MARYSVILLE FIRE DISTRICT
CHIEF OFFICER SUCCESSION PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The problem was that Marysville Fire District (MFD) did not have a succession program in place to identify and prepare their staff for future promotion to chief officer positions. Within the next four to seven years most of the chief offers will have retired, with no current plan in place to prepare their replacements.

The purpose of this research was to prepare and submit a chief officer succession program to the fire chief for implementation.

In conducting this research the author utilized historical, descriptive, and action research to answer these research questions:

1. Is a succession program needed in MFD?
2. What are the departments identified in the Fire District/Union negotiation process as comparable departments doing to prepare their future leaders?
3. What are the components of a succession program?
4. Should the future leaders of MFD come from the current staff or from outside of the department?

The procedures used in the applied research project included review of applicable literature and the internet, three interviews, a survey of MFD chief officers, a survey of MFD company and acting company officers, and a survey of comparable Puget Sound area fire departments.

The results indicated that a succession program for chief officer is needed. Components of this plan include a commitment by each participant, attendance of an annual Officer Development Academy, attendance at National Fire Academy classes, the
completion of a bachelor’s degree or Executive Fire Officer Program, National Fire Protection Association 1021 Fire Officer III certification, and participation in a mentoring program. This was supported by the literature that was researched and the surveys conducted.

Based on the findings of this research it was recommended that the succession plan found in Appendix E be presented to the fire chief for review, presentation to his chief officer staff for review, and then presented to MFD Board of Directors for adoption.
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INTRODUCTION

In Dana Baldwin’s article *The Strategy of Succession Planning* (2000), the question is asked, if there is no succession planning process, how will the company develop and nurture its human capital? Baldwin continues, how will you assure a continuing sequence of qualified people to move up and take over when the current generation of managers and key people retire or move on? According to Carter (2001), some people simplify the problem with their sincere belief that the toughest firefighter deserves to become the fire chief.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), "Fire Protection Handbook" (15th ed.) maintains that the fire service has many unique management needs. It requires a distinct team spirit; it has a need for a strong disciplinary influence for concerted and instant reaction on the fireground; it requires a high quality of leadership from its officers; it has a continuing training demand; it requires an extremely wide range of technical competence; it has a labor/employer relationship not comparable to that in other occupations; it requires an ability to deal with the public under both minor and major crisis situations (Section 14/Chapter 2).

Succession planning is a systematic planning for and tracking of the flow of talent through your organization over time. It's critical at almost all levels of an organization (Vouglass, 1998). Baldwin (2000) reminds us that succession planning is a part of the process of preparing for the future of your company.

The problem this research project addresses is the fact that the Marysville Fire District (MFD) does not have a program to identify and prepare their staff for future promotion to chief officer positions. Within the next seven years four of the six chief
officers will have retired, with no current plans in place to prepare their replacements.

The purpose of this research is to prepare and submit a chief officer succession program to the Fire Chief for implementation. This study utilized historical, descriptive, and action research to answer the following research questions:

1. Is a succession program needed in MFD?
2. What are the departments identified in the Fire District/Union negotiation process as comparable departments doing to prepare their future leaders?
3. What are the components of a succession program?
4. Should the future leaders of MFD come from the current staff or from outside of the department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Background

MFD provides fire protection services, advanced life support and basic life support emergency medical services including transportation, fire prevention and public education as well as many other services, to the residents of the City of Marysville, Snohomish County Fire District 12 (Dist. 12), Snohomish County Fire District 20 (Dist. 20) and to Smokey Point-area residents of the City of Arlington for a population of about 60,000 people. In 2001, MFD responded to 7,027 alarms out of 4 stations, which are staffed 24 hours a day.

MFD staff consists of 6 chief officers, 3 administrative support staff, 48 full-time firefighters (including 8 company officers, 15 firefighter/paramedics, and 25 firefighter/Emergency Medical Technicians). The department is supported by approximately 80 part-time/on-call firefighters.
MFD is comprised of three separate fire departments that have merged their operations. This brought together three chief officer positions from the City of Marysville Fire Department, two chief officer positions from District 12, and two chief officer positions from Dist. 20. Since these merger operations began in 1992, there have been two retirements and one promotion, bringing the number of chief officer positions to its current six. These chief officer positions are: Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief of Fire Prevention, Deputy Chief of Training, Deputy Chief of Support Services, and Deputy Chief of Maintenance/Facilities.

Each of the three fire departments evolved in a similar fashion. Each started as an all-volunteer department, eventually hired a paid chief from the volunteer ranks, and added paid firefighters as the call volume increased. At the time of the mergers each department was comprised of about 25% of their staff were paid and the remaining staff volunteer. All of the chief officers were promoted from the paid firefighter ranks and, almost without exception, were appointed to those positions with minimal testing or evaluation. The management skills acquired by these officers were mostly by on-the-job-training and common sense according to Fire Chief Greg Corn (personal communication, February 5, 2002). Because of the smaller size of the departments, this type of training appears to have worked out as the officers’ management skills have grown as the department has grown. Future MFD chief officers will be promoted into positions where they will be asked to manage a much larger, complex organization. Coleman (2001), in his article Are Our Rank And File Cut Out For The Rise to the Top?, would like to raise the bar for who gets to be chief.
According to Moody (2001), a common complaint from newly appointed officers is that they were inadequately prepared. Alternatively, Christiansen (2001) provides us with the insight that succession plans typically identify the potential future leaders in an organization and set in motion a plan to develop these individuals for future leadership roles.

**Significance**

The fourth course of the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) at the National Fire Academy (NFA) is *Executive Leadership*. Examples of the subjects covered during this 2-week class are: Developing Self As a Leader, Managing Multiple Roles, Using Feedback, Power, Networking, Negotiation, Persuasion, etc. This research is relevant to the *Executive Leadership* course, Unit 6: Succession/Replacement Planning. "Succession Planning is a critical element of organizational strategy. Organizations with well-developed employee development and planning methods are more competitive. Public safety organizations achieve excellence through a well-trained and competitive workforce" (National Fire Academy, 2000).

