You’re the New Chief; Now What?

BY Dennis L. Rubin

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After Years of Preparation that Included extensive training, education, and experience, you have been selected as your community’s fire department chief. The application process, consultant’s written assignments, personal interviews, jockeying for positioning, due-diligence background investigations, and political wrangling are over, and the process is completed. You have been selected to be the next person to wear all five speaking trumpets on your collar insignias. Tremendous congratulations are in order for your latest accomplishment! Now it is a time to celebrate your elevation to the corner office and finally having been selected to serve as the top firefighter in your department. With all of that behind you, it would seem as if it would be time to rest and enjoy what you have worked so hard to acquire. Right?

As the dust settles and you move into that office you have been sizing up for the past 25 years, you still have a lot of work left to do. What should you do first? How can you prioritize the steps you will take to leave your mark on this agency? Is there a checklist or some kind of a guide for a new chief?

Having been in the “new chief” role a few times, it felt as if I were the “good ole” family dog that always chased the cars down the driveway. Well, today is the day that Fido catches the Oldsmobile and wonders, “What do I do now?” That can be a sinking feeling if the new boss doesn’t have a resource to turn to or a mentor to talk with about the transition into this new position.

AFTER GRABBING THE BRASS RING...

My early days as the chief were a little scary and intimidating. There was so much to get accomplished, and everyone was looking to me to lead the department toward my vision. There was not a plan, a template, a checklist, or any other guidance available to reference. Flashing back, it seems like only yesterday that I received a telephone call from the mayor’s executive assistant asking me to send over a copy of the department’s “100-Day Plan.” All I could come up with was, “What 100-Day Plan?” I am glad that I had just started my “honeymoon period” with the mayor because no one told me that she expected a detailed plan for my first 100 days in office.

One of the mayor’s senior advisors came over to fire headquarters and gave me direction and instruction on what to do. Further, he provided copies of some other departments’ 100-day plans. After I got through that process and began learning the mayor’s system, the fire-rescue executive team had to develop a “Turn-Around Plan” that would cover a one-year period. The mayor ran for office on a platform of reforming city government. Each department head had to develop and submit a detailed plan as to how the department would be turned around to deliver services in a more efficient and effective manner. This was an excellent opportunity to research and build a detailed list of tasks that would have to be completed for our department to be turned around and run more efficiently. Over the past decade or so, I have made this one-year action plan more comprehensive. I will now share that plan with you.

This information will be most useful for members who might be asking, “What do I do now?” It is also a good benchmark for comparing an already developed first-year plan of action to see if everything is included. This article looks at the steps I implemented to guide the department for the first year. By the time the first year has passed, the expectation is that the chief would have developed a Five-Year Comprehensive Strategic Plan to keep the agency focused on what is important and set the direction for the future. My advice may not be perfect, but it has been reasonably effec-
NEW CHIEF

Checklist for the New Chief

General Items
• Learn as much as you can about your boss’s general expectations and policies.
• Determine the standards for the department’s performance.

Budget Issues
• Conduct a budget review or an internal audit to determine the status of several mission-critical items:
  1. Operating budget status. Hold a review once a month at the minimum.
  2. Payroll. Other budget items should be audited on a regular or recurring basis.
  3. Leave and attendance records.
  4. Overtime and overtime controls.
  5. Fixed asset (capital items) inventory.
  6. Hire and promote to fill all funded vacancies.
• Ensure that the budget preparation for the upcoming fiscal year is on track and up to date.

Legal Mandates—verify the following:
• The written respiratory protection policy is compliant.
• Two-in/two-out requirements are being met.
• SCBA regulator and cylinder testing and certification policies are up to date.
• Compressed breathing air testing and certification policy is current.
• Annual face piece and particulate filter mask fit test is done.
• Compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) has been adopted and is used.
• Annual aerial ladder testing and certification are done.
• Annual ground ladder testing and certification are done.
• HIPAA Laws are complied with.
• Bloodborne pathogens protection policy is in place.
• Bloodborne pathogens vaccinations are offered to all career and volunteer first responder employees.
• Bloodborne pathogens personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided to all career and volunteer first responder employees.
• Bloodborne pathogens training occurs.

Communications—consider implementing the following:
• Weekly meetings with executive staff.
• Monthly meetings with senior staff.
• Daily operations division conference call.
• Weekly support services conference call.
• Regular “all-hands” meetings.
• Regular fire station visits by the chief.
• Monthly video program with the chief.
• Regular civic presentation for the community.
• Regular newsletter.

Policies, Procedures, and Protocols—verify the following:
• A comprehensive review of all is conducted.
• Signatures are updated.
• Add new policies as needed.
• Initial policy training has taken place.
• Ongoing training is provided.
• All policies are effectively enforced.

