

AspiringFireOfficers.com

# FIRE OFFICER TRAINING

ORAL INTERVIEW PREPARATION – BATTALION CHIEF



ORAL INTERVIEW:

SAMPLE QUESTIONS / ANSWERS PREVIEW

## ORAL INTERVIEW BATTALION CHIEF SAMPLE QUESTIONS

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**A courageous conversation is best described as the conversation that you know you need to have, but are not looking forward to it. Please give an example of a courageous conversation that you have had with a supervisor or peer regarding his or her work performance.**

A time when I had a courageous conversation with a peer was when I was working as an officer on Engine 1. It became apparent to me that the officer on the other shift was running a pretty loose ship. In particular, he was lax on the uniform policy, his crews did not routinely check and sign off the apparatus check sheets, and the station was generally left in poor condition.

I approached the officer with my concerns. Before I finished what I had to say, he told me that I could run my shift the way I wanted to and that he would run his crew the way he wanted to. Moreover, it was none of my business how he ran HIS shift. He stated that he did not judge me for being a *micromanager* and he left his crews alone to do their job. He continued on to say that if he takes care of his crew, they take care of him. He concluded by saying that I could learn from his style as I had a reputation for being a hard ass and that people really didn't like working for me.

At first I was a little taken aback by his assertions, but I listened to what he had to say. As I processed his words, I quickly learned that his philosophy was to stay out of the way and let the crew run the station. The problem was that the basic details were not getting done. Additionally, there was a lack of leadership.

I explained that I understood his philosophy and that I had a concern that the rigs were not getting checked and that the station was not being cleaned on a routine basis. He stated that the rigs were fine and that his crews, for the most part, handled their station duties. Lastly, he said that uniforms were not a big deal to him and that nobody who was really sick ever complained if his crewmembers were wearing a t shirt.

I explained to him that his *laissez faire* leadership style was ineffective and that his crew was running the shift, not him. When he tried to interrupt me I reminded him that I listened to what he had to say and that it was now my turn to speak. I continued on to say that as a result of his leadership style, my crew had to pick up the slack. I gave the examples of having to clean the station and rigs after relieving his crew. I also explained that he could

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not selectively choose to enforce the policies and procedures, using the apathy to the uniform policy as my example.

I informed him that he was making it harder for every officer who followed the policies to do their job. In effect, he was minimizing the officer rank by not being a leader. Lastly, he was not doing his crew any favors by not holding them accountable for their basic job duties and that this was propagating the problems.

I reminded him that his crewmembers were a reflection of him and how he runs his shift. I shared with him that when one of his crew members works on my shift it is a constant battle to get him to check out the rigs and clean the stations. Whether or not he wears his uniform is hit or miss. My crewmembers see this behavior and question why one of their peers is allowed to perform at such a low level. It becomes a constant supervisory challenge when working with one of his crewmembers.

I shared with him that the other officer in the station felt the same way about how he ran his shift and the impact it had on the station and on his crew. The reality was his crew was the anomaly. They performed well on emergency responses, but all of the other associated duties were not being performed or were at a minimal expected level.

Slowly he began to understand. He divulged that he was proud of how his crew performed on emergency responses, but he acknowledged that there was room for improvement on all of the areas that I had pointed out. To his credit he had a crew meeting and explained to his members that he had let some things slide and it was time for all of them to up their game. The reality is that old habits are hard to break. There was a definite improvement in the way they cleaned the station and took care of the rigs.

What this reinforced in me was the importance of engaging in conversations, regardless of how uncomfortable, when expectations are not being met. Oftentimes the individual or group that you are speaking with simply is unaware of the impacts of their behavior. As a battalion chief I must address issues quickly and directly in order to make my officers successful and have high performing crews.

### **Here is another example:**

The issue was that when responding to a fire, my Battalion Chief would issue orders over the radio before he arrived on the scene. Chief Rollins had a habit of trying to run the

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incident and assign companies as he was driving to the scene. All of the officers found this to be very disruptive and it is against the rules of incident management. The rules state that the incident commander must be on the scene before he or she assumes command and assigns companies.