The Mission Statement of the Marysville Fire District reads:

The Mission of the Marysville Fire District is to plan for and prepare a state of readiness in order to provide a system of fire, emergency medical and other hazard prevention and/or mitigation services to the citizens and visitors of our community.

Pursuant to the stated mission, all four of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objectives, including the desire to reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group of between 14 and 65 years old, is desired. The result of this research
paper, a Chief Officer Succession Program, will produce future leaders of MFD with increased skill levels enabling them "To promote within communities a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk-reduction plan led by the fire service organization" (USFA, objective d).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review was conducted for the purpose of reviewing pertinent published material on the issue of chief officer succession planning. The research revealed that there is a recognized need for this type of activity and that there are a number of differing opinions on what it consists of and how it can be accomplished.

Devising and implementing a succession plan can be accomplished at many different levels and in many different ways (Vouglas, 1998). Promotion according to Mathews (1986) is a strong force in work motivation. He adds that full advantage should be made of the opportunities it creates to generate and maintain a desire for career long development. This is supported by Halas (1990) who believes that the path of leaders and managers will only be successful if we are willing to constantly evaluate our approach to developing the personnel on our team, division and organization. According to Morris-Lee (2001), since every organization is unique, with different missions, people, and challenges, a cookie-cutter approach to succession planning won't do. The best programs are custom tailored to meet specific sets of needs.

The issue of fire service management needs compared to private industry is studied in Christiansen’s research (2001), which concluded that there was no significant difference in public and private sector organizations relative to succession planning.
Research by Mathews (1986) indicates that leadership and management styles that are effective in our private sector can be effective in the fire service.

Less than one quarter of U.S. industry has robust, effective succession plans ready for unknown contingencies. Other authorities on the subject peg the figure at less than one company in 10 (Morris-Lee, 2001). Any organization that wishes to maintain leadership continuity and preserve its level of performance must have a comprehensive succession plan in place-"comprehensive" meaning that it must extend well beyond the CEO and top management level to include anyone whose contribution is essential to the organization (Buzzotta & Lefton, 1997).

Your succession plan should be proactive, with people moving into different areas for experience and training before they are needed in critical positions, rather than reactive-waiting for openings to occur, then scurrying around to find an appropriate candidate at the last second (Baldwin, 2000). Smith (2000) adds that it is a necessary training process whereby company officers can learn the duties and responsibility of the chief officers.

Baldwin (2000) provides us with a list of advantages of succession planning:

- An ongoing supply of well trained, broadly experienced, well-motivated people who are ready and able to step into key positions as needed.
- A cadre of desirable candidates who are being integrated into the company with positive goals established for them individually.
- Alignment of the future needs of the company with the availability of appropriate resources within the company.
• Positive goals for key personnel, which will help keep them with the company and will help assure the continuing supply of capable successors for each of the important positions included in the succession plan.

• Defined career paths, which will help the company recruit and retain better people.

The Hagberg Consulting Group (1998) identifies the following points on how succession planning helps organizations:

• Engages senior management in a disciplined review of leadership talent.

• Guides development activities of key executives.

• Brings selection systems, reward systems and management development into alignment with the process of leadership renewal.

• Assures continuity of leadership.

• Avoids transition problems.

• Prevents premature promotion.

Morris-Lee (2001) stresses that succession planning is an issue of leadership development, not management training. In his article *Lead the Way to Your Future Leaders*, he identifies "Signs of a Successor":

Do the future leaders of your organization possess the following characteristics?

• Problem analysis--thinking analytically, processing information; working with logic, theories, facts, and data; using intuitive insights and wide breadth of interests to think strategically.
• Creative thinking--thinking freely and finding new ideas and options; constantly exploring fresh options and possibilities, thinking "outside the box."

• Exercising judgment--setting clear, strategic, long-term priorities and sticking to them.

• Drive--getting things done; showing energy, enthusiasm, and determination; being proactive.

• Resilience--handling problems; coping with crises and overcoming setbacks; not getting thrown when things go wrong; finding alternative ways to reach desired goals.

• Empathy--building relationship skills; handling the people issues and the human angle of events; being sensitive to how others are thinking and feeling; having an interest in people's needs far outside the immediate circle.

Are your future leaders able to perform the following functions?

• Leading--bringing forth new possibilities through influence, guidance, and direction.

• Developing--moving possibility along a spectrum of feasibility until it becomes reality.

• Managing--directing the affairs, interests, and assets of an organization in ways that cause reliability, predictability, and certainty for the business.

• Speculating--exploring the early application of a new reality under controlled conditions.
• Testing--conducting exploratory fact-finding in search of a tentative new reality.
• Mentoring--using a teaching model in which a master commits to train an apprentice in exchange for the apprentice's loyalty in the master's interests.
• Facilitating--making available ways and means that enable and empower others.
• Supervising--promoting results through oversight and care taking.

The NFPA (1981), *Fire Protection Handbook (15th ed.)*, reports that more fire departments are including education requirements such as a community college fire science certificate for all officers, or a bachelor’s degree for chief officers. Moody (2001), in his EFO paper *Officer Succession Planning For the Salina Fire Department*, is of the opinion that fire chiefs should have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree with an emphasis on being an EFO graduate. A typical leadership development plan can include a number of activities--from programs conducted inside the company, to forums that bring together people from multiple divisions or organizations, to independent study and even higher education (Morris-Lee, 2001).

In contrast, Dick (1992) states that 33 percent of all college graduates come from the bottom third of their class, at least another third probably don't remember a thing they learned in college, and half of the rest don't have any common sense. He continues, nonetheless, it probably is a good idea for you to grab every shred of education you can get your hand on.