Other Surveillance Programs—verify the following:
• Annual hose testing.
• Annual pump service testing.
• Semiannual hydrant flushing testing.
• Semiannual PPE inspection and cleaning.
• Annual third-party PPE inspection and certification.
• Hazard zone accountability system.
• Fire station smoke detector status.
• Fire station carbon monoxide detector status.
• Annual third-party fire sprinkler system testing.
• Annual third-party kitchen hood system testing.
• Annual fire station fire inspection and resolution.
• Annual fire station “greening” audits.
• Ongoing fire station maintenance and repairs.
• General cleanliness audits.

Departmental Committees—establish or reconstitute the following:
• Emergency medical.
• Customer and community services.
• Community preparedness and Citizens Emergency Response Teams.
• Recruitment and selection.
• Technology.
• Apparatus specification and procurement.
• Hazard zone safety and accident/risk prevention.
• Member welfare and morale.

Comprehensive training program—verify the following:
• EMS training.
• Fire training.
• Hazardous materials training.
• Rescue training.
• Special operations training.
• Administration and executive training.

Support programs—verify the following:
• Comprehensive officer development program.
• Career ladder handbook.
• Promotional systems revisions.
• Recruit selection process revisions.
• Develop and maintain hiring list.
• Develop and maintain promotional lists.

Accreditation and Accountability Programs—verify the following:
• Review ISO Officer Class.
• Emergency medical and ambulance license.
• Department accreditation status.
• Quarterly performance status.
• Alarms for service reporting.
• Fire loss.
• Various EMS efficiency reporting (i.e., cardiac survival).
• Response time reporting.
• Building inspections status.
• Overtime and budget status.
• Apparatus downtime status.
• Apparatus preventive maintenance status.

Strategic Five-Year Planning—start this process:
• SWOT analysis.
• Part 1 – Customer and Community Services.
• Part 2 – Member Services.
• Part 3 – Apparatus and Equipment.
• Part 4 – Facilities.
• Part 5 – Technology.
• Part 6 – Systemic Conservation.

Personal Goals and Objectives
• Discuss expectations of the department.
• Obtain state fire chief and firefighter certification.
• Renew all of your certifications.
• Update professional memberships.
• Consider joining local civic club.
• Meet with all other department heads.
• Meet with all mutual-aid departments.
• Meet with union leadership.
• Visit and tour all fire stations.
• Visit and tour all support facilities.

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DEVELOPING YOUR TRANSITION PLAN

Consider developing a one-year written transition plan. Design the transition plan so that it clearly establishes the priorities, direction, and vision for the fire department. Open the plan with an acknowledgment about the capabilities, the past efforts, and the significant accomplishments of the department. In the opening statement, respectfully acknowledge the department’s history while preparing the agency to move forward in a new direction. Explain that the members of the department will have the opportunity to offer input and will be empowered to help develop the overall long-term (to cover a five-year period) plan as time and resources allow. State that the first priority of the organization will be to continue to respond to the needs of your community’s citizens and visitors and to deliver the best public safety services attainable.

A new chief has only one chance to make a good first impression. The opening statement along with the transition plan will be the basis for a press release that informs of the department’s mission, vision, and direction. It will also help people to understand more about you, the new chief. Finally, the plan can also be the source of a recorded message (audio or video) for department members. Everyone inside and outside your department in your community will be looking for signs and signals that will indicate what changes will occur under the new leader. I have found it better to make my message and intentions clear from the beginning. Do not let the rumor mill control the department’s direction and vision. A widely distributed transition plan will fill the informational gap and help to keep misinformation to a minimum.

GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

The first priority—after the mandatory goal to continue to answer alarms and other related calls for help—is to learn as much about your boss and the direction of the “parent organization” as possible. There is no sense in developing a plan that the municipality or other final authority will not support.

Next, thoroughly review the status of the current budget to ensure that the department is operating within its allotted resources. Make any budgetary adjustments needed to align the balance of the department’s spending plan with the remaining line item budget reserves. This review will ensure that the department has completed all of the required budgeting preparation steps for the upcoming budget cycle as directed by the Finance Department as well.

Next, the budget will have a tremendous amount of control over where you are going and how fast you can get there. Conduct an audit review of all budgetary items including the payroll. Schedule an audit at least every six months. Consider conducting an audit on members’ leave and attendance records. While you are at it, audit the overtime usage and review the overtime controls in place to manage the overtime expenditures. Hire new members, and promote folks to fill funded vacancies at all levels.

