

**OFFICER DEVELOPMENT:  
CAN THE PREPARATION FROM COMPANY OFFICER TO  
CHIEF OFFICER EASE THE TRANSITION?**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

The problem was that the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department (FLFD) did not prepare company officers to assume the position of chief officer. Without the continued implementation of knowledge, skills, and abilities, newly promoted and aspiring chief officers lacked the skills necessary to enhance their professional development.

The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) was to examine how the public fire service and private sector organizations prepared their first-level supervisors, to become chief officers or mid-level managers.

In conducting this research, the author utilized the descriptive methodology to answer the following research questions:

1. What guides or standards are available to build an effective chief officer program?
2. What are the similarities and differences between chief officer and non-executive officer training programs?
3. What advantages should be expected from a chief officer development program?
4. How might such a chief officer training program be integrated into the FLFD?

The procedures used in this ARP included a review of applicable literature: (a) fire service periodicals; (b) management textbooks; (c) human resource development textbooks; and (d) National Fire Protection Association standards. A telephone survey was conducted to establish if fire service organizations had a chief officer training program, and to identify other possible educational alternatives. Results indicated that although many fire service organizations did not have chief officer training programs, those that did, recommended that NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, be combined with non-fire management courses.

Recommendations made were to gain support from the fire chief, senior chief staff officers, and the Human Resources Department to establish a “Chief Officer Development Training Committee” and utilize NFPA 1021 as a developmental guideline for the curriculum. Other recommendations included employing qualified instructors who were recognized as experts in their field and seek nationally recognized speakers to address some of the training courses.

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## INTRODUCTION

The failure to effectively create leaders with management skills may be attributed to both the organization and senior level fire managers not recognizing opportunities to develop potential leaders. In today's society one important benchmark for top level managers of an organization should be to recognize that junior level chief officers, and those aspiring to become chief officers, are a resource that must be continually developed and mentored. Conversely, fire service organizations must create an environment and culture that provides the necessary training, mentoring, and growth needed to develop tomorrow's leaders.

The problem is that the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department (FLFD) does not prepare company level officers to assume the position of chief officer. Without the continued structured implementation of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitude, newly promoted chief officers and those aspiring to be chief officers, lack the necessary skills that are needed to enhance their professional development.

The purpose of this applied research project is to examine what public fire service and private sector organizations do to prepare their company officers, or first-level supervisors, in becoming chief officers or mid-to-upper level managers.

Research methodology used for this applied research project is the descriptive method that identified the following questions:

1. What guides or standards are available to build an effective chief officer program?
2. What are the similarities and differences between chief officer and non-executive officer training programs?
3. What advantages should be expected from a chief officer development program?
4. How might such a chief officer training program be integrated into the FLFD?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The City of Fort Lauderdale is located on the southeast coast of Florida and 25 miles north of Miami, Florida. The City has a population of 177,000 residents with a daily tourism and business population that may swell over one million people. The Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department (FLFD) was established in 1912 and provides a full service compliment of fire operations, advanced life support emergency medical services (EMS), fire investigations and inspections, training, hazardous material response, airport emergency operations, marine firefighting operations, and specialized tactical rescue operations. FLFD operates from 13 fire stations strategically located over 41.2 square miles of city boundary.

Prior to 1990 the requirement for the position of battalion chief for the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department was based on “time in grade” of at least five years and little college education for a company officer (lieutenant) to take the promotional exam. As time progressed in the 1990’s, FLFD expanded the level of services to include a full service EMS system. Hence, the requirements for battalion chief changed to include an Associate Degree in Fire Science, or related field, with at least three years as a company officer, and possession of a current emergency medical technician (EMT) license from the State of Florida.

In 1998, the fire chief and Human Resources Department mandated the job requirement for all fire service management ranging from battalion chief to fire chief will be required to have obtained a minimum of a Bachelor degree in a related field. This mandate caused many lieutenants aspiring to become chief officers to procure the appropriate undergraduate degree to qualify as a fire service manager. Additional mandates such as minimum of an EMT, and three years as a company officer in good standing remained as additional requirements.

In 2000, the FLFD experienced a major transformation in staffing when 72 fire service personnel from all ranks ranging from deputy chief to firefighter retired. Of the 72 personnel that retired, 52 were in the ranks of lieutenant, battalion chief, division chief and deputy chief. The fire chief and senior staff prepared a short term plan to mentor promotional candidates by pairing well seasoned and educated fire officers with those expected to fill the vacancies for the managerial and supervisory positions.

While mentoring worked to prepare qualified candidates for their promotion on the short term, those candidates were not adequately prepared for the overall job knowledge required to achieve long-term effectiveness. Fleming (2002) states, “That effective management and leadership are essential in fire departments. Both line and chief officers play an integral role in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of their department and its ability to fulfill its mission” (¶ 1).

Currently, newly promoted battalion chiefs and those assigned to “acting chief officers” are experiencing great challenges to perform the four basic managerial functions such as: planning, organizing, directing/leading and controlling. With planning, those newly promoted and acting chief officers were not completely adept to the goals and objectives of the overall operation in order to fulfill the overall objectives of their assigned duties. In the task of organizing, newly promoted chief officers are experiencing difficulty understanding the effective allocation of resources needed to fulfill those organizational objectives in as efficient a manner possible. Directing is the third function that most of our newly promoted battalion chiefs appeared to be deficient in. This function implemented planned initiatives and strategies and thus, is enhanced through effective leadership.

Lastly, the function of controlling too appeared to be deficient. Battalion chiefs utilized controlling in a fashion that may not have related to the altruistic definition. A prime example noted is a newly promoted chief officer's assumption of the term "controlling." Inexperienced chief officers assigned task functions to their subordinates in a "micromanaged objective" as to exactly (1) what task function is assigned, (2) how to do the assigned task, and (3) when such task is due for completion.

