

Your Next Fire Chief: Promoting From Within Versus Hiring From the Outside

Michael Robertson

Evesham Fire Department, Evesham, New Jersey

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

The problem is the Evesham Fire Department has not studied the advantages and disadvantages of selecting our next Fire Chief from within the department or hiring from outside the department. The purpose is to determine if there are benefits to selecting the next Fire Chief from externally instead of promoting from within. The research will be done utilizing an Evaluative Methodology. The research will be completed by determining what role succession planning plays in selecting internal candidates to be the next fire chief; researching what the human resources industry says about promoting internal candidates or hiring externally for the next CEO; and by contacting fire departments that have replaced their fire chief both internally and externally, and what the advantages and disadvantages were.

The research questions that were used to guide this research project included: A) What are the advantages and disadvantages of promoting the next Fire Chief from internal candidates? B) What are the advantages and disadvantages of selecting the next Fire Chief from outside of the department? C) What role does succession planning play in deciding whether to promote an internal candidate to Fire Chief or hiring from outside the department? The research included both a literature review along with interviews of fire chiefs, government officials, fire commissioners and executive search consultants.

The research indicates that there are different reasons that a fire department would want to promote an internal candidate to or hire an external personal for their next fire chief. There are valid reasons for both options. The decision is based upon several areas including organizational climate, community needs, goals and objectives of city government leaders and professional development of internal candidates.

The author's recommendations for EFD including implementing a formal officer development program and utilizing an executive search firm to hire our next fire chief.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Table of Contents .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Background and Significance .....	7
Literature Review .....	12
Procedures .....	18
Results .....	23
Discussion .....	38
Recommendations .....	44
Reference List .....	51
Appendix .....	54
A1 - USFA Strategic Goals	
A2 - Parrish Fire District, FL - Recruitment Flyer – Fire Chief	
A3 - City of Spokane, WA - Recruitment Flyer – Assistant Fire Chief	
A3 - Executive Search Firm Hiring Flyer – Fire Chief - Baytown, Texas	
A4 - Executive Search Firm Hiring Flyer – Fire Chief – Woodburn, Oregon	
A5 - IMCA Center for Public Safety Management Flyer	
A6 - Evesham Fire Department Draft SOP: Officer Development Program	
A7 - Evesham Fire Department Draft Personal Development Plan	
A8 - Wingspread VI report – Statement of Significance #7	

When looking at the future of the fire service nationwide, it must be recognized that there is a tremendous amount of experience exiting the fire service as countless firefighters enter retirement and a new generation enters the workforce (Alyn, 2012, pg. 13). Many of these retirements are being caused by economic impacts at the local and state level, including changes to employee pension systems and health care benefits. And while there are many other issues facing today's fire service including shrinking municipal budgets, a decrease in municipal tax revenue, and also increased liability in fire suppression and emergency medical services, the most pressing issue is leadership and the development of future fire officers (Alyn, 2012, p. 14). Fire Departments are not preparing their members adequately to step up and take over the roles and responsibilities of the modern day fire chief, leaving them unprepared when their current organizational leader is no longer there. Sometimes this person's departure occurs with advanced warning, but sometimes it occurs suddenly and unexpectedly or with limited notice.

The problem is the Evesham Fire Department has not studied the advantages and disadvantages of selecting our next Fire Chief from within the department or hiring from outside the department. The purpose is to determine if there are benefits to selecting the next Fire Chief from outside the organization instead of promoting from within. The research will be done utilizing an evaluative methodology. The research will be completed by determining what role succession planning plays in selecting internal candidates to be the next organizational leader. The research will also review what the corporate world says about promoting candidates from within to CEO or organizational leader, in comparison with hiring someone from outside of the company. The researcher will also contact fire departments that have hired their fire chief from outside of their department and determine the advantages and disadvantages that were realized. For the purposes of this research paper, any reference to the term fire chief will include whatever

the title is of your organizational leader in the fire department, if this is a term other than fire chief. This may include deputy chief, chief of emergency services, director of fire services or public safety director to name a few.

The research questions that were used to guide this research project included:

- A) What are the advantages and disadvantages of promoting the next fire chief from internal candidates?
- B) What are the advantages and disadvantages of selecting the next fire chief from outside of the department?
- C) What role does succession planning play in deciding whether to promote an internal candidate to fire chief or hiring one from outside the department?

Finding the answers to these questions and then making recommendations to improve my department will be the basis for this applied research project.

### Background and Significance

The Evesham Fire Department is a combination Fire-EMS department located in Burlington County, New Jersey, that is staffed by 34 career personnel and approximately 80 volunteer personnel. The department responds out of three stations strategically located throughout the community of 48,000 residents living across 30 square miles. They are Station 221/229 – Main Street Station, Station 223/227 – Kings Grant Station, and Station 225/228 – Kettle Run Station. Each station has both fire and EMS apparatus assigned to them, which reflects the dual numbers assigned to each station.

The career staff includes the fire chief, 1 assistant chief, 2 captains, 3 lieutenants and twenty-seven Firefighter-EMT/Inspectors. The department is currently undergoing a hiring process to add three additional Firefighter-EMTs by August 2017. The volunteer staff has both

firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), many of which are cross-trained in both certifications. Their supervisory ranks include 2 deputy chiefs, 1 battalion chief, 2 captains and lieutenants, in the Fire Division. There are currently no volunteer officers in the EMS Division, as this division has undergone recent restructuring and placed under the direction of a career Captain. It is anticipated there will be volunteer officers reassigned to the EMS Division in the future.

The volunteer members are assigned to respond to one of our three stations located closest to their home. They are activated to respond to emergencies using pagers that are dispatched by the Burlington County 9-1-1 Center and Central Communications. Volunteer staff members from all three stations are also required to participate in a Fire and EMS duty crew program. The duty crew program utilizes volunteer personnel in uniform on stand-by in the Main Street Station during pre-determined days and times. Station 221/229 has the highest Fire and EMS call volume due to residential, commercial/retail development and motor vehicle traffic. The duty crew program operates during non-career hours and provides staffing for one Fire and one EMS unit on weeknights and also 1-2 EMS units during the entire weekend. There are no fire units staffed by duty crew personnel overnights during the week or on the weekends.

The career staff provides primary coverage Monday through Friday during the hours of 0700-1800 out of two stations (plus one BLS crew working from 0500-1600), while the volunteer staff provides primary coverage during non-career hours including the weeknights from 1800-0700 hours, all weekends, and major holidays. Career coverage may be expanded in the near future to place a career ambulance on duty until 2000 hours on weekdays, along with a volunteer duty crew ambulance that comes on duty weekdays at 1800 hours. The department also provides fire code enforcement, public education and technical rescue services, as one

participating agency in a county-wide technical rescue team (Evesham Fire-Rescue - About Us, n.d.).

Evesham Township is the largest township in Burlington County, New Jersey by population. Our township operates under the Faulkner Act, utilizing a Council-Manager form of government. The community is primarily residential, but also includes several mid-rise office complexes and retail shopping centers, a community hospital, multiple nursing homes and assisted living facilities. There is also a large school district comprised of two middle schools and seven elementary schools. The high school in Evesham, which is Cherokee High School, is actually part of the separate Lenape Regional High School District. Evesham Township has two state highways passing through it and also includes a large area of wildland-urban interface in the lower two-thirds of the township. After a period of several years with little or no development, the township is currently experiencing a spike in new construction projects including residential developments, retail shopping centers, apartment complexes and one large mixed-use retail/residential complex.

Our department is anticipating the retirement of its career chief officer staff in the next one to three years. While the Chief and Assistant Chief will likely not retire at the same time, their departures will both happen in a relatively short period of time. The current Chief and Assistant Chief have been chief level officers since 2003 and 2005 respectively. These two career chief officers assumed their current roles less than 24 months ago in September 2015, upon the official retirement of the former Fire Chief. The former Chief became our first career Fire Chief in 1989 and remained the organizational leader for the next 26 years.

