



Thank you for attending The Hat Dance at FDIC 2025. I hope the following key points regarding developing and operating as officers dealing with short-staffing are beneficial take aways for you and your department. Although there is not a single solution for all situations, the maintenance of fundamental skills combined with the ability to adapt is the best recipe for success on the short-staffed fireground. The following information can be used as guide to maximize your capabilities by applying it in accordance with your department's policies and procedures. I hope you have found this information useful and found this class to be an investment in your career.

**Sincerely,
Marc Aloan**



Background

Departments across the country continue to struggle to maintain adequate staffing. Adequate staffing is generally defined by the recommendations in NFPA 1710 or 1720. However, short-staffing has become normal staffing for many departments where 2 or 3 personnel per apparatus is commonplace.

Past staffing studies have established a definitive link between staffing levels and efficient fireground operations. Adding or subtracting one person from a firefighting crew equates to approximately 1 minute difference in task accomplishment, except for search which is approximately 3 minutes difference. Some staffing studies can be accessed here:

<https://www.nist.gov/el/fire-research-division-73300/firegov-fire-service/staffing-studies>

https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/el/fire_research/Report-on-Residential-Fireground-Field-Experiments.pdf

<https://fsri.org/research>

Our strategies, tactics, and accompanying training do not always reflect our staffing deployment models. Most officer development programs focus largely on administrative and disciplinary prowess, not the ability to supervise as a functional member of a team under hostile conditions. As shorter tenures combine with reductions in staffing, we are rushing development while simultaneously adding responsibilities to company level supervisors who often lack the historical level of skill and experience expected of our company officers. We now face the reality that the company officer must be prepared to wear multiple hats in support of the mission and the organization.



Core competencies of the Company Officer

- Teachable
- Adaptable
- Patient
- Decisive
- Humble

Realities of Short-Staffed Company Officers

- We don't prepare to work in a short-staffed environment
- Promotions are happening earlier in careers
- Most officer development is too late and too generic, if provided
- You must be able to multi-task
- You will be hands on with limited staffing

Operational considerations

- What is your game plan based on your staffing?
- Does your staffing change frequently and require multiple game plans?
- How can you adapt tactics to staffing?
- Try to see 3 sides of building on arrival.
 - Location and access of fire and victims?
- What is your water supply?
 - What can be accomplished before your run out?
- How can you marry companies to maximize your personnel?
- How can you set up your equipment and apparatus to expedite operations?
- What skills can be accomplished by a single firefighter?
- Are your driver operators and administrative personnel utilized during operations?

Training considerations

- Are you training with the same number of personnel you will have on a run?
- Does your training incorporate some level of adversity?
- What equipment, apparatus, and facilities can you utilize for training?
- What can you build or acquire to aid in training?
- Are you recording training/runs to identify areas of improvement?
- Are you training for hours or outcomes?



Officer considerations

- Cannot neglect officer responsibilities.
- Must balance relationships to remain effective in officer role.
- Must establish effective time management techniques.
- Must maintain personal and professional goals.
- Must incorporate some type of stress relief.

Parting thoughts

- The incident doesn't change to our staffing.
- Low staffing requires proactive approaches.
- You can't talk a fire out.
- Being short staffed isn't a badge of honor.
- Officer development must prepare our officers for reality.

If you are interested in bringing The Hat Dance or any of my other course offerings to your department or training group, my contact links are below. I hope you enjoyed the class and FDIC! Thank you again for choosing The Hat Dance!



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