DETERMINING VALUES, AND THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The problem was that the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department did not have a strategic plan for the future. The department had gone through considerable change in recent years and faces future changes that will impact the organization. Without proper planning, the department would be unprepared to face those challenges and therefore may be unable to continue to provide the quality of service that its customers deserve. A significant part of the planning process involves an evaluation of values held by the members of the organization.

The purpose was to gain a greater understanding of values and their importance, to determine the values of the department’s members, and to determine if the strategic planning process was appropriate for the department.

Evaluative research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are organizational values and what is their significance?
2. What is the importance of values in the strategic planning process?
3. What are the values of the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department members?
4. Is the strategic planning process appropriate for the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department?

The procedures used to answer the research questions were a review of literature, and a survey of the department’s members, followed by an evaluation of the survey results.

The results showed that values have a significant impact on organizations and how they function. It was also revealed that organizational values play an important role
in the strategic planning process. Furthermore, the department was in need of the strategic planning process to address organizational concerns as indicated by the information gleaned from the department’s history and the organizational values surveys.

Recommendations were made to implement the strategic planning process, to open lines of communication with City Management and to involve members of the organization in the strategic planning process.
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INTRODUCTION

The fire service is constantly being tasked to accomplish more without additional resources. Increases in domestic security concerns regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, has added to the already overflowing plate containing Hazardous Materials, Technical Rescue, Emergency Medical Response, Fire Prevention, a myriad of safety related programs, and if there is any time left over, maybe even Firefighting. The training and documentation required to keep pace with this ever-growing list of demands, can take its toll on even the best-prepared and staffed departments. Sometimes, there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish all that is required of today’s fire service.

The only chance a department has to even coming close to accomplishing all that is required is through proper planning for the future. But where does one start in the planning process? According to Chief Mark Wallace (1998), in his book Fire Department Strategic Planning, “simply creating a situation wherein every member understands the desired results, the defined mission, and the goals, [of the organization] then we can turn them loose to create that future. The key to this process is our ability to understand the values held by our members, both as individuals and as a group” (p. 7).

The problem is that the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department does not have a strategic plan for the future. The department has gone through considerable change in recent years and faces future changes that will impact the organization. Without proper planning, the department will be unprepared to face those challenges and therefore may be unable to continue to provide the quality of service that its customers deserve. A
significant part of the planning process involves the evaluation of the values held by the members of the organization.

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What are values and what is their significance to an organization?
2. What is the importance of values in the strategic planning process?
3. What are the values of the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department members?
4. Is the strategic planning process appropriate for the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department?

These questions were answered through an evaluative research method, which included a literature review, to determine if any previous studies of this type had been conducted, and to gain insight into the value of conducting such a study. Next, a survey was conducted to gather data pertaining to the values held by the members of the City of Seminole Fire Department. Finally, an evaluation of the survey data was conducted to determine the values held by the organizations members.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department (SFR) is a governmental organization that operates under a hierarchical form of management, ultimate authority for the organization lies with the City Manager. As a serviced based organization, the City of Seminole Fire Rescue provides an array of services aimed at reducing the threat of fire to the community. The department also provides emergency response and mitigation services to include fire and emergency medical Advanced Life Support care.
The organization prides itself in being highly skilled, and with providing the highest quality service to the citizens, businesses and visitors of the departments’ response district.

All Fire Inspectors and shift personnel, with the exception of District Chiefs, are represented by a labor union. Eighty-five percent of the organization is represented in this category. The department’s official mission statement is: “To protect the Public by reducing or preventing personal injury or property damage due to fire, medical emergency, disaster, or other life hazard by providing public education, incident prevention and emergency response services” (City of Seminole Fire Rescue, 2002).

