

## Coming Recruit Class / Hiring Issues

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Placeholder for comments regarding the recent announcement of the coming Raleigh Fire Department recruit class. There was a [WRAL story](#) on same yesterday that included a text version. The latter has seemingly disappeared.

why is it that someone with a degree, in lets say accounting, and who looks in the paper one day and sees the fire department is hiring, has a better chance of getting hired than someone with no degree and who has been in the fire service and has applied more than three times. does that degree make that person smarter or a better firefighter? what happened to firefighters who had a trade like a carpenter or something? what does that person bring to the table that someone without a degree doesn't?

**Guest** - 08/16/06 - 19:58

why is everything black and white? does it matter to you who comes to your house to help you or your loved one when they may die? the only thing I ask is that that someone be the best at their job. if that means that a particular white person is better for the job, then give it to the white person. if a particular black person is better, than give it to the black person. if the best-qualified person is a woman, than give it to the woman. if the city of Raleigh wants their personnel to mirror the population of its citizens, why is their academy 57% minority? The people they hired better be darn good at a job that most of them have no idea about yet, because I know for a fact that they passed up a lot of good firemen again. and why do you advertise FD positions in Spanish? are you going to have a translator in the academy or just add a few weeks of English? i think reading and speaking English should be a requirement, or is that a racist thing to say? what if they had to make Major League Baseball rosters equal as far as race goes, and it didn't matter if they were the best or not? You would end up with a minor league team. The same for football or basketball. I hope this academy is the best one Raleigh has had, and I hope they realize how lucky they are. Good luck.

**Guest** - 08/16/06 - 19:58

Hey...I feel creative, so I will take on one of these. To have a degree or not to have a degree...that is the question (my apologies to William Shakespeare). That's a heck of a topic.

Back when I first became a firefighter (1976) the world was a lot simpler. I started volunteering in 1976 here in Wake County. I got my first 'real paying job' as a firefighter in 1978. In our line of work degrees were a rarity. I think (but could be wrong) that the only real places to get a degree in a fire service related field was either through Oklahoma State (home of the IFSTA books) and the University of Maryland. The only EMS related degree at that time was started at Western Carolina around 1977-76. So degrees were the exception. Except in the volunteer departments, where you had members who had degrees in law, engineering, biology, teaching, etc. My first paid fire chief did not have a degree, and I even heard once that he did not have a high school diploma- I do not know how accurate that was. None of the officers I worked under had degrees (although one had completed some college). I really cannot think of any of the paid fire chiefs back then that had degrees, but I am sure one or two may have. But the time was simpler. There were no OSHA rules to contend with, no legal matters, and the NFPA standards were limited. We were not certified (except as EMTs). Our equipment was pretty basic. We used 1 1/2" and 2 1/2" lines...LDH was still on the drawing board. Not a whole lot was really expected of us- ours was a physical job, not intellectual. You could be pretty smart, with a better than average amount of common sense, and be immensely successful as a fire officer (or chief).

Fast forward to 2006- it is pretty complicated to be a chief (or officer) these days. The rules have changed and gotten a lot more complicated. Does that mean you have to have a degree to understand them? Certainly not. You can be pretty smart, with a better than average amount of common sense, and be immensely successful. So what changed? We live in a society that has to measure everything. We have to be able to prove it in the numbers, put it on paper. Hence we are certified in everything. We have degrees available in just about any endeavor you may choose. And this is how society now 'measures' you. The fact that you have a degree says something about you that others may not readily know, since we live in a mobile society. It is a reflection of a level of dedication to a goal and a measure of your determination to achieve that goal. While your certifications essentially show that you have mastered certain skills, it is believed that a degree shows that you have the ability to understand those skills and apply them.

Bunk? Well, maybe. I know plenty of people with degrees that are, in the words of a former co-worker, "dumber than a bag of hair". At the same time, I know plenty of people that are certified (Firefighter, Driver/Operator, Fire Officer, Paramedic, Instructor Level I or II, etc) that

would also fit into that "bag of hair" description. And I know still more people who have been firefighters or paramedics for years and years who also fit in that bag. So what is the poor human resource manager to do?

It all goes back to that measurement thing. We want to measure it, so we have to have a way to do it. The unfortunate thing is that I learned more about firefighting from a group of 'non-educated' smoke eaters than many folks are learning in some of the certification classes today (no offense intended to anyone in particular). I learned about fire behavior, hydraulics, building construction, pump operations, and more from people who could honestly say "been there, done that". They learned it by figuring it out. I know that I can fight fire with the best of them, and work as an incident commander on a large or small scene, and can run a pumper as good as or better than most. I learned the hard way about how to tell what a fire is going to do, as opposed to what it has already done. But can I get a job as a firefighter or a driver/operator? No, since I am not certified. Fair? I don't think so, but that is the world of today. I know what works and does not work, but since I do not have BS or MS after my name, it does not count. Even if a degree is not in a fire or EMS related field, it shows a measurement of your intelligence, ability, and determination. If I could go back and change anything, I think that the one thing that I would change would be that I would have gone to college somehow. Maybe you all would be reading my articles in Fire-Rescue or Fire Chief.

