

Running head: IDENTIFYING THE CRITERIA FOR ADDING VOLUNTEER

Identifying the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department.

Kyle E. Rieber

Jeffersontown Fire Protection District, Jeffersontown, Kentucky

Abstract

The problem addressed in this applied research paper is that the current economic times have caused the Jeffersontown Fire Department to have problems maintaining proper staffing levels at all times. The purpose of this research paper is to identify the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department. Using the descriptive research method along with personal interviews and questionnaires the following research questions were answered.

1. What, if any, are the federal guidelines for a combination fire department?
2. What are the criteria that other fire departments similar in size and structure to the Jeffersontown fire department used to add volunteers firefighters to their department?
3. What, if any, are the issues that the Jeffersontown career staff has about adding volunteers into a career department?
4. What are the criteria for adding volunteers to the Jeffersontown fire department?

The results of the research showed numerous federal guidelines, along with a few local guidelines that would have to be met to add volunteers to a career department. The results also yielded a variety of different criteria for adding volunteers, in addition to various information addressing the remaining research questions. The recommendation was for the Jeffersontown Fire Department to establish a Volunteer Program Committee. The make-up of this committee should include line firefighters. The goal of the committee is to use information obtained from the applied research project to develop a comprehensive blueprint to outline a volunteer plan that will not only set criteria for adding volunteers, but also to increase volunteer membership and retention of those members.

Identifying the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department.

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INTRODUCTION

Fire departments across the country are feeling the fallout of a weak economy. High unemployment, high fuel cost, and a sinking housing market has effected many fire departments revenue source, while expecting fire departments to continue the same level of service.

The problem is that the current economic times have caused the Jeffersontown Fire Department to have problems maintaining proper staffing levels at all times.

The purpose of this research paper is to identify the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department.

The descriptive research method will be used to answer the following research questions.

1. What, if any, are the federal guidelines for a combination fire department?
2. What are the criteria that other fire departments similar in size and structure to the Jeffersontown fire department used to add volunteers firefighters to their department?
3. What, if any, are the issues that the Jeffersontown career staff has about adding volunteers into a career department?
4. What are the criteria for adding volunteers to the Jeffersontown fire department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Jeffersontown Fire Department located in the city of Jeffersontown, Kentucky, and is part of the Louisville metro fire service suburban area which includes 18 departments; it was formed in 1919 as a volunteer department. In 1980 the Jeffersontown Fire Department changed to a combination department with the hiring of five career firefighters. Jeffersontown fire department consists of a mixture of residential, commercial, educational facilities, and mid-sized strip shopping centers including national brand chain stores (Target, Wal-Mart etc.) The

Jeffersontown Fire Department covers approximately thirty-six square miles and has an average of over 1900 runs per year. In 2004, the department changed to nearly a full paid department with 48 career employees and one volunteer. Since 2004, the Jeffersontown Fire Department has made the commitment to provide staffing of 4 member engines and 4 member trucks 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In order to maintain this level of staffing, the Jeffersontown Fire Department had to create an overtime budget. Since the start of this program, the overtime budget has doubled in size. With the ongoing economic trouble causing a decrease in revenue sources, maintaining this staffing level has caused a huge financial implication for us. We are finding ourselves eliminating certain items such as new equipment from within our budget, just to cover the overtime. In addition to the increase overtime budget, a higher work load (such as hydrant testing and painting, and fire inspections) has caused us to lower staffing levels by one in order to send a member to do these tasks. Sending the entire company to do these tasks has caused us to have a higher fuel bill for our apparatus as well as an increase in wear and tear on our apparatus. This area alone has caused us great concern as it has caused us to not keep our full level of staffing 24 hours a day, even if it is just for a few hours. This could cause a delay in firefighting operations while waiting for the next company to cover the two-in two-out standard set by NFPA 1500. This also leads to difficulty in not meeting the minimal manning standard set by NFPA 1710, which could affect firefighter safety. These two standards relate to the U.S. Fire Administration operational objectives on reducing the loss of life from fire of firefighters. In addition, addressing this issue also meets the model of Executive Fire Officer Leadership, by .showing recognition of blind spots, weakness, and commitment to corrective action. The research conducted is to identify the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career

department which could possibly help the Jeffersontown Fire Department keep the level of staffing 24 hours a day as well as lowering their overtime budget.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The search of publications, journals, and internet research of USFA, NIMS, NFPA, and fire department websites throughout Kentucky was used to collect information on the research topic. The review also consisted of personal and e-mail contacts with Chiefs across the metro area. These included questionnaires on the research topic as well as interviews.