Our department lost our two career Deputy Chief positions (third level of chief officer) in the past five years, which were both division chiefs. We lost the position of Deputy Chief of

Operations in September 2015, when that officer was promoted to be our current Assistant Chief, and absorbed his prior operational responsibilities, along with becoming the Executive Officer for the department. The Operations Deputy Chief position was then back filled using the rank of Captain. We also lost a second position of Deputy Chief/Fire Official with the retirement of the former Fire Marshal in 2012. This officer commands our fire prevention office, which has four firefighter/inspectors assigned to it and is responsible for uniform fire code inspections, uniform construction code inspections, coordinates all of our public education programs and handles all fire investigations. We again did not back fill this rank thru a promotional process, instead choosing to replace the Deputy Chief/Fire Official with another Captain.

This position of Fire Official was recently identified in a consulting firm's strategic vision prepared for our department in 2016 as needing to be returned to the rank of a Deputy Chief. So after Captain in Operations, who was promoted in May 2016, and our Captain/Fire Official, who has been serving in that capacity for more than six years, there are three career Lieutenants. Two of the Lieutenants are station officers and the other is assigned as the Department Training Officer. This third Lieutenant/DTO also backfills for the other two Lieutenants as station officer for half of his shifts each week, as well as during vacation periods.

The impending loss of our only two career chief officers will result in a significant loss of knowledge and experience at the upper end of the fire department in a very short period of time. This has been compounded by delays in replacing supervisory ranks following anticipated retirements at both the ranks of Captain and Deputy Chief in our organization over the past nine years. The result is we may not currently be prepared to replace our career Assistant Chief and Chief of Department with internal candidates.

This is not to say that our remaining company officers, including myself as a Lieutenant, are not *capable* of assuming these chief officer roles. I believe that as an organization we have not lead them down a formal, structured, uniform path of professional development to adequately prepare them to successfully step into the roles of assistant chief and chief of department.

The near future loss of two our most senior officers could possibly create a “shock wave” through the organization and affect its continued success as a highly respected fire and EMS agency in Burlington County, New Jersey. While this would be a worst-case scenario, at the minimum our department could digress while our company officers “catch up” to their new roles and responsibilities at the chief officer level. Our future success as an organization will ultimately depend upon whether or not the remaining company level officers are fully prepared to assume the roles of Assistant Chief and Chief of Department. This has resulted in the need for this applied research project to determine whether we are prepared to promote the next fire chief from within or are we better served by hiring the next organizational leader from the outside.

This research paper is a part of the Executive Leadership course from the fourth year of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The research paper will make use of the information shared in this two week course with great emphasis on the modules about Thinking Systematically, Developing Self to Exercise Leadership, Decision-Making, along with Managing Multiple Roles (U.S. Fire Administration, 2015). The results of the research paper will allow me to address a current problem in my department and provide us with the solutions to resolve this issue, thereby making us a better organization.

The research paper will also support one of the five major strategic goals of the United States Fire Administration (USFA). The research paper will specifically focus on USFA

Strategic Goal 4: Advance the Professional Development of Fire Service Personnel and Other People Engaged in Fire Prevention and Control Activities (Appendix A-1). As a future chief officer in my department, I have the responsibility to ensure that not only myself, but also future company officers at EFD are guided toward professional development that encourages learning and improvement throughout their career. This is important to ensure the continued success of our organization in the community that we serve.

### Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to locate information that would help me to answer the research questions in this paper. Answers to the research questions are the driving force behind reaching my final recommendations. The sources of information that follow will be current and comprehensive, and will be used to show what other people have said and published about the topics covered in my research questions.

The American fire service is facing a leadership crisis, as veteran leaders retire at staggering rates and we fail to adequately prepare those who follow to assume these roles. Fire departments today are not providing sufficient leadership training for their officers that are modern, realistic, effective and hands-on. Kastros (2014) found that company officers, battalion chiefs and deputy chiefs who are promoting up to become the fire chief have not received hands-on leadership training that coincides with the changing modern fire service. Today's fire chief faces new challenges like a more diverse workforce, greater scrutiny from the community and government leaders, tightening budgets, and rapid advances in technology.

Kastros (2014) went on to say that "Osmosis is not a good succession plan". As an example of this, he says that airlines don't tell flight attendants to head up to the cockpit and fly the plane just because they have been on lots of flights. As another example, paramedics are

required to complete hundreds of hours of didactic classroom training, an internship in the emergency room, a minimum number of hours riding along on staffed paramedic unit gaining field experience and a minimum number of advanced life support treats before they can become certified. However company officers and chief officers have no such requirement in most fire department organizations. If they are lucky, they may be challenged by participating in a competitive promotional process, but once they are promoted they are typically handed the badge for their new rank and told “good luck”. Even our new recruits we see fit to send them through a recruit academy of anywhere from four to 16 weeks depending on the department, but our newly promoted officers with five to 10 years on the job are left to sink or swim in their new supervisory positions.

In the International Association of Fire Chiefs Officer Development Handbook (IAFC, 2010), the concept of professional development of officers is covered in great detail. According to the IAFC Handbook, professional development is said to occur in three different ways: through experience, mentoring and education (IAFC handbook, p. 4). Traditionally the fire service has placed most of the emphasis on professional development of officers on education and training. This is seen in the form of fire officers attending classes at training academies and receiving a certificate stating that they passed the class.

However too many fire departments have an informal or no mentoring program in place to provide leadership experience. Studies on organizational development have shown that people learn best from actual experience, so that they can develop competencies they will need later on in their careers (IAFC handbook, p. 5). The experience must have the risk of failure that will ensure significant pressure. It must also be highly visible in the organization, challenging, and meaningful. One example is the periodic rotation of officers through different areas of the

department that are outside of their normal comfort zone. This helps them gain valuable experience, so that as they promote to the chief officer level, they understand the challenges faced by each area of the fire department.

Today's fire chief is more closely aligned with a chief executive officer (CEO) in the corporate world than a battlefield commander in the military. The modern day fire chief faces many new and evolving challenges that require him or her to more commonly follow a proven business model in their daily activities, rather than an incident command board. For this reason, I decided to look at what the corporate world has to say on promoting CEO's from within the company as compared to hiring a CEO from outside the company. There were several findings on both.

In an article by Tichy (2015) in the *The Washington Post*, examples are given where a company believes that the answer to all its internal problems lies in the hands of an outside person. Resulting from a lack of proper succession planning, companies look to the outside and hire people at enormous costs, only to later find out they are not adequately prepared to run the business they are supposed to be rescuing. There are few topics in the corporate world that are more heated and generate debate as to whether or not outsiders or insiders are best to transform a failing or lagging company. Former IBM Chief Sam Palmisano, when interviewed by Tichy (2015) for this news article, stated that "whenever a company hires their next CEO from the outside, even if this person goes on to succeed, it is evidence that the former CEO and their human resources director failed at their primary job responsibility: building a leadership pipeline at all levels of the organization".

Not every outsider hired to lead an organization will fail. On the contrary there are several examples of those who did succeed in their new roles like when Alan Mulally was

brought in from Boeing to help turnaround Ford Motor Company, or when David Cote was recruited by Honeywell and engineered a successful comeback for the corporate giant.

Searching for the outside CEO may be a necessary evil for a company that is in dire straits, but in many cases it has proven to be more risky, costlier and far more disruptive than nurturing your own superstars from within.

An article from the Harvard Business Review (HBR) offers a different view concerning trends with hiring CEOs from outside the company the past few years (Nickisch, 2016). The article focuses on a recently released CEO Success study from PriceWaterhouseCooper's (PwC) strategy and consulting business Strategy& (2017). PwC is recognized as one of the world's leading professional services corporations. Their study, which is published annually, surveys the 2,500 largest public companies around the world on a variety of topics. The study discovered that 22% of CEOs hired in the prior four years came from outside the company. This is nearly twice the rate of CEOs hired externally from 2004 to 2007.

The PwC study found several reasons that external CEO hires has become increasingly more popular. The choice of an external CEO to succeed the prior CEO is most common when a company needs to either change its business model or do something that they have never done before. Some industries with higher than average rates of hiring external CEOs from 2012 to 2015 were telecommunications, health care, utilities, and energy. The CEO Success study found that outside hires for CEO are not only increasing as the preferred option in planned successions, but they also may perform better. This is believed to be because external hires for CEO, with experience in different competing arenas and not having any "baggage" from rocky relationships inside the company, can have an easier time steering organizational change. Another factor is that there has been a marked decline in CEOs who jointly hold the title of board chairperson.

