



PROBATIONARY FIREFIGHTER
TRAINING PROGRAMS

TRAIN. LEAD. REPEAT.

April 7-12, 2025

Indiana Convention Center & Lucas Oil Stadium

FDIC.COM

SETTING & RAISING THE BAR

The 8-Step Process of Setting & Raising the Bar

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STEP 1 | ANALYZE YOUR PROGRAM

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STEP 2 | BUILD YOUR CULTURE

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STEP 3 | DEFINE THE STANDARD

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STEP 4 | COACHING & MENTORING

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STEP 5 | BUILD YOUR TASK BOOK

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STEP 6 | BUILD YOUR TRAINING PLAN

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STEP 7 | MEASURE PROGRESS

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STEP 8 | CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

STEP 1 | ANALYZE YOUR PROGRAM

Know the Value of a Needs Assessment

- You have to know where you are in order to get where you want to go.
- Identify the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in your current program.
 - SWOT it out (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats).
- Understand department needs vs. national standards (NFPA, ISO, etc.).

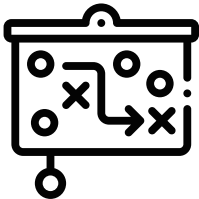
How to Conduct a Needs Assessment

- Collect data: training records, performance evaluations, feedback, etc.
- Engage company officers and senior firefighters in the review process.
- Follow the Four Step Process:



1. Identify the Current Situation

Define what is important for your organization.
Prioritize, strategize, mobilize!



2. Be SMART

Set S.M.A.R.T. goals based on where you would like to go.
Be specific, be strategic, be engaged.



3. Analyze the Gaps

Where are you? Where do you want to be?
It is critical that you understand the fine details.



4. Build the Bridge

Establish a plan to close the gap.
Develop action items and execute the plan.



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STEP 2 | BUILD YOUR CULTURE

Know the Role of Culture in Probationary Training

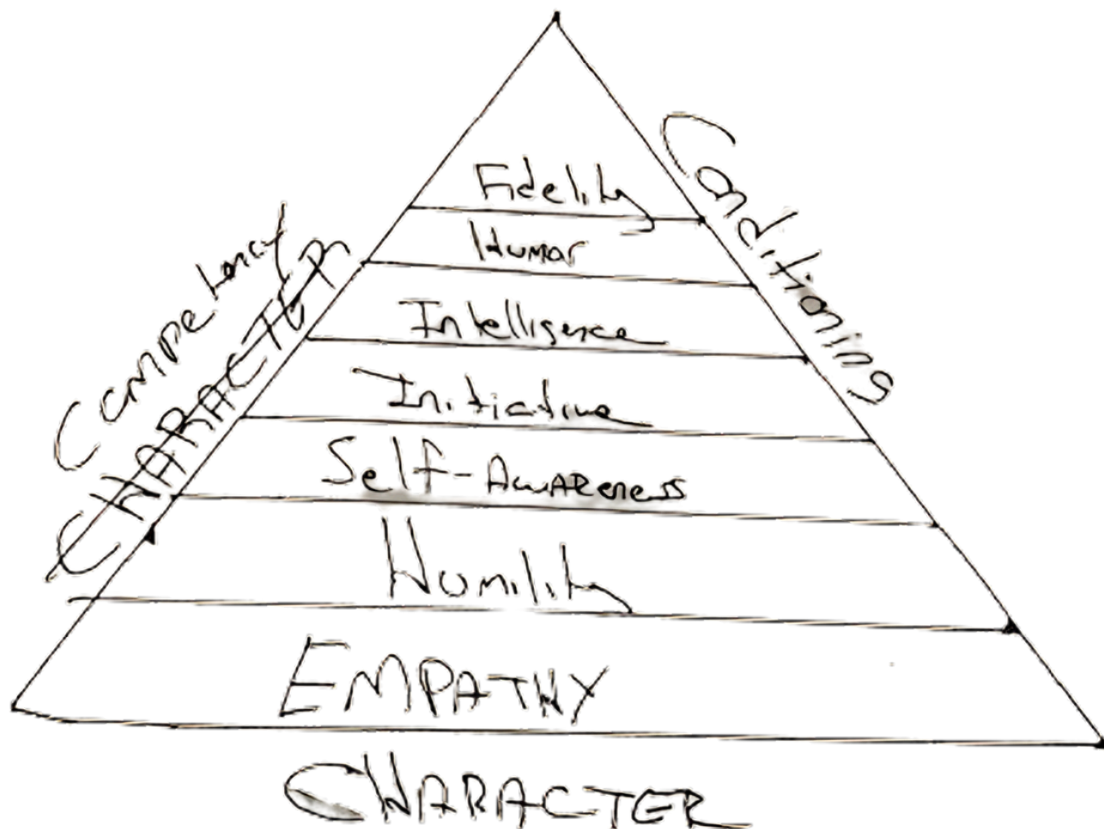
- Identify your organization's culture.
- Define your department's identity, expectations, and values.
- Reinforce your organizational values and expectations.

Understand Leadership's Influence on Culture

- Reinforce the impact of company officers and training personnel.
- Lead by example: Set the tone through actions, not just words.

Reinforce the Three C's of Culture

- Character – Trust, respect, empathy, humility, courage, discipline, etc.
- Competency – Skills, knowledge, adaptability (IQ and EQ)
- Conditioning – Physical and mental resilience



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STEP 3 | DEFINE THE STANDARD

Expectations Are a Two-Way Street

While we have expectations of our new firefighters, it is important to understand that they have expectations of us and the organization.

Establish Clear Expectations

- Develop a standard framework for others to follow.
- Identify core competencies and minimum expectations.
 - Applies to Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Attitudes.
- Balance NFPA standards with real-world operational needs.