With this “fresh” new start for the department, it would be appropriate to conduct a fixed assets (capital) inventory audit. It just makes good sense to account for everything you are going to be responsible for at the beginning of your watch, making sure that it exists and is in good order. At one department, the fixed asset inventory identified three abandoned fire department staff cars. The cars had been parked in a city parking garage and were forgotten by the department for a few years. Sending these vehicles to surplus made sense and would be required by any good “Homeland Security” policy. The question is, would these three worn-out sedans still be garage bound if we had not conducted a fixed assets inventory? The “lost vehicles” could have been embarrassing for the city, the city manager, and me (the chief).

Taking on the difficult task of learning what the “big picture” is relating to your “parent” organization’s vision and direction will go a long way to establish your credibility with the front office (mayor, city manager, and commissioners). Having a good understanding of the financial health of the agency on the front end of your tenure is critical for your success. When starting the accountability process, there should be a good deal of help available from such people as internal auditors, finance department staff, and the internal inspector’s office and fire administration staff. If you are told that conducting a thorough audit is not necessary, think twice about taking this new position. At a minimum, I would document this denial in detail (sounds like big trouble may be around the next bend) to protect your interest.

VERIFY COMPLIANCE AND COMPLETENESS

Verify that the department meets all of its legal mandates. Make sure the compliance records are being securely kept and that the records are in good order. Most likely, the local government must keep records for a required length of time. Find this information out early, and ensure that the fire department is in compliance with the city’s record storage policy.

Respiratory Protection Program

This is one of the first operational items you should confirm and verify. The program requirements are found in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.134/1910.156 and can be found on the Web or in the OSHA Handbook. Many details within this law will have a direct impact on your operation. First, find out who in your department is responsible for developing and implementing this program. Next, review every element of the program to make sure that it is being operated correctly, including documentation. In conjunction with respiratory protection, all self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) cylinders must be hydrostatically tested within the proper time frames according to the construction material used to construct the cylinders.

Another element in the Respiratory Protection Program is the two-in/two-out requirement. Review the written policy that describes how your department implemented the “Rescue the Rescuer” standard. Ensure that it contains all of the mandated components described by the Code of Federal
NEW CHIEF

Regulations. Review the training program for the "two-in/two-out" policy. I strongly recommend that you attend this training session and see firsthand that this policy and the associated training (initial and ongoing) have been developed and implemented. By attending this training, you will be following two of the significant Rube's Rules for Leadership: Leading by Example and Leading from the Front.4

This same Code of Federal Regulations and National Fire Protection Association 1500, Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, describe the SCBA testing and certification requirements, breathing air compressor maintenance and testing, as well as SCBA breathing regulator maintenance requirements. The air a firefighter uses in an environment described as immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH) is regulated.

The new chief (all chiefs for that matter) must make sure that the SCBA system is up to specification and certified as required by 29 CFR 1910.134/156. For instance, all breathing air must reach a minimum classification of Grade D. A certificate (suitable for framing or internal distribution) accompanies the tested breathing air samples that meet Grade D or better. I made it a practice to post all of the various required certificates, annual test results, and maintenance work for all regulated items on the fire department's Web site. The internal aspect (members-only portion) of the Web site was used for this purpose so that members could readily access this critical job safety-related information.

Presidential Directives

Review the status of your department's compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) mandated in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5. The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Web site provides guidance that will help your agency reach NIMS compliance. The penalty for failing to comply with the NIMS is disqualification for consideration under all federal grants. For some departments, the grant process can add up to a significant amount of funding. Another reason to comply is to avoid embarrassment and confusion if the department is called out on mutual aid or operates with another outfit that is "NIMS fluent."

Homeland Security Presidential Order 12, which covers personal identification cards for first responders, will also impact your department. This order, of course, affects the required identification card system first response agencies use to enter federal property. Since every community has federal buildings and this order is an effective way to identify first responders, it helps to protect our homeland. Make sure that your department is in compliance with both of these Presidential Orders; they have a direct impact on the first responder community.

More Testing and Certifications

Every aerial ladder and ground (portable) ladder should be tested annually and certified by an independent third party licensed to perform this service. The third-party outfit is to inspect aerial ladder trucks from bumper to bumper on an annual basis. Because ladders of all types are so closely tied in with life safety and OSHA has been known to fine departments that have failed to test and certify their ladders, I placed this process on the mandatory list. It could be debated that this testing is not a requirement but only a recommendation for departments that do not use their ladders. I hope that this sentence sounds as ridiculous to read as it was to write.