I understand that there are times when it may be appropriate for the Battalion Chief to remind an officer to lay a supply or to establish two out before making entry. However, he was assigning companies and giving objectives, which was very disruptive to the first in officer.

I spoke to the officer on the neighboring engine company. He said this was something Chief Rollins did on every incident and that I should get used to it. I asked him if he had discussed the issue with Chief Rollins and he said that he did not want to get ruffle his feathers since he was the Battalion Chief.

The first time it happened I didn't say anything. After the second time I asked Chief Rollins if we could meet at and review the fire. I brought up the fact that it was confusing when he issued orders while driving to the fire. He seemed genuinely confused about what I was saying. When I clarified it, he denied issuing orders over the radio prior to his arrival. I was taken aback by his statement and clarified what he had just said.

Fortunately, like I do after every major incident I am involved with, I had requested a copy of the audio transcript from dispatch and had already reviewed the incident. I simply played the audio tape for Chief Rollins. Slowly he nodded his head and apologized. He had not realized that he was doing it. He promised not to do it again and he has honored his word. Ironically, the officer on the neighboring engine brought it up to me that Chief Rollins no longer tries to run the incident while driving to the scene. I simply nodded my head and did not say a word.

**While you are making your station rounds, a firefighter at Station 3 comments that he is glad that he is not working at Station 4 today as the engine and truck officer do not get along. In fact, he just received a call from a firefighter at Station 4 who said today the two officers are arguing incessantly.**

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**You get in your vehicle and drive to Station 4. As you approach the officer's quarters you can hear the two officers shouting at one another. Please outline your plan to deal with this situation.**

First and foremost, I am disappointed that I was unaware of the tension between the two officers. I believe that it is my responsibility to know what is going on in my battalion. I am disappointed to learn of it in this manner.

I would approach the officer's quarters and knock on the door as I opened it. I would survey the situation and get a feel for what is going on. If it is as the question presents, I would demand that the two officers stop arguing immediately. If the arguing persists, I will raise my voice to gain control of the situation.

Once I have succeeded in getting them to stop arguing, I would let them know that their conduct is unacceptable. I will not tolerate having two officers acting so unprofessional at the fire station. This is not how I want my fire stations run. It shows a complete lack of leadership and does not promote teamwork and harmony within the station.

I will let them know that it is never acceptable to get into a screaming match at the fire station. While it is ok to have a disagreement, it is completely unprofessional to lose your composure and yell at another officer. If they were in such disagreement they should have separated themselves until cooler heads prevailed and revisited the issue or they should have called me to mediate. For me to hear about it while at another station is appalling. This incident has now traveled through the department and they have both lost credibility amongst their subordinates and peers, regardless of who is in the right. It would make matters even worse had a member of the public wandered into the fire station.

Before I have them describe what is going on I would set ground rules for the meeting and make sure they are very clear that raising of voices, unprofessional conduct, and name calling will not be tolerated. I will ask them together what the root of the problem is. I would expect each of them to tell me his side of the story. If there is a clear solution to the problem, I will identify it and put a plan into place. If I find that I am not getting the full side of the story I will speak to them individually. It has been experience that I may get a better story if they are separated.

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I will make it clear that I will not tolerate their bickering in the station. It is okay if they do not get along and do things together on their days off, it is not acceptable for them to be unprofessional. They need to find a way to be professional and work together.

If I believe they cannot work together, I can exercise “management rights” and transfer one, or both, out of the station. This is a last resort as it does not solve the problem and teach them to work together. Additionally, transferring one member often means displacing another member out of his or her station who did nothing wrong.

I will let them know that I will be following the department’s progressive disciplinary system and issuing each of them a counseling session. I will record it in my supervisor’s log. Any future similar occurrences will result in an oral reprimand. Lastly, I will remind them that if they feel the situation escalating in the future that they should take a step back and take a moment to settle down before it is too late. If this does not work, they are to call me to help them work through the issues.

**This is just a sample of the 40+ pages of questions with suggested follow-up answers included in the [AspiringFireOfficers.com](http://AspiringFireOfficers.com) member site.**