

# The Organizational Playbook - 2012

## *A 25 Point Guide to Promoting Agency Health and Employee Wellbeing*

Safety

Security

Readiness

Respect

### **Our Mission: To Help People**

*The Organizational Playbook is intended to help us all remember the important human based attributes that, if followed, can make the organization thrive both for our employees and our citizens. Utilization of the Playbook can help increase the overall wellbeing of the organization and the safety, health, and happiness of our people.*

#### **1. Employee Safety**

This is the first pillar of the agency. Our health and wellbeing are the top priority! No member of the agency is to take unnecessary chances or place others at unreasonable levels of risk unless there is no choice. There is no building or property in the city that is worth you risking your life. Keep an eye on traffic when working on the roadway. Keep yourselves safe at all times; call for additional resources, and assume defensive and protective posturing if the scene becomes too severe.

#### **2. Officers: Take Care of Your People**

Officers should always be last in line and ensure that your crewmembers are taken care of. Do they have everything they need? Consider the lower two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The base level refers to physiological needs - the basics. This includes food and beverage and other basic necessities. The next level refers to safety, which is the number one objective of the agency. *To keep people safe.* As officers, make sure your crewmembers are taken care of, have what they need, and are reasonably happy and safe. Your work unit will thrive if you take care of your people.

#### **3. Officers: Compromise and collaboration helps maintain morale**

The fire service produces a highly unique work environment. Not only do you work 48 hours or more with your counterparts, there is also little opportunity to separate yourselves due to being part of an engine crew. Thus, there is ample opportunity for nerves to fray. Because of the living situation component of the job, shift officers must understand that human differences exist and that tension or stress levels can rise over seemingly insignificant issues.

#### **4. Personal and Agency Security**

Personal security and that of the stations, vehicles, equipment, and your personal belongings is critical to the wellbeing and safety of our members and is the second agency pillar. Ensure that facilities are secured and that doors and windows are locked. Safeguard emergency vehicles and equipment, particularly when in the field. Keep personal belongings stowed, secured and out of sight. In the post 9/11 World, we must take higher levels of precautions to keep our members safe, our personal belongings secure, and the facilities and equipment protected.

## **5. The Complete State of Readiness**

Effectively mobilizing to manage any fire, EMS, and hazardous material incident is our primary mission and is our third agency pillar. From your personal protective gear to the equipment carried on board the apparatus, it is critical that all systems be in “go mode”. If you are missing a critical piece of gear or you notice that something is in a state of disrepair, take the appropriate action. Get help from a colleague or officer if necessary. Ensure that we are ready to respond at all times.

## **6. The Complete Transfer of Authority**

Our agency is unique in that it operates 24/7/365. Therefore, it is essential that the operation be handed off between platoons in seamless fashion and with a high degree of communication. The transfer can be compared to one that occurs when commercial airline flight crews rotate. The crew coming onboard the aircraft receives a brief yet concise rundown before the next departure. Just like the flight crew, the shift coming on duty must receive an update on any conditions that could affect the performance of the operation. There should be no surprises awaiting the oncoming crew. Along with face-to-face communication, utilize the electronic log and dry erase boards to broadcast important information.

## **7. Take Ownership, But Don't Take What's Not Yours**

The Fire Houses are unique work environments. Most consist of a mix of workspaces and living quarters, all within the same building. Thus, you will find an array of work related materials along with employee personal belongings in a living space that resembles a residence. This differs significantly from a typical office workplace. Thus, it's important to remember not to disturb or take another member's belongings. This could refer to someone's food, bath supplies, or computer equipment. The rule is simple: If it's not yours, don't take it or use it without permission.

## **8. Take Responsibility**

The fire agency is a human based organization. This means that productivity is attributed primarily to team members and secondarily to machinery or processes. Because of the strong human element, it is understood that errors are going to occur. Take ownership and responsibility for your mistake. Then, take corrective action and move on. If you take responsibility for your error, you will ultimately feel better about yourself and you will receive higher levels of respect and admiration from your peers.

## **9. The Quadrant Schedule**

The quadrant schedule assists with allocating the various engine company work assignments. It helps standardize the work pattern between the three platoons and assists in scheduling such activities as training, prevention details, and maintenance. The quadrant schedule also helps company officers plan the events of the work cycle. Scheduling events and activities within the quadrant schedule format will help synchronize the agency's operation.