This applied research project (ARP) will determine what guides or standards provided a suitable foundation to build an effective chief officer program. Additionally, this research will identify key advantages that may be expected from the development of a chief officer program. Moreover, this applied research project will describe the similarities and/or differences between chief officer and "non-fire executive officer" training. Finally, a discussion of how an effective chief officer-training program could be integrated into the FLFD.

The significance of this applied research project relates to the core objectives outlined in Unit 2: Professional Development, Unit 4: Managing Creativity, Unit 5: Following and Leading, and Unit 7: Organizational Culture taught in the *Executive Development* course (NFA, 2003). In an effort to better prepare newly promoted battalion chiefs and qualified personnel aspiring to become battalion chiefs, effective managerial development curriculum is needed to manage the increasing complexities associated with being a chief officer and overall benefits of implementing a chief officer training program.

This ARP relates to the United States Fire Administrative (USFA) operational objective to respond appropriately in a timely manner to emergent issues (FEMA, 2004). This paper is dedicated towards meeting the USFA objective by describing how chief officers and those aspiring to be chief officers could be better trained to respond appropriately.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of the literature material used, this applied research project asked four questions:

- (1) What guides or standards are available to build an effective chief officer program?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences between chief officer and non-executive officer training programs?
- (3) What advantages should be expected from a chief officer development program?
- (4) How might such a chief officer training program be integrated into the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department?

Question number one asked what guides or standards are available to build an effective chief officer program.

In 1971, the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations created the National Professional Qualifications Board for the fire service. Its mission was to facilitate the development of nationally applicable performance standards for uniformed fire service personnel. As a result, a technical committee was given the task of developing standards for fire officers and created the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*. The first edition of NFPA 1021 was adopted in July 1976 (NFPA, 1997).

The present version of NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, outlines the requirements for fire officers at four levels of competency. The first level, Fire Officer I, focused on the needs of the first line supervisor that clearly identified the traditional role of “company officer.” The second level, Fire Officer II, identified requirements to the managerial aspects of the company officer’s job function and assisted in the preparation of qualified candidates for upward mobility to “staff officer assignments.” At both Fire Officer I and II levels, NFPA 1021 addressed numerous requirements such as human resource

management, public administration, community and government relations, inspections and investigation, and emergency service planning and delivery. Levels III and IV of NFPA 1021 addressed requirements for chief fire officers focusing primarily on management and administrative issues at the senior staff level of the organization (Smoke, 2001).

Having officers certified at the aforementioned levels assures: (1) the provision of an orderly progression in the career development of individuals, and (2) the provision of a consistent, realistic standard for assessing company and chief officer knowledge, skills, and abilities. Utilizing these standard levels provided tangible evidence to the competency of their officers (Smoke, 2001).

In many communities, progressive public service organizations pursued nationally recognized accreditation and certification as evidence of the quality of their service delivery to their respective community. Certification of officers in these organizations is the key to this process (Smoke, 2001). This style of activities assured the citizens of their respective community, and their elected leaders, that the department could provide quality service to the community. Moreover, that all areas of service are addressed and service is provided in as timely and efficiently possible (Smoke, 2001).

The authors agreed, that in today's fire service it is no longer enough to just have tenure to be a successful company or chief officer. Chief officers need to possess a plethora of knowledge regarding the applicable national and local laws and standards to assure that personnel assigned under their charge are adequately developed, prepared, technologically educated, at any given time. The authors jointly agreed that there are numerous personal and tactical issues that combine to determine the success or failure of a chief officer (Knopf, 2003; Edwards, 2000).

Knopf (2003) stated:

There are certain guidelines that chief officers need to follow: establish credibility, protect your integrity, be a leader, not just a manager, attend the National Fire Academy (USFA), treat firefighters as responsible adults, develop shared goals with your employees, and stress safety to your employees in every forum possible (p. 7).

In order to build an effective chief officer program two major elements emerge as essential in identifying and establishing this program for development:

1. Knowing the context for planning,
2. Establishing a solid base of support for educational activities (Caffarella, 1994).

Caffarella (1994) defined context, “As the situational and environmental factors that affect decisions planners make about programs” (p. 46). These factors included both internal and external factors. Internal factors include: department’s mission/value statement(s), goals and objectives of the organization, standard operating policies/procedures, and organizational history, traditions, beliefs and values. The external factors are the political stakeholders such as the mayor and council/commission (Caffarella, 1994).

Caffarella (1994) added:

In order to establish a firm base of support for planning and conducting educational programs you must need commitment and action. Commitment is viewed as a recurrent promise, which comes in the form of written and/or verbal statements. Action involves having people at all levels of the organization respond to that commitment in the form of budgetary and other resource allocations and actual involvement in the educational function (p. 49).

Question two addressed the similarities and differences between chief officer and non-executive officer training programs.

Gates (2003) defined mentoring as, “The process by which organizational knowledge and the experiences of senior executives are transferred to others in the organization is a valuable learning mechanism widely employed in the private sector but is almost nonexistent in the fire service” (p. 104). The lack of mentoring programs has serious implications for the executive fire officer (EFO) when asked to manage an ever-changing and increasingly more complex environment (Gates, 2003). Authors agreed that mentoring is a tool that may be used to bridge the gap between the knowledge required for the management activities, and the skills needed for a leadership role (Gates, 2003; Edwards, 2000). Gates (2003) agreed that some benefits of mentoring at the executive level included clear succession planning, institutional knowledge transfer, improved management skills and capabilities, and increased job satisfaction.