Until five years ago, this organization was a private, not-for-profit organization, and the members had a high degree of autonomy in running the organization. When the City took over the department in 1995 that autonomy was lost. It now appears that a number of the employees remaining from the period prior to the City taking control feel that they are at war with the City, and fail to recognize and accept that they are now part of the City. As one may imagine, this often presents problems within the organization. The fire service has historically been resistant to change, it has often been said that; the fire service is 200 years of tradition uninterrupted by progress, and members of this department reflect this statement well.

The significance of this study is fourfold; first, it will identify what organizational values are and why are they significant; second, it will provide the management with valuable information regarding the values of its members, which will aid in the strategic planning process; third, it will determine if the strategic planning process is appropriate
for the department; and finally, it will serve as a catalyst for future studies related to this subject.

This applied research project relates to the National Fire Academy’s Strategic Management of Change course in at least two different areas. First, in The Change Management Model as outlined in module two, this project assesses the internal organization to determine the values held by its members. Second, as outlined in module three this research served to “Ensure the core values are clarified before undertaking the change process: clear, strategic core values allow the development of a focused, feasible, and effective mission statement” (U.S. Fire Administration, 1996).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was initiated by accessing documents from the National Emergency Training Center’s Learning Resource Center through the Inter-Library Loan program via the Seminole Community Library. This research continued on the Internet, in the researchers personal library as well as the Seminole Community Library. The purpose of the research was to determine if any previous research had occurred regarding organizational values and strategic planning, and to determine the significance of personal and organizational values. Further, the review was to determine the worth of conducting research designed to determine the values of an organization preparing to begin the strategic planning process.

During the review of literature, several authors’ definition of values were identified. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English describes values as “…the principles you have which control your behavior” (Cambridge International Dictionary of
English, 2002). The online dictionary source Rymezone further describes values as “beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment (either for or against something)” (Rymezone, 2002). According to the *Encyclopedia of Values and Ethics*, “The word values refers to that property of a thing or person for which it is esteemed, desirable, or useful; or of worth, merit, or importance. Value implies an intrinsic excellence or desirability. In humans, worth/value implies moral excellence” (Hester, 1996). This source continues to identify values as being constantly evolving and changing, spawning further values, which in turn will need to be evaluated against the existing values (Hester, 1996, p. 325).

The United States Department of Commerce’s National Institute of Standards and Technology spearheads a program that is designed to evaluate and recognize organizations for outstanding quality. The Baldridge National Quality Program sets criteria by which organizations throughout the Nation are evaluated. This program identifies Value as “the degree of worth relative to cost and relative to possible alternatives of a product, service, process, asset, or function” (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2000, p. 29). Though this definition lacks the direct inference toward personnel that the writer was searching, a connection is reflected when an individual makes a decision based on the alternatives provided, as it relates to their personal inference of worth toward a purpose or circumstance.

Organizational values are a set of common behaviors that the entire department is committed to, and due to their commitment, they will not violate these principles. In this concept each member of the organization self-imposes the same set of values creating cohesion throughout the organization that further bonds its members.
Decisions are based on the values of the organization instead of trying to uphold volumes of stringent rules and regulations. The fact that a department's values are specific to that individual department does not negate the reality that they may be common with those of other fire service organizations (Wallace, 2000).

In his book Principle Centered Leadership, Stephen R. Covey (1990) expound on his view of the role values play in the workplace. “Every organization, and individual, struggles to gain and maintain alignment with core values, ethics, and principles”. He further explains the effects the work environment can have on individuals. “Whatever our professed personal and organizational beliefs, we all face restraining forces, opposition, and challenges, and these sometimes cause us to do things that are contrary to our stated missions, intentions and resolutions” (Covey, 1990, p. 48). When this takes place, an unbalance occurs in the individual that extends to the organization.

Values are personal, however, when they are used as the framework from which an organization builds its foundation they exude into the fabric of the organization.

