

**RESEARCH INTO THE DECLINE OF VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION
IN THE FREDERICK AREA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The problem that has prompted this paper is the decline in the number of volunteer members of the Frederick Area Fire Protection District who respond to alarms in our district. This trend is a serious threat to the safety and efficiency of our paid crew person and those few volunteers who do respond. These concerns are being compounded by the dramatic increase in alarms in our district in the last year.

The purpose of this project was to try to determine what the reasons were for this decline in participation.

The descriptive research method was used to accomplish this directive from the Chief of the department. Three basic research questions were constructed as a basis for this project:

Question 1: What are the contributing factors responsible for the decline in the number of volunteers responding to alarms?

Question 2: What can the organization do to address this problem?

Question 3: What can the individual do to address this problem?

The procedures used consisted of a literature review and the use of an external survey form sent to other departments and an internal survey for our members. The results of the surveys support the published literature in that time conflict between demands of family and demands of the department was the primary cause of the decline of volunteer response to alarms.

Recommendations would include reviewing the present policy and looking at alternatives to required attendance at non-emergency functions. Pre-scheduling volunteer shifts so that members could better schedule life activities to fit in with department requirements would be appropriate. Finally, a recommendation that all members of the department revisit the standard operating procedures that have been adopted by our organization so that everyone is current with this information to enhance our effectiveness, efficiency and safety.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem that has prompted this paper is the decline in the number of volunteer members of the Frederick Area Fire Protection District ("FAFPD") responding to alarms in our district. This trend is a serious threat to the safety and efficiency of our paid personnel and those volunteers who do respond. These concerns are compounded by the dramatic increase in alarms in our district in the past year.

The purpose of this applied research project is to satisfy the requirements of the Executive Fire Officer Program and to try to determine what the reasons for this decline in participation are. Once the reasons are determined, programs can be designed to address these problems and resolve them. This should improve our service delivery capabilities and the safety of our initial response personnel.

The descriptive research method was used in this project. Relevant published literature was reviewed. The author conducted personal interviews with the Chief and the paid members of the department on an informal basis on several occasions, and numerous phone calls were also made between the author and the Chief.

Research Questions

The purpose of the research questions was to answer the following:

1. What are the contributing factors responsible for the decline in the number of volunteers responding to alarms in our district?
2. What can the organization do to address this problem?
3. What can the individual do to address this problem?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Frederick Area Fire Protection District is located 20 miles north of Denver, Colorado. The Town of Frederick was established in 1908 as a coal mine camp. The fire department was organized in 1915 and was the pride of the town. It was an honor to be a member, and the members were very dedicated to their position. Fire department events were some of the biggest social events of the town. At that time, the area protected was approximately one-half square mile and had a population of 300 to 400 people. The department grew to about 30 members by the early 1930's and added motorized equipment at that time. The success of the coal mines meant a gain in the area to approximately 1.5 square miles, with the population up to around 800 people by the mid to late 1940's.

After the Second World War ended, the demand for coal began to drop and the mines began to close down. People were forced to move from this area to where they could find work to support their families. The population dropped to around 300 people again, and the fire department had shrunk to around 15 members. Most of the remaining department members were in their mid to late 50's and beyond by then, as the younger members had been the ones who moved. There was very little money for the fire department as it was no longer the focal point of a disappearing population. What little money they could scrape together had to be spent on repairing the older equipment to keep it operational.

A population explosion hit Colorado in the late 1980's, and the area began to grow again at an alarming rate. With this explosion the Frederick Fire Department became the Frederick Area Fire Protection District. In the past six years, the size of the district has expanded to over 21 square miles with a population of over 7,500 and climbing. Our normal response was approximately 12 to 15 volunteers per call, a fairly consistent number that we could count on for years.

Along with this population/area growth came the usual growing pains -- increased call loads and diversity of call types. While these pains were anticipated early on and addressed through various training and educational offerings in preparation for this growth, a few unanticipated problems have evolved. Most of these have been addressed and resolved, either by additional training or by purchasing needed equipment, etc. One major factor could not be resolved by these methods and that was the need for a full-time, paid person to be added to the existing volunteer force to reduce the response times and subsequent incident mitigation time.

After careful documentation of calls and response times, a presentation was made to the district board explaining the need to hire at least one person. The board approved the hiring of a paid person as proposed after several months of deliberation on how to fund this position. This was in 1995.

The hiring of the paid person did cut down the initial response time as predicted, but then a new problem developed. Fewer and fewer volunteers were responding to the calls as time progressed, from approximately 12 to 15 responding per call down to four to eight

per call and sometimes even fewer. This jeopardized the current manner of hose line deployment and safety team back-up on the fire ground, causing delays that allowed fires to grow out of hand. Fewer people meant more work at the scene, and that increased the risk of injury.