Traditionally, the managerial training process at the executive level of the fire service has focused on formal management classes, which are the technical duties of the EFO. Some of these duties may include: budget preparation, incident command skills and report writing (Gates, 2003). The modern EFO may encounter additional responsibilities that encompass the “non-technical duties” such as: (a) labor-management relations; (b) visioning; (c) personnel administration; (d) and team building (Gates, 2003). These activities are not just important to the fire service but are encountered in private industry as well. There is a disparate focus on formal management education and formal leadership education (Gates, 2003).

Mentoring programs are very often perceived as projects that require significant management and financial resources. The fire service generally has a smaller senior staff than

many of the large corporations that have instituted formal mentoring programs. Therefore, many fire departments just have not seen the need to adopt mentoring programs (Gates, 2003).

Gates (2003) stated that there were four mentoring approaches that the fire service and private sector organizations used: formal, informal, one-to-one, and peer mentoring. Formal programs are the most common in the private sector, and almost non-existent in the fire service mainly because of the need for program management and financial resource allocations. The informal mentoring approach is the most commonly used format in the fire service. The mentor and mentee choose each other outside the boundaries of a structured program. Most of the informal mentoring occurs without conscious awareness. With one-to-one mentoring, an experienced EFO is paired with someone who has less experience. While this method is effective, it is very time consuming for both parties and limits the number of personnel that can participate. Finally, the peer-mentoring example uses knowledge and experience of two officers of equal rank within the confines of a mentoring relationship. This example encourages lateral exchanging of ideas between coequals rather than downward dominant roles (Gates, 2003).

There are a number of guidelines that may be useful in making a mentor relationship as productive as possible. The department needs to ensure that the program is voluntary on both sides (Edwards, 2000). If someone is forced or coerced into a mentor relationship, it will not work and may in fact be damaging to that person (Edwards, 2000). Authors agreed, that the expectations of the mentor relationship should be realistic, and what can and cannot be accomplished needs to be made clear (Edwards, 2000; Gates, 2003). The mentor should not be the direct supervisor of the person to be mentored; however, a good flow of information and communication to the supervisor can help to avoid conflicts and misunderstanding (Edwards, 2000).

Authors agreed that, mentor programs could assist with the diversity of the fire department and provide people with limited access to those in power the opportunity to be recognized for their talents. Women and minorities can benefit from mentor programs, and should be encouraged as a way to provide upward mobility for their careers. Mentor programs seemed to offer a unique method to provide for this and the program should be diverse to best accomplish this goal (Edwards, 2000; Cascio, 1998).

In non-executive fire officer training programs, the *Theory of Management Development* is used. Management development has been described as having three main components: management education, management training, and on-the-job experiences. Keys and Wolfe, (1988) defined management education as, “The acquisition of a broad range of conceptual knowledge and skills in formal classroom situations in degree-granting institutions” (p. 205). Management training seemed to focus more in providing specific skills or knowledge that may be applied immediately to an organization, and/or to a specific position or set of positions within an organization (DeSimone & Harris, 1998). Many on-the-job experiences may be planned or unplanned opportunities for managers to gain self-knowledge, enhance existing skills and abilities, or obtain new skills and information within the context of day-to-day activities (DeSimone & Harris, 1998).

Three authors agreed that a successful management development curriculum should contain company ideologies, procedures, marketing trends, and innovative technologies, must be taught as a collective group. It was further agreed by the three authors that personnel must understand and achieve what is expected as one successful organization (Caffarella, 1994; Cascio, 1998; DuBrin, 1997).

Caffarella (1994) stated, “Educational programs foster three kinds of change: individual change related to acquisition of new knowledge, building of skills, and examination of personal values and beliefs” (p. 3). Furthermore, five authors concurred that a comprehensive management development program provides curriculum to achieve the needs of an organization to provide: (a) competitive strategic objectives for managers; (b) problem solving techniques; (c) common value techniques; and (d) overall organizational objectives (Buckman, 2001; Cascio, 1998; DuBrin, 1997; Sargent, 2002; Wendt, 1999).

Conversely, Buhler (2001) states, “Management requires a variety of skills. There is no cookbook recipe because management is both art and science. There is not a standardized approach to management development. Standardization doesn’t work because management focuses on dealing with people – an unpredictable entity at best” (p. 195).

Question three addressed the advantages that should be expected from a chief officer development program.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) 1021 *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, a general prerequisite skill for all officers is the ability to communicate verbally and in writing. With Fire Officer I and II there are eight references that call for writing skills. Fire Officer III, a chief-level officer standard, contains 16 references; verbal and writing skills are listed as a prerequisite in every standard at that level. Finally, Fire Officer IV, the highest chief-level standard, requires all preceding prerequisites, plus it adds nine more references (NFPA, 1997).

As managers, chief officers are responsible for effectively and efficiently managing the present day, but as leaders, chief officers have to prepare their fire departments for the future

(Fleming, 2002). Fleming (2002) defines leadership as, “The ability to influence others to work toward the goals and objectives of the organization” (¶ 17).

Two authors agreed, that successful managers must possess technical, human and conceptual skills that are necessary to perform the daily management functions of planning, organizing, directing/leading and controlling; and the communication and decision-making skills that support each of those functions (Sargent, 2002; Fleming, 2002). Three articles stated, that successful leaders must articulate a vision for the future, develop consensus regarding that vision, and assist with the development of shared goals and objectives (Fleming, 2002; Sargent, 2002; Buckman, 2001).

The questions to ask is-- How does one develop as a leader? Leadership development requires both experiences and the ability to learn from experiences. Experience is what an individual brings to the development process (Buckman, 2001).