The first question posted is, what, if any, are the federal guidelines for a combination fire department? According to the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) regulations issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (Federal OSHA) are binding only upon private sector employers. Therefore, only a fire department or fire brigade that is part of a private company would have to comply with all of the applicable OSHA regulations, note that if it is a federal fire department is must comply with these regulations.

State and local government agencies are not required to meet the regulations established by Federal OSHA. Although the Federal OSHA standards are not directly applicable to state and local agencies, which include fire departments or rescue agencies. However, the Federal OSHA law gives states an opportunity to operate under its own occupational health and safety programs and explicitly requires the employer to train employees in the safety and health aspect of their job. (The United States Department of Labor OSHA handbook July 14, 2010 P.1) The states that choose to operate their own program are sometimes called “OSHA states”, and are required by Federal law to meet the same regulations as the private sector. As of July 1995 there were 23

states and two territories which were state OSHA jurisdictions, Kentucky is included as an OSHA state. (National Volunteer fire Council, August)

OSHA regulations for volunteer fire departments or volunteer firefighters are generally determined by state government. Under Federal rules, the applicability of OSHA laws dependent on the existence of an employer/employee relationship, an employer/employee relationship is made once a monetary compensation is given by the employer to the employee, the only exception would be if a state has chosen to extend the OSHA laws to volunteers. Several states have chosen to extend the OSHA regulations to cover volunteer firefighters; Kentucky is one of those states. However, volunteers in all states are not exempt from OSHA regulations as it pertains to Hazardous materials training. This is because to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) incorporates OSHA standards into its regulations, and the EPA regulations are applicable to all firefighters, paid or volunteer. The National Fire and Protection Agency (NFPA) standards are designed to protect fire and rescue workers from occupational and workplace hazards. Although NFPA standards are voluntary, NFPA regulation working incorporated into OSHA standards and regulations for fire departments are mandatory for Kentucky as it is an OSHA state. (Ehow NFPA standards for fire stations July 2010)

Other Federal guidelines included training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires all state agencies, including fire departments to be trained in (NIMS) to receive federal preparedness grants. Dates were set by FEMA in 2006 for what training was to be done and when. All members were to be trained, as well as new members that were added to the department's membership.

The Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) also deals with issues concerning volunteers in a career fire department. The FLSA sets guidelines for what qualifies as an

employee or volunteer. Any individual employed by an employer and receives compensation for services rendered, are considered employees under FLSA. However, any private individuals who perform service for a public agency (Fire Department) for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons with no expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered are not considered employees under the FLSA. In addition, if a volunteer who works as a career firefighter wants to volunteer as a firefighter can do so as long as he or she is not doing so with the department that they are an employee of. (America reads resource kit 1998).

In addition, the Kentucky Fire Commission requires all volunteer firefighters to obtain 150 hours of firefighter training in select subjects and also requires 400 hours of firefighter training in select subjects to be a paid firefighter they are as follows:

Subjects	Volunteer	Paid
Administration and Organization	2	12
Safety	2	10
Fire Alarm and Communications	2	8
Fire Behavior	4	10
Portable Extinguishers	2	5
Personal Protective Equipment	8	20
Forcible Entry	2	10
Ventilation	2	10
Ropes	2	12
Ladders	5	20
Fire Hose, Nozzles, Appliances	7	20
Foam Fire Steams	2	4

Fire Control	5	20
Salvage	2	5
Overhaul	2	5
Rescue	2	10
Water Supply	2	18
Sprinklers	0	10
Response to HAZ-MAT Incidents	12	20
Fire Prevention/Public Fire Education	2	20
Building Construction	2	10
Aircraft Crash Firefighting	2	6
Emergency and Disaster Planning	2	15
Pumper Operations and Maintenance	7	20
Drivers Training	12	12
Total	112	332

The remaining 38 hours for volunteer and 68 hours for paid are elective and may in any subject.

In addition, volunteer firefighters must also complete courses in Firefighter Survival and Rescue, and Wild land Firefighting Awareness Level.

When conducting this review, the author wanted to not only review what other fire departments criteria were for adding volunteers, but also to review what other agencies were doing as well. When reviewing what other agencies are doing for adding volunteers, one thing to look at is how they are getting them. Agencies such as American Red Cross do not have set criteria for adding volunteers; they use a company named Volunteer Match and its Preferred

Partnership Program. This program helps national nonprofit organizations simplify and support the volunteer efforts of their local affiliates. The Partnership Program provides an automated email, monthly reports, affiliate checks, and administrative services support. Mary Johnson, the recruitment manager for the American Red Cross in Louisville, Kentucky, says, “I’ve registered my program profile on 8 – 10 websites, and have been contacted by far more interested volunteers from Volunteer Match than all of the other sites combined”, M. Johnson (personal communication August 30, 2010).