An investigation was begun to determine what was the cause of this problem. The first finding was that several of the volunteers who had been available almost all the time to respond had moved from the district. Another had been transferred from night shift to day shift at his job, so he was no longer available during the day. These are understandable occurrences and can be addressed through aggressive recruitment of replacements and by contacting all of the other volunteers and informing them of the situation, stressing the importance of their response to calls now that the ranks are depleted. This combination had worked well in the past.

During this period of contacting other members, a deeper cause of the diminished response was uncovered. Many of the members stated that although they would hear the tone on their pagers, they would not drop what they were doing as readily as they had done before the department hired a paid person. Now they knew that at least one person would respond for sure and that others would probably show up as always, so they would sit this one out or respond only if it turned out to be something significant.

This apathetic approach has had a strong impact on our organization in several ways. First, we were reducing the response time by having a paid person which was good, but fewer and fewer people were now responding which meant we were decreasing our

safety margin which was bad. Next, the call load continued to grow, adding more pressure to find a solution quickly. Third, methods to recruit new members and get increased participation from current members was not as productive as in the past.

Our second station was opened in 1996 as planned, and additional equipment was purchased also. This growth revitalized the commitment level of our members, and the response numbers again approached the 10 plus range per call. This was a welcome development, and at the time it appeared to be the result of the efforts put forth by the department leadership in re-educating our members on the importance of their participation.

Since then, our department has expanded to three full time paid personnel and 25 volunteers. Our projection is to increase this force to six paid personnel by 2001 and up to 12 by 2005 when our third station is scheduled to be opened. The infrastructure and funding formulas are in place to accomplish these goals, yet our organization is again facing the problem of a decline in the number of volunteers who respond to alarms. Before this organization can progress further, the human element must be addressed and successfully integrated into the organization or there will be no organization.

The problem our organization is addressing is related to the subject matter presented in the Executive Leadership class in the following ways. First, the problem has to be addressed in the macro management level. Doing this is something our organization was not accustomed to; we tend to micro manage programs to pieces. By looking beyond the immediate, absolute, only available answer, usually prompted by prejudice based on

successful previous experience, we are better able to see the big picture, or at least part of it, at the organizational level. From this vantage point, we have a clearer vision of options available and what the interaction of our choices will be on the community and the department. This relates to Unit 6 of the Executive Leadership course that discussed Fostering Creativity and Innovation and the Attitudes and Factors that Block or Reduce Organizational Creativity. Unit 6 also touched on Creative Problem Solving Characteristics.

This problem has forced our organization to re-examine the changing environment in which we exist. The composition of the community has shifted from "blue collar" to a collage of workers. With that we have found a change in attitude toward community commitment. The new demographics find people who are now centered on their family, career, and self, not on the community or their neighbors as before. This relates to Unit 10 which addresses being in transition, and also Unit 11 regarding Managing Change, Shifting the Paradigms and Approaching Change Proactively.

By referring to Unit 7, Assessing the Organizational Culture, we were able to determine that our organization has gone from having an abundance of people who would do anything to help to an abundance of people who would be willing to possibly do something if they can fit it in their busy schedules. This reflection of society is not bad in itself. It did catch our organization off guard and unprepared for the decrease in response personnel numbers. With this lack of response, our organization has been forced to face the fact that we can no longer do business as before.

The author and Chief agreed that this research should start with our current recruitment procedures to see if they may be out of date and not providing new members with the desired traits, only warm bodies for our organization. Next, the area of retention of those members we have should be re-examined to see why fewer and fewer are participating and what would motivate them to become more active in the department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The author began searching various fire service publications that our department had in our library to see if any articles could be found on recruitment and retention of volunteers. Several articles were found and these provided a starting point for the research process.

One of the first articles found gave a brief overview of common problems and also a brief list of possible solutions for these problems. In this article (Sittleburg, 1994) the points the author made reference to were almost a mirror image of what our department was facing, management issues, motivational issues, lack of time issues, etc.

The next article reviewed was quite a surprise to this author. First, the title of the article captured the essence of this project, "What if no one answered the call?" (Cohn, 1996). This article gets right to the core of the recruitment and retention question that his department has faced in these areas. In fact, the statement, "Recruitment and retention of members are the greatest problems facing the volunteer emergency services today," (Cohn, 1996) was enlarged, bordered and placed in the middle of the text to draw your attention to the topic. This article describes how a department took the initiative and got

the recruitment and retention question to the forefront of the volunteer fire service in New Jersey and to the national level by offering this information through the management courses offered by the National Fire Academy.

Another article on recruitment described how a department in Michigan created a strong recruitment program by developing better marketing skills and product improvement (Marinucci, 1988).