The result is that an independent chair on the company's board of officers makes it easier for corporate boards to talk about succession plans without the CEO in the room.

This trend of hiring outside CEOs proved to be true in my area of South Jersey with the recent hiring by Virtua Health System of an outside CEO to replace their longtime internal CEO Richard Miller (Brubaker, 2017). On June 27, 2017, Virtua Health System named Dennis W. Pullin, who was an executive at MedStar Health in Baltimore, to succeed Richard P. Miller as president and chief executive of South Jersey's largest health system with 8,400 employees. As the leader of MedStar, Pullin, 57, was the president of MedStar Harbor Hospital in Baltimore and also a MedStar senior vice president responsible for pharmacy, imaging, lab and pathology, behavioral health services, and transportation. Miller had been the CEO of Virtua since 1997, so it is interesting that such a large corporation would hire an external CEO instead of grooming one internally.

In recent statistics released by the Pew Research Center, 10,000 people turn 65 in the United States every day. The result is that government organizations are experiencing a critical loss of knowledge as seasoned and experienced workers are departing (Ibarra, 2016). The fire service is no different and this is negatively impacting fire departments nationwide. The exodus of experienced fire officers at the chief level, in combination with the wider breadth of knowledge required to lead the modern day fire service organization, has exemplified the need for succession planning. Smaller and medium sized organizations are particularly struggling to replace their fire chief, since a natural successor is not always ready or available internally.

Ibarra states (Ibarra, 2016) in his article, "effective succession planning is an ongoing process of identifying, assessing and developing talent to ensure leadership, management and supervisory continuity throughout and organization and, moreover, to sustain its performance"

(p. 1). In order for succession planning to work, it requires that the fire department's executive leadership team visibly support and advocate for it. Succession planning allows the organization to shape its workforce to effectively adapt to emerging industry trends, shifting priorities based on community needs and embrace changes in technology.

In the fire service leadership book, *First In, Last Out*, Chief John Salka talks about the importance of developing leaders at all levels of the organization. This creates a foundation for what is known as the "leadership pipeline". A leadership pipeline is a process that can be used in any organization for selecting and developing leaders. He cites that one of the biggest problems facing any organization is the lack of homegrown talent, or those who have been developed from inside the fire department (Salka & Neville, 2004, p. 205).

When you develop a leadership pipeline in-house, it helps to assure that future leaders understand the character and mission of the organization, resulting in them being prepared to assume top management positions and be effective in those positions (Salka & Neville, 2004). Salka emphasizes that a leadership pipeline doesn't happen accidentally. It's really the result of using a systematic process for evaluating your people, identifying key leaders and developing them to take on higher positions in the organization (Salka & Neville, 2004, p. 205).

The International Association of Fire Chiefs continues to be the premier source for professional development and networking in the United States. The author of this research paper is a member of the IAFC, Company Officers Section and regularly refers to their website for professional development and leadership articles, training opportunities plus sample policies and procedures. In an article from their *On-Scene* section, the question is asked "Where will your next chief come from?" For many departments today, this is a difficult question, to which they are struggling to find an answer. Many departments are having to hire their next fire chief from

the outside for a variety of reasons including: not enough interested or qualified personnel in the officer ranks (two different reasons); not having the best fit internally; organizational need for a cultural change and change to the “status quo”; or needing a fresh perspective from a veteran, experienced fire service leader. The article goes on to say that if a fire department doesn’t have at least three candidates qualified, interested and a good fit to be the next fire chief, then we either didn’t hire the right personnel over the years or we didn’t prepare our firefighters and officers to step up and lead (IAFC On-Scene, 2015).

The findings in my literature review validated for the author the need to continue with the research to further determine what persons responsible for hiring a fire chief had learned from their past experiences with internal promotions versus an external hiring. In addition, the researcher wanted to learn how they searched for and then selected their final candidate. The researcher also wanted determine from those who hired a fire chief how important succession planning was in selecting their fire chief, as the literature review showed this is an important factor.

### Procedures

The procedures section of the research paper discusses the steps taken to arrive at the final results of the study. It will define what was done, when it was done, who did it, and who was involved. The procedures section will allow another member of the fire service to replicate the research if they have a similar challenge in their department related to my research topic.

This process started while the researcher was still at the National Fire Academy (NFA) for the Executive Leadership course in March 2017. During that time, the researcher visited the Learning Resource Center on campus and utilized the electronic catalog to find sources for research, which included textbooks, journal articles, and other EFO research papers. The LRC

staff at the NFA campus was very helpful during the times that I visited the LRC to locate sources.

Once the researcher returned home, he continued to review other sources including internet based fire service journals, journals from the human resources industry, fire service textbooks, and numerous local and national news websites. There are many current events news stories online about fire chiefs being replaced in major metropolitans departments around the United States and Canada. These included Montreal in Canada and in the United States cities including Baltimore, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Elgin, Rutland and Dallas that have recently changed or are in the process of changing their organizational leader. Many of the trade journal articles and news stories I found online also provided names to contact from these fire departments that replaced a fire chief in the past five years. These all become good sources of information to find answers to my research questions.

When the researcher returned from the course, the first research question he wanted to answer was, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of promoting the next fire chief from within?" This led me to an internet search of fire service articles on promoting the next Fire Chief. I would also review articles from the corporate world about promoting the next organizational leader from within or hiring that person from the outside. The researcher found several articles both in favor of and against utilizing internal candidates. This is covered further in Literature Review section of this paper. The researcher also contacted fire departments in New Jersey and other states that had promoted fire chiefs from within. The researcher spoke to people either by phone or in person who had been part of those hiring processes. This included city managers or members of a board of fire commissioners to ask them about their experiences. This is covered in greater detail in the Results section.

The next research question the researcher wanted to answer was, “What are the advantages and disadvantages of hiring the next Fire Chief from outside of the fire department?” Once again the researcher was able to locate departments through news stories on the internet that had announced the hiring of their fire chief from outside of their department and why they did so. The researcher also contacted local fire departments local in New Jersey and also ones outside of New Jersey to speak with people who were directly involved with the hiring of a fire chief from the outside. The findings are covered in greater detail in the Results section.

The final research question the researcher was looking to answer was, “What role does succession planning play in deciding whether to promote an internal candidate to fire chief or hiring from outside the department?” The researcher was able to locate several published works discussing the importance of succession planning. The researcher also asked what role succession planning played in the hiring of their fire chief when he conducted personal interviews with members of various hiring authorities.

The researcher sent emails to members of various hiring authorities that are responsible for hiring the fire chief and asked if I could speak to them by phone or in person in regards to my research paper as a student of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Officer Program. Among the 10 people the researcher interviewed were a city manager from a city of 282,000 residents in Greensboro, North Carolina and the human resources director of a small town in Wilton, Connecticut. All of the people that the researcher spoke to are either currently responsible for or have been directly involved with selecting a career fire chief. Additionally, the researcher interviewed two representatives from two different executive search firms that are contracted to assist clients with selecting their next fire chief, from both internal and external candidates.

The researcher also interviewed three current or former fire commissioners from fire districts in New Jersey that had completed hiring processes for career fire chief positions. Fire departments in New Jersey are funded by one of two means – local government funded as a municipal fire department or funded by a special taxation district known as a fire district. Communities that have a fire district have a publicly elected board that oversees the finances and policies of the fire department. The members on the board are called fire commissioners and one of their responsibilities includes the hiring of career employees if necessary, both uniformed and civilian personnel. Once again my findings are covered in greater detail in the Results section of this research paper.

The researcher spoke to Philadelphia's Fire Commissioner Adam Thiel in fall 2016 about his selection as the new fire commissioner at a training seminar hosted at their fire academy and he referred me to the mayor's office to find out more information. The researcher then attempted to contact the managing director and the mayor for the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia hired their new fire commissioner in May 2016, in conjunction with the change of the city's mayor in January 2016. Philadelphia has a strong mayor form of government, where the mayor gets to select or renew all department heads. This typically results in a sweep of most incumbent director level positions and replacing them with his or her own cabinet selections. It was the city's first fire commissioner selected from outside of the Philadelphia Fire Department (PFD) since 1952 (Palmer, 2016). After two email attempts to both the mayor's and managing director's offices, the researcher did eventually receive a reply from Mayor James Kenney stating that he would be forwarding my request to the team that led the search for Fire Commissioner Thiel and good luck with my research. The researcher did not receive a reply from anyone on the search team by the time this paper was completed for submission.