I could go on and on, but sum it up like this- get the degree. I am 48, have been in this line of work for 30+ years, and have started back to get my degree. It is too easy today to get an Associate or Bachelor of Science Degree in Fire Protection or Emergency Medical Care not to. They are available in large part online. There is no excuse today for any firefighter or paramedic not to have one. Yes, it costs money. And yes, it takes a time commitment. But it shows a lot about your character that those who do not know you (i.e. fire chiefs, EMS chiefs, and human resource managers) realize. You set a goal, you worked hard to reach it, and you endured sacrifice to attain it. That, my friends, will get you further than you might realize.

**Dale** - 08/16/06 - 19:59

well said!

**CFP-7021** - 08/16/06 - 19:59

Here's a mirror of the WRAL story on Firehouse: <http://cms.firehouse.com/content/article..>

**Legeros** - 08/16/06 - 21:44

I don't disagree with that at all but some of the best firemen i know don't have a degree. and now that they want you to have a degree to become an officer they may not have a chance at advancement. Now they may be like me and not want that position, but if they did want it and had to compete with someone with a fraction of their experience who would you rather have telling you what to do? who would you put your faith in the guy with an accounting degree and 5 years or the guy with only FD certifications and 15 years on the job? granted the young guy might be able to keep you out of legal trouble better but what matters to you when the stuff hits the fan on scene?

**Guest** - 08/17/06 - 05:42

I'd like to see them maybe offer "extra credit" or something like that for holding a degree. However, I don't think it should bar you from a promotion because you lack a college degree. I know plenty of guys that would make awesome company officers, but because they don't have a degree they can't take the test. They've been on the job 15-20 years and learned from the best, are awesome teachers, and are good enough to "act as Captain", but not good enough to hold the position permanently? C'mon, double standards!!

**Silver** - 08/17/06 - 11:26

The main point I tried to make is that a lot of the people that are making the hiring and promotion decisions do not know you. They are from out of town, or even out of state. So, they need to have their 'measurement' tools to assess your knowledge, abilities, and skills. So the degree is a measurement. I know it is not fair all the time. I have been doing fire and EMS for 30 years. I can 'act' as an EMS District Chief. Then again, I was certified as a Firefighter III and a Fire Instructor III in NC, and a Firefighter III, Rescue Technician, Driver/Operator, and Fire Instructor III in another state, but since my certifications have expired, I cannot even get a part time job in one of the local volunteer departments here. I can do the job, probably as good if not better than a lot of folks, but I do not have that 'piece of paper' anymore. Fair? Not hardly. But it is the real world.

But I now know, whether I agree with it or not, what the playing field is. I have lost promotions in the past to lesser 'real wold' qualified individuals simply because I had an Associate Degree (in fire protection) and they had a Bachelor's Degree (in business administration). I had the experience, had demonstrated my abilities as a field professional, administrator, and incident commander and they didn't.

I know several folks that would make great officers- down to earth with tremendous common sense. And I know of several officers that have degrees that have no clue of reality, unless you can show it to them in charts, graphs, and numbers. But, the standard today is the degree. Right or wrong, that is it.

And with that, after 30 years, I have seen the future. I can continue to hump hose or stretchers for several more years, maybe getting to retire on disability as my father did, unable to really enjoy retirement, or I can adapt (something firefighters and paramedics are better at than anyone). I would much rather take the 'bull by the horns', so maybe I can ride around in an SUV, making the decisions that everyone writes about in weblogs like this.

It is a double standard at times, because you are good enough to 'fill in' but not get the promotion. I was even told once to train the person I lost the promotion to, since I had the skills, but she had the degree. But no one ever told me life was fair. And like I said, it is too easy to get a degree now, a lot easier than it was when I traveled to Wilson 2 or 3 days a week for 3 years for an Associate Degree. You can do just about all of it from home. There is no reason not to, as I finally realized.

**[Dale]** - 08/17/06 - 13:47

I agree with y'all about this. I have been in the fire service since 1994 as a vollie and have been paid since 1996. I have learned so much from people with 20 or more years of service. I have some college but no degree. I am however a 33 year old ffII, haz-mat tech, emt, instructor II, d/o, live burn instructor, and x- rescue tech. I learn something every time I go to work. About the degrees, they told us 10 years ago that one day we will need a degree to move up the chain. 2 years ago they gave us the time frame that we needed to get our education for promotions, so it is our fault if we don't get it. my dad spent 29.9 years on the job in law enforcement. back then they did not need the education, but he raised 3 boys and still found time to get his 2 years degree and was 1 class away from his 4 year degree. If he can do it any one can. Now for the deal about college-degreed people over high school-educated people. I have had everything from computer degrees to not even an 8th grade educated person taking my ffII classes at the vol. dept. The thing is some times you can find a ff with book sense and common sense together and they are willing to learn and love the job. But most of the college educated ff's will ask why instead of just doing what you ask. But Dale is right it is the generation of our society. If I ask a new boy to check the truck off or clean the toilets at the station, some will ask why like they are too good to do it. But our generation would get dog @#\$% out of the yard if asked to. The only thing I can say is go get your degree, or not but don't forget why we came to this job! we do it for the love of the job, most college people came here because they can't find a job in their field and they will not stay long. Except for the ones going for fire or ems.