A value is shared but becomes salient only in action toward some goal. It is motivated, and thus emotionally involving, but it is also directed outward, into the space occupied by the group and its standards for communication. It is strongly bound up with notions of selfhood, and of the definition of the person, but impossible to separate from group dynamics and conflicts. Value thus relates group and individual, knowledge and desire, without specifying what these relations must be. Moreover, it problematizes the connections between these domains and refuses to bleach out their conflicts and contradictions. (Nuckolls, 1998, P. 3)
Evaluating the much broader importance of values that extends well beyond the closer organizational level, one finds that “Nothing is more central to a nation than its values and nothing is more important to the ordinary American’s private and personal experience than the values of liberty and equality, respect for others, responsibility for one’s behavior, and self reliance” (Hester, 1996, p. vii).

Willard P. Martin, of Greenly Colorado Submitted an Applied Research Project to the National Fire Academy in March 1999 entitled *Determining the Values of the Union Colony Fire/Rescue Authority Employees*. In his report he described the importance values as follows:

A determination of employee values plays a key role in determining how the organization is perceived by the customer, or what service or product is delivered and how effectively and efficiently, it is delivered. Each and every employee has a set of values, which determines their behavior and how they perceive themselves within an organization. The values are often difficult to determine, even more difficult to measure and assess. (Martin, 1999, p.1)

When an organization decides to focus on its values, there needs to be a realization that practicing a value-centered approach most often brings some form of turmoil. Since values can be as unique as each individual of the organization, there will most likely be conflict when attempting to get an entire organization to conform to an exclusive set of values. The practice requires a diligence in maintaining the values throughout the organization (Lencioni, 2002, p. 113).

In an attempt to cope with the broad range of belief systems some organizations recognize and incorporate the varying beliefs into the organization. Recognizing and
allowing for diversity strengthens the organizational culture. This broad-range approach provides two positive effects. First it serves to promote cohesion within the organization, which in turn allows the organization to reach its desired goals. Second, when problems do occur within the organization, the broadly shared values helps the members stay focused and serves to assist in reducing turmoil (U.S. Fire Administration, 1996, p. SM 6-4).

The literature clearly indicated the importance of strategic planning and the importance of identifying organizational values when initiating the strategic planning process. Strategic planning not only helps guide and shape an organization, but it determines why the organization exists. According to John Bryson (1995) “The first and perhaps the most obvious potential benefit is the promotion of strategic thought and action” (p.7). This provides the launching pad from which the department builds its priorities and clarifies its mission.

Strategic planning is one way to help organizations and communities deal with changed circumstances. Strategic planning is intended to enhance an organization’s ability to think and act strategically. It can help organizations formulate and resolve the most important issues they face. It can help them build on their strength and take advantage of major opportunities, while they overcome or minimize their weaknesses and serious threats to their existence. (Bryson, 1995, P. 20)

In a text sanctioned by the American Management Association, strategic planning is recognized as part of a holistic approach toward a total quality organization. The author states, “Strategic planning is not an end in and of itself. It is a framework for
continuous, productive, strategic change within an organization. The framework supports the surfacing of issues and provides a structure for their effective and profitable resolution” (Fogg, 1994, p. 33).

Chris Tubbs (1999) of the Mercer Island Fire Division relates strategic planning as being a process that “involves many internal and external components”, the most basic being the incorporation of the stakeholders into the process. Once the stakeholders are identified, their commitment to the process needs to be acquired, once this is accomplished and the organizational values are determined, the strategic planning process can positively benefit the organization (Tubbs, 1999, p. 27).

Assessing the values of an organization can be accomplished by surveying the members of the organization. According to Desatnick (1987) a survey provides a quantitative snapshot of an organization’s health at a given point-in-time. It is designed to obtain specific opinions on specific subjects from specific groups of people. A survey literally measures what people perceive to be the facts in a given situation; furthermore, they will act according to those perceptions. Surveys are important to management because they provide a measurement of the organization with regard to the questions posed within the survey (p. 89).

**PROCEDURES**

This research project involved an evaluative process that included a literature review and a survey process. The literature review was initiated at the Seminole Community Library using the Interlibrary Loan program to access literature from the National Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center. The research
continued at the Seminole Community Library, through Internet sources, and the researches personal library. The second component of the research was conducted through the use of a survey of the organization’s members.