There were a few limitations to the procedures, one of which is discussed above that sometimes people that can provide valuable information for your research don't contact you back. While this is disappointing, the researcher honestly didn't expect to hear back from anyone on the search team for fire commissioner in Philadelphia, as the researcher was told by both members of the PFD and the fire service community locally that the hiring of the new fire commissioner from outside the department created some turmoil and angst within the fire department. In fairness to the new commissioner, Fire Commissioner Adam Thiel seems to be a very bright individual, as the researcher has seen him speak on three different occasions about his vision for the Philadelphia Fire Department. By all accounts speaking with PFD firefighters, Commissioner Thiel has also surrounded himself with internal people with extensive service in the PFD and has already made some significant positive changes within their organization.

Another limitation of the procedures is that conducting personal interviews can be time consuming. Coordinating availability between you and the person you want to interview is sometimes challenging. Then of course if either one of you misses your scheduled phone or in-person interview, then you have to try and reschedule the interview.

Another limitation of my procedures is that when conducting interviews about personnel and hiring matters this can be a very touchy subject. Sometimes the reasons they chose a fire chief internally or externally they keep close to the vest or are just unable to share the true reason. The researcher found in most cases the people who were interviewed were fully transparent and if something was sensitive they either said "off the record" or please don't include that statement in your paper. The researcher felt this was fair enough and agreed to their request. The researcher doesn't believe that any of the limitations significantly impacted the findings and all that was learned.

## Results

The results section includes findings from the original research that was conducted and the resulting data collected. These findings allowed the researcher to draw conclusions and reach the final recommendations concerning the research questions. The combination of literature review from both the fire service and corporate business world, combined with personal interviews brought a wealth of information to the applied research project. For the remainder of this applied research project, the term fire chief will be used generically to mean the organizational leader at your fire department. This changes across the United States and could be called a fire commissioner, district chief, fire command, director of public safety, director of emergency services or other regionally accepted titles. Anywhere the term fire chief is used in this paper, insert the title of your top person.

To answer the research questions, the researcher felt it was important to conduct personal interviews with people who had “been there and done it” when it came to hiring a fire chief both internally and externally. The researcher has provided a table of people that were interviewed and were instrumental to the findings (Table 1). These include a fire chief hired from the outside, a fire chief who had been hired internally, two city government representatives, four fire commission board members and two representatives from executive search firms. I contacted everyone by email, explaining that the researcher is a student in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy conducting original research about hiring the next fire chief. Everyone listed below was more than glad to speak to me, spoke to me very candidly and all encouraged me to contact them again with any additional questions. Some of the people below the researcher already knew through my time in the fire service and some the researcher was speaking to for the very first time.

**Table 1 – Original Research Conducted for Applied Research Paper**

<b>Person</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Interview Method</b>
Chief John McGrath	Raleigh Fire Department	Raleigh, NC	Phone
Chief Joe Palumbo	Pennsauken Fire Department	Pennsauken, NJ	Phone
Sarah Taffel, Director – Human Resources	Town of Wilton, Connecticut	Wilton, CT	Phone
Jim Westmoreland, City Manager	City of Greensboro	Greensboro, NC	Phone
Marcus Kragness, Senior Consultant, Retired Fire Chief	The Prothman Company	Issaquah, WA	Phone
Bill Peterson, Senior VP, Retired Fire Chief	Strategic Government Resources	Keller, TX	Email
Hugh Gibson, IV, Chairman	Board of Fire Commissioners Cherry Hill Fire Department	Cherry Hill, NJ	Phone
Kent Neiswender, Past Commissioner	Board of Fire Commissioners Mount Laurel Fire Department	Mount Laurel, NJ	In-person
Anthony Sirolli, Commissioner	Board of Fire Commissioners Winslow Twp. Fire Department	Winslow, NJ	Phone
J. Casey Healy, Chairman	Wilton Fire Commission	Wilton, NJ	Phone

The first research question the researcher was trying to answer was about the advantages and disadvantages of hiring the next fire chief internally. The literature review and the interviews with members of hiring authorities listed above resulted in the following advantages of hiring the internal candidate:

1. Already knows the department's culture and key players
2. Good perspective on the history of the organization
3. Knows the formal and informal leaders of the department
4. Has existing connections to the community
5. Process can be completed in a shorter time frame
6. Sends the message to other employees that hard work will be rewarded
7. Can be less disruptive and stressful on department members (known commodity)

Conversely there were findings about the disadvantages of hiring the next fire chief internally which included:

1. Department members are aware of the potential chief's "baggage"
2. May not be willing to make needed changes due to personal connections with those impacted.
3. May not be as experienced or knowledgeable as an outside candidate
4. May not be able to perform adaptive leadership to affect organizational change
5. May result in no change to the current state or "status quo" of the department from prior fire chief
6. May have limited administrative or executive level experience and a clear understanding of job requirements like budget preparation, negotiating labor contract or conducting statistical analysis of call volumes.
7. Individual selected may not be in the position long due to their future retirement
8. Internal candidate promotion may result in a chief seeing the selection of fire chief as a destination (retires on duty)

The second research question the researcher was looking to answer was concerning the advantages and disadvantages of selecting the next fire chief from outside of the department.

The results from my literature review and personal interviews conducted concerning advantages of searching externally for the next fire chief were:

1. External candidate may bring wider background and experiences to the position of fire chief
2. External candidate has prior experience functioning at the executive level
3. External candidate has proven track record of leading organizational change

4. Process results in the best candidate being selected, allowing both internal and external candidates to apply for the position
5. Allows for the comparison of qualifications and capabilities of both internal and external candidates
6. Final external candidates most likely have prior experience as a fire chief
7. External candidate will typically be accepted by their peer department heads in local government
8. The internal pool of candidates for the next fire chief is less than three, or the fire department doesn't have a formal career development plan or succession plan in place, resulting in the need for a more comprehensive search
9. No internal candidates want the position
10. The fire department or its hiring authority believes the organization is in need of change of direction that cannot be accomplished by an internal candidate
11. Internal culture of the fire department is dysfunctional and the hiring authority believes an internal candidate for fire chief will not receive the support from the membership to effect change.
12. Hiring authority believes the internal candidate has limited perspective of the state-of-the-art fire protection and EMS delivery methods and issues
13. Hiring authority believes that current performance and leadership capabilities of the fire department need to be improved
14. The fire department is going through a consolidation of other fire companies into one department and an external candidate is needed to bring a fresh perspective

and has experience with successfully leading a fire department through a merger or consolidation.

The results to research on the disadvantages to hiring the external candidate for fire chief are as follows:

1. Could adversely affect department employee morale
2. Will create some initial stress of not knowing the selected candidate
3. Usually results in negative rumors spinning through the department grapevine about what the new fire chief intends to do
4. Could send a message to internal department candidates that a search including outside candidates means they will not be seriously considered as a viable candidate
5. A poorly conducted search process conducted by the fire department itself, instead of using an executive search firm, could result in a poor selection that ends up being not a good fit for the department.

The researcher mentioned above about fire department's considering the use of an external search firm to select their next fire chief. Prior to this research paper, the researcher knew of external search firms but was very unfamiliar with what services they offered. The results of reading the websites of several public safety executive search firms, combined with the interviews of two executive search firm consultants, provided a valuable understanding of this potential tool in the search for your next fire chief. The researcher felt that it is important to share these results with other fire departments who may be replacing their fire chief in the future.

The researcher conducted an informative phone interview with Marcus Kragness from the Prothman Company in Washington and an email interview with Bill Peterson of Strategic

Government Resources in Texas. Both men were retired career fire chiefs and were now working as executive recruiters for public safety search firms. They were both able to articulate to the researcher many reasons that fire departments and hiring authorities are increasingly hiring executive search firms to select their next fire chief.

Executive search firms conduct national searches for executive level positions for city, county, state governments, school districts and fire districts. The positions they recruit for include school superintendent, city manager, police chief, fire chief, human resources director and public works director just to name a few. Each search firm uses a slightly different process, but the following is one example the researcher learned about from the interviews above.