Traditionally and historically, the fire service has relied on outside programs to provide education in the theoretical application of management techniques
(Rankin, 1984). He continues, that although there is still a need for these outside programs, there is also a continuing need for in-service training in administration and management. The Clovis (California) Fire Department (Rankin, 1984) developed a chief officer trainee program to fill that void. Developing the program was quite challenging because of the need to adopt qualifying criteria that would open the opportunity to participate in the program to personnel interested in every facet of the department--administration, prevention, operations, and training. The four facets, called tracks, require certification as a Fire Officer and completion of Fire Command II at the California Fire Academy. The third element is based on obtaining a bachelors degree in a related field, and then completing a track related certification at the California Fire Academy. Once accepted into the program, a chief officer trainee would become part of the chief's staff for six months, working a 40-hour workweek. During this six-month period, the trainee will work with the staff as follows: deputy chief, two months; fire marshal, two months; training officer, two months.

Orange County (California) Fire Authority (OCFA) (Martin, 2001) realized that they had a leadership deficiency within their organization. To worsen matters, a significant number of personnel would be retiring within 5-7 years. In response, the OCFA designed and implemented the Leadership Institute in August 1998. The institute, a 112-plus hour program, targets leadership development, personal growth, communication, problem solving, decision making, empowerment, delegation, conflict management, team building, and ethics, while maintaining the philosophy that leadership is a reflection of action and not position within an organization.
The position of chief can encompass a variety of ranks: battalion, district, division, deputy, assistant and chief of department. The titles and duties will vary in day-to-day operations (Smith, 2000). At any of the officer levels the following topics could be considered for supplemental training sessions: strategic role for information systems, human resources, managing innovation and creativity, entrepreneurial concepts, work cultures, private and public partnerships, analyzing productivity in the fire service, stakeholders of the department, substance abuse counseling, developing and evaluating programs and policies, strategic planning, creative financing, risk management, and new technology (Hamlett, 1988).

The NFPA Standard 1021 *Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (1997) identifies the performance requirements necessary to perform the duties of a fire officer and specifically identifies four levels of progression. These are:

Fire Officer I. The fire officer, at the supervisory level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level I.

Fire Officer II. The fire officer, at the supervisory/managerial level, who has met their job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level II.

Fire Officer III. The fire officer, at the managerial/administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level III.

Fire Officer IV. The fire officer, at the administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level IV.

NFPA 1021, section A-1-1 envisions that in addition and supplemental to the
requirements of the above, appropriate educational credentials are necessary. These can include fire degree programs and general education in business, management, science, and associated degree curriculums.

**Summary**

There are a number of published documents that focus on successions planning. A large percentage of those agree that there is a need for a "plan," because as Smith (2000) states, "There is a difference between a chief and a company officer. A company officer is part of an engine or truck company." A company officer has to be offered the opportunity to be prepared for the next level of leadership. Carter (2000) tells us that the ways in which we train our followers set the tone for the future leadership pool of our organization. The opportunity should be there for anyone to achieve the higher level of responsibility in the fire service (Coleman, 1988). He adds that the responsibility to prepare them for those positions is shared between the organization and the individual. The individual must provide the motivation and the intrinsic skill. The organization must provide the direction and the standards for that achievement.

Before any solutions can be formulated, the next step is to survey the MFD chief officers to obtain their opinion as to the need for a succession plan (Appendix B & B-1), the opinion of the succession needs perceived by the company officers of MFD (Appendix C & C-1), and how fire departments of comparable size in the Puget Sound area are dealing with the issue of chief officer succession (Appendix D).

**PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a chief officer succession program that could be presented to the fire chief of adoption by MFD.
Historical, descriptive, and action research methodologies were utilized to help guide this applied research project (ARP) to find answers to the research questions.

The initial research for this EFOP research paper began at the Learning Resource Center (LRC) on the campus of the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, MD. This search resulted in articles in journals, periodicals, and previous ARPs by other EFOP students on the subject of succession planning. An additional search, using the LRC online card catalog resulted in locating additional journal and periodical articles. The interlibrary loan service through the Marysville, WA. branch of the Sno-Isle Library system was used to obtain these additional resources. The MFD library was searched to obtain information from books and NFPA documents. Additionally, a search was conducted of the internet to obtain additional information on succession planning.

Three interviews were conducted, twice with MFD Fire Chief Greg Corn and once with MFD Firefighter Jeff Cole, President of Local #3219, IAFF.

Three surveys were conducted. The six chief officers (including the author) were queried to determine via a written survey (Appendix B & B-1) when they expected to retire, if they thought that a replacement within MFD was available, and how our department could prepare our members for promotion to chief officer. A written survey (Appendix C & C-1) was conducted of the 13 company officers of MFD (8 Lieutenants and 5 Acting Lieutenants) to obtain information on their years of experience as an officer, their interest in possible future promotion to chief officer, what they need to do to prepare themselves, and what standards should be in effect for promotion to chief officer. Chief officers of 11 Puget Sound fire departments identified as comparable to MFD by Fire Chief Greg Corn and Firefighter Jeff Cole, President of Local #3219 IAFF were surveyed
via telephone to determine if they had a succession program for chief officer, what their minimum standard are for promotion to chief officer, if they thought one should be in place, and if so, what should be included (Appendix D).

Since there was direct contact with each person or fire department chosen for these survey procedures, 100% participation was obtained.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

An assumption was made that the respondents to each survey understood the questions, had the desire, knowledge, and ability to answer them accurately. It was also assumed that the respondents from other fire departments had the authority to represent their department and were knowledgeable of the operating procedures pertaining to chief officer succession.

The scope of the study was limited because the number of surveys distributed was small, limited to the eleven fire departments identified as comparable to MFD. This is a small sample of fire departments in Washington State, but being of comparable size, personnel numbers, budget constraints, call activity, and other influences, would allow a more direct comparison of how the departments have developed and responded to their own needs.

Time was a limiting factor because the project has a six-month completion timeframe established by the NFA for ARP submittal. The literature review represented only a sampling of information available on the subject and a lengthier, intense review would no doubt reveal additional information, particularly in the private sector. An unknown limitation of implementation of the results of this ARP will be the budget constraints of MFD.
Research Methodology

The desired outcome of this research was to develop a program to prepare MFD staff for future promotion to chief officer. Historical, descriptive, and action research methodologies were utilized to guide this ARP to find answers to the selected research questions.