At about this point in the literature review process, the author found two text books used by Aims Community College, Greeley, Colorado, in their fire safety programs. These books were current and offered an immense amount of information on recruitment and maintenance of volunteers and insights into our future as an organization. These books provide much more depth than the magazine articles and will be used by our department as reference guides from this point on. The first text is titled *Recruiting, Training and Maintaining Volunteer Fire Fighters*. As the authors take the reader from the beginning history of the volunteer fire service to the projections for the future, they present a road map to the future. As this author read the text, it seemed as though these authors had been in our organization. There are so many similarities (Snook, Johnson, Olsen and Buckman, 1998).

The other text, *The Future of Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service: Taming the Dragons of Change* (Perkins, Benoit, 1996), would be viewed more as an atlas rather than a road map of the fire service. This book deals with big picture approaches to where our organization is going from here, the future. This book was at times hard to put down

because it holds so much information about where the fire service is headed, dragging our department along with it. At other times, it was very hard to pick up and read because it describes some future options that our organization does not want to face.

Reading the published literature mentioned above had a solid impact on the author and provided a positive influence toward this project. The referenced materials not only gave a starting point for the project, they relieved a lot of tension in the author, knowing that there were others who had initially the same problems as our organization had and that they had written down what they had to do to overcome these obstacles was a great relief. The depth that some of the literature went to was very much appreciated by this student.

The more this author read, the more it became apparent that options existed, that ours was not a hopeless case, and that the sooner the project was put into motion, the sooner results could be reached. Now armed with this information and several guides to help us move forward, the project could move ahead in a predictable direction.

PROCEDURES

The problem of the declining number of volunteers was addressed early in January of 1999 during a conversation with the Chief of the department. He was very concerned that recently there had been several calls in the district and that the paid person on duty was the only member who responded. This required a request for aid from a neighboring department just to get enough people on the scene to be able to function. During this conversation, the Chief asked for any ideas and help that the author could offer to identify the reasons for the diminished participation.

The author accepted the challenge and began to gather information from the Chief as to what had been done to this point. He explained that he had already tried personal contact with each member to try to convince them of their importance to the organization and see if he could get a little more of a commitment from them. He felt that it was a positive move as it had been several times before. The members were receptive to his requests while he was there and, for the most part, agreed to a higher level of commitment. However, as time has passed, the response numbers are not reflective of the commitment promised.

The author constructed a simple survey form to be sent to other fire departments in the area. This was done to see if others were experiencing the same trends or if our organization was dealing with just local and internal problems. The survey, included as Appendix A, was sent to 10 randomly selected departments. A list of departments from the Colorado Fire Training Officers Association was used, and from this list, 20 departments in the northeast quadrant of the state were chosen for their location only. Their addresses were copied onto small pieces of paper and placed in a paper bag. The bag was closed and then vigorously shaken. Then the bag was opened and 10 pieces of paper were drawn from it to form the mailing list. The survey was designed to be anonymous and gather general information only, not in-depth details. Of the 10 surveys sent out, all 10 were returned. The limitations to this were the small survey size and restricting it to the geographical area of the state. This was purposely done to try to compare similar departments with possibly similar problems, i.e., rapid growth, changing population, etc.

Next, the author constructed a survey to be distributed to the members of our organization. This survey, included as Appendix B, was a little more complex than the survey sent to the other departments. This was due to the response that the Chief had received from the members when he talked to them earlier. The author felt that if the questions on the survey were just a repeat of what the Chief had already asked, the answers could very well be the same with not much chance to get to the root of the problem. The author wanted to create a survey that could be filled out at the member's leisure, preferably at home without other members present to influence them. In the past 14 years with this organization, the author has seen good information exchanges interrupted or destroyed when one or two members would voice their opinion in a hostile or intimidating manner. Efforts to regain the positive exchange that was happening before these blow-ups were never successful as the fear or frustration of others replaced their desire to contribute, thus the opportunities were lost. The premise that the problem could be traced to either recruitment or retention of members served as a guide to the construction of the survey questions.

The author felt that Questions 1 and 2 would address the recruitment issues. This was not viewed as a probable cause for the decline in response at the start of the project, but rather as a possible contributing factor that should not be completely overlooked or ruled out at the start.

Questions 3 and 5 were designed to see if the organization has exceeded, met or fallen short of what the members had expected from it and then explain what was good and what was lacking on the part of the organization.

Questions 4 and 6 were designed to have the members look at their contributions to the organization and see if they could find reasons for exceeding, meeting or not reaching the expectations that the organization had of them.

Question 7 was designed to address the main problem in our organization today, diminished response of volunteers to calls, and list reasons they felt were responsible for this problem.

Questions 8 and 9 were constructed to see, after the members answered the preceding questions completely, if they still wanted to be a part of the organization as is, or if they would stay if things they listed as problems were corrected or at least looked at by the organization, or if they would rather leave the organization.

The author felt that Questions 3 through 6, 8 and 9 were questions that related to the problem of retention of the members or retention of their attention. The author attempted to have Question 10 be a commitment statement that would be the result of how the members viewed their interaction with the organization in the past, the present, and especially if they wanted to change that interaction, and how, in the future. The answers to Question 10 would direct the organization into either new or improved retention activities or to more recruitment activities if the present members chose to leave the organization.