To answer the first and second questions, and to provide a better understanding of the significance of values, a literature review was conducted. This process served to provide insight regarding how an organization is affected by the values of its members. This review also explored the importance of values and the role they play in regard to the strategic planning process.

To answer the third question, and identify the values of the organization’s members, a survey was conducted. The survey tool was a questionnaire adapted from the book *Strategic Management of Change* (see Appendix A) that asked the participant to rank, in order of personal importance, a provided list of ten items that they perceived as being the important to them. The survey also provided two questions that ask the respondents to identify what they liked about being a member of the organization, and what they would change. The final question was also answered through the review of literature on strategic planning.

Surveys were distributed to seventy-nine of the department’s eighty-three personnel. Excluded from the survey were the Chief, two new staff assistants, and the researcher. The surveys were distributed to the line personnel through their respective District Chiefs, and to office personnel by the researcher. The surveys were color coded to enable further examination of the results by shift. However, this delineation was not needed, nor used for the purpose of this study.
Each participant recorded their answers on their individual survey forms which were gathered by their District Chief and returned to the researcher, or were sent directly to the researcher. The survey forms were then reviewed for completeness and to verify that they had been completed correctly. Of the 79 surveys distributed, only 49, or 62 percent of the distributed surveys were returned. A review of the survey forms revealed that 23 of the forms were either incomplete or completed improperly. This reduced the data set to only 26 responses, which represents 33 percent of those surveyed, or 31 percent of the entire department.

The researcher tabulated the data on the individual survey forms in the following manner. The first section of the survey, the “ranking” activity section, was calculated by using a matrix (Appendix B) to assign each of the ten questions point values of one to ten. Then the number of responses for each question was indicated for the corresponding point value. This process was repeated for each of the ten questions. Next, the number of responses were multiplied by the point value for each question and placed onto a second matrix (Appendix C), where all point values for each question were totaled. This total was then divided by the number of surveys tabulated, providing a final ranking score for each of the ten questions. Those rankings are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Final Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay and Benefits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Pride</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a team member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the Comm.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.35 Tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.35 Tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement/Risk</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second section of the survey, asked the respondents to answer two questions. The respondents were able to provide multiple answers to each question, which provided a number of responses greater than the total number of surveys. The questions were evaluated by listing out verbatim, the responses from all of the surveys. This data was then evaluated, with two primary categories arising for each of the two questions. (Appendix D)

The first question posed was: What do you like about being a member of the fire department? Of the 26 surveys evaluated, there were 15 with responses that the researcher categorized as displaying the value of Teamwork, and 12 responses that were evaluated as displaying value or desire to Help and/or Serve. There was also total of 12 additional varied responses that were not calculated because they showed no single statistical significance.

The second question posed was: If you could change anything about your fire department, what would it be? Of the 26 surveys evaluated, there were 15 responses that the researcher categorized as City Management, and 15 responses that were categorized as Benefits. There were also 11 additional various responses that were not calculated because none showed a statistical significance.

Limitations

This research was limited by the number of participants surveyed, the number of survey forms returned, and the number of survey forms used in the final computation. The participants understanding of the questions also limited the study. This study was
further limited by the researcher’s ability to interpret and categorize the answers provided by the survey participants to the survey questions.

**Assumptions**

Assumptions were made that all survey respondents understood the questions presented, and were truthful in their answering of the survey. There was also the assumption that the surveys returned and calculated provided a fair representation of the entire department.

**RESULTS**

The results of this project came from the comprehensive review of literature regarding Values and Strategic Planning and the information gleaned from the survey process.

**Question One**

What are organizational values and what is their significance?

Values are the beliefs or principles upon which one’s behavior is founded. When introduced into the organizational setting, values become a set of common behaviors that the entire organization becomes committed to and will not violate. Each member of the organization self-imposes the same set of values creating cohesion throughout the organization that further bonds its members (Wallace, 2000).