The research was historical research in that a literature review was conducted to examine what other fire officials published on the subject, telephone surveys were conducted of comparable fire departments to determine their succession process, and three interviews was conducted in part to collaborate the authors experience of the history of MFD and how the chief officer positions were established. The research was descriptive in that the literature review conducted and the survey of MFD company and chief officers reveal the current status of officer succession within and around MFD. Action research resulted in a recommended plan for chief officer succession.

The fourth edition of *The Publication Manual* published by the American Psychological Association provided guidelines for the organizing and formatting of this ARP.

Definition of Terms

Succession Planning. Interchangeable with terms such as career development, officer candidate school, and promotional development. NFA defines this as an organized and systematic way to ensure that employees in a particular organization are capable, competent, and willing to replace and/or succeed to strategic roles within the organization.
Chief Fire Officer. Those management-level employees in the highest three tiers of the hierarchical organizational structure of MFD. Also includes ranks not associated with MFD at this time such as battalion chief, divisions chief, district chief, etc. The fire chief may also be known by terms such as CEO or Director.

Comparable Departments. The eleven Puget Sound fire departments used by MFD and IAFF Local #3219 during labor negotiations as being of comparable size.

RESULTS

These results review answers to the research questions and results of the surveys taken.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. Is a succession program needed in MFD? Four of the six chief officers of MFD will have retired within seven years (Appendix B-1). That is a significant turnover rate for any organization. A successful organization needs strong leaders and chief officers are the leaders in a fire department (Smith, 2000). Naum & Peterson (1984) add that the solutions to the problems faced today by fire chiefs cannot be learned by years of riding the engine or truck company

Incumbent officers of today have to ask themselves about their responsibilities to their successors (Coleman, 1988). The "old dogs" discussed by McCalister & Baker (2001) adapt, and as an added benefit to the department, pass along their wisdom, experience and supervisory skills to those who are training to rise in the ranks behind them. They add that no matter how many new systems are in place, nothing can replace years of experience, geographic knowledge and supervisory know-how. A mentoring program would provide a vehicle for the passing of knowledge, wisdom, and skill.
Coleman (1998) reminds us that succession planning is nothing more than working with your subordinate staff so that, in the event that one of them succeeds you, they'll believe that they're carrying the organization in the same direction you established.

In the surveys conducted, three of the six chief officers of MFD felt that there was no current staff members prepared to be promoted to replace them at this time if needed (Appendix B-1). Ten of the 13 company officers (Appendix C-1) indicated that they were interested in a possible future promotion and in addition indicated that they need additional education to prepare themselves for promotion. Examples of their needs:

- to learn "facets of fire department operations."
- to be more familiar with the chief officer position.
- to have exposure to the positions.
- improvement in fire service communications.
- preparation mentally for a change in the type of work.

Their opinion of what minimum standards for promotion should be include:

- Nine of the 10 feel at least a 2-year degree should be required.
- Equal balance of education, training, and hands on experience.
- NFA Leadership Program MCO, etc.
- Time at each rank.
- Ability to communicate.
- Exposure to other people of different races.
- Past history of being progressive.
- Management skills are not inherent but need to be learned and cultivated.
- Knowledge in labor/management relations and experience of such.
• Required to do continued training both inside the department and outside the department.

• Perhaps in the future MFD could implement a chief officer development plan for those interested, just a thought.

The review of relevant literature, information obtained from current MFD chief officers, information from current company officers and acting company officers of MFD, information from identified comparable fire departments, and the fire chief’s opinion all support the concept of a chief officer succession plan for MFD.

**Research Question 2. What are the departments identified in the Fire District/Union negotiation process as comparable departments doing to prepare their future leaders?** MFD Firefighter Jeff Cole, President of IAFF Local #3219 (personal communication, March 12, 2002) and MFD Fire Chief Greg Corn (personal communication, February 27, 2002) agreed that the 11 fire departments listed in Appendix A are of similar size and operate in such a similar manner as to be recognized as comparable to MFD. Between March 12, 2002, and March 19, 2002, each of the fire departments listed in Appendix A were contacted by telephone. The list of questions and the results obtained are in Appendix D.

Two of the 11 departments have a succession plan in place. The City of Olympia Fire Department establishes a self-study program, as needed for a possible open position. They have a probation book that is also used to guide the study program and is then used as the basis for the oral and written testing procedures for the position. Pierce County Fire Protection District #5 uses an Administrative Intern Program where their battalion chiefs serve one or two year rotations with the senior chief officers. They also require
that battalion chiefs meet the requirements of NFPA 1021 and 1041, and attend NFA Leadership and Tactics classes. In addition they attempt to have a three-hour class presented at their monthly officer meetings on various management issues. Both departments stated they feel a need to improve and expand their programs.

To summarize the results of Appendix D, nine of the 11 departments do not have a succession program. Two of those nine are in the process of developing one, leaving the two departments discussed above having a program in place. Their minimum standards or requirements for promotion to a chief officer position include the requirement, or at least preference, of at least a 2-year degree on four of the departments and minimum experience at lower ranks. Ten of the 11 departments feel that a succession program should be in place. Their opinions of what minimum standards should be in place include additional college degree requirements, executive courses at NFA, additional experience at rank, use NFPA 1021 as a "road map" of training/performance objectives, and additional training in such courses as cultural diversity awareness, communications, etc.

Research Question 3. What are the components of a succession program?

Buzzotta & Lefton (1997) state that "Actually succession planning is simply a highly specialized form of employee development. As such, fulfilling the need does not require the construction of a complex succession planning system. Rather, it relies on some fundamental common sense principles for human performance enhancement." The literature review revealed a common theme concerning succession planning, described by Coleman (1988), "In recent years those who were competitive for top level positions in the fire service are those who have educational experiences beyond the scope of
conventional fire service training. That is especially true in the area of written and verbal skills and to a more limited degree, in the area of analytical ability and problem solving."