According to Buckman (2001), there are three key elements to leadership development, they are: assessment, challenge, and support. Assessment is important because it gives managers an understanding of where they are now, what their current strengths are, and what their level of performance or leadership effectiveness is. The challenge experience forces people out of their comfort zones. It requires managers to develop new capacities if they want to be successful. Finally, support helps personnel handle the struggles and pain of developing; it can actually help them bear the weight of the experience. Support is always needed to help maintain a positive view as people grow and learn (Buckman, 2001).

Successful managers must have the following characteristics so that they can benefit an organization: strong sense of personal integrity, sense of fairness and humor, good balance, good listening abilities, capacity to build trust and teams, visibility in the organization, mental

toughness, flexibility, innovation, competency, and the ability to learn from the past (White, 2003).

Managers, or aspiring managers that receive formal training can fulfill five critical areas: (1) acquaints them with organizational policies/procedures and resources; (2) provides valuable insight into the organization's culture; (3) is a forum in which they receive systematic and objective feedback; (4) facilitates relationships with peers and subordinates; and finally, (5) is a rite of passage (Hill, 2003). Hill (2003) states, "That with manager training, personnel learn the techniques that are helpful to them with mastering the administrative aspects of their new position" (p. 219).

Other advantages to establishing a chief officers training program are: to encourage the continuous growth and development of individuals, prepare people for their current or future career opportunities, assist the organization in achieving desired results and adaptations to change, increase morale, and finally assist personnel with responding to practical problems and issues of adult life (Caffarella, 1994; Cascio, 1998).

Two authors agreed that management development consists of training and development specifically designed for managers. The advantages that this program brings about is effective leadership, mentoring, coaching and counseling skills, strategic thinking, improving communication skills either verbally or written, policy making, crisis management, and the development of cultural sensitivity (Buhler, 2001; DuBrin, 1997).

Finally, the fourth question addressed how such a chief officer training program might be integrated into the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department (FLFD).

"The importance of integrating a chief officer training program into an organization is to assist company officers with making an informed decision with regard to their career

advancement to chief officer. Therefore, it is important to provide these individuals with a realistic preview of the roles and responsibilities of the position, as well as make suggestions for their successful transition” (Fleming, 2002, ¶ 3).

Kefalas (August, 1997) stated, “Today’s fire officers, as well as those of the future, will face demands and challenges that are not only new but occurring at a faster pace. The emerging, diverse workforce will present previously unseen personnel issues that new managers will need to address” (p. 62). With this new generation of firefighters, which come from many backgrounds and cultures, they bring a whole new set of values to the fire service. Company officers and chief officers will need an array of management styles and techniques to deal with these new employees. Only through proper training and education can these managers be prepared (Kefalas, 1997).

According to a few authors, some of the guidelines for developing and integrating a chief officer program into an organization are: (1) have instructors who are recognized as experts in their field; (2) do not limit your training only to fire related materials; (3) seek nationally recognized speakers to address some classes; (4) be able to duplicate the class every year or when it is necessary for your organization; finally (5) create an atmosphere where students can interact with one another and the instructor without feeling threatened (Kefalas, 1997; Edwards, 2000; Caffarella, 1994).

Another approach that the FLFD may take to integrate a chief officer training program into their organization is to mentor aspiring chief officer candidates. A mentoring relationship provides both a career and psychosocial function to an aspiring chief officer. The mentor provides the protégé/mentee with career support, by opening doors, teaching him/her the ropes of the job, creating opportunities to demonstrate competence, and ensure that the protégé/mentee

has challenging work (DeSimone & Harris, 1998; Caffarella 1994). In return, the protégé/mentee provides the mentor with a meaningful, reinforcing relationship that demonstrates both parties' commitment and value to the organization (DeSimone & Harris, 1998; Edwards, 2000; Caffarella, 1994).

In utilizing NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* as a standard guideline, the FLFD can incorporate a training program to assist aspiring chief officer candidates or newly promoted chief officers to enhance their careers. By using NFPA 1021, students will be able to learn how to communicate properly either verbally or by writing, have an understanding of human resource management, be able to build partnerships with the public and government agencies, be able to perform administrative duties such as; prepare a budget, and solicit bids for purchasing and awarding those bids (NFPA, 1997).

The pedagogies that should be relied on are those that best capture the realities of managerial work and encourage learning from experience (Hill, 2003). Management training should be based more on experience than theory. By using this approach, it requires a person to act and encourages new attitudes. Changes in attitude are required for changes in behavior (Hill, 2003).

In summary, a chief officer's success will ultimately depend on their ability to assimilate new knowledge, skills, and abilities, some of which include marketing trends, innovative technologies, immerging organizational ideologies, and environmental exposures. It is obvious that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021 Standard is currently the most comprehensive officer development standard available for uniformed fire personnel to follow. Lastly, a successful chief officer program would provide an organization with a prime

opportunity to create a culturally diverse environment with optimum training, education, and effective networking into social areas previously untapped.

## **PROCEDURES**

This applied research paper utilized the descriptive method in gathering information regarding the preparation of a company officer to become a chief officer.

Research information was taken from: (a) Fire Engineering and Fire Chief Magazines; (b) management textbooks; (c) human resource development textbooks; and (d) National Fire Protection Association standards. Upon the completion of research using magazines and textbooks concerning management development objectives, a telephone survey was conducted with 25 fire service organizations of equal or greater size to the City of Fort Lauderdale. The telephone survey guaranteed a 100% response. The telephone numbers from the survey are provided in (Appendix A) with a sample of the survey questionnaire provided in (Appendix B). The demographics and rank of personnel surveyed are provided in (Appendix C).