The population was the entire department, 25 members, regardless of their status or rank or time in the organization. This was to be as complete a survey as possible so everyone had to be eligible to participate. The only limitations were that the members be open and honest in their responses and that they needed to return the survey by March 18, 1999. Other than that, they were encouraged to be innovative, creative and helpful in their responses.

Some basic assumptions were made concerning the members' responses. It was assumed that they would all answer this instrument openly and honestly with no hidden agendas that might skew the results for whatever reason and that they would answer all questions or provide other reasons as appropriate. A response of 80% (20 surveys) was also expected.

RESULTS

External Survey Results

The results of the external survey (Appendix A) are summarized as follows. There were 10 surveys sent out and 10 surveys were returned to the author.

Question 1 found the survey had reached one paid, three combination paid/volunteer and six all volunteer departments.

Question 2 had four "yes" responses, one "no" response and five "somewhat" responses.

Question 3 asked how their organization addressed this problem, and a summary of the responses is presented here. There were five responses that stated that their

department had improved their recognition and awards programs for members. These ranged from having a person's picture and a brief story about the individual's accomplishments in the local newspaper, to having a plaque made for them for presentation at the awards banquet each year. Three stated that they offered personalized department baseball-type caps, wallets with badge holder, even up to warm-up jackets with the department and member's name embroidered on it. One respondent offered educational incentives to attend either fire science or EMS seminars in the area. The final response was to offer tickets for family dinners at regional restaurants so that the member's family could receive some payback for all the sacrifices they had to make while the member was "away" on calls or other department functions.

Question 4 asked how well this program has worked to resolve the problem of diminished participation. Six stated that their program worked well for them, three stated that their program was somewhat effective and one stated that their program did not work well at all. The comment made on this paper stated that this was the program where the department would give educational incentives, but even though this seemed like a great idea, it was viewed as another way to get their people to give up time with their family to attend a function for the department. The comment continued on to say that this program is now an option. The person being rewarded can select from several offerings -- dinners, movies, or the educational opportunities.

Question 5 had seven respond that they would recommend their program to others, while three stated that they would opt for another.

Question 6 had two of the three state that they would offer more choices for their members rather than just one but would stay with their main program. The third stated that they were exploring a "free time" reward that could be used as an "approved absence" on a scheduled volunteer shift so that they could be with their family for school events or vacation or whatever instead of pulling a tour as scheduled.

The questions that this survey was designed to answer were:

1. Has your organization experienced a lack of participation or "burnout" phenomena?
2. If your organization has experienced this, how did you address this problem?
3. Would you recommend this program or share others with our organization?

In response to Question 1, nine of the ten respondents (90%) indicated that they had experienced at least some form of burnout or slowdown by their members. Many comments attributed this to the time requirement and the increased demand for time with family, real job, kids' projects and school activities, etc. Also, another recurring theme was the redundancy of training classes, same stuff over and over, as opposed to different classes, and having to maintain too many certifications.

In answer to the second question, all of the respondents talked about improving or modifying their awards and recognition programs to better fit the members' wishes and make these awards something that they would want and be willing to work for.

Seven of the ten respondents (70%) stated that they planned to stay with their program for recognition and awards as these seemed to be contributing to keeping the

members' interest up. Two of the replies (20%) stated that they would modify their plan to make them more meaningful to the members, and the third (10%) stated that the current program would become an option at the member's choice, and the department would add other recipient-friendly types of awards to keep their interest high.

Internal Survey Results

There were 25 internal surveys and cover letters sent to the members of FAFPD in early February, 1999. The deadline for returning the survey was March 18, 1999. As of that date, 14 were returned. This equates to 56% of the total population. The survey was designed to look at our organization through everyone's eyes and get an internal perspective on how to answer these research questions:

1. What are the contributing factors responsible for the decline in the number of volunteers responding to alarms?
2. What can the organization do to address this problem?
3. What can the individual do to address this problem?

An analysis of the results of the survey was conducted by the author. This process was accomplished by reviewing the answers to the survey questions and converting these into percentages.

The answer to the first question found that 29% of those responding had joined to serve their community, while 43% joined to prepare themselves for future job opportunities. Seventeen percent joined to keep the family tradition going, 8% joined for the educational opportunities, and the final 8% joined to be a part of a respected civic organization.

Question 2 found 33% stating that someone from the district had explained the duties and responsibilities of membership prior to joining. More than 50% stated that no one from the department had explained these responsibilities, and another 21% stated that they learned after they were a member or from a friend or family member. In response to Question 3, only one respondent, 7% of the surveyed group, felt that the organization had exceeded his initial expectations. Three members (21%) felt the organization had met their expectations while five members (36%) felt the organization had fallen short of their expectations. Two other members (14%) stated that they didn't look at the organization as to what it could do for them, and three members (21%) did not respond to this question.

