7%
No	13.3%

The final research question wanted to know what programs or courses are available to develop these competencies. This question was also answered in the literature review. The IAFC Fire *Officer Development Handbook* identified the beneficial courses and a professional development plan for aspiring fire officers. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010) In question six of the internal survey, respondents were asked: What courses or books have been most beneficial to you as an officer? The most popular answers were ranked below accordingly. The fire officer courses were listed as being the most helpful to them in their current positions. (Table 6)

**Table 6**

*Courses or books that have been beneficial*

Ranking	Beneficial Books & Courses
1.	Fire Officer I & II Courses
2.	Blue Card Command Training
3.	<i>21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership-by John Maxwell</i>
4.	<i>How to Win Friends &amp; Influence People – by Dale Carnegie</i>
5.	Ohio Fire Executive (OFE)

In question eight of the external survey, I was able to gain more insight into the literature that is available to assist in developing the leadership dimensions. It asked those surveyed: What courses or books have been most beneficial to you as an officer in your professional development? Since there were multiple different answers, I have ranked them in order according to the number of times that they were suggested. According to those responding, the fire officer I, II, III and IV courses were the most beneficial. The Ohio Fire Executive program was second. The books *Extreme Ownership*, *How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin and *Fire Officer's Handbook of Tactics*, by John Norman were next and tied at third. The books *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* by D. Michael Abrashoff and the *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* by John Maxwell tied at fourth. The book *Above the Line: Lessons in Leadership from a Champion Program* by Urban Meyer and the book *Step Up and Lead* by Frank Viscuso tied at fifth. There were several books that were mentioned only once and they are: *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R.

Covey, *Leadership Under Fire* by Nick Halley, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* by Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz and *The Edge: The Guide to Fulfilling Dreams, Maximizing Success and Enjoying a Lifetime of Achievement* by Howard E. Ferguson, *What It Takes to Be #1* by Vince Lombardi Jr and *Band of Brothers* by Stephen E. Ambrose. (Appendix 4) The courses that were mentioned only once as being beneficial were: The National Fire Academy's Executive Skills, Command Control of Multiple Alarms, Shaping the Future, Fire Instructor, Air Force General Mark Welsh video series and college level course relating to human resources. (Appendix 4)

**Table 8**

*Beneficial courses or books*

Rank	Course/Book Title	Suggestions
1.	Fire Officer Courses (I, II, III, IV)	7
2.	Ohio Fire Executive Program (OFE)	5
3.	Extreme Ownership & Handbook of Tactics	4
4.	21 Irrefutable Laws & It's Your Ship	3
5.	Step Up & Lead & Lessons in Leadership	2

## DISCUSSION

The respondents in both surveys (Appendix 3 & 4) also identified problem solving as one of the top officer dimensions that they found to be vital for a successful fire officer. In the literature review, Commander Divine discusses how decision making is an important dimension. (Divine, 2013) This is why fire service experience plays a role in the promotional process. The

IFAC cites in their *Officer Development Handbook* that supervising officers should have 3-5 years of experience. Managing Officers should have 2-4 years of experience at a supervising level prior to promotion and administrative officers should have 3-5 years of experience as a managing officer before receiving a promotion. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010) When officers are faced with decisions, this valuable time on the job allows them to use their past experience to help guide them through the process.

Incident scene management was ranked consistently high according to the survey results (Appendix 3 & 4) as being a desirable dimension of a successful officer. Like the problem solving, years of fire service experience will be of the biggest benefit to any incident commander. The Blue Card Certification Training can also assist an incident commander with their command presence (B Shifter, 2018). As we found in the interview with Battalion Chief Ken Taylor, job shadowing can be successful tool in developing a fire officer (Taylor, 2018). Job shadowing is referenced in NFPA 1021 as another way to develop the knowledge and skill set of future officers. (National Fire Protection Association, 2014)

A leader's attitude was important to the survey respondents. It ranked first in the internal survey (Appendix 3) and third in the external survey (Appendix 4). However, this is not specially a dimension listed in NFPA 1021, it is very important for leaders to understand how their attitude impacts their entire crew. Captain Abrashoff acknowledges this in *It's Your Ship*. (Abrashoff, *It's Your Ship*, 2002; Abrashoff, *It's Your Ship*, 2002) The book, *First, Break All the Rules*, by Gallup, also found that good managers led to employee satisfaction (Gallup, 1999).

