THE RULES OF FIRST-CLASS SERVICE

21 organizational rules that align with both the service we deliver & how we deliver it.

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The fire department deployment model I grew up with was built on the premise that the department exists to deliver a full menu of emergency services. My fire chief father used to joke with the chiefs of Class 1 departments about the true benchmarks of a top-flight department. The Class 1 chiefs teased Big Al because the Phoenix Fire Department (PFD) had never earned a Class 1 rating from the insurance industry (the PFD never used insurance ratings). Big Al would reply, "Instead of going after a Class 1 insurance rating, we choose to deliver first-class service."

Within each company, it's the firefighters who deliver that service. Like every other occupation in history, leadership, effective personnel-management practices and proper supervision policies are the gateways to high-quality service delivery. This strategic-level philosophy becomes the basis for developing strong personnel-management rules/SOPs. The effects of these policies and practices directly influence department morale.

A thoughtful organizational mission statement serves as the basis for executive-level strategic vision. (The executive level includes the fire chief and their staff, the union president and their staff and the fire chief's boss.) Any rule or regulation developed by the fire department must account for, support and align with the mission statement. The PFD's mission during my tenure was: Prevent harm, survive, be nice. *Harm prevention/intervention* serves as the basis for all of the services the department delivers. *Survival* is a primary part of our mission because firefighters routinely operate in IDLH hazard zones. *Being nice* defines how we provide service. If the department expects the firefighters to be nice to the customer, then that's the way the department members should treat one another.

Since service is our only reason for living, any discipline system must strive to correct any issues impeding competent service delivery—including personnel issues. To create a functional, effective department, discipline must be corrective instead of punitive, requiring the formal discipline process to be corrective, progressive and lawful. What follows is a simple set of administrative rules and regulations for managing the personal conduct of the members of the organization:

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All members shall:

1. Follow the operations manuals and written directives of both the fire department and the authority have jurisdiction (AHJ).
2. Use their training and capabilities to protect the public at all times, both on and off duty.
3. Work competently in their positions to ensure all department programs to operate effectively.
4. Conduct themselves to reflect credit on the department.
5. Manage subordinates in an effective, considerate manner.
6. Follow instructions in a positive, cooperative way.
7. Conduct themselves in a manner that creates good order within the department.
8. Keep themselves informed so they can do their jobs effectively.
9. Be concerned and protective of each member's welfare.
10. Operate safely and use good judgment.
11. Keep themselves physically and mentally fit.
12. Observe the work hours of their position.
13. Obey the law.
14. Be careful with department equipment and property.

Members shall not:

15. Engage in any activity that is detrimental to the department.
16. Engage in a conflict of interest with the department or use their position with the department for personal gain or influence.
17. Fight.
18. Abuse sick leave.

(Violating the following rules can result in disciplinary action including termination.)

19. Do not steal, lie or cheat.
20. Never use intoxicating substances while on duty.
21. Do not engage in sexual activity while on duty.

These rules and regulations support effective service delivery. They also create a personnel-management system that views any obstacles to high-quality service as issues requiring correction, not behaviors demanding punishment. This philosophy allows the department to make constant improvements that support its mission, and the rules support the concept that the best form of discipline is self-discipline. We train everyone to operate in a standard, competent and nice manner, and we want supervisors to use the same approach when managing the work and the workers. Such an approach creates a pleasant work environment.

How we apply and manage the rules and regulations significantly influences morale. Departments where it's okay for the chief of personnel

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to have lunchtime sex with their secretary, but the last firefighter caught doing the same was terminated, tend to have low morale. These departments also spend lots more time and money going to court to defend their crooked personnel-management system. Egomaniacal leaders always call for more "accountability" for the workforce. What they want is the ability to punish members who do not automatically submit to their will. Bosses in these systems use rank like a cattle prod to keep the workers in line. It's the same management style the prison industry uses to control inmates who do not follow orders.



Conversely, placing service delivery above everything else forces everyone to do their jobs effectively. (It's much simpler and more unifying to base our professional relationships on our work rather than appeasing a group of leaders seeking to be worshiped.) Using our primary mission as the bedrock for managing, supervising and leading the entire organization provides the simplest and most effective personnel-management system. This approach redefines accountability and supports the primary reason we exist—to deliver public safety services to the community. Members of the department who do not manage themselves in a way that supports this reality should find other work. A career in the fire service is not only an occupation that comes with a salary and benefits package; it is a calling. Connecting occupation to service delivery causes the fire department to be a *professional* organization. We become a *fraternal* organization when the service we provide takes a secondary role to everything else. Our primary mission of protecting Mrs. Smith saves us from ourselves.

The "be nice" approach to managing the workforce does provide consequences for infractions when other corrective measures do not work. This system utilizes progressive steps to bring out-of-balance members back into compliance. It produces the most authentic organizational accountability because the main priority of every position within the department is delivering service to the customer.

If a department requires its members to abide by its rules and regulations, it must provide appropriate training programs to support its mission. Certification-based training programs produce the most consistent and safe operations. (The fire service uses this approach when training new firefighters. These training programs include Firefighter 1 & 2, hazmat tech, tech rescue, EMT and paramedic training programs, and

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the Blue Card program for training and certifying members who operate as incident commanders.) Most certification-based training programs require ongoing continuing education to maintain certification. This approach also allows for making constant improvements to the program as our methods improve. Another benefit: In court, certification-based training shows the department has done its part to ensure all members are trained to uphold current standards and best practices. These types of training programs have been accredited as best practices by outside organizations (IFSAC & Proboard).

Doing our job offers the highest level of professional satisfaction. Properly crafted rules and regulations standardize operations and how we treat one another and the public. These rules must apply equally to all department members to be effective. SOPs are meant to be followed all of the time, especially when designed to support firefighter safety and survival. BS



Nick Brunacini joined the Phoenix Fire Department (PFD) in 1980. He served seven years as a firefighter on different engine companies before being promoted to captain and working nine years on a ladder company. Nick served as a battalion chief for five years before promoting to shift commander in 2001. He then spent the next five years developing and teaching the Blue Card curriculum at the PFD's Command Training Center. His last assignment with the PFD was South Shift commander. Nick retired from the PFD in 2009 after spending the first 26 years of his fire-department career as a B-shifter and the last three on C Shift. Nick is the author of "B-Shifter—A Firefighter's Memoir."He also co-wrote "Command Safety." Today, he is the publisher of B Shifter and a Blue Card instructor.