Question 4 found five members (36%) who felt they exceeded their expectations of what they could do for the organization, two members (14%) felt they met their expectations, and two other members (14%) felt they had fallen short of their expectations. Two others (14%) marked choice d, for other, but offered no comment. Three other members (21%) did not respond to this question.

Question 5 was more of an explanation of Question 3. The one member (7%) who felt the organization had exceeded their expectations appreciated the variety of training on various tools and appliances. Three members (21%) felt the organization met their expectations. Suggestions for what the organization could do to meet the initial expectations of the members brought the following responses. Seven members (50%) would like to have more practical, hands-on training like fire and smoke training classes. Five members (36%) would like to see a reduction in time requirements for non-emergency

functions, i.e., meetings, training, station and vehicle maintenance duties, etc. One person (7%) expressed a desire to see everyone follow the same standard, not one for paid and a different one for volunteer.

Question 6 found five members (36%) who felt they had exceeded their expectations of what they could do for the organization. Most of these felt that they had given more of their time than they really felt they would be required to when they joined. Two members (14%) felt they had met their expectations but added comments that they would do more if they just had more time to give. One member (7%) stated that he lived too far out of the district to respond to calls other than those on his scheduled volunteer shift, and one member (7%) stated that he attended school full time and could not respond during the day. Three respondents (21%) provided no answers to this question.

Question 7 asked the members to list the reasons they were aware of that contribute to the diminished response level of our members. Seven members (50%) stated time conflicts and constraints, too much time required from their busy life. Four more members (29%) stated that the increase in the number of calls had left less time for sleep. Two members (14%) cited a conflict between the volunteers and the paid personnel, and one person (7%) stated that they felt the amount of time spent getting and maintaining all of the required certifications was too much to ask as well as responding to calls.

Question 8 asked the members if they had the opportunity, would they still join the organization as before? Ten members (71%) stated they would. Four members (29%) stated they would if some things were changed. No members stated they would not join.

Question 9 found all "yes" or "yes if some things were changed" answers. Their reasons for willingly joining the department if given the opportunity were as follows. Eight members (57%) stated that this was good education and preparation for future fire service careers. Four members (29%) would join again for the family-type atmosphere and the friendly people of the organization. Two members (14%) said the reason they would join again was that it offered them a chance to serve their community.

Question 10 asked the members what level of participation our organization can expect from them in the future. Three members (21%) felt they could increase their level of participation. Nine members (64%) felt their level of participation would remain about the same as now, with only two members (14%) stating that their level of participation would probably decrease. Both of these members offered reasons for the decline, one being work that could not be interrupted and the other due to increased family activities with his high school-aged children.

Summary

The results of this research were derived from a review of relevant published literature that was locally available and the information gathered from the external survey sent to other local departments and the internal survey sent to department members. The external survey determined 90% of the departments surveyed had experienced or were

currently experiencing some degree of lack of volunteer participation or "burnout". The literature reviewed and surveys conducted by the author produced these answers to the original research questions:

Question 1: What are the contributing factors responsible for the decline in the number of volunteers participating in department activities?

Answer: Time conflicts with family and personal activities; increased call count that further affected time conflicts; lack of recognition for the efforts they expend; a conflict between the paid members and the volunteers.

Question 2: What can the organization do to address this problem?

Answer: Schedule more productive time with hands-on training classes as opposed to repetitive classroom sessions; reduce required time for non-emergency activities; return to a single standard of operation for all members, paid and volunteer.

Question 3: What can the individual do to address this problem?

Answer: Try to schedule non-emergency activities far enough in advance to avoid conflict with other life activities; become a better time manager; utilize available time to best advantage.

DISCUSSION

The results of this project were very close to the findings of others discussed in the Literature Review section of this paper. A primary factor that was identified in the study results was the amount of time that was required by the department for non-emergency

duties. The report by Sittleburg (1994) referred to this problem by stating, "Other departments try to reduce the time commitment for volunteers by recruiting other people to provide support services, such as clerical and maintenance duties. This way a responder's time is spent more effectively." Sittleburg also found that, "One solution is to require only a specific amount of time from each volunteer every month, rather than leave expectations open ended."

Describing obstacles to recruiting and personnel maintenance, Chief Richard Marinucci of Farmington Hills, Michigan, fire department states, "The department must be aware of factors which impede the recruiting and maintenance process. One major problem is the conflict between the departments' demands for time and personal commitments. Increased run volume, training, EMS, and fire prevention activities can conflict with an individual's need for leisure or family activities." (Marinucci, 1988)

Addressing the facts that our organization is changing and not static as it was leads us to explore the areas of managing and influencing this change. All too often, organizations get caught up in the change mode just because some other organizations have changed. "Change should not be made for the sake of change -- but for the sake of improvement." (Windisch, 1999) This article addresses influencing change with a new culture. In describing how his department addresses the volunteer participation level, Windisch stated, "All members must meet minimum participation levels as established by the organization and must be held accountable. The rules must be realistic and consider volunteers personal lives. The officers must be firm and fair in enforcing the rules. There is

no value for our internal and external customers if we have a membership of 50 and we only see 25 members!" Windisch continues later in the article and states, "We need to provide members with the minimum of requirements that are based on reasonable expectations. Members will meet these expectations. If we are receptive to new ideas and flexible in our approach, then we will be better managers of our most important resource -- our people."