Once hired, the executive search firm sends a consultant to your department for 3-4 days to meet with and interview all the stakeholders affected by the hiring of the next fire chief. The consultant interviews the hiring authority (city manager or board of commissioners), the members of the department both career and volunteer, community leaders and local government leaders to determine what each group is looking for in the next fire chief. Then the consultant returns home and develops the hiring profile for your fire chief, including knowledge, skills, abilities, education and training desired. Once the profile has been reviewed and approved by the hiring authority, the search firm creates a 3-5 page recruitment flyer that announces the position and describes the desired candidate, lists the challenges and opportunities of the job, includes demographics for your area and showcases your community using photos that you provide. The researcher has included a few sample recruitment flyers in the appendix of this research paper (Appendix A2-A4).

The search firm then releases the hiring announcement to any local media sources or any local/regional fire chiefs associations that you identify, plus an additional 30 internet based

career sites. Some of the sites are fire service based like the IAFC, trade journal sites like Fire Chief and FireEngineering, as well as non-industry websites like Indeed and Monster. In addition to advertising through the internet and social media, the search firm already has a pool of quality fire chief candidates who were second place finishers in other hiring process that they conducted. The search firm will also send the hiring announcement to these prior fire chief candidates that they already know and target it toward prior candidates that fit the profile of what your fire department is looking for (Ex. – a candidate with prior experience as a fire chief in a combination department). Marcus explained that in his time at Prothman, 75% of job placements for fire chief they have done are from the pool of candidates who were the runner-up in other hiring processes that they assisted with. Internal candidates from your fire department that meet the requirements in the hiring flyer are always encouraged to apply for the job. Utilizing the services of an executive search firm does not necessarily mean you will end up selecting an external candidate as your next fire chief. The job announcement is posted for 30-45 days and then the candidates must apply online through a link provided in the hiring flyer.

Once the applications are received, the search firm reviews them all and then brings the candidate pool down to about 12 candidates to be targeted for interviews. The search firm consultant working with you then does a 30 minute interview with the 12 candidates either by skype or in-person about their application and background. From their he will identify 4-6 finalists and then return to meet with the hiring authority to discuss the 12 candidates that he interviewed and how he determined the final 4-6 candidates. The hiring authority can choose the finalists from the 4-6 candidates identified or select to interview any of the 12 finalists that received a preliminary interview with the consultant.

So once the hiring authority selects their 4-6 finalists, they are all invited to the fire department for a two day interview process. This is facilitated by the executive search firm's consultant and is normally done on a Friday night and full day Saturday. The candidates come the first night to a "meet and greet" with all the stakeholders being invited and is held either at the fire department, if they have a suitable facility, or at a local catering hall. This part is less formal and more on the casual side with light refreshments and social interaction with the candidates. Each candidate is brought up to the front of the room separately and the search firm consultant tosses out three general questions to each candidate, allowing the stakeholders to see how the finalists think on their feet and provides a window into their personalities.

The next day all the candidates return to the fire station to move through a round robin of interview panels with stakeholders. This part of the process is not open to everyone. Instead a panel of 4-5 people is selected to represent each stakeholder group (Ex – local government leaders, the board of fire commissioners, community group leaders, volunteer personnel and career personnel). Each stakeholder group is provided a list of questions from the search firm and each group can also add their own questions. Each finalist will meet separately in a room with each interview panel for a pre-determined amount of time and then they will all rotate to the next interview panel. Each panel will get to meet with each of the finalists.

Rotating finalists through the interview panel process can sometimes take 5-8 hours to complete, depending on the number of candidates and the breaks taken for any meals. Sometimes if the number of finalists is greater than the number of interview panels, the facilitator from the search firm will rotate the finalists through a tour of the district and the stations using one career and one volunteer member. Or in major cities with fully career departments, this may be done by a firefighter and a company officer.

Upon completion of the interview panel rotation, the finalists are released to go home and the facilitator from the search firm will meet with each panel group separately to survey their findings. This process normally results in 2-3 finalists dropping right off and then normally 1-2 finalists shine and come to the top. The hiring authority can then choose to make their final selection or can choose to re-interview the final two candidates selected by the interview panel process. The executive search firm can also assist with creating employment contracts if needed.

This entire process described above start to finish can take 3-5 months and can cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000. However, this is no more than what you might pay to hire a consulting firm to come in and write a report that documents everything you already know about your own fire department and create a strategic plan for you. Sometimes the consulting firm's final report is valuable and comprehensive. In other cases fire departments have ended up paying for a report lacking substance, feeling like they got a 20 lb. suitcase with nothing inside of it. In the case of executive search firms, their time tested, proven and reliable process used by to hire fire chiefs can be money well spent to get the right person to lead your organization into the future.

Executive search firms are not new. They have been used to do searches for city managers for more than 40 years. Executive searches for fire chiefs were unusual until the 1980's. With the advent of the fire chief's position requiring a greater emphasis on experience and formal education, as well as hiring authority's wanting their next fire chief to be considered a qualified peer with other department heads on the city's management team (police chief, human resources director, finance director, etc.), this resulted in executive searches for fire chiefs becoming more common.

In 2017, it has become a standard practice for local and city governments to use executive search firms for all key senior management team vacancies. The researcher found this to be true in the interview with Jim Westmoreland, the city manager in Greensboro, NC. Mr. Westmoreland relayed to the researcher that the City of Greensboro has used executive search firms for hiring department heads for many years and it is the “normal course of business in Greensboro”. This includes their fire chief, of which the last two prior to their current fire chief were hired from the outside. Their current fire chief was hired internally in 2016, in which the final decision came down to one internal and one external candidate. Mr. Westmoreland explained that the City of Greensboro is always “looking outward” for director level positions and internal candidates are always encouraged to apply. Mr. Westmoreland stated that Greensboro has the best fire department in North Carolina and he believes this is true of all his city departments because of their drive to ensure the best people lead all their city government departments.

In Greensboro, unlike Philadelphia, the form of government is manager-council, which results in the city manager being the final say on all hiring and firing of department heads. This means that department heads are not “swept” and replaced every four years with the change in the mayor. Mr. Westmoreland believes that as the city manager, he has a responsibility to the people of the City of Greensboro to make sure they get the best candidate for every department head position. If that ends up being an internal person, well that’s even better he said.

In a similar conversation with Sarah Taffel, who is the Director of Human Resources, Labor Relations and Administrative Services for the Town of Wilton, CT, Ms. Taffel also believes it is her responsibility to find the best candidate for department head positions, including the fire chief. Both the current and prior fire chiefs, as well as the current deputy fire chief, were

all hired as external candidates. The current fire chief in Wilton, CT is Chief Ron Kanterman, well known fire service expert and former industrial fire chief at Merck Pharmaceuticals in Rahway, NJ and past fire chief at Mohegan Tribal Fire Department in Connecticut. Chief Kanterman is a friend and fire service mentor of the researcher and upon request he directed me to Director Taffel and also to his fire commission chairman, J. Casey Healy. Both people were a part of the search and hiring process for fire chief that led to hiring Chief Kanterman.

Ms. Taffel explained that in some cases when Wilton had a department head vacancy, they either didn't have an internal candidate who was ready to assume either role or they didn't have an internal candidate who wanted to take over the position. Ms. Taffel explained to me they always do an external search for qualified candidates for fire chief, police chief, health department director, public works director, however she does not utilize the services of an executive search firm. Their process is to develop a recruitment flyer themselves and then advertise it through social media and career job websites, fire service trade journals and email blasts to fire chiefs associations in Connecticut and several other states in the northeast corridor. She believes that since she became the Human Resources Director in 2001, this process has brought them both very qualified internal and external candidates. She said that as government officials we have a responsibility to the taxpayer and should not be promoting the next fire chief "out of convenience" or because the fire department believes it's the next person in line's turn to be the fire chief.

For fire departments and local governments who want to do their own hiring and selection process for their next fire chief, the researcher discovered another valuable resource that he was unaware of. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has been around since 1914 and exists as a non-profit, professional networking association for local

government officials. The ICMA is comprised of 13,000 members throughout 32 different countries. Their mission is to identify best practices for local governments and professionals serving communities worldwide, while also providing publications, conducting research and assisting with professional development to its members. ICMA also has working relationships with our federal government to represent local governments in projects with the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (ICMA, about-icma, n.d.).