He adds, look at succession planning in the sense of not preparing your individual replacement, but rather establishing a system to provide replacements.

Feedback obtained from the three surveys completed and information revealed in the literature review indicate that there is a need for time spent at each rank or experience, formal education/college degree, additional training in a number of areas, usually associated with the management of personnel, certification in specialty areas including NFPA 1021 Fire Officer compliance, and mentoring. A succession program would be made up of these components.

**Research Question 4. Should the future leaders of MFD come from the current staff or from outside of the department?** Coleman (2001), in his article, *Are our Rank and File Cut Out For The Rise To The Top*, discusses the fact that it was almost a given that the only way you would ever become a fire chief was to work your way up a single department's chain of command. He continues that now more and more chiefs and officers take control of their careers by moving to other agencies. "I would like to take professional mobility to the next level, requiring every full-time, professional fire chief job posting to be open to outside recruitment" (Coleman, 2001). In this same article he questions that because of firefighters lifestyle and working conditions now that the Fair Labor Standards Act has allowed them to count of overtime as a fairly stable form of income, will they want to promote to chief officer positions?

Christiansen (2001) tells us that an implication of not having a succession plan is that you may be forced to hire an outside candidate if no internal candidates are prepared.
He continues that this could result in a complete change of organizational direction and the abandonment of the organization's strategic plan.

In Appendix C-1 the results of the survey of existing MFD company officers reveal that 10 of the 13 wish to be considered for future promotion to a chief officer position. Beside the fact that MFD has a relatively large pool of staff members interested in future promotion, numerous authors (Carter, 2001; Christiansen, 2001; Coleman, 2000; Maxfield, 1996; Moody, 2001; NFPA, 1981; Vouglas, 1998) discuss succession planning in terms of preparing existing staff members for advancement within their organizations.

In an interview with Fire Chief Greg Corn (personal communication, February 27, 2002) he stated that his preference would be that future chief officers be promoted up from MFD staff, but admitted that there was not a plan in place to specifically prepare them. He added that all of the chief officers had promoted up through the ranks on each of the three departments and that the "gene pool" had been small, but with the growth and changes that have created MFD, a better situation could be in place for future promotions.

Hiring chief officers from outside of MFD is clearly an option that is supported by some. Generally the literature appears to support preparation of current staff members for promotion. A successful succession plan would have staff members prepared for promotion and the hiring from the outside is an option to be considered by the MFD Fire Chief and the Board of Directors if it was thought best for the department.

Besides the succession programs in two comparable fire departments in the Puget Sound area of Washington State, there are two departments in California that have developed programs to deal with their succession needs. Clovis Fire Department and Orange County Fire Authority both created programs to enhance the training and
educational opportunities for their staff. These four programs have similarities that provide a template for the creation for a MFD plan.

Appendix E is the format that will lead to adoption of a chief officer succession plan for MFD. It is a summary of ideas and examples obtained during this research project. Coleman (1988) favors an attitude towards succession planning that centers around the organizational environment where opportunity and preparation is key. Baldwin (2000) adds that time is the gift that good planning can bestow on the succession process and that it is never finished. He adds:

Over what time period should you plan? To be realistic, succession must be planned years in advance of expected needs. To properly train a successor, the firm needs sufficient time to expose the people to the full spectrum of opportunities within the firm, as well as any desired or required outside educational experience expected.

The MFD Chief Officer Succession Plan will identify the MFD company officers who are interested in potential promotional opportunities. The plan, after it has been reviewed by the fire chief, discussed by the chief officer staff for any additional input, will be presented to the Board of Directors for adoption. Minimum training objectives will be set, an annual training opportunity will be established specifically dealing with management issues pertaining to MFD, minimum educational requirements established, and a mentoring plan will be established. This will establish the minimum requirements for participating in the evaluation/testing procedures for any future MFD chief officer positions.
Summary

The results of this ARP indicate that a chief officer succession plan is needed at MFD. The recommended plan is shown in Appendix E. Included is a requirement for at least three years experience as a company officer, a letter of commitment from each participant, attendance of NFA courses, attendance of an annual Officer Development Academy, meet the requirements of NFPA Fire Officer III, obtain a Bachelor Degree from an accredited college or university, and participate in a mentoring program.

DISCUSSION

Instead of "chronology of birth dates", Coleman (1988) states that tomorrow's fire chief or the successor to any incumbent in the fire service is likely to be picked by a different criteria. The MFD chief officer staff is a result of the merger of three small fire departments. The make up of the chain of command is not necessarily a result of the needs of MFD as it is a result of creating positions for the staff being merged together (G. Corn, personal communication, February 27, 2002). The number of and designation of chief officer could change in the future, reducing the number of deputy chiefs and the creation of battalion chiefs for example. The organizational implications of this study is clear, the result of the findings of this ARP is that the future chief officers of MFD will be selected in a different manner and with a larger and better prepared pool of applicants. We must be willing to put aside the past and foster an environment that favors the best candidate for promotion (Maxfield, 1996).

Another issue that is discussed by Riepe (1987) in his article Priming for Command: The New Officer is a newly promoted officer being ready mentally for the shift in responsibility. He refers to experienced officers who sometimes wish they could
relive the early days of their first command. They generally agree the first few months are crucial in determining whether the new officer will make the successful transition from firefighter to supervisor. This is another area where it would be assumed that after years of preparation a person would be ready to make the necessary changes in their leadership style. Worth repeating here is Smith’s (2000) comment that there is a difference between a chief and a company officer, a company officer is part of an engine or truck company. This difference must sometimes be specifically learned. The suggested mentoring program would help provide insight into some of the mental changes a person must make to be a successful chief officer.