Another valuable article dealing with the necessity for change is Initiating Change by Chief John Cook, Jr. of the Denton, Texas, fire department. Though written in 1989, his opening sentence is as true today as then. It states, "Today's fire service manager must either adapt to and become an agent for change or become a victim of it and join the proverbial dinosaur in extinction." (1989) He continues that when it comes to change, "Often there will be considerable opposition from members. They do not want change. Some members have spent years developing negative attitudes that are difficult to displace." As a closing statement, Chief Cook states that "Change is a dynamic process. If we are not vigilant, our organizations will pass away even though we were the original catalysts. The journey is long and hard, but the results worthwhile." (1989)

The article titled Planning for Fire Service Success, by Dr. Harry Carter, relates real well to our study results that indicate change in our operation is necessary. He states, "In far too many instances we are railroaded, kicking and screaming into the future. And on far too many of these unguided trips into the future, our destination is not a pleasant one." He continues, "It is my conviction that we can take control of a great deal of what happens to us in our fire service careers. However, the primary prerequisite for this involves a

conscientious decision to affect what is going to happen to us." (1995) The rest of the article is information about change management, but this author found his closing comment to be one that will serve as a guide for our department and it is, "Whether you plan for it, or hide from it, the future will occur. Better to have a hand in choosing the road your fire department will have to travel anyway." (1995)

The author's interpretation of the study results are mixed. First, the author is relieved to know that ours is not the only organization with these problems. It is very reassuring that others have taken the time to explain steps that they have taken to turn their organizations around so that we have guidance in place to begin our revival trip. It is of great comfort to find that our organization is very salvageable, not a hopeless entity headed for certain disaster. Just a relatively few adjustments from management and the members, and our organization will be on the road to recovery in the fast lane.

On the other hand, the author is more worried than before this project was started, because now the author has a better vision of the harsh realities that await our organization if we should fail to resolve the issues facing us today. If response levels stay low or go farther down and we are unable to provide the level of service that our community has come to expect from us, serious problems will arise which could result in a plethora of unthinkable outcomes. Consolidation, merger, privatization, all the issues that we used to think of as big city problems that would never threaten our little department, are waiting at our door. We've grown up as a department, and now it is time to face the fact, shoulder our burden and get on with our business.

The organizational implications of the study results show that adjustments must be made to the way we do business and quickly, or we as an organization providing services to our community will be out of business. We must prepare for and implement meaningful changes in our organization to not only address the results of the surveys, but to regain that pride and professionalism that has slipped down somewhat in the recent past.

It is the author's belief, if the department can research and then implement programs that directly relate to those deficiencies noted on the survey and posted on the bulletin board for all to see, that this will reinforce the members' faith and trust in the honesty of their department leaders. This will be a small step but a positive one once the members realize that their input on the survey did matter and that something is being done about it. Small steps toward the center of the pendulum swing from both sides will start to close the gap that exists now.

Of course, open communication will enhance whatever action or inaction that happens. It is the author's belief that legitimate best and worse case scenarios be communicated to the members. No coercion, or threats of doom and gloom and demise, just a legitimate projection of pro and con possibilities if we don't come together and pull for a common cause.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author will forward the results of the surveys and a copy of this research paper to the Chief of FAFPD with the following recommendations. First, a statement that makes sure he knows that this research was based on a small response population and is not the

ultimate survey that will solve all the organization's problems if he follows it to the letter.

Also, the resources listed and referenced are available for his review in his own library, and I shall encourage the Chief and all members to read these articles in their entirety to get the full flavor of them, not just cited quotes to emphasize a point. Then I will encourage the Chief to seize this opportunity to demonstrate to the members that their opinion does matter, that instruments like this and other surveys or questionnaires are tools to help the members help the organization through participation without fear of reprisal.

The posted results of the survey are on the bulletin board for all to see. Appropriate actions to address these concerns will start to patch the crack that is forming between "us and them". We are all on the same team. This goes for the members, also. They have the opportunity to re-evaluate their relationship with the organization and their personal life. I would encourage all members to take a few days and really try to find a way that they could become more involved from their end of this spectrum. I would also caution all members that change will happen, but it might not happen as soon as we want it. Be patient; don't jump ship yet. We are just taking on a little water, not sinking.