### **10. Your Personal Appearance Helps Boost Our Image**

Maintain personal grooming, hygiene, and the appearance of uniforms. Simply, keep yourself looking clean, neat, and professional. This should take no significant effort, but is appreciated by your colleagues and makes a positive statement for the department. Think about your appearance from your haircut down to the shine of your shoes. Whether you're in the station during business hours around your peers, or out in the community, your overall appearance sends a clear message about how you feel about yourself and your organization.

### **11. The Appearance of Our Equipment, Rolling Stock, and Facilities**

Strive to keep the equipment, vehicles, and facilities not only at an operational state of readiness, but clean and in order. Seek permission to replace worn or unsightly parts, no matter how minor. Even something as minor as leaves accumulated by the front door or mud in the engine's wheel wells sends the message that you don't care. Appearances send a message to your colleagues, your counterparts in other agencies, and to the public. Equipment, vehicles and facilities that are clean and well maintained, no matter the age, exhibits pride and professionalism.

### **12. Your Positive Attitude and Behavior within the Organization**

Your attitude sets the tone for the work period. Be respectful and upbeat to people you work with unless they are not treating you to this standard. If this is the condition, it's imperative to discuss the issue and attempt to reach a resolution, or seek out help in doing so. Don't promote unfriendliness and refrain from negative dialogue about co-workers, unless you are attempting to improve behavior or performance. Don't allow others to degrade fellow co-workers as this just leads to the decay of the integrity of the department. Think of your colleagues as your extended family. You'd never speak negatively or allow others to degrade a family member. The same principle should be used for your co-workers.

### **13. Your Positive Behavior Outside the Organization**

When outside the station, you should understand that you are on display to the public. Because of the vital role that you serve, you command attention, whether you like it or not, in all settings - from cleaning the rig on the ramp, to performing fire inspections, grabbing lunch or handling an emergency. From the citizen's standpoint, many are impressed by your mere presence. However, you must realize that others are highly critical. People are observing your behavior and activities, so regardless of the setting, act in a professional manner, practice proper language skills, and respect the citizens of the community.

### **14. Respect for Authority and the Chain of Command**

As the fourth pillar, LFD staff are urged respect those who have higher levels of authority, both within and outside our organization. Avoid circumventing the chain of command unless your manager is in the loop or there are extenuating circumstances.

### **15. Be Aware of Your Surroundings**

Our presence can at times be imposing. This is often due to the size of the rigs and equipment, and the noise this machinery can produce. If a religious event is in progress at the local church, try to defer your morning pump or equipment tests. When on a routine call during early morning hours at a mobile home park or multi family complex, if it doesn't compromise safety or integrity of the operation, turn off the rig and secure lights that might disturb neighbors. Our fire station facilities are surrounded by homes and businesses. When possible, be sensitive to those around us.

### **16. The Spoken Word**

Proper grammar and a professional tone should be the norm. The use of profanity should be minimized at all times, due to its offensive nature. If you do use profane language, be aware of it and the impact it can have on others. This is a professional organization with a high degree of integrity; your language should reflect the agency and our industry. Slang and profanity should not be present in your dialogue while wearing the fire department uniform unless you are in a closed setting and sure that your colleagues will not be offended. Also, speak at conversational tones when out in public and pay attention to whom else might be listening in on your conversation.

### **17. The Written Word**

This is a public agency, which means anything written (besides those relating to personnel, medical, and legal matters) is public record *and not confidential*. You should understand that anything you write while on duty is an official document and thus is considered *permanent record*. This includes a letter, a memo, or even e-mail. Additionally, consider how others will react and the impression they will get from the document that you prepare. Is what you have written upsetting or will it invoke anger or hard feelings? If so, pick up the phone or make an appointment to see the person face-to-face. Never reprimand or embarrass a fellow member with e-mail, especially one sent to a group. Also understand that e-mail can easily and instantly be re-sent to others without your knowledge.