Establish a Baseline for Performance

- Utilize probationary task books, skill sheets, and performance evaluations.
- Set progressive benchmarks (0-3 months, 3-6 months, etc.).
- Identify the process for low-performing and high-performing candidates.
- Respect the standard.
 - The hardest decision to make may be the best decision to make.



Build Relationships, Not Resentment

“Unspoken expectations are premeditated resentments” - Neil Strauss



STEP 4 | COACHING & MENTORING

Understand the Basics of Coaching and Mentoring

- Identify the difference between coaching and mentoring.
- Coaching supports the development of technical skills.
 - e.g., ground ladders, search operations, ventilation, etc.
- Mentoring supports the development of transferrable skills.
 - e.g., trust, respect, empathy, humility, courage, discipline, etc.

Implementing Coaching and Mentoring

- Design your program based on the desired outcomes.
 - Know when to coach and when to mentor.
- Selecting the right senior firefighters as coaches/mentors.
- Structure regular feedback sessions and progress check-ins.

Building a Positive Learning Culture

- Encourage probationary firefighters to ask questions and seek feedback.
- Create a learning environment that allows for two-way communication.
- Avoid toxic habits, conversations, and environments that hinder growth.



“The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create their own” - Steven Spielberg



STEP 5 | BUILD YOUR TASK BOOK

Task Books are Essential to Success

- Provides structure and consistency in technical competencies.
- Establishes a roadmap for success.
 - Both for the Probationary Firefighter and the Evaluator.
- Allows national standards to be localized into your operation.
- Ensures probationary firefighters are meeting defined benchmarks.

Key Components of an Effective Task Book

- Technical skill assessments (SCBA, search, fireground operations, etc.)
- Job Performance Requirements (JPRs)
 - NFPA 1010 | Standard on Professional Qualifications for Firefighters
 - Includes NFPA 1001 | NFPA 1002 | NFPA 1003 | NFPA 1005
 - Local standards, policies, practices, and procedures
 - Skills development within the context of YOUR operation/organization versus generic application.

Best Practices for Implementation

- Develop training schedule to accommodate completion.
- Leverage all available resources to best meet organizational needs.
 - “Tradition meets innovation”
- Ensure instructors officers, and mentors properly document progress.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Localize national standards and practices to fit the needs and operation of your department.



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STEP 6 | BUILD YOUR TRAINING PLAN

Know Your Audience | Who You Are Teaching Matters

- Understand how adults learn and best practices for teaching adults.
 - Utilize a collaborative, experience-based, problem-solving approach.
- Balance classroom instruction with practical application.
 - Design lessons focused on the intended outcome (why, when, how).
- Engage probationary firefighters with hands-on, scenario-driven training.

Instructional Design | Crawl, Walk, Run Approach

- Crawl: Introduction to concepts, fundamental skills, and basic procedures.
- Walk: Repetition and skill-building through controlled evolutions.
- Run: Fireground decision-making and real-time scenario execution.

Instructor Selection | Choosing the Right People

- Identify passionate, knowledgeable, and engaged instructors.
- Avoid toxic trainers—focusing on those who develop, not demean.
 - Be a coach, not a critic.
- Assign instructors based on strengths (technical skills, leadership, etc.).

Logistics | Identifying Resources & Planning for Success

- Identify facilities, apparatus, and equipment needed for effective training.
- Manage scheduling constraints to maximize training effectiveness.
 - This is especially important when conducting training off-site.

Scheduling | Structuring Training for Maximum Impact

- Creating a progressive training schedule.
- Incorporate scenario-based trainings to maximize topics/skills covered.
- Ensure all instructors follow a standardized framework to maintain consistency with learning materials within the prescribed timeframe.



STEP 7 | MEASURE PROGRESS

Tracking and Evaluating Firefighter Performance

- Understand the difference between formal vs. informal evaluations.
- Conduct daily, weekly, and monthly performance reviews and feedback sessions utilizing department resources.

Develop Performance Evaluations

- Establish clear and measurable criteria based on the intended outcome.
 - Technical skills versus transferrable skills
- Align evaluation benchmarks with department expectations.
- Utilize objective scoring to ensure consistency across evaluators.

Address Performance Issues Early

- Identify red flags and areas of concern based on program benchmarks.
- Implement performance improvement plans before probation ends.

How to Develop Effective Employee Evaluations

1. Understand the employee's duties.
2. Choose the proper frequency.
3. Choose the right evaluator.
4. Prepare an evaluation form.
5. Meet face-to-face.
6. Have Clear Policies and Procedures

Best Practices When Conducting Evaluations

1. Be candid.
2. Be consistent.
3. Have data on hand.
4. Stay focused.
5. Make it a two-way discussion.
6. Set clear expectations
7. End on a positive note.

Source - [How to Conduct an Employee Evaluation in 6 Steps](#)



STEP 8 | CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Good is the Enemy of Great

- Avoid complacency by continuously refining the program.
- Ensure the program evolves to meet today's mission & tomorrow's needs.

Feedback, Follow-Up, and Follow-Through

- Collect input from probationary firefighters, mentors, and officers.
- Ensure leadership follows up on recommendations and concerns.
- Implement changes to enhance, not just modify, the program.

Change for the Sake of Improvement, Not for the Sake of Change

- Identify meaningful updates based on performance data and feedback.
- Balance tradition with innovation to maintain operational excellence.

Create a Culture of Lifelong Learning

- Instill a mindset of continuous development beyond probation.
- Encourage all of your personnel to refine and enhance the program.



"Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning."

-Benjamin Franklin



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