### ***Assumptions and Limitations***

The information that was gathered in the survey was in joint agreement with the objectives recognized by this applied research project. The respondents surveyed by telephone are assumed to be certified chief officers and/or human resource managers assigned in their respective organizations. The reliance of the information provided by the respondents was based on their knowledge of current chief officer development programs or lack thereof within their particular jurisdictions.

The telephone survey conducted was limited to a select group of career, volunteer or combination fire service organizations equal to or greater in size to the population of the City of Fort Lauderdale for use in the applied research project.

The results of the survey are not based on scientific sampling. The survey represents a convenience sample of specific sets of data in regards to implementation of a chief officer development program within the participating organizations polled.

### ***Definition of Terms***

**Career Department** – A fire suppression agency or organization in which all active firefighters are considered full-time employees; are assigned regular duty shifts, and receive financial compensation for their services rendered on behalf of the department.

**Volunteer Department** – A fire suppression agency or organization in which no active firefighters are considered full-time employees; and which no members receive financial compensation for their services rendered on behalf of the department other than life/health insurance, workman's compensation insurance, length of service awards, pay per-call or per-hour, or similar token compensation.

**Combination Department** – A fire suppression agency or organization in which at least one active firefighter receives financial compensation for his/her services rendered on behalf of the department and at least one active firefighter does not receive financial compensation for his/her services rendered on behalf of the department other than life/health insurance, workman's compensation insurance, length of service awards, pay-per call or per-hour, or similar token compensation.

**Company Officer** – A first-line supervisor in charge of a specific response unit and its personnel.

**Chief Officer/ Battalion Chief** – This is a managerial, technical and administrative work planning, organizing and controlling the operations of a fire rescue district or an administrative bureau. Employees managing a district are responsible for the command of all fire-rescue companies in the district on an assigned shift; for the control of these

forces at fire scenes, emergency medical incidents, hazardous incidents or other emergencies; for employee relations, public relations, budget preparations and administration; for the proper maintenance of fire-rescue stations, apparatus and equipment; for the coordination of tactical surveys and building inspections; and for the training of subordinates during their tour of duty. Employees assigned as Bureau Chief are responsible for the management of such Bureaus as Training and Special Operations, Fire Prevention, Support Services, and Emergency Medical Services. Employees in this class exercise considerable initiative and independent judgment.

Incident Command System (ICS) – the model tool for the command, control and coordination of resources at the scene of an emergency; a management tool consisting of procedures for organizing personnel, facilities, equipment and communication at the scene of an emergency.

Executive Fire Officer (EFO) – a person having administrative or managerial authority in a fire service organization.

## **RESULTS**

As part of the applied research project, a telephone survey was conducted to 25 career and combination fire service organizations that were equal to or greater in population to the City of Fort Lauderdale. Those career and combination fire service organizations surveyed were departments ranging in size from mid-sized to metropolitan staffing levels greater than 2000 members.

The telephone survey determined the number of career and combination fire service organizations out of the 25 departments sampled that utilized a chief officer development program as a way to maintain the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitude of their respective

chief officers. The demographics, rank of respondents, and staffing size of the organizations surveyed are listed in (Appendix C).

Feedback from the telephone survey is as follows:

**1. Does your department have a chief officer development program?**

Yes	10*
No	15

\* The City of Riverside, in California, contracts with their local community college to send their company and chief officers for officer development training. The State of California has a wide curriculum for company and chief officer development. Therefore, most fire service organizations in California utilize the community colleges in their area to teach the uniformed officer curriculum to their respective officers, as well as aspiring company and chief officer candidates.

**2. If your answer is “yes” to Question #1, what criteria do you use?**

CRITERIA	RESPONSES
NFPA 1021	9
Local Policies	7
Various Management Tools	9
Other	4

Out of the 10 departments that stated they had a chief officer development program, nine used NFPA 1021 and various management tools as a foundation for their program. Seven departments stated that they used local policies along with NFPA 1021 to develop their chief officer program. Finally, four departments stated that they used other criteria to develop their chief officers. The other criterion stated were as follows: The *Executive Fire Officer Program*

offered at the National Fire Academy, classes taught at state fire academy's geared towards chief and officer development curriculum, on-the-job training (mentoring), and continuing educational units to respective chief officers every quarter.

The Fire Department of New York City (FDNY) has a seven week program in which newly promoted battalion chiefs are required to attend. In those seven weeks the new chiefs undergo five weeks of classroom training on the above topics, and then spend two weeks mentoring with an experienced battalion chief. FDNY believes in the philosophy that formal mentoring will maintain the knowledge and skills that were taught in the classroom, and be able to apply it in the field. FDNY has reinforced its chief officer development program after the tragic terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 that took the lives of 343 of their own personnel, many of whom were experienced and distinguished chief officers.

Survey questions one and two are relevant to research questions one and four, which asked: (1) what guides or standards are available to build an effective chief officer program; and (4) how might such a chief officer training program be integrated into the FLFD. It was noted that out of the 25 fire service organizations that were surveyed, the 10 organizations that stated they had a chief officer development program, nine of them used NFPA 1021 as the national standard to build their chief officer program. Various management tools were also incorporated into their chief officer developmental program so that new philosophies, concepts, and techniques could be uniformly taught in addition to the guidelines set by NFPA 1021.