Approach this requirement as if all aerial and ground ladders are to be tested in a one-month time frame (if possible). Allow a window of two or three months (before the certification is due) to make needed repairs to aerial ladder trucks and ground ladders. When the vehicles or portable ladders are tested, the agency conducting the certification inspection will provide a list of needed repairs that the department must complete before certification can be obtained. The repairs are listed according to their significance for affecting the functionality of the vehicle or ladder. The worst of the deficiencies will require that the vehicle or ladder be placed out of service immediately, since it is in imminent danger of failing and will likely cause injury. The least deficiency is described as minor repairs or adjustments; the vehicle or ladder can remain in use. However, these repairs must be made before the outside agency can grant annual certification.

Remember to include the reserve apparatus in the testing. This will cause some scheduling issues that could conflict with the day-to-day operations. It is recommended that when the annual testing is conducted, the vehicle being inspected be placed out of service for response work and replaced with a vehicle from the reserve fleet for the time required.

EMS Requirements

Ensure that your agency is in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA Law). Several components of your emergency medical services (EMS) delivery system will have to be reviewed and verified before compliance is obtained. A great starting point is to review the security process used for the patient care reports (PCRs), electronic or paper. The process has to ensure that the confidential information the department is gathering on a patient is secured at all times and that the PCR information is being properly handled. Only the actual prehospital caregivers have access to all of the patient care information. Of course, when the patient arrives at the definitive care location, usually a receiving hospital, the medical staff is cleared to receive a briefing as well as all of the associated reports, charts, or pictures. The medical director has access for quality control purposes, and the billing agents have access to some of the information relating to patient care and treatment. If the PCRs are left out in the open (not secured) for anyone to access or if the ePRC computers can be accessed by anyone outside of the above-mentioned few, it is a serious problem and needs to be corrected as soon as possible. There should be a written policy that describes how the patient's rights (HIPAA) will be protected at all times, and members should be given initial and ongoing training in this required process.

A bloodborne pathogens program is another mandated EMS program that needs to be validated from the perspective
that a comprehensive program exists and is being managed properly. All employees who may deliver patient care must be trained in this policy. Appropriate equipment must be purchased and available to the employees (includes career and volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians) who may deliver patient care. The appropriate sizes of body substance isolation equipment must be available, and members must be trained in its use.

Appropriate vaccinations have to be offered (at the department’s expense) for all employees who may provide patient care. Refer to the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Requirement for details. This area of medicine is rapidly changing, so continually research it so your information is current. Review the department’s comprehensive infection control program for accuracy and completeness. Local hospitals can help the department to develop and implement this plan if one does not exist.

**Departmental Communications**

There are no mandates in this next section of the transition plan. However, communications is one area that can make or break a new chief (and an old chief for that matter). Communications will be a determining factor in how the department performs in and out of quarters. This section focuses on the administrative side of the communications process. For operational communications, use the information found in the NIMS guidance to ensure that the department is able to perform properly at responses.

I have had good luck with setting up recurring meetings and events within the first 30 days of my tenure. I preferred a weekly fire department executive team staff meeting held the day after the city department head meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to disseminate and share information with the fire department’s executive team members. I found that I would get “homework” assignments at the weekly department head meeting. The executive staff would be a great help in providing the information or reports I was asked to submit to the mayor. Also, good news (i.e., pay raises) and bad news (i.e., mid-year budget cuts) were released at the city staff meetings. I wanted the executive team to have access to it first to discuss and consider the impact on the department.

We held a monthly general fire department meeting attended by a much broader selection of staff members that included labor and association representatives. General staff meeting minutes were recorded and distributed to the entire department to keep all members informed in a timely fashion.

I established a daily morning conference call just after shift change. I asked the senior operations chief officer (or the replacement for the day) to conduct this phone teleconference. This telephone meeting should be the focal point to coordinate all departmental activities for that shift and review anything that will be out of the ordinary for the day (peaceful demonstration gathering, for example). The other staff chief officers, on-duty battalion chiefs, the station captains, and I would participate in the phone meeting. Most of the fire stations in the system would “secure” the telephone bridge call-in phone number and quietly (mute their line) listen in to the call. I was delighted to learn that this was happening. Nothing confidential or secure was discussed over an insecure telephone line. When the firehouses were listening in, the members were better informed and felt like a part of the management team. This action generated more cooperation by the troops and less “cop” work (enforcing discipline policies) for the officers.

I instituted a monthly video magazine called “The Fire Department’s Rumor Control Program” during my first year. If your agency has an in-house video production and distribution capability, the project would be of no or very little additional cost to the department.