Other nonprofit organizations, such as The Salvation Army, use brochures or posters, public service announcements on television, radio or newspaper, and speaking to community groups. Called a warm body method, it consists of spreading the message about the potential volunteer to as broad an audience as possible. The theory is that somewhere among this audience will be those who find this position interesting. (The Salvation Army, 2010)

The remaining research questions reviewed were done by personal communication. The reader can find that information in the results section and in the appendix section.

In summary, the literature review was able to show a lot of information on federal and state guidelines for volunteer’s firefighters, but showed no information on criteria for adding volunteers to a career department as it pertains to written plans. While most departments had some requirement for the volunteers, the lack of written plans influenced the project as there was nothing to compare to.

PROCEDURES

The Descriptive Method of research was utilized to obtain the necessary information to meet the purpose of this study. Research was conducted utilizing internet search engines and the Louisville Free Public Library to find information related to the topic being researched. The information obtained was used to help the author identify the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department. The research continued with the development of a questionnaire. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was constructed for the Metro Fire Services to determine the criteria for adding volunteer firefighters to a career department.

The questionnaires were sent via e-mail to the 18 fire protection districts that provide services to the Suburban area of Metro Louisville which includes the following Districts: Anchorage Fire District, Buechel Fire District, Camp Taylor Fire District, Dixie Suburban Fire District, Eastwood Fire District, Fairdale Fire District, Fern Creek Fire District, Harrods Creek Fire District, Jeffersontown Fire District, Lake Dreamland Fire District, Lyndon Fire District, McMahan Fire District, Middletown Fire District, Okolona Fire District, Pleasure Ridge Park Fire District, St. Matthews Fire District, and Worthington Fire District. These departments were selected for their similar size and structure and that they are all in the same metro area. The following questions are from the questionnaire. 1. Do you have a volunteer program? If so, do you have a SOG for that program? 2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department? 3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteers? If so, could you list them? 4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers? 5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department? 6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

The author also conducted interviews with the following Fire Department personnel. Chief Russ Rekestraw of the Lyndon Fire Department, Captain Brennen D. Lawrence, Recruitment Officer Worthington Fire Department, Captain Matt Golsby of the Middletown Fire Department, Major James S of the Jeffersontown Fire Department, Captain Chris Verdi of the McMahan Fire District, Chief Brent Davenport of the Eastwood Fire Department, and Mary Johnson, recruitment manager for the American Red Cross in Louisville, Kentucky.

The limitations of the research were that most of the answers from the questionnaires were not as in depth as the author would have liked. In addition, the amount of questionnaires that were turned back in was small in numbers leaving very little data to use. The interviews were conducted using the same questionnaire to increase the amount of data for the applied research paper.

RESULTS

The results of the research for research question one (What, if any, are the federal guidelines for a combination Fire Department?) show that in some states there is no law that says you are required to follow NFPA guidelines. The compelling factor to follow them is 1) they make sense, 2) they are created with input from the fire service, and 3) they are the standard that you would be held to if something went wrong and a lawyer got involved. However, the research shows that Kentucky is an OSHA state and is required to meet OSHA guidelines. In addition, these guidelines would require the volunteers of a fire department to meet them as well, as Kentucky has chosen to extend the OSHA regulations to cover volunteer firefighters. Some of the OSHA requirements were the general Industry training requirements 29 CFR part 1910 which includes 1910.155 covering fire protection as well as NFPA standards 1500, 1001, 1002 just to name a few.

The research also shows that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires all states agencies, including fire departments to be trained in (NIMS) to receive federal preparedness grants. The research also shows that the Kentucky State Fire Commission also requires 150 hours of fire training for certification as a volunteer firefighter and 400 hours for certification as a paid firefighter.

The Fire Department questionnaire that was sent out covers the three remaining research questions. The results of the Fire Department questionnaire are as follows, with 18 questionnaires sent out, only seven of the following replied. They are the Buechel Fire District, Eastwood Fire District, Jeffersontown Fire District, Lyndon Fire District, McMahan Fire District, Middletown Fire District, and the St. Matthews Fire District. Also included are the results of the interviews. The result of question one (Do you have a volunteer program and if so, do you have a SOG for that program?) is that the author was surprised by the amount of fire departments that used volunteers, but did not have a formal volunteer firefighter program or SOG.