**3. If your answer is “no” to Question #1, does your department recommend off-site training?**

<b>OFF-SITE TRAINING</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
National Fire Academy (EFOP)	6
Community College Classes/Degree	7
4-Year Degree (University)	2
State Fire Academy	1
Other	6

Out of the 25 fire service organizations that were surveyed, 15 organizations stated that they did not have a chief officer development program. Six organizations reported that they sent chief officers and aspiring chief officers to the National Fire Academy’s *Executive Fire Officer Program*, or did an informal mentoring program. Seven organizations recommended that chief officer candidates attend fire officer development or management classes at the Community College. Two organizations mandated their chief officer candidates and respective chief officers to have a four-year degree in Fire Science, Business Administration or Public Administration. Finally, one organization sent their chief officer candidates to their respective State Fire Academy to attend classes on officer development. Eight organizations that were polled stated that in order to become a chief officer they just needed to take the promotional exam, while others stated you needed 10 years experience at the level of lieutenant or captain before taking the promotional exam.

The FLFD requires all chief officers and aspiring chief officers procure a minimum of a four-year degree in Fire Science Technology, Business Administration, EMS Management, or Public Administration. Conversely, the New Orleans, Louisiana and New Brunswick, New Jersey Fire Departments requires an Associate degree in Fire Science to become a chief officer.

Indianapolis Fire Department provides aspiring chief officers self study materials to assist them in preparing for their oral interview and assessment center practical.

**4. If you have answered “yes” to Question #1, do you combine NFPA 1021 Officer Development models with non-fire manager training courses? If so, what non-fire management tools do you use?**

MANAGEMENT COURSES	RESPONSES
Budget Training/Preparation	3
Human Resource Management	8
Labor Relations	7
Administrative Law/Ethics	8
Disciplinary Practices	8
Other	0

The 10 fire service organizations that stated they did have a chief officer development program, nine reported that they used NFPA 1021 as a guideline and other various management tools to develop their chief officer program. Eight organizations out of the nine use the following non-fire manager training courses in the development of their chief officer program: human resource management, administrative law/ethics and disciplinary practices. Seven of the nine organizations polled stated that labor relations courses were taught in their chief officer development programs. Finally, three organizations reported that in their chief officer development program, the candidates had budget training and preparation classes.

Survey question number four relates to research question two, which asked: what are the similarities and differences between chief officers and non-executive officer training programs. This survey question was geared towards discovering if fire service organizations that had chief officer development programs taught management courses along with fire science courses or NFPA 1021 guidelines. The survey noted that many organizations geared their non-fire

management courses to the following courses: human resource management, administrative law/ethics, disciplinary practices, and finally labor relations. Very few fire organizations had budget training or preparation.

**5. What is the overall feedback of the chief officer development program?**

<b>RATINGS</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
Excellent	4
Good	5
Poor	0
Pilot Program, still accruing information	1

The 10 fire service organizations that responded “yes” to a chief officer development program, four reported that their program had excellent ratings from their chief officer candidates and respective chief officers. Five organizations affirmed that their chief officer development program was good, but needed updating. Boise, Idaho Fire Department reported their respective chief officer development program delivery is a pilot program and that they are currently accruing feedback from attendees. Boise Fire Department further stated that they currently have a successful company officer development program, which was implemented back in the 1990’s.

Survey question five is relative to research questions three and four, which asked: (3) what advantages should be expected from a chief officer development program; and (4) how might such a chief officer training program be integrated into the FLFD.

The survey reported that many advantages were gained from developing a chief officer program. These advantages are as follows: greater knowledge, skills and abilities to make executive level decisions on the fire ground and in dealing with the local community and/or

government officials; enhanced leadership development; and learning how to become proactive in the organization.

Effective feedback from the survey garnered helpful information to integrate a chief officer training program into the FLFD by giving ideas such as: partnering with the local community college, university, or state fire academy to provide the necessary instructors to teach courses geared toward NFPA 1021 and non-fire management courses.

## **DISCUSSION**

In comparing the literature review and the results from the telephone survey conducted for this applied research project, there were similar patterns to achieve success in the preparation and development of aspiring chief officers as well as newly promoted chief officers. Knopf (2003) stated, “Provide career development training to your employees as they advance through the ranks, document the training, and train, train, train on safety and your Incident Command System (ICS)” (p. 21).

The role of the chief officer has evolved. This is natural and inevitable in the ever-changing world we inhabit. Contemporary chief officers must know about and be able to deal with concepts such as gender equity and cultural diversity. They must know about planning, budgeting, and time management. Surprisingly, the greatest challenge for the new company or chief officer may be human relations (Kefakas, 1997).

Most authors agreed that a uniform development program, combined with mentoring, maintained both individual and organizational skills to remain competitive (Caffarella, 1994; Cascio, 1998; DeSimone and Harris, 1998; Wendt, 1999). Gates (2003) stated, “If mentoring programs at the EFO level are to be embraced, there must be recognition that value is attached” (p. 106). For a short termed goal, informal and unstructured mentoring programs can have an

effect; however, for a longed term goal it would be vital to the success of fire service organizations worldwide to engage in formal mentoring at the executive level (Gates, 2003). This would be the true value created for the individual chief officers, aspiring chief officers and the fire service organizations to which they serve. It is through this process that the American fire service will establish itself as a professional organization ready for the challenges to come (Gates, 2003).

However, there are limitations to using just mentoring programs to develop and prepare aspiring chief officers or mid-to-upper level managers. DeSimone and Harris (1998) stated, "Limitations of formal mentoring programs include a small number of mentor pairs that can be accommodated" (p. 37). Therefore, mentoring single-handedly would not be recommended as a primary development tool for aspiring chief officers or managers in a large organization that had a large managerial turnover rate due to normal retirement or advanced growth climate (Caffarella, 1994; DeSimone & Harris, 1998; Wendt, 1999).