The internal and external surveys ranked relationship skills or human resources dimensions high on the list of skills that an officer should possess (Appendix 3) (Appendix 4). Those responding to this survey also listed the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

by Dale Carnegie as being a helpful tool to develop the human resources component of a fire officer (Dale Carnegie, 2018).

It was determined in question five of the external survey (Appendix 4) that simply having a written development plan will not guarantee successful future officers at the fire department. In the survey results, 86.7% of the respondents indicated that their department's development plan was not successful in preparing them for the position. Only 13.3% of those surveyed felt that their plans effectively prepared them for the officer position. (Table 5)

**Table 5**

*Did the Officer Development prepare the candidate*

No	86.7%
Yes	13.3%

The IAFC provides a written action plan for those seeking career advancement in their *Officer Development Handbook*. This plan specifically lists the fire trainings, formal educational requirements, fire service experience and the self-development a fire officer should have at each promotional level of their career. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010) A fire officer at each promotional level is able to perform a self-assessment based on the handbook and prepare themselves for advancement.

While the respondents ranked the dimensions that they felt were important, a good fire officer should be proficient in all of these dimensions. The literature review identifies several available resources for officer development, but those that are particularly useful and relevant to the fire service were NFPA 1021 and the IAFC handbook. In NFPA 1021, they list the following dimensions that are necessary for a fire officer beginning with Human Resources,

Community and Government Relations, Administration, Inspections and Investigations, Emergency Scene Delivery, and Health and Safety. (National Fire Protection Association, 2014) They further define these dimensions by listing the knowledge and skills that are required of each area. The standards within NFPA 1021 are nationally recognized and courses such as the fire officer series I, II, III, and IV found at the Ohio Fire Academy (Ohio.gov, 2018) are designed around developing these particular KSA's identified. The respondents in both the internal and external surveys (Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) overwhelmingly indicated that administrative duties consumed the vast majority of their time. In the *Chief Officer* book, they acknowledge the importance of developing organizational and planning skills along with written and verbal communication skills. (National Fire Protection Association, 2014)

Once a good foundation of knowledge is in place, an officer candidate should consider professional development literature as another way of developing their skills. The IAFC lists have a Self-Development portion at each officer level (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010). Here the officer assesses their own personal strengths and weakness. It is this area of professional development where books by Dale Carnegie, Captain Abrashoff, Stephen Covey and John Maxwell all may be of benefit. All of these books have made their way into today's fire service and should be considered as required reading.

Finally, a fire officer can gain recognition for their years of dedication and commitment to professional development by seeking to become credentialed. The credentialing process can be accomplished through The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE).

As this applied research project has found, there are a wide array of personality dimensions that need to be developed in a prospective officer candidate to achieve success. The Truro Township Fire Department can no longer afford to allow individual candidates to design

their own professional development plan and hope for a successful outcome. This method has shown to be unproductive and ineffective in developing the KSA's required for the positions. An officer development plan must be designed and implemented that addresses the recognized national standards along with meeting the fire departments current requirements.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this research project was to identify the most critical leadership dimensions of a successful fire officer. Then using the recommendations, develop a program for the Truro Township Fire Department consisting of specific courses, literature, and formal education classes that are designed to develop these dimensions. The recommendations contained here are the results of the information collected and analyzed during this applied research project.

Another problem was discovered in the course of researching the issue. During the process of researching the background and significance section, it was discovered that Truro Township did not have adequate job descriptions for the fire officer positions that it recognizes within the fire department. Therefore, prior to designing a professional development plan, attention must be first given to writing the prerequisites and qualifications for a fire officer at the fire department.

The first recommendation would then be for the administrative officers to develop thorough job descriptions for positions within the department. The Truro Township Fire Department recognizes the positions of firefighter, lieutenant, battalion chief, assistant chief and fire chief in their policies and procedures manual. A comprehensive job description should be written for each of these positions. The job descriptions should list prerequisites, qualifications,

and KSA's for the position. It is also recommended that these job requirements coincide with the recommendations listed in NFPA 1021 Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications (National Fire Protection Association, 2014). They should also specify trainings that include the important personality dimensions that were identified through question 5 of the internal survey (Appendix 3).