Fire departments may consist of three or four distinct shifts or perhaps seven duty crews for volunteer members. Many organizations have multiple fire station locations. There could be some support facilities in the system (i.e., training center or maintenance shop), so effective communication becomes more difficult with the increased size. The video program can be set up so it can be viewed on demand and have an accountability process built in so that everyone is getting the same information in a timely fashion. The monthly video magazine will reduce the communications void and keep all hands informed and engaged.

The expressed goal of this monthly video magazine is to provide another line of communications to members of the fire department and to kill the rumor mill “one piece of gossip at a time.”

**Departmental Policies, Procedures, and Protocols**

Conduct a comprehensive review of all policies, procedures, and protocols to ensure accuracy and completeness. The initial review process was divided into two steps to get it up and running effectively. I generally hired a college intern (from Oklahoma State University or the University of Maryland) to get this process underway. I determined the look and format for the policies. Some of the departments in which I have worked had a policy on how to write policies, which was included in the approval process and format and was distributed. I like that and think that it should be standard operating guideline/procedure (SOG/SOP) No. 1. The college intern gets the existing policies in the correct format. Once the policies have been formatted and updated to the degree that the intern can complete them, it is time for the SOG/SOP Committee to review them.

A chief officer should head the SOG/SOP Committee. The members, about seven, should be a diverse group. The college intern becomes the support person for the SOG/SOP Committee.

The policies should undergo a “legal sufficiency” review before they are approved, signed, and distributed to the members. Having an attorney on the committee may expedite the review process.

Another component of a comprehensive policy and procedure review is to determine if the department is providing adequate and effective training. The training aspect is as important as the policies themselves (some would argue more; either way, all types of training for fire and rescue departments are mission critical). The SOG training strategy must include initial SOG training for new members and ongoing, recurring training for department veterans. Keep detailed records of this
and all training completed. Most systems incorporate the SOGs into the promotional process. If your department can do this, do it. It adds value and validates the importance of the SOGs. Let's face it: We should all know the SOGs since they indicate how we operate.

The last component of a comprehensive SOG system is to ensure that all policies and procedures are enforced. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the process of using an SOG system. Since everyone has his own philosophy on discipline, I am not going into great detail here. I would say use the “Hot Stove Rules,” and you should be fine.

MORE OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS

There are several other annual surveillance-testing programs that should be verified (or implemented if need be) early in your watch. Because these programs require so much detail and much “how to” information is readily available on these topics, these tests are listed without commentary:

a. Annual fire hose testing.
b. Annual fire pump service testing.
c. Semiannual fire hydrant flush testing.
d. Semiannual personal protective equipment inspection and cleaning.
e. Annual third-party personal protective equipment certification.
f. Hazard zone personnel accountability system.

COMMITTEE WORK

Establish or, if one is present and operational, reconstitute your fire department's committee process. Identify the members of each committee, and confirm the mission and goals. I suggest you attend the first couple of committee meetings. Once the committee process is rolling along, move into more of the ex-officio role. I required a report from each committee meeting. This document keeps the executive staff informed of the progress. The regular reporting process helped to keep the committee on track. As part of the reporting process, each committee chair identified barriers to reaching success and described the resources needed. This type of reporting process keeps the executive staff members engaged and aware of committee work effort at the appropriate levels (be careful not to micromanage the committee process). Each committee should be as diverse as possible but not overwhelmed with too many members, which will most likely impede progress.

Focus on good relations with the labor organization. The labor force will be a critical element of your success. Think about it. The labor force (firefighters) is the group that works directly for the customer who calls 911, and we all know that (uniform and civilian) members are the keys to the fire department's success. The labor force and management would be in lockstep on about 90 percent of the issues. Both groups should want the best for the customer and to properly protect, equip, and train the members to do the work of the government. So, positive relations with labor should be a plus for everyone. If there is mutual respect, the two sides can agree to disagree on the 10 percent of issues without losing sight of keeping an open and honest dialogue. Labor should have a seat, a voice, and a vote on every committee the department sanctions.

The standing fire department committees should include but not be limited to the following:

- EMS.
- Customer and Community Services.
- Community Preparedness and CERT.
- Community Relations.
- Recruitment and Selection.
- Training, Education, and Career Development.
- Technology.
- Apparatus and Equipment Procurement.
- Hazard Zone Safety and Accident Prevention.
- Member Welfare and Morale.
- Facilities and Grounds.

FACILITIES

An executive member of the department should conduct annual fire station and facilities inspections, which should include hands-on testing, verification, or validation of the following items:

- Smoke detector status (battery replacement).
- Carbon dioxide detector status (battery replacement).
- Independent third-party fire sprinkler testing and certification.
- Independent third-party hood system testing and certification.
- Annual fire alarm system testing.
- Annual fire inspection and violation resolution.
- Energy audit (to include fire station "greening").
- Facilities general maintenance and repair.
- General cleanliness.