In 2014, ICMA conducted a corporate restructuring and created a spin off separate company called the ICMA Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM). CPSM exists as an independent company with the purpose of assisting local governments specifically in the areas of law enforcement, Fire and EMS, Emergency Management and Homeland Security. CPSM's team of public safety industry veterans provides technical assistance to local governments. Some of these services include workload and staffing deployment analysis, examine department culture and organizational structure, strategic planning, identifying industry best practices and selection processes for organizational leaders. CPSM is the exclusive provider for ICMA of public safety sector technical assistance (CPSM, about, n.d.).

CPSM provides search selection processes for police and fire chiefs for its local government members known as Chief Selection Advantage (CSA). CSA provides a framework for a data-driven selection process, which uses an assessment tool that is research-based (Appendix A-5). CPSM doesn't screen resumes and they won't make the selection of the next fire chief for you, however, they provide HR directors, city managers and local board members with critical information you will need to recruit and select the best candidate to lead your organization. They will help you to pre-screen candidates based on established core competencies in the fire service. CPSM will also assist you in determining if the candidates can

handle the unique issues facing your fire department, while also enable you to achieve buy-in from your employees, elected officials and residents. By partnering with ICMA and CPSM, a municipal government or a fire department that has a human resources division can conduct their own recruitment and selection process for the next fire chief in-house and keep the costs down.

The final research question the researcher was looking to answer concerned what role succession planning plays in deciding whether to promote from within or hire then next fire chief from outside the fire department. The literature review showed that the lack of succession planning today in the fire service is crippling fire departments across the country, with the mass exodus of a generation of fire service leaders nationwide. Fire Chiefs are being promoted across the United States that are not prepared to be executive level planners and strategists. This has resulted in a 2-4 year learning curve for the new fire chief to traverse and figure out how to do parts of his or her job that they weren't trained for by the prior chief level officers during their career.

The result above was reinforced to the researcher in an interview with a local career fire chief in Pennsauken, NJ, Chief Joseph Palumbo. The researcher met Chief Palumbo as a student in the Fire Officer II and Fire Officer III courses at the Camden County Regional Emergency Training Center in Blackwood, N.J. Since then, Chief Palumbo has been a resource to the researcher for other EFO papers that he has completed. Upon interviewing Fire Commission Chairman Hugh Gibson IV from the Cherry Fire Department for this paper, he suggested that the researchers contact Chief Palumbo and ask him about his journey to becoming the first career chief of department in Pennsauken, which happened in 2011 at the age of 36 years old. The Pennsauken Township Fire Department (PTFD) is a municipal fire department that borders Camden, N.J. The department has been combination since 1943 when they hired their first

career personnel. Today the department has 18 career personnel and approximately 95 volunteer personnel according to their website (Pennsauken Township Fire Department, n.d.).

Chief Palumbo began his career with the PTFD as a firefighter in 2000, was eventually promoted from Lieutenant to Battalion Chief by civil service waiver in 2009 at the request of the township government leaders, became the provisional fire chief in January 2011 and then completed the civil service testing process to become the first permanent career chief of department in May 2011. The researcher asked Chief Palumbo directly about his journey to becoming the fire chief and if he was prepared to assume the position. Chief Palumbo told the researcher emphatically that he “was grossly unprepared to take over as the fire chief in 2011”. He told me there was no succession plan or professional development in place at the PTFD and no one before him showed him the way to the training and education needed to become the fire chief. Chief Palumbo could not stress enough how the lack of succession planning and career development hurt both him and the PTFD.

While Chief Palumbo has fought and also been incident commander of many fires over the years, no one had prepared him for the managerial and executive level functions of being the fire chief. This again created a slow-down in his career progression, having to go out and seek the additional education and preparation needed to catch-up and assume his new responsibilities. To his credit, Chief Palumbo has since become a certified public manager through Rutgers University in Camden and is also in the final stages of completing his bachelor’s degree in public safety administration at Neumann College in Aston, P.A. Chief Palumbo plans to continue his education by pursuing a graduate degree and also is considering applying for the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. Chief Palumbo told the researcher that in his remaining years with the Pennsauken Township Fire Department, his number one priority is

preparing the men behind him through succession planning and assisting with their professional development to assume the role of fire chief upon his retirement.

The other fire chief that the researcher interviewed is an equally dynamic and intelligent person, much like Chief Palumbo. Chief John McGrath of the Raleigh Fire Department in Raleigh, N.C. was hired in 2006 to be the chief of department. Chief McGrath is formerly a Deputy Fire Commissioner with the Philadelphia Fire Department, having served there for more than 32 years. The researcher first met Chief McGrath while serving as a volunteer over the past ten years at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Chief McGrath serves as the incident commander for the four-day operation, which is held annually in October at the start of fire prevention week. Chief McGrath was hired externally to lead the Raleigh Fire Department after the completion of a nationwide competitive search process. Chief McGrath was hired at a tumultuous time when city government leaders in Raleigh felt that the fire department was not diverse enough and didn't represent the community it was serving (Chau, 2006).

When the researcher asked Chief McGrath how succession planning affects the decision to hire internally versus externally when replacing a fire chief, he stated that it has a huge role. When the fire department has a succession plan in place it ensures that we get the best out of our people and that there will be qualified, experienced and progressive candidates ready and prepared to step into the role of fire chief. Chief McGrath took the researcher back in time to his final interview for chief in Raleigh, when he was asked a question by the interview panel, "what's going to be your number one priority if you were to be hired as the fire chief in Raleigh?" Chief McGrath said his reply was, "my number one priority will be to make sure that you never hire another John McGrath again for fire chief." Chief McGrath then expanded on his

reply by saying that his time at the Raleigh Fire Department would include succession planning and preparation of all members of the department to assume the next rank above them. Chief McGrath then told the researcher that he had recently been asked by his city manager which one of his four deputy chiefs should be promoted to fire chief in the event something were to happen to him. Chief McGrath replied to the city manager, “I would tell you to promote any of them, because they are all ready to assume the role.” And that’s a good problem to have Chief McGrath said.

### Discussion

The purpose of the applied research project was to determine if there are benefits to selecting the next fire chief from outside the organization instead of promoting from within. In the discussion section, the researcher will review and analyze the results of the research, including what others have said about the topic, things that were discovered through the original research and what the impacts are for the researcher’s own organization.

The research has shown that there is no one single approach that will fit all fire departments when making the decision to hire the next fire chief internally or hire someone from the outside. Experts do agree that there are general scenarios that can help a fire department or its hiring authority make that decision. Reasons to hire the next fire chief externally include: when the organization has become stagnant and a difficult change in direction and culture are needed; when the organizational mission statement lacks meaning and has never had a clear vision or core values partnered with it; when succession planning for its management team has non-existent; when performance evaluations are inconsistent or absent; and when a specific set of executive level skills are needed and not currently available within the fire department (Krell, 2015).

The question that challenges many fire departments across the country today is “Do we build it or buy it?” This question is the focus of the research that was done by Harvard Business School Professor Boris Groysberg. Groysberg’s research shows that it’s not whether you build the next fire chief from within the organization or whether you hire one from the outside, because in 2017 you must do both. It’s more about understanding the conditions which you build or buy (Groysberg, 2010). In his book, Groysberg goes on to say that deciding whether to promote internally or hire from the outside, “build or buy”, occurs long before hiring the next fire chief is ever made. The first step an organization must take is to embrace a diligent approach to succession planning and developing your employees. External hiring of the next fire chief has several advantages including the new leader injecting a fresh set of ideas and bringing new skill sets into the fire department (Krell, 2015).

In the personal interviews conducted by the researcher with fire commissioners from four different fire departments, their experiences mirrored the findings of Groysberg and Krell above. The Winslow Township Fire Department (WTFD) in New Jersey had external hires for its first three career chiefs. The first one was an excellent fit, but the next two were not. Commissioner Anthony Sirolli explained that when the WTFD and its board of fire commissioners were early on in establishing that a career chief was needed to lead the department, it was felt that there was not an internal candidate that was ready to assume this role. Over time, the WTFD developed internal candidates for the fire chief position, and as a result, the current fire chief and the fire chief just prior to him were both internal hires. The WTFD has had five career fire chiefs to date and their board of fire commissioners has used both its own search and selection process and also utilized the services of executive search firms.

