

## Helpful Hints for Successful Probation

If you're reading this article, congratulations. You've gotten past the interview process and been allowed a sneak preview into a sequestered world that the general public isn't a part of; the time-honored fraternity of firefighters. Your journey doesn't end with the interview though. Whether six months or a year, you'll have to prove yourself to your fellow members to get that coveted vote and retain your position. These are some of the qualities established members look for in "probies".

### **Commitment:**

You were told during your interview just how time intensive firefighting can be and you cheerfully agreed to that. Probation is when we see if you actually meant it. This involves showing up for calls, practices, and all the extras that we do (tours, clean up, training, etc.) Becoming a habitual 'no-show' is a fast track to early retirement.

### **Enthusiasm:**

Firefighting is seldom glamorous or heroic. Most of it is repetitious, backbreaking manual labour. No matter what task you've been assigned to though, do it to the best of your ability. If you act as though you'd rather be somewhere else, we'll be happy to accommodate that.

### **Deference to Senior Members:**

Unless there is a blatant safety issue, never argue with senior members. Whether it's on scene or at the hall, insubordination won't be tolerated. Even if you were a higher rank at a different department, you're still probationary now. Don't make the mistake of forgetting where you fit in.

### **Self Motivation:**

If you see something that needs to be done, offer to do it. Avoid being a spectator whenever possible. From sweeping the bay floors to spot cleaning the apparatus, there are always things that need to be done. Standing around watching everyone else work won't score any brownie points.

### **Fortitude:**

"It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the fight in the dog." No one is perfect, and we're not asking you to be. We can look past weaknesses if you give us your strengths. The amount of heart you put into the job is every bit as important as being able to do it.

### **Public Image:**

Becoming a firefighter puts you in the spotlight 24/7. Everyone in town will know who you are and what you do. Every move you make is subject to public scrutiny and, should you stray, can tarnish the well-groomed reputation of your department. No matter what you're doing at the time, remember that you are a representative of that department and act accordingly.

### **Pride:**

Arriving in a uniform that looks slept in with a three-day growth of facial hair shows not only a disrespect for your department, but a lack of personal image as well. Make us proud by demonstrating your pride in being part of our organization.

### **Aptitude:**

Some firefighters seem to be naturally gifted, and others have to work at it. No matter which one you think you are, take every opportunity to expand your knowledge and skill

base. Even as an observer, there is a wealth of information to be obtained just by watching your senior members. If by the end of your probation you're still bumbling ineptly around the fire ground, we might assume that you're not really interested in learning the trade.

**Team Spirit:**

Your fellow firefighters are, in every sense of the word, extended family. We look for people who are gregarious, helpful, polite...people we want to be 'related' to. Being antisocial, irritating, rude or disrespectful are almost certain to make you the cousin we don't invite to stay.

**Safety Compliance:**

Firefighting by its very nature is a dangerous and even life-threatening job. Breaching safety policies, freelancing, failing to wear proper PPE, or putting others at risk is not acceptable. SOP's and bunker gear are in place for a reason. Yes, gear can be uncomfortably warm and heavy, but it's designed to protect you. If we have to constantly remind you of that, or listen to you complain while you wear it, we may suggest you undertake more suitable hobbies.

While all of these suggestions may seem fairly straight forward, common sense sometimes vaporizes when probies get caught up in the Hollywood perception of what firefighting is all about. By keeping this list in the back of your mind as you work through your probation, you too can look forward to a productive and rewarding career in the fire service.