In reviewing the telephone survey results, it was noted that FDNY and Peoria, Arizona used formal mentoring as a tool to maintain or reinforce the knowledge and skills that were taught in the classroom. Out of the 25 fire service organizations surveyed, 15 organizations stated that they did not have a chief officer developmental program. Out of those 15 fire service organizations, three organizations stated that they did have an informal mentoring program, while three other organizations encouraged their respective chief officers and/or company/line officers aspiring to be chief officers to attend the EFOP at the National Fire Academy.

It was disheartening to note that while conducting the telephone survey, many fire service organizations polled stated that they do not send any of their company/line or chief officers to attend cutting edge courses (up to, and including the EFOP) offered at the National Fire

Academy. Could it be that their fire service organization is too traditional or proud to send their chief officers and company/line officers to gain knowledge and skills at the National Fire Academy? Or, could it be pure ignorance and fear of identifying a weakness of organizations not taking advantage of such stellar curriculums? It was interesting to note that out of the 15 fire service organizations polled that stated they did not have a chief officer developmental program; eight organizations stated that the only requirement needed was to take the promotional exam to become a chief officer, while seven organizations stated you needed “time in grade” before taking such a promotional exam.

The survey and authors agreed that the NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* was a good source of information and structure in developing a chief officer training program. Nine out of 10 fire service organizations that stated they did have a chief officer program used NFPA 1021 as the standard to develop their program. The officers of those respective organizations polled stated that NFPA 1021 assisted them in not only the development of their programs, but encouraged aspiring chief officers to effectively prepare by attending college level courses and earn advanced degrees thus, making the position of chief officer more palatable and professional.

The information that was gathered during the telephone survey, particularly questions one and two, will be able to assist the FLFD in developing a chief officer training program by using NFPA 1021 as the standard to develop professional fire officers. In addition to using this standard, many fire service organizations are sending their members to the National Fire Academy for the *Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP)*. The FLFD can instruct their respective chief officers and aspiring chief officers to attend this program, so that they can learn how to transform the fire and emergency service organization from being reactive to proactive

and assist them on developing their leadership skills. This program will also enhance their executive – level knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary to lead the department through various transformations.

The survey results coincided with the authors in regard to the importance of incorporating a chief officer/management development program. The implementation of a successful program will prepare, train, and utilize personnel while maintaining an adequate pool of efficient managers to remain competitive for years to come (Cafarella, 1994; Cascio, 1998; DeSimone and Harris, 1998; Sargent, 2002; Wendt, 1999).

There were no disagreements as to the benefits that are derived from the implementation of a chief officer/management development program. The surveys and authors concurred that managers, supervisors, and aspiring personnel should understand and be provided with the lay of the land regarding environmental opportunities and threats faced by their fire department as well as goals, objectives, operational procedures, and the mission statement. Fleming (2002) stated, “Fire departments need people with the qualifications and interest in serving as chief officers” (¶ 37). Fleming (2002) further stated, “Becoming a successful chief officer requires thorough preparation, including education and experience” (¶ 38). Fire service organizations need aspiring chief officers and respective chief officers to demonstrate their commitment to continuous education and who, by their nature; will engage in furthering their knowledge and skills throughout their fire service careers (Fleming, 2002).

The literature review revealed that there was a great benefit in incorporating a uniformed officer development program that provided a qualified pool of candidates for future promotions to chief officer. All the authors agreed that the incorporation of a structured managerial development program coupled with formal mentoring often times made the transition from line-

supervisor to manager (chief officer) an easy venture (Cascio, 1998; Fleming, 2002; Sargent, 2002).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The problem, as previously stated, was that the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department did not prepare company level officers to assume the position of chief officer. The purpose of this applied research project was to examine what public fire service and private sector organizations did to prepare their company officers, or first-level supervisors, to become chief officers or mid-to-upper level managers.

The research presented in this study has demonstrated the need for the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department to develop a chief officer development training program for newly promoted chief officers and those aspiring to become chief officers. In addition to just training newly promoted, and aspiring chief officers, this program can educate respective chief officers on the latest technologies or current trends in human resource management, ethics and labor relations. Based on the literature review, survey, and the analysis of the results of this applied research project, the following recommendations have been designed to assist with the preparation and development of a comprehensive and effective chief officer training program for the City of Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue Department:

1. Obtain support from the fire chief, senior chief staff officers and the Human Resources Department for the development of a chief officer training program for newly promoted chief officers and personnel aspiring to become chief officers.
2. Develop a “Chief Officer Training Program Development Committee” responsible for the design, development, and implementation of the program.

3. Identify and select key Fire-Rescue Department and Human Resource Division personnel to serve on the “Chief Officer Training Program Development Committee.”
4. Utilize NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*, as a guiding document for the development of the curriculum for the chief officer training program.
5. The Chief Officer Training Program Development Committee will evaluate the job description levels of a chief officer in the City of Fort Lauderdale. Items will be compared with the performance requirements outlined of Fire Officer II, III and IV in NFPA 1021. Once reviewed, the committee will develop curriculum to the appropriate level based on the aforementioned. After the comparisons are effectively identified, specific content, and lessons plans will be developed.
6. Identify and obtain the appropriately qualified instructors who are recognized as experts in their field to teach students, and seek nationally recognized speakers to address some of the classes.
7. After completion of the curriculum and delivery of the chief officer training program, execute an evaluation component to assure the continuing effectiveness and appropriateness of the training curriculum.

It is recommended that the implementation of these recommendations begin immediately or within the next six months. Unfortunately, due to severe fiscal budgetary cuts to all departments in the City of Fort Lauderdale, this training program may not come to fruition in the ideal time frame.

