



Preparing Tomorrow's Firefighter Candidates for a Career in Today's Fire Service

5 Fatal Mistakes Firefighter Candidates Make During the Oral Interview

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Being Late to Your Interview

If you don't know the saying, "If you're early you're on time, and you're on time if you're late," you better get to know it well. And, if you're actually late for your interview, you may not be let in. So, get there at least a couple of hours early to make up for any traffic issues, and so you can drive around the city and get the lay of the land, geography, and a general sense of how the city is laid out. This will help you when you are asked about the city or department.

Tardiness is not acceptable in the fire service and won't be tolerated. It shows lack of personal responsibility and lack of desire for the job.

If you're actually late, you better have a good excuse, like you stopped to help at a traffic accident, but that won't guarantee you an interview. If you arrive two or more hours early, you can still stop and help out at the T/A without being late to your interview. So, remember, if you're on time, you're late!

List below some attributes and target hazards you can look for as you drive around the city before your interview:

Lying to or Trying to BS the Interview Panel

Many times candidates don't realize or understand the significant amount of life experience the panel has. I'm a car guy. A number of my Captains are construction contractors. Another one of my Captains races road bikes, and other Captains possess many skills they've learned over the years. Many interview panel members have a tremendous amount of expertise and if you start going down a path by saying you're an expert in a given area, don't be surprised if a panel member asks you pointed questions about your skill, to determine if you are BS'ing or outright lying. Lying is death to you in your interview. So, only talk about those things you know are true or have experience with.

List below the skills that you have expertise in, or some expertise or exposure:

Talking About the Pay and Benefits

When asked "Why do you want to be a firefighter?" or "Why do you want to work for X department?" and the first response out of your mouth is you start talking about the pay, benefits and the time off firefighters have, you are doomed for failure, or at least a very low score. If the reason you want to be a firefighter is for the pay and benefits, and the time off, you are finished before you even begin. Try to remember, people are everything, and if you can't talk about how rewarding this career is because of your desire to serve and help make a difference in other's lives, then you are not only going to fail your interview, you may not be cut out to be a firefighter and you should look for another profession. If the panel doesn't see a passion in your heart, for people, then you are not seeking the right profession.

List as many reasons as you can, as to why you want to be a firefighter:

Giving Canned or Rehearsed Answers

There's nothing worse than sitting on the other side of the table and hoping to hear some great things from a candidate only hear a very monotone, rehearsed and canned answer come out of his or her mouth. Your only hope to resolve this problem is prepare, prepare, prepare.

The more you are prepared, the better you will know yourself, and the job you are applying for, which will make it much easier to answer each question in a conversational manner rather than just spewing a rehearsed canned answer.

You will need to make a determination as to how many hours per day you are willing to prepare, so you can finish at the top of the list!

Number of hours per day _____

Number of hours per week _____

Not Knowing Yourself Extremely Well

Not knowing yourself will be a fatal mistake. You are going to be asked questions about yourself and you need to give compelling answers as to why you want to be a firefighter, and what have you done to prepare yourself. You'll also be asked what you have done to prepare, and why should we choose you as the number one candidate. Also, your closing statement is where you recap what you will bring to the department, your strengths and why you should be chosen as the number 1 candidate. So, you must be prepared to score well.

List the knowledge, skills, strengths, and other attributes you bring to the table that will make you stand out among the other candidates:

Bonus Section

If You Come Across Arrogant or a Know-It-All

Being arrogant, rude or a know-it-all is a fatal error. There is a way to show your confidence without being arrogant. Arrogance or cockiness is a sure fire way to tank your interview, so you will need to display what I call “humble confidence.” You can demonstrate humble confidence by saying you’ve been fortunate or blessed to have the opportunity to do X, or whatever that may be. It could be a skill you’ve learned or a second language you know. It could be anything that shows how you’ve prepared to be a firefighter. How you come across to the panel in your attitude can and will determine if you score hi or low or fail.

List some of those skills you’ve acquired where you can demonstrate your “Humble Confidence:”

Not Knowing the Department and City for Which You are Testing

Not knowing the department you are testing for, especially in small to mid-sized department can and will reduce your score to the point that you may never move on in the process. It’s very difficult for the interview panel to take a chance on you if you never learned anything about the department where you are applying. In fact, it shows that you don’t truly care about the department you’re testing for. If you really cared about that job, you would take the time and do several station visits; you would get to know its members, the city and the department; you would learn about their staffing levels and the types of target hazards they have; you would know how many stations they have; and the types of specialized equipment and apparatus they have.

List the questions you will ask when you do your next station visit

A final thought

If this is the career path you have chosen, remember to never give up and always stay committed to your goal of becoming a firefighter. You've heard me say multiple times that commitment and focus on your preparation are necessary for success. I've never said a more true statement. Commitment and focus are the cornerstone of your success. Then, be sure to surround yourself with positive people and influences. Learn as much as you can about the city and department for which you are applying. Never give up, even when you feel like quitting. Finally, remember that successful candidates always take responsibility for themselves by understanding where they need to improve, and then create a plan for improvement; then they take action. Unsuccessful candidates always blame others or the process for where they are and why they aren't receiving job offers.

If you commit to this journey, it will provide you with a reward like you never thought possible. I'm so thankful that I am able to make a difference in people's lives every day, and I'm so thankful that I can be of value to my family and friends, and the community that I serve. The greatest reward is when you can make a difference in someone's life or change the outcome of an incident or someone's personal situation for the better. That is what makes it worth going to work every day!

Begin using these tips and strategies today to help you realize your dream of becoming a full-time, professional firefighter, and you will quickly become successful at not only attaining your dream, but in all aspects of your life. I hope to talk to you soon!

For more entry level firefighter information, check out TomorrowsFirefighter.com

About the Author

Chief Dean Guccione has over 32 years of fire service experience, and just retired as a Battalion Chief, in charge of the Personnel Division for the Beverly Hills Fire Department, after 29 years. He was the Chief Officer assigned to the entry level firefighter interview panel and was responsible for writing and administering the entire entry level exam process, including writing the oral interview questions. He was also responsible for writing and administering all promotional exams for Engineer, Captain, and Battalion Chief for the BHFD.

For over 20 of his 29 years at the BHFD, Chief Guccione has assisted countless entry level firefighters prepare for their interviews and backgrounds, with a very high success rate. He has interviewed hundreds and hundreds of firefighter candidates throughout his career, so he fully understands what departments and the fire service in general, are looking for in a candidate. Additionally, he has also helped coach and mentor dozens of firefighters prepare for Engineer, Captain and Battalion Chief promotional exams, also with a 90+% success rate.

Chief Guccione is also an accomplished classic Camaro restorer who has won several best of show trophies for his work. He also enjoys riding his Harley, surfing, golfing, and playing drums & guitar. He currently resides in the City of Norco, CA.



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