This succession plan will create opportunities for the personal and professional growth of MFD staff members, but Dick (1992), reminds us that expecting an employer-any employer-to take care of your future is a big mistake. He adds, your future is your responsibility, especially if it's your goal to lead and coordinate the activities of others. Buzzotta & Lefton (1997) adds that by identifying the competencies we need, we indicate to high potential employees that there is a place for them in our enterprise. He reminds us that our commitment to their development is an investment in their careers, their future and by keeping the whole process on track we underscore our commitment to employees development and future success.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

"I would submit that many of us don't dwell a lot on retirement until our last two or three years at the top. Most of our career is spent pushing ourselves to higher level of responsibility and control in our fire agencies, with retirement as a secondary thought" (Coleman, 1984).
The problem, as previously stated, was that the Marysville Fire District does not have a program to identify and prepare their staff for future leadership positions. The purpose of this applied research project was to prepare and submit to the fire chief a Chief Officer Succession Program.

The research presented in this study has demonstrated the need for MFD to implement a Chief Officer Succession Plan. It is recommended that based on the supportive evidence revealed in the literature review, surveys, and interviews, the succession plan, explained in Appendix E, should be reviewed by the fire chief and his staff, amended as needed, and adopted by the Board of Directors as soon as possible.

Additional research will be required for actual implementation. The availability of individual classes, instructor availability, and costs involved will have to be budgeted for at least one year in advance. There are two Community Colleges in the area of MFD who could be contacted for instructor and program resources.

Additional research will be needed to determine the actual selection process that will be used for future chief officer promotions. A number of literature articles such as *A Performance Standard for Promotions* by Roig & Reardon, discuss the virtues of the assessment center evaluation process.

A recommendation to the future readers of this ARP is to evaluate what their organizational needs are for chief officers, determine the skill level/knowledge of their staff, learn from other departments how they are addressing the issue, and set standards that are reasonable and obtainable.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

List of Comparable Fire Departments

City of Lynwood Fire Department

Snohomish County Fire Protection District #8, Lake Stevens

King County Fire Protection District #11, North Highline Fire Department

Thurston County Fire Protection District #3, Lacey

City of Olympia Fire Department

Kitsap County Fire Protection District #1, Central Kitsap Fire & Rescue

City of Auburn Fire Department

City of Bremerton Fire Department

Pierce County Fire Protection District #5, Gig Harbor

King County Fire Protection District #43, Maple Valley Fire & Life Safety

Snohomish County Fire Protection District #7
Appendix B

Survey of Chief Officers of Marysville Fire District

CHIEF OFFICER OF MARYSVILLE FIRE DISTRICT

I am writing a paper as part of my participation in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy titled "Marysville Fire District Chief Officer Succession Program." A result of this paper will be a recommendation to the chief on adopting a program where we will be able to prepare our staff members to succeed us when our careers are over. To get a feel for what our needs for this will be I would like to get a general idea of our future. Please answer the following questions as well as you can. Since none of us are exactly sure what the future holds for us, I would expect that some of the answers will be general. This is fine.

1. Your current rank ___________________.
2. Your staff assignment ___________________.
3. Your age ______________________.
4. Years of service ___________.
5. Years of service you expect to complete when you retire _______.
6. Your age at your planned retirement ________.
7. Do you feel that there are currently members of our department who could succeed you if you were to retire today? ______
8. Do you have any thoughts on how we could prepare members of our department to be in a position to promote to a chief officer position? Suggestions?
Appendix B-1

Results of

Survey of Chief Officers of Marysville Fire District

1. **Your current rank?**
   
   Chief, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief of Fire Prevention, Deputy Chief of Training, Deputy Chief of Support Services, Deputy Chief of Maintenance/Facilities

2. **Your staff assignment?**
   
   Administration, Operations, Fire Prevention, Training, Support Services, Maintenance/Facilities

3. **Your age?**
   
   49, 50, 51, 45, 42, 57. Average age: 49.

4. **Years of service?**
   

5. **Years of service you expect to complete when you retire?**
   
   32, 25, 30, 30, 30, 25. Using the results from numbers 4 and 5 indicate an average years to retirement: 7.5.

6. **Your age at your planned retirement?**
   
   56, 54, 57, 55, 55, 65. Average age at retirement: 57.

7. **Do you feel that there are currently members of our department who could succeed you if you were to retire today?**
   
   Yes, yes, no, no, no, with some job requirements being adjusted.

8. **Do you have any thoughts on how we could prepare members of our department to be in a position to promote to a chief officer position? Suggestions?**
   
   Encourage education & training opportunities, mentor prospects, assign chief level projects.
Appendix B-1 (continued)

A more comprehensive training and educational program starting with maybe require Fire Officer I and/or II minimum for company officer level moving to additional training for future chief officers. That would include business, budgeting, personnel issues, management, etc.

The authors comments are part of this ARP.

Degree program and yearly officer training, with a chief officer training tract.

Current administrative assignments are a good start, possibly invite (one at a time) to staff meeting for period (similar to Fire Marshal rotation awhile back).

Personnel management skill training.
Appendix C

Survey of Marysville Fire District Company Officers

COMPANY OFFICER FOR MARYSVILLE FIRE DISTRICT

I am writing a paper as part of my participation in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy titled "Marysville Fire District Chief Officer Succession Program." A result of this paper will be a recommendation to the chief on adopting a program where we will be able to better prepare our staff members to promote to chief officer positions. Please complete this form to the best of your ability. None of this is "binding" nor is it something that will not have changed in the near future. It is just an attempt to gather feedback and opinions from the company officer ranks.

1. Your current rank _______________

2. Years of experience at this rank _______________

3. Are you interested in promoting to a chief officer rank in the future? _________

4. If you are, what do you feel you need to do to prepare yourself for that promotion?

5. Do you think there should be some minimum standards, academic standards, training requirements, etc. for a person to be considered for promotion to chief officer at MFD? Your thoughts?
Appendix C-1

Results of

Survey of Marysville Fire District Company Officers

1. **Your current rank.**
   8 Lieutenants and 5 Acting Lieutenants

2. **Years of experience at this rank.**
   11.5, 5, 8, 11.5, 13, 5, 8, 5, 4, 7, 6, 1, 1. Average years of experience: 6.6.