Former Commissioner Kent Neiswender explained to me that in 1991 the Mount Laurel Fire District # 1, which is also in New Jersey, was in need of their first career fire chief. Their board of fire commissioners had identified that the community was growing rapidly and demand for service was also increasing at a fast pace. With a handful of career employees, two stations of volunteer personnel and an organizational structure that had an all-volunteer command structure, the board realized that they needed to change their business model by adding a career fire chief to unify the volunteer personnel, career personnel, the fire district and create the new identity of what today is the Mount Laurel Fire Department (MLFD). Their search for fire chief was nationwide, but did eventually result in the hiring of a local fire service veteran, who had the incident command, managerial and leadership experience, and strong personality that they needed. Chief William Dukes, with the assistance of a full-time fire district business administrator, would serve as their fire chief and organizational change agent from 1991 until 2006.

Commissioner Neiswender told the researcher that their board recognized back in 1991 that the position of career fire chief had become less about being primarily a strong tactical on-scene commander and more about being an executive level manager with proven leadership skills, who could provide vision for the fire department's anticipated growth. The research shows that this holds true even more today. The higher you progress in your fire service career to the chief officer level, the less your incident command skills matter and the more your knowledge, skills and abilities need to be developed toward directing and leading a large corporation, funded by the community that you protect. This was also affirmed for the researcher by all four commissioners that were interviewed from four different fire departments. This was also said to the researcher by both fire chiefs interviewed for this research paper. And

finally, it was also said to the researcher by both of the executive search firm consultants interviewed, as well as the city manager and human resources director that were interviewed. In the results of the study, this is a very significant finding both from the literature review and unanimously across all 10 of the personal interviews.

The challenge of preparing firefighters for advancement to company officer and eventually chief officer is certainly not unique to the Evesham Fire Department. It is being experienced daily by fire departments all around the country, including volunteer, career and combination departments alike (Kastros, 2014). If you are a fire chief or any level of chief officer, the researcher strongly encourages you to step back and take a look at your command structure. Then evaluate what the next one, three, five and ten years will look like in your organization. Ask yourself, is the organization ready for anticipated retirements or if people in key positions leaving unexpectedly? If your answer is no, then you probably need to update or implement a succession plan and professional development for your leadership team.

The researcher has included a draft standard operating procedure (SOP) in the appendix (Appendix A-6) that the researcher recently created to implement a formal officer development program in the Evesham Fire Department. The SOP identifies that officer development is a shared responsibility between the fire department and the employee. Each has responsibilities to ensure that professional development can be done logically and successfully. The employee should have access to job descriptions for all ranks in the organization. The SOP provides minimum requirements for each rank, additional recommended education, a recommended reading list for each rank and a list of prerequisite skills. The draft document has been submitted to the researcher's chain of command for review and hopefully by the time this paper is finished it will be adopted.

Professional development is a process that must be embraced early on and done continuously throughout a person's fire service career. It must be a journey, not a destination (IAFC Handbook, p. 5). It can't begin a few months before a promotion process occurs. Professional development is also a key element of succession planning. The biggest mistake a company officer can make is not to prepare for promotion to chief officer. Firefighters and officers alike should have a written personal development plan that is updated annually. The researcher has also included in the appendix a draft version of a personal development plan that is one component of our future officer development program at the EFD (Appendix A-7). This form will allow the member annually to assess strengths and weaknesses, identify personal and professional goals, identify areas of education and training they need to obtain for promotion to the next rank, and identify opportunities to gain leadership experience at work and in their personal life. The research also shows that membership in professional networking groups is a key component to professional development.

The results of the research have significant impacts on the researcher's own organization. The EFD has reached a critical crossroads in its history, where the highest two ranking officers in our department could retire at any time in the next 1-3 years and the department may or may not have the *best* possible candidates to replace them internally. A combination of things has occurred over the past 20 plus years at the EFD that have put all of the department's career officers at a disadvantage today. These include: having the same organizational leader in place for 26 years, resulting in a lack of upward movement in the officer ranks; not promoting officers before or immediately after a scheduled retirement occurs; utilizing lower level officers to assume the responsibilities and duties of higher ranks following a retirement instead of promoting; not having a written officer development program that includes mentoring and job

training for newly promoted officers; and not having a formal succession plan in place. The current chief and assistant chief inherited a lot of these issues less than two years ago when they were both promoted to their current ranks.

The EFD has always been and continues to be supportive of members attending advanced education including the National Fire Academy and seeking college and graduate degrees. The department has a robust training budget and career employee contracts include financial reimbursement for attending academic degree programs. However, for far too long we have relied on the employees to seek out this advanced academic education, without the EFD ever providing a roadmap to advancement throughout the department. Some employees have prepared themselves for advancement on their own, but as an organization we have not done a good enough job identifying key leaders, from firefighters to company officers, and preparing them to assume the role of fire chief at the Evesham Fire Department. We do not formally utilize mentoring, job shadowing, coaching or provide initial training for the newly promoted officer at any rank. Do we have lots of internal talent on the career staff at all levels? Absolutely we do. That doesn't necessarily mean, however, that our next fire chief is ready and prepared to take over within the organization today.

It has been said to the researcher by more than one firefighter and officer with over 10 years of service at EFD, "When I was hired here at EFD, we were the department everyone looked at for answers. Somewhere along the way we did not evolve to stay there". This systemic organizational failure is shared by all of us. This includes the researcher as the current training officer, past training officers, current and past fire chiefs, current and past members of our board of fire commissioners and the members themselves for not demanding more. *We all* collectively own a piece of this dilemma. What we do with this situation going forward will

ultimately define us as an organization for years to come. Do not misunderstand, we are a very good emergency services organization, but the researcher along with other internal stakeholders, both volunteer and career, believe that the EFD could be so much more.

### Recommendations

The Evesham Fire Department has for many years has been recognized as a leader in Burlington County, New Jersey, for its ability to deliver a variety of services to the residents and visitors of Evesham Township, using a blend of career and volunteer personnel. These services include fire and emergency medical responses, fire code enforcement, public education and technical rescue services. In a period of less than 35 years, the EFD has grown substantially and now serves the largest community in Burlington County, New Jersey, with over 48,000 residents spread out over 30 square miles.

The department is facing a critical time in its history, with the anticipated loss of the assistant fire chief and fire chief in the next few years. This research study shows the importance of professional development and creating a leadership pipeline within the fire department to ensure continued organizational success. The department must also recognize the need to adopt a model of continuous improvement and adopting industry best practices to also ensure its future success.

As a result of the findings in this applied research paper, the author makes the following recommendations. The recommendations are not listed in any particular order of importance:

1. The EFD should create a written officer development program that provides members with job descriptions for all ranks in the fire department, as well as a roadmap to achieve promotion at each level.

2. The EFD should review our entire career staff and determine how many years each member has left to reach 25 years of service at EFD. This will allow us to conduct succession planning with promotional processes and allow members to be mentored by and job shadow experienced officers *before* they leave the fire department.
3. As a combination fire department, the EFD needs to identify current and future key leaders from both the career and volunteer membership and then prepare all of them to assume the next rank above them. This will create a leadership pipeline that will help us grow, adapt and become the premier fire-EMS provider in all of New Jersey.
4. The EFD should assign the role of Professional Development Officer (PDO) to an existing supervisor on the career staff. This position should initially be separate from the Department Training Officer, as this new position will have significant and time consuming responsibilities. This officer will be responsible to create model professional development plans for each supervisory rank in the EFD. These plans should be aligned with the EFD job descriptions for each rank. These professional development plans would follow the National Professional Development Matrix as established by the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) network and also adopt the guidelines in the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Officer Development Handbook.
5. The EFD should re-evaluate its current mission statement to see if it is still relevant and meaningful to the members of the fire department. In addition, the EFD must establish what its core values are and visions for the future are, and make them both transparent and widely known to all members of the organization. Included in our