The next recommendation would be to form a committee, comprised of department members, to design a professional development plan for the firefighters. The committee should have representation from all ranks of the fire department from chief officers to firefighters. A diversified committee will allow for opinions and ideas from all ranks. It will also benefit from the input of senior officers as to the struggles during their careers and account for the challenges faced by today's aspiring officers. Another benefit of engaging the members of the department is to give them ownership over the process and gain "buy in" as seen in Carnegie's book. (Dale Carnegie, 2018)

The third recommendation is for the committee to utilize the information acquired in this applied research project. The committee members should include trainings based on the important personality dimensions listed in the internal survey results (Appendix 3) and the external survey. (Appendix 4) The findings from the external survey allows the committee the benefit of an objective view from veteran fire officers outside their own fire department. Therefore, the contents of the development plan should give particular attention to developing the dimensions listed in both surveys. The committee should utilize the IAFC *Officer Development Handbook* as a guide in their plan development. This book provides a clear career path for professional development by listing the trainings, educational courses, desired

experience, and self-development expectations at each officer level. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010)

The fourth recommendation for the plan is to include some form of job shadowing prior to a candidate's promotion. NFPA 1021 recommends job shadowing as part of the officer development process. It has also been proven to be a useful and effective part of the process at the Violet Township Fire Department as cited in the Literature Review. (Taylor, 2018)

The fifth recommendation would be to incorporate a professional development read list. As we saw in both survey results (Appendix 3 & 4), professional development literature has proven useful to veteran fire officers throughout the fire service. The read list should not only be influenced by the results of this research, but the fire chief should assist in guiding the process by including literature that impart the values that are consistent with their vision of the fire department's future. The fire department's strategic plan would also be of benefit in establishing this list to ensure the personality dimensions that we are developing are consistent with the community's expectations of the Truro Township Fire Department.

The sixth recommendation is for the professional development plan to include a continuing education component for the officers. As we saw in the interview with Captain Watson, the military recognizes the need for continuing education within its officer ranks. (Watson, 2018) The department should conduct continuing education training for its fire officers. The trainings should focus on the fire officer competencies that were identified in NFPA 1021.

The seventh recommendation is that the plan should be reevaluated on a periodic basis. The plan should be reviewed to ensure its effectiveness in developing department personnel.

The development plan should reflect current training courses, standards, trends and recommendations. The needs of the department's current officers should also be reevaluated to ensure the personality dimensions that were identified in the internal survey (Appendix 3) are still relevant.

The final recommendation would be for the committee to perform additional research regarding professional development plans that are being utilized by other fire departments. As the results show from the external survey, (Appendix 4) simply having an officer development plan does not guarantee that you will get your desired results. They should examine other plans to identify any educational or training deficiencies and plan accordingly. Furthermore, it should evaluate other plans for effectiveness and identify any pitfalls they have experienced.

In summary, a comprehensive professional development plan should include the involvement of the department's personnel in its design. It should meet the NFPA 1021 standard and provide a clear outline of recommended courses, trainings, and the KSA's expected from its officers. It should have a mentoring component and allow for continuing education in the plan. Finally, it should be reevaluated on a regularly basis to ensure relevancy and effectiveness. By adhering to the above recommendations, the Truro Township Fire Department will be able to design an effective professional development plan and successfully prepare its members for the future.

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## Appendix 1 - Internal Survey Questions - Truro Township

1. How many years of fire service experience do you have?
2. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?
3. What fire department functions consume the majority of your time?
4. What are the most important job functions an officer performs?
5. What do you feel are the most important personality dimensions a successful officer should possess?
6. What courses or books have been most beneficial to you as an officer?
7. Rank in order the following personality dimensions of an officer from most to least important with 1 being the most important and 9 the least.

\_\_\_ Incident Scene Management

\_\_\_ Relationship Skills

\_\_\_ Problem Solving / Decision Making

\_\_\_ Administrative Skills

\_\_\_ Flexibility

\_\_\_ Positive Attitude

\_\_\_ Organization/Planning

\_\_\_ Communication Skills

\_\_\_ Time Management

## Appendix 2 - External Survey Questions

1. How many years of fire service experience do you have?
2. What is your current position?
3. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?
4. Does your fire department currently have an Officer Development Plan? If “No”, skip to question 6.
5. If you answered “Yes” to the above questions, did it adequately prepare you for your position?
6. Rank in order from most to least important personality dimensions.
 

<input type="text"/> Incident Scene Management	<input type="text"/> Relationship Skills
<input type="text"/> Problem Solving / Decision Making	<input type="text"/> Administrative Skills
<input type="text"/> Flexibility	<input type="text"/> Positive Attitude
<input type="text"/> Organization/Planning	<input type="text"/> Communication Skills
<input type="text"/> Time Management	
7. As an Officer or in-charge firefighter, which of the below functions consume the majority of your time?
 