**Question Two**

What is the importance of values in the strategic planning process?

Organizational values are a set of common behaviors that the entire department is committed to, and due to their commitment, they will not violate these principles. In
this concept each member of the organization self-imposes the same set of values creating cohesion throughout the organization that further bonds its members. (Wallace, 2000) The values held by the members of the organization play a key role in determining how the customer perceives the organization. They also determine how effective, and at what level service is delivered, making member values an important part of the strategic planning process (Martin, 1999, p. 1).

**Question Three**

What are the values of the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department members?

The study suggests that the values held by the members of the department fall into two primary categories. First, are family oriented and teamwork or relationship values, further related to dedication, supportiveness, with compassion and caring to each other and the public. Second, are opportunistic and prideful values, relayed through honesty and confidence of self-worth. These values were exhibited in the answers provided through the survey instrument.

**Question Four**

Is the strategic planning process appropriate for the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department?

Strategic planning is a process that assists organizations deal with change. Strategic planning provides the groundwork upon which an organization can strategically plan for the future, allowing the organization to identify and build upon their core values and strengths. It can assist in the resolution of important issues they face
and take advantage of major opportunities (Bryson, 1995, p. 20). This describes a process that would serve to benefit any organization prepare for the future.

**DISCUSSION**

The literature reviewed provided a good insight into what values are and how they effect an organization. Since values are part of an individual’s core belief system, and an intrinsic part of every human being, they are manifested through principle behavior and actions. When shared in the organizational setting, values become a set of common behaviors in which the entire organization becomes committed. Shared values create a bond among members, which can create synergy within the organization (Nuckolls, 1998, p. 3).

Strategic planning is a process by which an organization that has gone through, or plans to go through significant change, can benefit. Though not a quick or simple process, if properly executed, strategic planning can provide a framework for organizational growth and excellence. Strategic planning assesses the organization from the inside, through the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. It also evaluates the external environment for opportunities and threats, and creates a roadmap for the future. Due to the inherent nature of strategic planning, it requires a thorough understanding of the organization’s values, and those values must be incorporated into the planning process. Strategic planning is also a process that allows organizations deal with change in a proactive manner (Bryson, 1995, p. 20).

The results of the survey indicate two, apparently contrasting, sets of values for the members of the department. First, are family oriented and teamwork or relationship values that are supported by dedication, compassion and caring for each other and the
Second, are the opportunistic values as discerned from the desire for benefits, along with prideful values displayed through professional pride in the organization. Honesty and confidence of self-worth were displayed by expressing the desire for change in the relations with City Management.

By its design, the survey instrument used in this study provided a limited amount of feedback information from the research subjects. Furthermore, the inability of 47 percent of the respondents to properly interpret the instructions further reduced the useful data. However, this information, along with the literature review, was able to answer the research questions.

The stressors imposed upon today’s fire service effects everyone from the recruit firefighter all the way to the Chief of the department. Most of those involved have a genuine desire to provide the best possible service for their community to “protect lives and property”. However, internal and external factors that hamper their ability to accomplish this desired goal can tend to place emotional strains on those involved. Any influence that hinders or is perceived to impede the ability to provide quality service grows to be perceived as a foe to some of the organizations members. If left unchecked, this can quickly become detrimental to the health of the organization as a whole, especially if the perceived detractor is the governing body of the organization.

The study serves as a catalyst for future, more in-depth studies related to the departments’ values and the strategic planning process. This study also proved to provide valuable information that will assist the department in its planning process for the future growth of the organization.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study it is recommended that the department go forward with implementation of the strategic planning process. The research clearly indicates that there are issues that could be hampering the growth of the organization. This is evident from the survey data that indicates organizational friction between organizational members and the City Management. However, the survey data also provides evidence that the members like working with their peers, and have a genuine desire to serve the community. This provides a good foundation to build upon.