The various levels of department managers should participate in the annual fire station and facilities inspection process: unit commander (lieutenant), company commander (captain), battalion commander, and shift commander. This process is used to improve every aspect of the department's real property. Annual inspections cannot be used as a means to punish personnel and deliver discipline. If inspections are conducted correctly, the annual inspection should be viewed as a chance to shine for the higher-ranking bosses, not as a witch hunt. The last thing a new chief needs is to have the troops engage in the “avoid the punisher” tactic because the chief makes the annual inspection process painful for the members. Make the annual inspection a positive experience for all; focus on improving the living conditions for the members assigned to the station.

Include an energy audit program to get a jump-start on the fire station “greening” program. This part of the transition plan may not seem important or exciting for the new chief. However, this is a detail that should not go unaddressed for too long. The way I presented the “greening” process to the department was that either the executive team could manage it or external forces would direct us to make the changes to conserve and recycle the city’s resources. I always choose to be in charge of our destiny rather than to allow someone from the outside to direct our resources and processes.
NEW CHIEF

The energy audit should include an outside technical specialist to provide advice and assistance. Consider asking the utility companies to send representatives to be a part of the annual fire station inspection process. One area that most fire departments can greatly improve on with very little cost or effort is the better use and conservation of resources. In general, more attention must be paid to recycling the materials that the neighborhood is required to sort, separate, and place in the proper containers for collection.

KEEP YOUR MEMBERS FIRST

Training/education is the cornerstone of every efficient and effective fire-rescue department. Each member must be properly prepared to do the tasks they are assigned. Training/education must prepare them to take on more responsibility before they pin on the new collar brass or act in higher, more-demanding positions. As a benchmark, no one would knowingly let a member perform emergency medical skills for which they are not trained and certified. Why should we risk letting members perform other emergency response duties for which they are not qualified?

This listing may seem like instructions on how to build a response agency from the ground up, but the truth is that the function of training is too important to leave to chance. You must find time within your first year to see how effective the entire training process is for the department. The new chief must ensure that the training programs have been developed and implemented in a comprehensive way that ensures that every member knows their job responsibilities. The list of topical areas that need to be validated are the following:

- EMS training.
- Fire training of all types.
- Hazardous materials training to the level identified by policy.
- Rescue training to the level identified by policy.
- Special operations training to the level identified by policy.
- Other support training topics such as governmental orientation, workplace violence prevention and harassment prevention training.

Your agency needs to offer other member development programs as well. They include other topics such as the following:

- New member recruitment and selection process.
- Career ladder handbook.
- Comprehensive officer development program.
- Promotional system process.
- Developing and maintaining initial hiring and promotional roster.

ACCOUNTABILITY, REPORTING, AND ACCREDITATION

Verify that an accountability reporting system exists in your agency. If not, establish one. Several software systems are available on the market.

The plan is to have a real-time tracking dashboard that closely follows the progress and accomplishments of the department. This type of tracking software system is generally accessible to the general public, so there is no mystery about how the fire department spends the hard-earned taxpayer dollars. Most places where I have worked conducted a quarterly performance status report. Every three months, we were assigned a time slot to review our progress and brag about our accomplishments. Of course, that would mean pointing out any strategic targets that may have been missed as well. Among the many items tracked and presented during the quarterly reviews were the following:

- Budget performance.
- Alarms for service (all types).
- Turnout (chute) times to emergency events.
- Response times to emergency events.
- Building inspections completed.
- Fires investigated.
- Overtime consumption.
- Apparatus preventive maintenance performed.
- Hiring data.
- Promotional data.
- Strategic plan goals.

The idea is that if a process or procedure could be measured in some form or fashion, it should be measured, reviewed, and discussed at the quarterly performance review. Perhaps it is time for a quality improvement quote: “If the process or product can be measured, it can be improved. If it is not being measured, it simply does not matter to the success of the organization.” If it is important, measure it and work on improving it.

The agency’s accreditation status is another aspect of accountability. It involves governmental policy making at the highest levels (this is likely your boss or your boss’s boss decision). For instance, does your jurisdiction want the department to strive to reach Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 1 status? As you likely know, this accreditation will greatly reduce the fire insurance premiums for the businesses and homeowners in your community. However, it will cost the community to obtain an improved ISO Class rating. As a new chief, you will have to review and clearly understand the following:

- Classification status from ISO Class 1 to ISO Class 10 City.
- International accreditation for the department.
- Emergency medical certificates and licenses.
- Any other licenses that your city, county, or state requires.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT YOUR FIRST YEAR

All eyes will be on you to see what, when, and how you implement programs and solve problems for the department. This article should give you the information you need to have a positive impact on department morale while learning the goals and direction of the government.