The author will recommend to the Chief of the FAFPD the following for his consideration. First, the areas that the Chief and the author initially thought were the trouble spots, recruitment and retention, appear to be just minor factors, if factors at all. The responses on the survey forms did show several areas that need improvement in recruiting though. In the past, recruiting was largely based on people wanting to serve their community. The results of this survey found that most people who join the department

today do so for the educational preparation for future careers in the fire service. Service to the community has dropped from the primary reason to join to number three at the present.

Because of that, the author feels that a revision to the recruitment policy be considered. Perhaps if more of an emphasis was placed on the ability to train here for future jobs, we could draw more applicants.

The second recommendation would be to look at and possibly revise our orientation policy as addressed in Question 2 on the survey. Only 33% of those surveyed stated they had received information as to what their responsibilities would be once they joined.

Another encouraging area on the survey was the response to Question 8 which was designed to deal with retention. Ten of the 14 who responded stated they would join again as is, and four members stated they would rejoin if some changes were made. Retention doesn't seem to be the problem. Time conflicts and slight internal turf battles seem more prominent than retention.

The author will recommend to the Chief for his consideration that a possible revision in the number of calls you are required to respond to be reduced if possible from 20% down to 15% or lower if possible. This might take some of the pressure off those who fear they are never going to meet their quota percentage. Another suggestion would be to examine the program where the volunteer just commits to a certain number of hours per month, rather than a call percentage. Another suggestion would be to promote the scheduling of volunteer times for shift work. This way, you know that someone will be there ahead of time.

Another recommendation would be to continue the membership survey method of intelligence gathering. The author believes that this will become a very useful tool in the future which will generate more response. Another suggestion would be for the Chief and the staff members to take a closer look at the annual awards banquet and the type of awards offered, what it takes to earn one and, if possible, a selection of awards by the recipient would be in order. Finally, the author suggests that all the members of the organization reread the standard operating procedures that have been adopted by our organization so that everyone is current with this information. These were adopted for our efficiency and effectiveness, but primarily for the safety of our members.

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APPENDIX A

EXTERNAL SURVEY

Frederick Area Fire Protection District

January 15, 1999

Training Coordinator
Name of Fire Department
Address
City, State, Zip

Good Morning,

As the training coordinator for the Frederick Area Fire Protection District and as a Student of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program at Emmitsburg, Maryland, I am conducting an Applied Research Project. This survey is designed as a tool to gather information from multiple organizations. The results will address a problem that currently exists in our organization and may well exist in yours. We have experienced a severe decline in the number of active volunteers. Participation is down in call response, training attendance and meeting attendance. Obviously this needs to be corrected, and this survey is a step in this direction.

The survey is purposely designed to be anonymous. Please answer all questions and, in doing so, make no marks that would identify you. Once you have completed this questionnaire, please mail it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

I have enclosed my card with this packet. If you would like a copy of the research results, send your card or request after June 1, 1999 and I will forward them to you.

Thank you for your assistance. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ray Bury, Training Coordinator

1999 External Survey

1. Is your organization:
 - a. paid
 - b. volunteer
 - c. combination

**If your organization is a full paid department and you have no volunteer, reserves or combination experience to draw from, you may stop here. If you have experience in these areas, please continue.*

2. Has your organization experienced a lack of participation or "burnout" phenomena?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. somewhat

**If your organization has not experienced this type of situation, you may stop here. However, please return this survey with any suggestions or information you may have that has prevented this. If you have experience in these areas, please continue.*

3. How has your organization addressed this problem? Please outline your program.

4. How well has this program worked to resolve the problem?
 - a. very well
 - b. to some degree
 - c. not at allPlease briefly explain:

5. Based on your organization's results, would you recommend this program or opt for another?

6. If you were to try another program, what would it be? Please briefly outline.

APPENDIX B

INTERNAL SURVEY

Survey of Department Members Frederick Area Fire Protection District

Dear Member,

This letter-questionnaire is being sent to each member of the district. I strongly urge each of you to honestly respond to these questions. These answers and comments are to be used to help rebuild our organization from the inside. All answers and comments are confidential. No one is to sign their name or make other identifying marks on this survey.

When you finish, place the survey in the enclosed envelope, seal it and place it in the secured ballot box at Station 1. I will tabulate the results and type your comments on separate papers verbatim. (Please write legibly so that I can correctly copy your statements.) I will then shred the returned sheets so that no one other than myself will see the returned papers. All of this is to provide each of you the opportunity to be open and honest in your response and suggestions for improvement without fear of retaliation or harassment.

We (the district and I) value your time and efforts and want to offer this non-threatening method for your use in addressing some very tough issues that threaten our organization today. We can then begin to develop new programs or "tweak" existing programs as needed to not only meet today's challenges, but also prepare us for those we will face in the next five to ten years and beyond.