“Whatever the source of the education and training, each fire and rescue organization has an obligation to the community to provide high-quality leadership. Grooming those within the department to manage effectively not only addresses that obligation at the particular time but

also provides an investment in future leadership” (Compton & Granito; 2002, p. 276). The chief officer position is an important and vital position in a fire rescue organization. A comprehensive and well-planned chief officer training program will perhaps guarantee that aspiring or newly promoted chief officers, and ultimately their fire service organization meet the many challenges and opportunities that awaits them.

The success of the chief officer training program in the FLFD is contingent upon the fire chief supporting and encouraging post developmental training outside of the organization. The most popular of those training programs recommended for cutting edge managerial training would be for those current chief officers and those aspiring to be chief officers to enroll, qualify, participate, and complete the *Executive Fire Officer Program* at the National Fire Academy.

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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF MUNICIPALITIES SURVEYED

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT NUMBER
Alexandria, Virginia Fire Department	(703) 838 – 4620
Atlanta, Georgia Fire Department	(404) 853 –7000
Austin, Texas Fire Department	(512) 974- 0300
Boise, Idaho Fire Department	(208) 378- 8517
Boston, Massachusetts Fire Department	(617) 343 – 3640
Dallas, Texas Fire Department	(214) 670- 0220
Hyattsville, Maryland Fire Department	(301) 927 – 5770
Indianapolis, Indiana Fire Department	(317) 327 – 6074
Las Vegas, Nevada Fire-Rescue Department	(702) 455 – 7700
Los Angeles City, California Fire Department	(213) 485 – 6254
Memphis, Tennessee Fire Department	(901) 354 – 6700
Mesa, Arizona Fire-Rescue Department	(480) 644 – 4694
Miami, City of, Florida Fire-Rescue Department	(305) 446- 0722
Minneapolis, Minnesota Fire Department	(612) 673 – 2890
Newark, New Jersey Fire Department	(973) 733 – 6276
New Brunswick, New Jersey Fire Department	(732) 745 – 5169
New Orleans, Louisiana Fire Department	(504) 565 – 7818
New York, Fire Department, City of	(212) 860 – 9220
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Fire Department	(405) 297 – 3314
Orlando, Florida Fire-Rescue Department	(407) 246 – 2786

<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>CONTACT NUMBER</b>
Peoria, Arizona Fire Department	(623) 773 – 7903
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Fire Department	(215) 685 – 8961
Riverside, California Fire Department	(909) 826 – 5332
Shreveport, Louisiana Fire Department	(318) 673 – 6766
Tampa, Florida Fire Department	(813) 242 - 5410

**APPENDIX B**

**TELEPHONE SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**Company Officer to Chief Officer Preparation  
Applied Research Project  
External Telephone Survey**

**Department Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone Number:** (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What is the population served by your fire service organization?**

- A. Less than 100,000** \_\_\_\_\_
- B. 100,000 to 150,000** \_\_\_\_\_
- C. 150,001 to 200, 000** \_\_\_\_\_
- D. 200,001 to 500, 000** \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Greater than 500,000** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is the staffing size of your fire service organization?**

- A. Less than 200** \_\_\_\_\_
- B. 200 to 500** \_\_\_\_\_
- C. 501 to 1000** \_\_\_\_\_
- D.1001 to 2000** \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Greater than 2000** \_\_\_\_\_

3. What type of organization are you?

A. Career/Paid \_\_\_\_\_

B. Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_

C. Combination \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many Chief Officers does your organization have?

A. Less than 10 \_\_\_\_\_

B. 10 to 50 \_\_\_\_\_

C. 51 to 100 \_\_\_\_\_

D. More than 100 \_\_\_\_\_

5. The organization rank classification of the respondent:

A. Senior Level Chief Officer \_\_\_\_\_

B. Division Chief \_\_\_\_\_

C. Battalion/Bureau Chief \_\_\_\_\_

D. Training Officer \_\_\_\_\_

E. Human Resource Officer \_\_\_\_\_

6. Does your department have a chief officer development program?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

*If the answer is "yes," what criteria do you use?*

A. NFPA 1021 \_\_\_\_\_

B. Local Policies \_\_\_\_\_

C. Various Management Tools \_\_\_\_\_

D. Other \_\_\_\_\_

*If the answer is "no," do you recommend off site training?*

**A. National Fire Academy (EFOP)** \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Community College Classes** \_\_\_\_\_

**C. 4 - Year Degree (University)** \_\_\_\_\_

**D. State Fire Academy** \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Do you combine NFPA 1021 Officer Development models with non-fire manager training courses? If so, what non-fire management tools do you use?**

**A. Budget Training/Preparation** \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Human Resource Management** \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Labor Relations** \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Administrative Laws/Ethics** \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Disciplinary Practices** \_\_\_\_\_

**F. Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What is the overall feedback of the program?**

**A. Excellent** \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Good** \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Poor** \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Pilot Program, still accruing information** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your time.**

## APPENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHICS AND PERSONNEL RANK SURVEYED

#### 1. Population Served by Responding Organizations:

Population	Organization Represented
Less than 100,000	0
100,000 to 150,000	2
150,001 to 200,000	1
200,001 to 500,000	12
Greater than 500,000	10

#### 2. Staffing Size of the Organization Represented:

Fire Department Staffing Level	Organizations Represented
Less than 200	2
200 to 500	6
501 to 1,000	10
1,001 to 2,000	4
Greater than 2,000	3

**3. The Organizational Rank Classification of the Personnel Surveyed:**

<b>Department Rank/Title</b>	<b>Number Represented</b>
Senior Level Chief Officer	6
Division Chief	1
Battalion/Bureau Chief	5
Training Officer	11
Human Resource Officer	2