3. **Are you interested in promoting to a chief officer rank in the future?**
   1 possibly, 8 yes, 1 yes (someday), 1 yes (in the future), 2 no.

4. **If you are, what do you feel you need to do to prepare yourself for that promotion?**

   - Budgeting, administration duties, etc.
   - A bachelor degree in fire administration and become an effective project manager.
   - College degree, better knowledge in fire prevention, keep working inside training division.
   - Continue to develop my people skills and expand my education. I also feel that it is important to learn all facets of fire department operations.
   - In our department I forecast that I'd need more formal college education than I have. I'd need to be familiar with what the chief officers position was. Education, administrative experience.
   - Continued experience at that position, taking human relations classes, organizational skills, etc.
   - Education, exposure to the position.
   - To continue with my fire service education in both experience and academics. To take an active part in learning as much about the department and how it manages its personnel as possible.

   No comment.

   No comment.
Appendix C-1 (continued)

I feel that I need much more experience as a company officer, continuation of my college education, and continued improvement in fire service communications.

I think that first there is preparation mentally for a change in the type of work, and next some job and task specific classes for knowledge or a particular position i.e. operations, training, etc.

5. **Do you think there should be some minimum standards, academic standards, training requirements, etc. for a person to be considered for promotion to chief officer at MFD? Your thoughts?**

I am not so concerned with academic standards as I am with training requirements. I've seen to many book smart people who cannot function on the fireground. I believe our testing process is geared to book smart people and not to people who can do the best job. I believe an equal balance of education, training, and hands on experience is the way to go.

Yes, a minimum 4 year degree in some area. I don't think the area of study is as important as the degree itself which I feel is a symbol of a persons willingness to prepare themselves for higher levels of responsibility.

Yes. Education-at least 2 year degree and possibility of a 4 year degree. % years or better at company officer.

Yes, should be time on job time in rank and definitely minimum of AA.. As well as completion of classes such as NFA Leadership Program, MCO, etc.

Yes-there should be some time in service standards i.e. time as a Lt. prior to BC promotion, BC prior to DC, etc. Plus, there should be definite academic standard required-minimum AA in fire administration, command, etc. Training requirements: Yes! But this should carry over after a promotion. Any employee should keep up the training that is required to do the job he's given. Our dep. Is too small for any chief officer (or company officer) to shirk his training responsibility. This should be a consistent and adhered to standard. I believe any department that encourages and requires higher education will succeed.

Yes, I'm not sure where the standards should be set but I believe some sort of minimum requirement is necessary so a person can show they have the desire and expertise for the position that they are striving for. I don't believe a person should be promoted just because they've been around a long time.

I believe that at least some college background be a minimum standard. By taking the minimum college core classes (English, math, chemistry, psychology 101) gives a person a good solid knowledge base to face future problems. This
also encourages studying and organizing your time. Plus the exposure to other people of different races, classes helps the person with future human relations. A demonstrated ability to communicate w/people is a must as well as writing and being able to state clear thoughts & intentions to others should be a standard as well as life experiences and dealing w/people. I think as a whole administrators need more education in this area.

Yes. Minimum 2 year degree in Fire Command, not Fire Sciences. Minimum 3 years as a company offer. Past history of being progressive, expanding our department. Other standards would depend on the particular job description, i.e. training, maintenance, FMO, etc.

Yes. I believe that additional academic standards are a must. BS, MS or above should be a requirement. The old days of simply being there the longest are not good enough. Today we do not simply lead people but we manage them. Management skills are not inherent but need to be leaned and cultivated.

Yes. -Minimum BA degree
-Minimum line FF/Company Officer for 10 years.
-Active participation in industry such as NFPA, IAFC, state organizations, etc.
-Knowledge in labor/management relations and experience of such.

I don't believe that the natural progression to Chief Officer rank should be Lieutenant to Deputy Chief. I do believe there needs to be a step in between. Say Battalion Chief. There needs to be a step where perspective chief officers are still involved with the line but also have some responsibility as staff. Since there is not a step at MFD for that, maybe there could be a program put in place where a Lieutenant could work as an on duty Battalion Chief (with compensation of course). Or there could be a testing process and Lieutenants could test to be Acting Battalion Chiefs with compensation and some added responsibility. As for minimum standards, academic & training requirements...I've never been real bit on the fact that you have to have a bunch of college to do your job as long as through some sort of performance evaluation you show that you would be able to do the job. But, the education thing is a way this district has decided to do so...If a firefighter is required to have a specific number of credits toward a Fire Science Degree and minimum number of years as a firefighter, then this same theory should apply toward Chief Officer promotions. My shot in the dark for Chief Officers promotion requirements would be this. Since we have no mid step like Battalion. Chief and we promote right from Lieutenant to staff officer (which is stupid). At the very least to be promoted to Chief Officer I'd say, 5 years as a Lieutenant. A Fire Science Degree and a given # of credits toward a Fire Command Administration Degree or any other applicable degree.
Appendix C-1 (continued)

Plus an assessment center give by knowledgeable superiors to assess their ability to perform their job description i.e. training, maintenance, etc.

Yes, I do believe there should be stringent standards for chief officers as these will be the leaders of our organization in the future. Education has been and will continue to be extremely important for chief officers and the minimum standard should most likely be set a Bachelors Degree if we are working towards requiring our company officers to have an associates. Training requirements are something that I feel should be set and worked on as stepping stones to promotion but should not stop once promotion occurs. In order to continue their own personal growth and the growth of our organization chief officers should be required to do continued training both inside the department and outside the department.

Yes, I think that someone should have a number of years on as a minimum. Academic standards are a good consideration however I don't feel that someone should be promoted because of their academic achievements. People that are good with other people and are hard workers and have a history of management, good solid decisions, have potential of making good chief officers. Perhaps in the future MFD could implement a chief officer development plan for those interested. Just a thought.
Appendix D

Survey and Results of Survey to Comparable Fire Departments

1. **Do you have a program to prepare your staff for promotion to chief officer positions?**

   No program: 9 Two of the departments with no program are in the process of developing one.