Although this agenda may seem daunting at first glance, consider that some or all of these items are probably in place and functioning well. If they are not, don’t take these challenges on alone. There is help within your agency, your government, and the fire-rescue service. Just ask. The International Association of Fire Chiefs has a collection of SOGs you can obtain and retool to meet your agency’s needs. There are dozens of Web sites that offer the information you will need.
NEW CHIEF

to get you through your first year. Often, there are presentations at all levels designed to support the new chief. Finally, don’t forget the network you have built over the years of your career. Many great people will be willing to lend a new chief a hand.

ENDNOTES

1. Steel cylinders should be tested every five years; they have an indefinite service life until they fail a hydro test. Aluminum cylinders (not including hoop-wrapped) should be tested every five years; they have an indefinite service life until they fail a hydro test. Hoop-wrapped cylinders should be tested every three years; they have a 15-year service life. Fully wrapped Kevlar® cylinders should be tested every three years; they have a 15-year service life. Fully wrapped carbon fiber cylinders should be tested every five years; they have a 15-year service life.


3. Hot Stove Rule: (1) Have clearly written policies. (2) Properly train the members in these policies (initially and ongoing). (3) Be impartial. (4) The effect is immediate. (5) The punishment fits the crime. (6) When it’s over, it is over.

DENNIS L. RUBIN is the principal partner in the fire protection consulting firm D.L. Rubin & Associates. His experience in fire and rescue spans more than 35 years. He has served as a company officer; a command level officer; and chief in major cities including Dothan, Alabama; Norfolk, Virginia; and Atlanta, Georgia. In 1994, he served as the president of the State Fire Chiefs Association of Virginia. He held several positions with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, including a two-year term as the Health and Safety Committee chair. He was the host chief for the “Wingspread IV and V” conferences held in 1996 and 2006.

Notes
Continuing Education

You’re the New Chief; Now What?

COURSE EXAMINATION INFORMATION
To receive credit and your certificate of completion for participation in this educational activity, you must complete the program post examination and receive a score of 70% or better. You have the following options for completion.

Option One: Online Completion
Use this page to review the questions and mark your answers. Return to www.FireEngineeringUniversity.com and sign in. If you have not previously purchased the program, select it from the “Online Courses” listing and complete the online purchase process. Once purchased, the program will be added to your User History page where a Take Exam link will be provided. Click on the “Take Exam” link, complete all the program questions, and submit your answers. An immediate grade report will be provided; on receiving a passing grade, your “Certificate of Completion” will be provided immediately for viewing and/or printing. Certificates may be viewed and/or printed anytime in the future by returning to the site and signing in.

Option Two: Traditional Completion
You may fax or mail your answers with payment to PennWell (see Traditional Completion Information on following page). All information requested must be provided to process the program for certification and credit. Be sure to complete ALL “Payment,” “Personal Certification Information,” “Answers,” and “Evaluation” forms. Your exam will be graded within 72 hours of receipt. On successful completion of the posttest (70% or higher), a “Certificate of Completion” will be mailed to the address provided.

COURSE EXAMINATION
1) What should a new chief consider when developing their one-year action plan?
   a. Develop a transition plan
   b. Forge a solid labor/management strategy
   c. Learn how to politicize the department’s accomplishments
   d. All of the above

2) Which of the following is a component of a transition plan?
   a. Priorities
   b. Direction
   c. Vision
   d. All of the above

3) When developing a transition plan, explain that the members of the department will have the opportunity to offer input
   a. True
   b. False

4) What component of the one-year plan will be the basis for a press release that informs of the department’s mission, vision and direction?
   a. Closing statement
   b. Executive summary
   c. Opening statement
   d. Introduction

5) What should not control the department’s direction and vision?
   a. The mayor
   b. Union
   c. Rumor mill
   d. Public input

6) After the mandatory goal to continue to answer alarms the first priority is to learn as much about your boss and the direction of city leaders?
   a. True
   b. False

7) The second priority is to review the status of current labor negotiations
   a. True
   b. False

8) The chief should schedule an audit at least every ____________
   a. Year
   b. Month
   c. Six months
   d. Week

9) When starting the accountability process, who would be helpful in assisting the chief?
   a. Internal auditors
   b. Finance department staff
   c. Fire administration staff
   d. All of the above

10) What is one of the first operational items the chief should confirm and verify?
    a. Apparatus is in working order
    b. Chief officers have attained incident command training
    c. Firefighters meet certification requirements
    d. A respiratory protection program