Stay Safe.

**jason** - 08/18/06 - 10:03

Jason, Jason, type a little slower and more carefully next time. :-) Especially when writing about "book since." I'll clean up your posting after work tonight...

**Legeros** - 08/18/06 - 12:40

Jay, Good article last year in Fire Engineering about the "Y" or "why" generation. It's not that we ask questions or ask "why" because we are actually questioning someone, it's the fact of wanting to be educated as to why. The older generations came up based on the old school, militaristic mindset of "do as your told and don't ask any questions". Well, times are a changin' my friend, and people that have a better "education" of those in the past, truly want to know "why", so don't take offense.

I will say that I think it's a great thing that Asst. Chief Styons is doing away with the "warm and fuzzy" academy and going back to a para-military style. It seems as though the respect that is shown from a lot of probies/ rookies to the existing on-line personnel has decreased as the academies became "softer". Bravo to her, her staff, and upper admin. for supporting it.

**Silver** - 08/18/06 - 14:13

Hey, I know I can't type and I have not figured out this whole blog thing, so I will tie up my goat now! I did not take offense to your reply Jeff. We have been BROTHERS for some time now. But remember I am not talking junk about anyone that asks why? In 1994 when I joined the ranks as a new boy in Wendell, some of the paid guys called me "BUG". Because I followed them around at training, on calls and around the station asking questions all of the time. Just like you Jeff, I wanted to know, when, why and how everything worked. I learned a lot from them. But at the same time there is a difference in asking about something fire related verses asking why we have to cut grass? Why do I have to go to the store? Why do I have to wash dishes and they big one why do I have take the walk in blood pressures? Jeff just the other day I saw a probie sitting at the table at 9:00 am reading the sports section while the other firefighters were outside checking off the trucks. The Capt. was cleaning the bathrooms. This guy [ identifying details and other things deleted. No personal attacks, please, even indirect ones. ] My point is questioning why is not always bad, but the whole cry-baby why when it comes getting work done is bull! Mike thanks for dealing with my typing!

**jason** - 08/18/06 - 16:01

On the subject of new hires and respect, I submit that courtesy is a two-way street. The chief, officer, lieutenant, etc. who uses dismissive

derision to exert their authority ("hey, newboy," "hey, probie," etc.) is demonstrating their own lack of professional courtesy. While that senior person's **position** is certainly deserving of respect, the person occupying same is not. I can't think of a less effective way to treat the newest member of a work team regardless of industry. Hopefully this regrettable tradition is passing or has already passed...

**Legeros** - 08/18/06 - 16:30

It's part of the tradition; right, wrong, or indifferent. Everyone has had to endure some sort of ribbing in the fire service. I don't have a problem with it, whether I'm giving it or receiving it.

**Guest** - 08/19/06 - 19:55

My take on the degree question...

If I am hiring an employee, I view the pursuit of higher education as an asset that tells me this person is serious about being a career person. Whether you are hiring a firefighter, a paramedic, or a law enforcement officer, you are going to commit hundreds of hours of staff time and thousands of dollars in equipment to that individual during just the first few years of their employment. One of the traits you have to weigh in making that investment is the individuals ability to commit to a mission – and the achievement of higher education is a clear and documented indicator. Another advantage of hiring personnel with higher education is, especially with a degree attained since the late 80's, you are hiring someone with the ability to navigate around a computer. There is no role in today's Public Safety that does not require at least a moderate degree of interaction with a computer. I can appreciate the candidate that has years of experience in a given field, but when you ask them to complete an electronic record and they stare at the desktop for five minutes in disgust, their odds of success crash quickly.

Having just completed two weeks at the National Fire Academy in an EFO course, it is very clear why personnel having any degree of command responsibility need to have the ability to evaluate complicated situations and develop sound, safe, and effective solutions. While experience is a key to doing this, so is having the education to know how to properly assess and act. You have to not only know how something happens, but why and more importantly, why not. As much as we try to downplay it, we live and work in a highly technical complex arena – and deserve to have leaders (and future leaders) that are prepared to flourish.

My \$0.02...

**Olson** - 08/19/06 - 22:46

Name: (real name preferred)  
E-mail: (optional)  
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes  
No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

**What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?**

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

**Small print:** All html tags except <b> and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.