### **18. Files and Record Keeping**

It is quite important that all documentation, ranging from the daily vehicle log to the most sensitive run report, be written correctly, concisely and with care. Additionally, when it comes to files and record keeping, proper file maintenance is just as important. This includes attendance/payroll, hydrant maintenance records, training records, vehicle-check sheets, inspection forms, school fire drill reports and any other forms or documents you are responsible for maintaining. Please note that at anytime and without warning, an outside agency - such as Cal-OSHA, can inspect the department's files. Inaccurate or incomplete documentation can place the agency in legal jeopardy and those responsible for file management in a position to have to explain and justify inaccurate or incomplete documentation. A poorly worded run report just might become the subject of court litigation in which you have to testify. Don't embarrass yourself by having to explain it in front of a judge, jury, and audience.

### **19. Promptly Returning Phone Calls and Electronic Messages**

Generally, people don't like leaving voice mail, although it has become a routine part of life. An unreturned call gives the impression that you don't care or that the caller wasn't important. Check voice mail several times per day. If there is a message for a member on a different shift, get back to the caller to advise; don't just save the call and/or enter the information in the log. The calling party needs to hear back from somebody the very same day, hopefully within an hour or two. Again, return all calls promptly. The same applies to e-mail messages.

### **20. Practice Positive Public Interaction**

Are you familiar with the phrase, "the customer is always right"? It's primarily intended for private sector service industry employees but applies to us in the public sector as well. In fact, for us it applies to a higher level as our customers, the public, are really the owners of the business that we operate. Our primary purpose is to serve the public, who are the taxpayers that ultimately provide funding for local government services. So, be nice!

### **21. Don't be the *Talk of the Town***

When possible, keeping under the radar screen when it comes to department business is often a *best practice*. Extreme behavior or outlandish comments can become the subject of morning gossip within our neighboring agencies. Often, as stories are passed along, the details become distorted and sensationalized. Don't be the subject of this fodder. On the other side of this issue, if conveying information you've heard along the grapevine, try to make certain that you have the facts and details correct and that you are not distorting a story for the sake of entertainment or humor. Use of this play will add to the professional posture of the agency.

### **22. Routine Driving and Parking**

No one likes to be a victim of a "power merge", especially when it's an emergency vehicle that just cut in line. You are an ambassador of the community when in a fire vehicle. Make sure you drive in full regard of all laws, stop for pedestrians, use your turn signals, do not make "California" style stops, and please wave to the kids. Also, don't take the best parking place, especially if it's a rainy day, and don't abuse your authority by parking in "no parking" or "loading" zones when grabbing lunch or a mid-day snack. Lastly, cell phone or text conversations while driving a vehicle is not safe and presents a poor appearance. Laws now prohibit such practices.

### **23. Sustain and Work to Maintain Your Areas of Responsibility**

Delegation and decentralization are embedded managerial elements of the agency. In essence, the department has been divided up so that everyone shares in the management of the operation. Keep everyone informed as to the status of your area and maintain an open posture. Try to seek input and share new developments when appropriate.

#### **24. The Organizational Highway**

It's important that we're all headed down the same route. Some of your colleagues are in different lanes and moving at different speeds, and that's okay. But it's essential that the people in the agency are all moving in the same direction working to achieve the same overall objectives. Remember, the middle lane is usually ideal. Review your personal goals, your platoon's goals, and the agency's goals to ensure that they all are heading in the same direction and down the same path.

#### **25. Keeping in the Loop & Staying in the Know**

It's important to keep up to speed on events and issues involving our department, our industry, our city, and our region. Do you know and would you recognize our mayor or any of the council members if one of them knocked on the door? Are you aware of any important development issues in the Planning Department such as upcoming major projects? Do you check the City web page or scan the local papers? What are some of the key issues our Council is deliberating on at the moment? Keeping in tune with your surroundings deepens and broadens your knowledge base and reduces the "I don't know" factor. It makes you a more informed member of the agency!

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*What is the Organizational Playbook? First let's define what the Playbook is not. The Playbook is not a set of hard fast rules, policies, or procedures. The Playbook is not law, nor is anyone going to suffer any formal ramifications for not following the statements contained in this document.*

*The Playbook is merely a guide that can serve to help us bolster our workplace wellbeing and possibly assist to maintain the consistency and integrity of our organization. It can be considered a list of best practices.*

*By using the Playbook as a personal resource, members can help to ensure that our fire agency environment is safe, employee focused, and that our people, rolling stock, and equipment are ready to serve our community.*