In reference to question two, regarding special criteria for volunteers, the Worthington Fire Department Jefferson County, Kentucky, used their local movie theater to put up recruitment information on the movie screen while people waited for the show to start. "When our department did this, we were able to draw 51 contacts over 90 days with 20 applications resulting in 15 new recruits using this method", says Captain Brennen D. Lawrence, Recruitment Officer Worthington Fire Department. The criteria for adding their volunteers to the department were that the volunteer was required to be 18 years of age, possess a valid driver's license, and have no felony criminal record. (Personal communication August 31, 2010)

The Lyndon Fire Department Louisville, Kentucky painted their fire engines with recruitment logos on them, resulting in many contacts a month. “Our criteria for adding volunteers is the same as most in general (driver’s license, high school), but we do required them to have taken the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) says Chief Russ Rekestraw of the Lyndon Fire Department, R. Rakestraw (Personal communication September 1, 2010)

The results of question three, regarding career staff having any issues with any of the volunteers were as follows. Captain Matt Golsby of the Middletown Fire Department says “Most of or career staff had issues with that of training. They felt that once a week was not enough based on that they did not know when these volunteers would be making runs or doing a stand-by”. He goes on to say that, “The volunteers seem to have an issue with the amount of money per run, as due to cut back, we lower the amount”. M. Golsby (personal communication July 8, 2010). The author, being the past Assistant Fire Chief of the McMahan Fire District and held that position at a paid level and working with the other career members saw no issues. The career staff worked very well with the volunteers as most of all current career staff was once volunteers with McMahan and were hired from within. Captain Chris Verdi of the McMahan Fire District, who is a career staff member says, “I think the volunteers are happy working with the career staff, the fact that they can work a 8, 12 or 24 hours shift and get little money for it makes them feel they are a part of the career staff” C. Verdi (personal communication July 14, 2010).

Question four asked, “What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?” Out of the seven departments that replied, all stated that a willingness to serve was the most important. “The day of the volunteer firefighter just showing up and hanging out is over, we require so much time and training. When I joined my department in 1970, we attended one training night a week for two hours. Now, we have to train five hours a week plus training

on Haz-Mat, EMT, heavy rescue, and so on. We need volunteers that are willing to put in that kind of time.” Chief Brent Davenport, Eastwood Fire Department (personal communication, July 29, 2010).

Question five asked, “What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?” Out of the seven departments that replied, all stated that training was the most important. “Training, training, training. We want our volunteers to be trained as well as our career staff, so that everyone is on the same level and working on the same page” Chief Brent Davenport, Eastwood Fire Department (personal communication, July 29, 2010).

Question six asked, “Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?” Out of seven departments that replied, all stated that they have compensation for their volunteers, but in the form of reimbursement for out of pocket expenses. However, the McMahan Fire Department compensate their volunteers for services if they are filling in for a career staff member. The author has knowledge of this by having been a career staff member for 25 years.

To answer the question, “What are the criteria for adding volunteers to the Jeffersontown Fire Department?”, one could apply the research gathered from The Fire Department questionnaire along with the Literature review.

Discussion

Clearly, the research conducted in this paper shows that are several federal and local guidelines for a combination fire department and a volunteer fire department for that matter. While NFPA standards may be voluntary, the research shows that since Kentucky is an OSHA state, the NFPA standards would be mandatory, which would include volunteer’s firefighters as Kentucky has chosen to extend the OSHA regulations to cover volunteer firefighters (National Volunteer fire

Council, August). In addition, fire departments in Kentucky will have to meet the Kentucky Fire Commission training requirements covering basic firefighter skills as well as Firefighter Survival and Rescue, and Wild land Firefighting Awareness Level. (Kentucky Fire Commission 2010)

The fire department questionnaire shows that all of the departments that replied use volunteers, but don't have a formal SOG. While all that replied used a general criteria (driver's license, high school) for adding volunteers, the willingness to serve was the most important. In addition, it was important to have the volunteer firefighters trained to the same level as the career firefighters.

The author's interpretation of this research is that I have identified what the federal and local guidelines are. These guidelines are pretty much the norm in the fire service, and should not be an issue when adding volunteers. An issue of concern is compensation vs. reimbursement. The Federal Fair Labor Standards could come in to play, depending on the amount of reimbursement you are giving volunteers. If it is more than what would be considered out of pocket expenses, it could be considered compensation for services (which would make your volunteers considered career).