- core values should be a commitment to professional development of future leaders in the department.
6. The EFD must begin to take a more active role in preparing its current career company officers for near future roles as chief officers. This includes establishing the rank of career battalion chief so there is not such a big a leap in roles, responsibilities and knowledge, skills and abilities from captain to assistant chief. This would also include emphasis on encouraging participation in the EFO Program at NFA, as well as pursuit of executive level education such as the certified public manager program and a graduate degree. This should also include meeting with all company officers to review the job descriptions of the next two ranks above them and determine what needs to be done to prepare them for these roles. In addition, current chief officers should consider sharing anticipated retirement dates, for the purpose of succession planning for the remaining officers. This could possibly be done with all career officers gathering in a day trip or weekend retreat format at a location away from the EFD.
  7. The EFD should create an application process for both career and volunteer firefighters and officers to be accepted into the voluntary officer development program. The application process (letter of intent and a basic resume) would formalize the member's intention to pursue future leadership opportunities in the department and establish a partnership between the member and the department, defining the roles and responsibilities of each. Upon acceptance into the program, the applicant would be required to complete a professional development plan. The EFD should purchase and issue the IAFC Officer Development Handbook, current edition,

- to each member accepted into the program. The member will be given an assignment that would require them to read the handbook in order to complete it.
8. The EFD should establish a mentoring program as part of its professional development plans. Each level of the organization, career and volunteer, should have the responsibility to mentor those in ranks directly below them, including Lieutenants mentoring firefighters. The mentoring program should be established in writing and define objectives of the program and benchmarks for learning to promote to the next rank. The program may also include partnerships with other fire departments in New Jersey to exchange officers for the purpose of mentoring.
  9. The EFD should establish a duty chief program for volunteer officers, requiring all volunteer officers at the rank of captain and above to rotate as the “on call” or duty chief during the volunteer staffed hours, seven days a week. Volunteer captains would initially ride along with existing volunteer chief officers during normal duty crew hours, before them being allowed to act as the duty chief. Existing volunteer chief officers would also participate in the program. The duty chief would utilize a command car during their assigned shift of four, eight, or twelve hours as defined by the program. Requirements and minimum standards to participate in the program regarding experience, education, and certifications would be defined jointly by the assistant chief of operations and the volunteer chief officers. This program would be used to develop future chief officers from within the volunteer company officer ranks.
  10. The EFD should develop a reading list of both fire service and non-fire service books and target them toward each rank in the organization. This established reading list

- should be periodically updated and may also be used in future promotional processes for each rank.
11. The EFD should require its volunteer and career chief officers to attend a minimum number of meetings and serve on committees for the Burlington County Fire Chiefs Association. Our county fire chiefs association is a very strong professional networking group of volunteer and career, past and present, chief level officers. The researcher is a life member of this association, having first joined in the mid 1990's while serving as a volunteer deputy chief in the former Westampton Fire Department & Emergency Unit. This association also now allows company officers to join as members. This organization can only remain successful with continued participation from the leaders of fire departments across our county.
  12. The board of fire commissioners at the EFD should utilize the services of an executive search firm to ensure the selection of the best possible candidate to be our next organizational leader. This process should also be open to any internal candidates that meet the hiring criteria established by the board of fire commissioners, the internal and external stakeholders, and the executive search firm utilized. The research has shown that we have a responsibility to not only our taxpayers, but also our personnel to ensure that the best overall candidate available is chosen as the next fire chief. Whether a comprehensive search process determines that the next fire chief is an internal person or an external hire.

Following these recommendations will ensure that the Evesham Fire Department achieves continued organizational success and implements a process for continuous quality improvement. The recommendations will also ensure that company officers are fully prepared

in the future to assume the role of chief officer as positions open up due to a variety of reasons including retirements, unexpected injuries, a job relocation for volunteer officers or career officers leaving for outside advancement opportunities. Some of the recommendations above can be implemented in shorter time frames than others, however, they are all important steps to ensuring the future success of the Evesham Fire Department.

It is the author's hope that the recommendations in this research paper will benefit officer development in both the career and volunteer divisions of the EFD. Critical knowledge gained from my research would not have been possible without the cooperation extended by those fire chiefs, municipal and city government officials, fire commissioners and executive search consultants that participated in personal interviews with the researcher. The author hopes that the results of this research paper help future readers to improve each of your organizations, as well as improving my own fire department, by establishing formal officer development programs. The author also hopes that this research paper inspires future readers to begin today and commit to a lifetime of personal and professional development.

The author recommends to future readers that you obtain a copy of the recently completed Wingspread VI report and learn about statements of national significance to our United States fire and emergency services. In this comprehensive report, statement of significance #7 (Appendix A-8) discusses how today's fire and emergency services leaders must develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to manage in current times (Wingspread VI, p. 12). It further talks about how it is known that leaders are not effective because of their titles, but more importantly their capabilities. It also how there was an agreement among all the participants that there is still a critical need to improve fire service leadership. This includes preparing leaders to address the financial challenges of their department and community,

developing a model for continuous leadership improvement and improving the effectiveness of leaders in the area of human resources and interpersonal skills (Wingspread VI, p. 13).

## References

- Alyn, K. (2012). *Leadership lessons for formal and informal fire service leaders*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Higher House.
- Brubaker, H. (2017). Virtua names new ceo. Retrieved from <http://www.philly.com/philly/business/pharma/virtua-names-new-ceo-20170627.html>
- Center for Public Safety Management, LLC – About. (n.d.). <https://www.cpsm.us/about/>
- Chau, R. (2006). New raleigh fire chief begins first day. Retrieved from <http://www.firehouse.com/news/10501004/new-raleigh-fire-chief-begins-first-day>.
- Evesham Fire-Rescue – About Us. (n.d.). <http://www.eveshamfire.org/about-us/>
- Groysberg, E. (2010). *Chasing Stars: The myth of talent and portability of performance*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- International Association of Fire Chiefs *On-Scene* (IAFC). (2015, July). Where will your next chief come from? Retrieved March 8, 2017 from <https://www.iafc.org/on-scene/on-scene-article/where-will-your-next-chief-come-from->
- IAFC Officer Development Handbook* (2nd ed.). (2010). Fairfax, VA: International Association of Fire Chiefs.
- Ibarra, P. (2016, February). Why governments need to ramp up succession planning. Retrieved June 27, 2017 from <http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-government-workforce-importance-succession-planning.html>
- Kastros, A. (2014, April). The American fire service leadership pandemic. Retrieved June 27, 2017 from <http://www.fireengineering.com/articles/print/volume-167/issue-4/features/the-american-fire-service-leadership-pandemic.html>

- Krell, E. (2015, January). Weighing internal vs. external hires. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/010215-hiring.aspx>
- International City/County Managers Association – About Us. (n.d.). <https://icma.org/about-icma>.
- Nickish, C. (2016, April). Outsider ceos are on the rise at the world’s biggest companies. Retrieved March 2017 from <https://hbr.org/2016/04/outsider-ceos-are-on-the-rise-at-the-worlds-biggest-companies>
- Palmer, C. (April 2016). Sources: Former VA fire chief to head philly department. Retrieved at [http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/20160408\\_Sources\\_\\_Former\\_Virginia\\_fire\\_chief\\_to\\_head\\_Philly\\_department.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/20160408_Sources__Former_Virginia_fire_chief_to_head_Philly_department.html)
- Pennsauken Township Fire Department. (n.d.). <http://www.twp.pennsauken.nj.us/firedept/welcome-pennsauken-fire-department>.
- PriceWaterhouseCooper. (2017). Annual ceo success study. Retrieved from <http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/ceostudy>
- Protham Company. (n.d.). <http://www.prothman.com/>.
- Salka, J., & Neville, B. (2004). *First in, last out: Leadership lessons from the new york city fire department*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Strategic Government Resources. (n.d.) <https://www.governmentresource.com/>.
- Tichy, N. (2015, July). The problem with outsider ceos. Retrieved March, 2017 from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/07/01/the-problem-with-outsider-ceos-2/?utm\\_term=.1559a37f0a78](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/07/01/the-problem-with-outsider-ceos-2/?utm_term=.1559a37f0a78)
- U.S. Fire Administration. (2015, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition). Executive Leadership. [Student Manual]. Emmitsburg, MD: Author.

U.S. Fire Administration. (2014). Strategic Plan Years 2014-2018. Retrieved from  
<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/about/>

Wingspread VI report. (2016). Statements of national significance to united states fire and  
emergency services. Retrieved from [http://strategicfire.org/resource/wingspread-vi-  
report/](http://strategicfire.org/resource/wingspread-vi-report/)