Marshal Williams (1991) asserts, “…a corporation with a genuine and intrinsic culture as a foundation is well positioned for success. But, more important, a corporation that understands its values and objectives is in much better position to respond successfully to change” (p. 20). The City of Seminole of Fire Rescue Department has that foundation, however, there seems to be a lack of unity within the organization. The strategic planning process can provide the framework needed to enhance unity and build upon the department’s strong foundation. Furthermore, when the employees are involved in the decision making process, the likelihood of success of the change will be increased.

The research revealed that through the strategic planning process the organization is required to consider the values of its employees and to identify the internal and external forces that effect the organization. Through this process, additional information will be revealed that can further assist the department in its pursuit to abolish the poor attitudes and focus on future excellence. The research also suggests that the organization would benefit from an increase in overall communication between
the members and the City Management to address some of the member’s concerns. The study indicates that there needs to be a cultural change from within, this will not be an easy task; however, it is not impossible. Engaging the strategic planning process will also enable the department to be on the cutting edge when it comes to implementing the latest technologies and strategies in the emergency services field. These advances should fuel positive growth and further strengthen the organization.
REFERENCES


ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES ACTIVITY

Complete the following sentence: ________________ is/are important to me.
(Please rank from 1 thru 10)

1 = most important; 10 = least important.

1. Being a team member. ______
2. Contributing to the community. ______
3. Pay and benefits. ______
4. Excitement/risk. ______
5. Professional pride. ______
6. Family and friends. ______
7. Accomplishment. ______
8. Recreation. ______
9. Goals. ______
10. Responsibility. ______

Likes Vs. Change

In the space provided below, briefly answer these two questions:

1. What do you like about being a member of this fire department?

2. If you could change anything about your fire department, what would it be?
## APPENDIX B

### Organizational Response Matrix

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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# APPENDIX C

## Organizational Response Matrix Ranked

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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APPENDIX D

Organizational Values Activity
Likes vs Change

What do you like about being a member of the fire department?

**Helping**

Ability to provide calm in others crises.
The rewarding job we do, helping people.
Helping the community.
Providing service to the community.
Helping others.
Self-satisfaction from helping others.
Chance to help those in need.
People we serve. Pay and benefits.
Working to keep community safe.
Being able to help people and make a difference in someone’s life.
Being able to provide services to the public in a manner I enjoy and have skill.
Chance to make a positive difference for the community.

**Teamwork**

Togetherness of shift.
Relationship with other firefighters.
Employees I work with.
People I work with.
The camaraderie.
The people and teamwork.
The relationship among members.
The people on shift.
Crews I work with.
Coworkers.
Relationships developed within a small department.
Being part of a professional team working to keep community safe.
Kindness and cooperation exhibited by employees in everyday working conditions
The great people I work with.
High standards of our personnel and how we work as a team.
If you could change anything about your fire department, what would it be?

**Benefits**

Health insurance for new employees.
Pay & Benefits.
Benefits.
Health Insurance.
Health Insurance
Better benefits.
Better insurance
Increase in benefits rather than a decrease.
Our benefits.
Health Insurance (Cost).
Pay education incentive or vacation.
Pay and benefits. Twenty-five and out retirement.
Attitude on professional education on duty or with D.L.
Better health insurance (cheaper).
Have education policy that everyone can use, including non-degree seeking.

**City Management**

City Hall and Administration saying thanks occasionally.
Politics.
Get the City manager to realize how important we are to the community.
City Hall – F.D. relationships
Relationship between department and City Hall.
The way the City treats the F.D. as 2nd rate employees.
City Manager.
City Management and the way they treat the dept. and its employees.
Be treated like we mean something to the City instead of a burden.
Less interference from the City Manager and Council.
The way the City views the fire department.
The relationship with the City (we are a burden to them).
More acknowledgement from management (City) that our job is appreciated thru words, actions.
Eliminate the misunderstanding the City leaders have of my work and coworkers.
City’s lack of concern over poor working conditions