I will also use the information gathered as a part of the applied research paper I am completing for the National Fire Academy. The problems that are confronting our organization will be evident in other organizations either now or in the future. I believe that we should share with others the programs that we develop to improve upon these existing conditions. Even if these solutions prove to be less than optimum in our organization, they may work well for others.

Again, thank you for the time and effort you are about to provide on this project. This is an undertaking that is critical to the survival of our organization, and we want to emphasize that again. There is no intent to assign blame or shame to anyone. This instrument was designed to eliminate or reduce to an acceptable level the factors that are affecting our department operations. Please don't blow it off or dismiss it as just another time eater that won't matter anyway. Your ideas do matter. This is your organization, and you have already invested a lot as a member. Now you have the opportunity to strengthen this investment.

On the enclosed survey, please follow the directions for filling out each question and remember to print any comments so that I will be able to read them when I transfer them to typed print. Again, your survey will be shredded after I have transferred the results. We want your ideas to chew on, not your butt! If no one knows who sent them in, then the ideas can be reviewed for their merit and content, not stigmatized or tainted by the author's name.

Be honest, thoughtful and constructive. When you finish, return the form in the sealed envelope. Please return the survey by March 18, 1999. I will tabulate the results as soon as possible, possibly in two to three weeks, depending on the depth of response. The results will be posted on the bulletin board at Station 1. The process of improvement and future planning will proceed from there.

This is just the beginning of a never ending journey filled with danger and excitement along the way. No, this is not Alice in Wonderland or the Wizard of Oz. This is real life drama because this is real life. Let's begin the adventure.

Thank you for your time,

Ray Bury, Training Coordinator

Frederick Area Fire Protection District 1999 Internal Survey

Please circle only one answer or write down reasons in spaces provided. You may attach additional sheets or use the back of the survey as needed.

1. Why did you become a member of FAFPD?
 - a. to serve my community in times of need
 - b. to prepare myself for future job opportunities
 - c. to keep the family tradition going
 - d. other _____

2. Did someone from the district explain the duties and responsibilities of being a member before you made application for membership?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. other _____

3. When we become a member of an organization, we have expectations of what the organization can do for us as well as what we can do for it. At this point in your career with FAFPD, would you say the organization has?
 - a. exceeded my initial expectations
 - b. pretty much met my initial expectations
 - c. fallen way short of meeting my initial expectations
 - d. other _____

4. Looking at Question 3 above and taking an introspective look at yourself: At this point in your career with FAFPD, have you:
 - a. exceeded your initial expectations of what you could do for the organization
 - b. pretty much met your initial expectations of what you could do for the organization
 - c. fallen way short of meeting your initial expectations of what you could do for the organization
 - d. other _____

5. Referring to Question 3:

If you feel that the organization exceeded your initial expectations of what it could do for you for you, please list what made you feel that way.

If you feel that the organization fell way short of meeting your initial expectations of what it could do for you, please list as many of these as you can.

Next, and this is really important, list what you feel the organization can do to meet your initial expectations and give this a log of thought. Remember, things like budgeting constraints make obvious answers impossible (hire people, buy new equipment, etc.), so be creative but realistic too.

6. Referring to Question 4:
 If you feel that you exceeded your initial expectations of what you could do for the organization, please explain what you did to get to this level.
 If you feel that you fell way short of your initial expectations of what you could do for the district, please list what you feel you can do to bring your contribution level up.
 Again, this is very important. Be honest and realistic in your answer. Don't be overly critical and don't set unreachable goals.

7. Over the past year, the call rate has increased by 28%. This is primarily due to the exponential growth in our community and the increased traffic that accompanies it. This has become a major factor in the problem equation our organization is facing. It is a fact that on occasion, different times of day or night, there have been alarms where the paid person on shift has been the only one to respond. Here is where we need your input. We, as an organization in time of transition, need to find out from our members (our most valuable asset) what has caused this decreased level of response. This will require to think very responsibly and be honest in your answer. Again, we want your answers to chew on, not your rear. We need answers to identify problem areas so that we can develop programs to resolve them -- plain but not simple. This requires effort on your part! Give it your best.

Please list the reasons that you are aware of that contribute to the diminished response level of our members:

8. Given what you have learned and experienced to this point in your career with FAFPD, if you had the opportunity, would you still join the organization as before?
- yes
 - no
 - if some things were changed - please explain: _____

9. In Question 8 above, if you answered yes or no, please explain why.

10. After answering the question above which forced you to face some sobering facts and to take a hard look at your relationship with our organization, we need your honest answer for one more question. Knowing that the calls will, in all likelihood, continue to increase as they have in the past, and reviewing your interaction with the organization as of late, please provide an accurate answer with reasons for the following question:

What level of participation can our organization expect from you in the future?

- a. increased level of participation
- b. about the same level as now
- c. decreased level of participation

Explanation:

Thank you again for your time and effort. We know that some of these questions were blunt, but the problems we are facing are extreme and they require straightforward answers. Please return this as soon as you are finished.