The research conducted in this paper has yielded a great deal of criteria for adding volunteers from general criteria to requiring CPAT testing or be certified as a volunteer firefighter by the state. The implications of this research have raised a future question for the Jeffersontown Fire Department and that is how soon do you need these volunteer firefighters? Can you wait to train them to meet the Kentucky Fire Commission 150 hours for a volunteer firefighter, or do you make one of your criteria pre-certified? One way to answer this question is, how long will my overtime budget last, and can the department afford to wait?

In addition, do we want to take a chance on being down one firefighter when that one firefighter may be needed those few hours while hydrant testing or fire inspections are being conducted? Furthermore, do we want to pass up an opportunity to increase the departments staffing? In regards to having a full crew, size does matter. We know that running with fours and fives is safer and more effective than running with twos and threes. The author feels this study will help our organization meet our staffing needs while also increasing our size, which will not only increase our firefighter safety, but also enhance our customer service.

Recommendations

By completing this research project, this author recommends that the Jeffersontown Fire Department establish a Volunteer Program Committee. The make-up of this committee should include line firefighters. The goal of the committee is to use information obtained from the applied research project to develop a comprehensive blueprint to outline a volunteer plan that will not only set criteria for adding volunteers, but also to increase volunteer membership and retention of those members.

The objectives of the Volunteer Program Committee are: 1) to facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers, 2) Review all federal and local guidelines that pertain to fire department, and make sure we our meeting them, 3) Determine our need for volunteers, immediate or gradual, if need is immediate; then determine if volunteers should be pre-certified state firefighters, 4) Using information obtained from this applied research project to set criteria for adding volunteers.

It is important to know that these are recommendations for the committee, and through further study of volunteers programs and volunteer criteria questionnaires by the committee, these objectives could be changed.

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Appendix B

Fire Department Questionnaire Results

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer: yes to use of volunteer, but no formal program or SOG.

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer; Six departments No One department Yes

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer: all seven said training

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer: all seven said willingness to serve

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer: all seven said training

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

Eighteen sent out, seven replied. Answer all seven said we gave reimbursement

Appendix C

Interview with Captain Brennen D. Lawrence:

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

“Yes with do use volunteers, but we don’t have an SOG”

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

“We required them to be 18 years of age possess a valid driver’s license, and have no felony criminal record”. However, we used our local movie theater to put up recruitment information on the movie screen while people waited for the show to start. “When our department did this we were able to draw 51 contacts over 90 days with 20 applications resulting in 15 new recruits using this method”.

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

“ I would say training, they want them to do the same amount of training they do.”

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

“I think wanting to do the job”

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

“I would say training”.

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

“Yes on a reimbursement only”

Appendix D

Interview with Chief Russ Rekestraw:

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

“We have volunteers, but no formal program or SOG”

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

“Our criteria for adding volunteer is the same as most in general (driver’s license, high school), but we do required them to have taken the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT)”

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

No

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

“I think heart, do they want to be here”

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

“Training”.

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

“Yes, reimbursement only”

Appendix E

Interview with Captain Matt Golsby:

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

Yes/No SOG

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

NO

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

“Most of our career staff had issues with that of training, they felt the once a week was not enough based on that they did not know when these volunteers would be making runs or doing a stand-by”. He goes on to say that “The volunteers seem to have an issue with the amount of money per run, as due to cut back we lower the amount”.

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

“The willingness to do it”

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

“Training”.

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

“Yes, reimbursement only”

Appendix F

Interview with Captain Chris Verdi:

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

Yes/No SOG

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

NO

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

“I think the volunteers are happy working with the career staff, the fact that they can work a 8, 12 or 24 hours shift and get little money for it makes them feel they are a part of the career staff”

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

“Do they have the time and want to do the job”

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

“Training”.

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

“Yes, reimbursement only”

Appendix G

Interview with Chief Brent Davenport:

1. Do you have a volunteer program, if so do you have a SOG for that program?

Yes/No SOG

2. Does your department have any special criteria for adding volunteers to your department?

NO

3. Does your career staff have any issues with any of your volunteer, if so could you list them.

No

4. What do you think is the most important criteria for selecting volunteers?

“Willingness, we need volunteers that are willing to put in that kind of time.”

5. What is the most important issue when using volunteers in your department?

“Training, training, training, we want our volunteers to be as trained well as our career staff is, so that everyone is on the same level and working on the same page”.

6. Do your volunteers receive any compensation for services?

“Yes, reimbursement only”