<input type="text"/> Incident Scene Management	<input type="text"/> Problem Solving / Decision Making
<input type="text"/> Organizational Planning	<input type="text"/> Relationship Building
<input type="text"/> Administrative Work	
8. Optional. What courses or books have been most beneficial to you as an officer in your professional development?

### Appendix 3 – Internal Survey Answers

1. How many years of fire service experience do you have? Average 20.9 years

Table 1.

0-10 Years	1% (1)
11-15 Years	1% (1)
16-20 Years	36.4% (4)
21-30 Years	45.5% (5)

2. How many years of experience do you have in your current position? Average 8 years

Table 2.

0-5 Years	27.2% (3)
6-10 Years	45.5% (5)
11-15 Years	18.2% (2)
Over 16 Years	1% (1)

### Appendix 3 cont.

3. What fire department functions consume the majority of your time?

Table 3.

	Job Functions	% of Time
1.	Emergency Calls	18.2% (2)
2.	Training	1% (1)
3.	Administrative	45.5% (5)
4.	Human Resources	18.2% (2)
5.	Team Building	1% (1)

4. What are the most important job functions an officer performs?

Table 4.

Ranking	Most Important Function
1.	Crew Safety
2.	Relationship Building
3.	Problem Solving

### Appendix 3 cont.

5. What do you feel are the most important personality dimensions a successful officer should possess?

Table 5.

Ranking	Most Important Dimension
1.	Relationship Skills
2.	Communication Skills
3.	Problem Solver

6. What courses or books have been most beneficial to you as an officer?

Table 6.

Ranking	Beneficial Books & Courses
1.	Fire Officer I & II Courses
2.	Blue Card Command Training
3.	<i>21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership-by John Maxwell</i>
4.	<i>How to Win Friends &amp; Influence People – by Dale Carnegie</i>
5.	Ohio Fire Executive (OFE)

### Appendix 3 cont.

7. Rank in order the following personality dimensions of an officer from most to least important with 1 being the most important and 9 the least.

Table 7.

	Dimensions	Average Ranking
1.	Incident Management	5
2.	Problem Solving/Decision Making	3.09
3.	Flexibility	6.55
4.	Organization/Planning	6.82
5.	Time Management	6.27
6.	Relationship Skills	3.09
7.	Administrative Skills	7.66
8.	Positive Attitude	2.66
9.	Communication Skills	3.91

## Appendix 4 – External Survey Answers

1. How many years of fire service experience do you have?

Table 1.

0-10 Years	0%
11-15 Years	0%
16-20 Years	34.5% (10)
21-30 Years	65.5% (19)

2. What is your current position?

Table 2.

<b>Company Officer</b> (Lieutenant, Captain)	63.3% (19)
<b>Chief Officer</b> (Chief, Assist. Chief, Dep.Chief, Batt. Chief)	36.7% (11)

## Appendix 4 cont.

3. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?

Table 3.

0-5 Years	33.3% (10)
5-10 Years	46.7% (14)
0--15 Years	6.7% (2)
Over 15 Years	13.3% (4)

4. Does your fire department currently have an Officer Development Plan? If “No”, skip to question 6.

Table 4.

Yes	86.7%
No	13.3%

5. If you answered “Yes” to the above questions, did it adequately prepare you for your position?

Table 5.

No	86.7%
Yes	13.3%

### Appendix 4 cont.

6. Rank in order the following personality dimensions of an officer from most to least important with 1 being the most and 9 being the least.

Table 6.

	Dimensions	Ranking
1.	Incident Management	6.67
2.	Problem Solving/Decision Making	7.34
3.	Flexibility	4.67
4.	Organization/Planning	4.93
5.	Time Management	3.89
6.	Relationship Skills	4.60
7.	Administrative Skills	2.77
8.	Positive Attitude	6.37
9.	Communication Skills	4.23

## Appendix 4 cont.

7. As an officer or in-charge firefighter, which of the below functions consume the majority of your time?

Table 7.

	Job Functions	% of Time
1.	Incident Scene Management	0% (0)
2.	Problem Solving	30% (9)
3.	Organizational Planning	3.33% (1)
4.	Relationship Building	13.3% (4)
5.	Administrative Work	56.7% (17)

8. Optional. What courses or books have been the most beneficial to your as an officer in your professional development?

Table 8.

Rank	Course/Book Title	Suggestions
1.	Fire Officer Courses (I, II, III, IV)	7
2.	Ohio Fire Executive Program (OFE)	5
3.	Extreme Ownership & Handbook of Tactics	4
4.	21 Irrefutable Laws & It's Your Ship	3
5.	Step Up & Lead & Lessons in Leadership	2