11) Which of the following is a fire chief’s concern with failing to comply with the National Incident Management System (NIMS)?
    a. Poor ICS practice
    b. Disqualification of grant funding
    c. Federal audit
    d. None of the above

12) What should be tested and certified annually by an independent third party?
    a. Nozzles
    b. NIMS
    c. Aerial and ground ladders
    d. Dispatch center

13) What should a fire chief’s department be in compliance with when delivering emergency medical services with regards to patient care reports?
    a. HIPAA
    b. NIMS
    c. OSHA
    d. NIOSH

14) What is a determining factor in how the department performs in and out of quarters?
    a. Communications
    b. Mission Statement
    c. Vision Statement
    d. Age of apparatus fleet

15) Who should head an SOG/SOP committee?
    a. Company Officer
    b. Mayor
    c. Chief officer
    d. Independent third party consultant

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You’re the New Chief; Now What?

16) Which of the following are other annual surveillance-testing programs that should be verified early in a fire chief’s watch?
   a. Hose testing
   b. Fire pump testing
   c. Hydrant flush testing
   d. All of the above

17) As part of a committee reporting process, each committee chair should identify barriers to reaching success and describe the resources needed
   a. True
   b. False

18) Who should conduct annual fire station and facilities inspections?
   a. Fire Chief
   b. Executive member
   c. Company officer
   d. Budget office

19) What is the cornerstone of every efficient and effective fire-rescue department?
   a. Administration
   b. Union
   c. Fire company
   d. Training/education

20) An agency’s accreditation status is another aspect of accountability as it involves governmental policy making at the highest levels
   a. True
   b. False

Notes
# Continuing Education

## You’re the New Chief; Now What?

### PROGRAM COMPLETION INFORMATION

If you wish to purchase and complete this activity traditionally (mail or fax) rather than Online, you must provide the information requested below. Please be sure to select your answers carefully and complete the evaluation information. To receive credit, you must receive a score of 70% or better.

Complete online at: www.FireEngineeringUniversity.com

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### PERSONAL CERTIFICATION INFORMATION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY OR TYPE)</th>
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<td>City/State Zip Code</td>
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</tbody>
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Daytime Telephone Number with Area Code:

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### TRADITIONAL COMPLETION INFORMATION:

Mail or fax completed answer sheet to

Fire Engineering University, Attn: Carroll Hull,

1421 S. Sheridan Road, Tulsa OK 74112

Fax: (918) 831-9804

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### PAYMENT & CREDIT INFORMATION

Examination Fee: $25.00 Credit Hours: 4

Should you have additional questions, please contact Pete Prochilo (973) 251-5053 (Mon-Fri 9:00 am-5:00 pm EST).

- I have enclosed a check or money order.
- I am using a credit card.

My Credit Card information is provided below.

- American Express
- Visa
- MC
- Discover

Please provide the following (please print clearly):

Exact Name on Credit Card

Credit Card # Expiration Date

Signature

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### ANSWER FORM

Please check the correct box for each question below.

1. A B C D 11. A B C D
3. A B C D 13. A B C D
5. A B C D 15. A B C D
7. A B C D 17. A B C D
8. A B C D 18. A B C D
10. A B C D

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### COURSE EVALUATION

Please evaluate this course by responding to the following statements, using a scale of Excellent = 5 to Poor = 1.

1. To what extent were the course objectives accomplished overall? 5 4 3 2 1
2. Please rate your personal mastery of the course objectives. 5 4 3 2 1
3. How would you rate the objectives and educational methods? 5 4 3 2 1
4. How do you rate the author's grasp of the topic? 5 4 3 2 1
5. Please rate the instructor's effectiveness. 5 4 3 2 1
6. Was the overall administration of the course effective? 5 4 3 2 1
7. Do you feel that the references were adequate? Yes No
8. Would you participate in a similar program on a different topic? Yes No
9. If any of the continuing education questions were unclear or ambiguous, please list them.

10. Was there any subject matter you found confusing? Please describe.

11. What additional continuing education topics would you like to see?

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### PLEASE PHOTOCOPY ANSWER SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS.

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**INSTRUCTIONS**

- Please check the correct box for each question below.
- All questions should have only one answer. Grading of this examination is done manually. Participants will receive confirmation of passing by receipt of a verification form.

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**RECORD KEEPING**

- Please keep your completed answer sheet for your records.
- If you have any questions, please contact Pete Prochilo at (973) 251-5053.

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- Please photocopy answer sheet for additional participants.
- All participants scoring at least 70% on the examination will receive a verification form verifying 4 CE credits.
- Participants are urged to contact their state or local authority for continuing education requirements.

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