   Yes. As needed, there is an overview program for each position, allowing for self study. A probation book is used as a study guide and is the basis of the testing process (written or oral).

   Yes. Administrative Intern Program. Bring Battalion Chiefs to administrative side for a 1 or 2 year training in the different administrative areas.

2. **Do you have minimum standards or requirements for promotion to a chief officer rank?**

   Yes, any outside training, require AA in Fire Command and HazMat IC. Must attend *Incident Management System* (IMS?) drill at Washington State Fire Academy. Have a least 2 years experience at Lieutenant.

   Yes. Prefer a degree or equivalent experience. 7 1/2 years experience at Lieutenant prior to testing for Battalion Chief.

   Yes. 3 years as a company officer.

   None. Training requirements for Captain prepares for future Battalion Chief.

   Yes. 45 college credits.

   Not at this time. 2 years rank experience. Bachelors Degree for Fire Chief.

   Yes. Battalion Chief: AA degree with 3 years experience in fire service.
   Assistant Chief: Prefer Bachelor Degree, 5 years experience.
   Fire Chief: Bachelor Degree, 8 years experience, 5 of which at command level.

   Yes. General Education Degree (GED, equivalent to a high school diploma)

   Yes. Battalion Chief: No degree requirements. Meet NFPA 1021, 1041 requirements. Attend NFA Leadership & tactical classes.
Appendix D (continued)

Fire Chief: Bachelor Degree and 15 years experience, 7 of which at or above Battalion Chief.

No. But must have 4 years on the department and cannot promote from firefighter to Battalion Chief.

3. **Do you feel that a program should be in place?**

   Yes: 10

   No: 1 You should be able to look "deep" within the ranks.

4. **In your opinion, what are the minimum standards an applicant should have to apply for a chief officer position?**

   What we have now.

   7 1/2 years at rank of Lieutenant before testing for Battalion Chief.

   Executive courses at NFA. Management/Personnel training. A Bachelors Degree in Management.

   Promoted up through the ranks, Lieutenant→Captain→Battalion Chief. At least an AA degree, prefer Bachelor or EFO. At least 10 years firefighter experience. Use NFPA 1031 as a road map of training/performance objectives. Obtain "Safety Officer", "Haz/Mat IC", and other pertinent certifications.

   Minimum 3 years at each rank, Lieutenant→Captain→Battalion Chief→Fire Chief. AA degree in Fire Command or Fire Prevention Specialist. IFSTA Company Officer. Attend advanced supervisory courses, cultural diversity awareness. Attend NFA courses Fire Service Communications, Interpersonal Dynamics in Fire Service Organizations, etc.

   Bachelors Degree, NFPA 1021 Level 3.

   Working on it!

   Previous rank on at least one year. Should have 10 years total experience before promoting to a chief officer position. Minimum of a 2 year degree.

   Fire Prevention background. 3-5 years at officer rank. Minimum of AA degree, finish Bachelor degree within 4 years. Establish a list of specific goals and objectives to be met.
Appendix D (continued)

AA degree for Battalion Chief, 5 years at BC to test for Assistant Chief. Require EFO or enrolled to be an AC.

Enough knowledge of how your department works. How your department fits into the county/city structure and politics. Breadth of education is needed. Needs to be a factor.
Appendix E

Marysville Fire District Chief Officer Succession Program

Compliance with the criteria of this program is preferred prior to promotional testing. It is a guide of pre-qualifications that may include but will not be limited to the following steps for preparation to promotion to a chief officer position with the Marysville Fire District. Three years of service at the rank of Lieutenant will be required prior to promotion to a chief officer position.

Step 1. Request a letter from each company officer stating:
   a. Their desire to prepare themselves for future promotion to a chief officer position.
   b. Their commitment to comply with the program steps set forth in this document.
   c. Their understanding that this program in no way a guarantee that they will be promoted to chief officer position.

Step 2. Upon completion of one half of a 2-year college degree program requirements, Marysville Fire District will provide a catalog of classes available at the National Fire Academy and arrange with the Assistant Chief of Operations to provide a work schedule such that participants of this program can attend NFA classes. Prior to being considered for promotion to chief officer, an applicant should have attended:
   a. R107 Fire Service Communications
   b. R332 Interpersonal Dynamics in Fire Service Organizations
   c. One additional NFA class relating to a specific area of MFD management i.e. Training, Fire Prevention, EMS, etc.

Step 3. Budget for, and schedule an annual "Officer Development Academy". This school will last 3 to 5 days. Conducted by experts in the selected areas to teach subjects determined to be of use in the preparation of MFD staff members for promotion to chief officer position. Examples of subjects are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essentials of Supervision</th>
<th>Motivation and Productivity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising the Problem Employee</td>
<td>Management Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuing Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>Leadership Dynamics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>Financial Management/Budgeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising Employee Training</td>
<td>Supervision and Group Behavior</td>
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<td>Managerial Excellence</td>
<td>Organizational Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing for High Performance</td>
<td>Group/Organizational Ethics</td>
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<td>Improving Workplace Performance Through Coaching</td>
<td>Coaching</td>
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<td>Teambuilding</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
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<td>Managing Change</td>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>Performance Appraisals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
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Appendix E (continued)

Step 4. Obtain the necessary education and training, utilizing the subjects discussed in Step 3, formal college education, and other training opportunities to comply with the requirements of NFPA 1021 "Fire Officer III" prior to testing for chief officer position.

Step 5. Obtain a Bachelor Degree from an accredited college or university or completion of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, prior to testing for a chief officer position, or, provide documentation that either degree will be obtained within three years of being promoted.

Step 6. MFD will provide, subject to budget constraints, a mentoring opportunity for each company officer participating in this program. Periods of 3 months will be spent in the Fire Prevention Bureau, Training, Operations, Maintenance/Facilities, and the fire chiefs office.