



**Legacy Profession: A Multi-Generational Fire Service
Webinar Notes**

Imagined Life vs Actual Life in the Fire Service

- How did life in the fire service compare to what you imagined before you joined?
 - **Brithany:** Believed the fire service to be very family oriented. The department gave out a guidebook on how to treat each other and she based a lot of her expectations on that. When she got into the department, she found that it was a little different. There was some backstabbing and it's not as team/family oriented as she thought it would be. A lot of her expectations about what life would be like came from the testing process. She had known before that the fire service was family oriented, but when she was testing she found that the fire department had its own version of what 'family oriented' meant.
 - **Keith:** Saw the fire service through both his father and his grandfather. He perceived that the job would be fulfilling and that he would be able to garner relationships through his job and those all were true. The only thing that shocked him when he entered the fire service was the competition. He thought that people just got jobs in the fire service and he expected it to be easy, especially as a third generation firefighter. He did have to work hard to obtain a position in the fire department.
- Did you have to overcome any obstacles to join the fire service?
 - **Keith:** There were no obstacles for him to join the fire service. Since his father and grandfather were both firefighters he did have additional resources available to him and excellent background on the fire service to prepare him for a career in this profession.

Becoming a 'Multi-Generational' Fire Service Family

- How did your family become a multi-generational firefighter?
 - **Keith:** There really was no recruitment strategy, becoming a firefighter was really inherent, because he was able to get insight into the profession since both his father and grandfather were in the fire service. When he was younger he did not want to become a firefighter, because everyone told him that since his father and grandfather were firefighters, he was going to be one too. As he got older, he found that the lifestyle of a firefighter was something that appealed to him and he became interested in pursuing it as a career. The fact that his father and grandfather had successful meaningful careers helped with Keith's decision to become a firefighter as well.
 - **Brithany:** She always wanted to be a firefighter, but it really started to become something she wanted to pursue when her older brother started testing to become a firefighter. Seeing the benefits of the lifestyle her family led also really helped with her decision.
- Did the fire department's recruitment messages help your decision to become a firefighter?
 - **Keith:** No, they did not. There was no specific department that he wanted to work for at the time, so there was no department specifically recruiting him. The only specific that he had when he was testing, was that he did not want to work for the same department as his father.
 - **Brithany:** Had made the decision to only test for Phoenix Fire Department, so no other department's recruitment messaging affected her decision.



- Are there any recruitment messages that could enhance the appeal of joining the fire service for individuals who already have a family member working in the profession?
 - **Keith:** Simply asking their family members would be a great way to see if they are interested. In many Caucasian families it is a known fact that you will follow your father in his chosen profession. Many African-American families do not have the same view on following in your parent's footsteps into their career. Because it is non-traditional in the culture, you really have to reach out and make it known that you want them to be a part of the department and that it is an option.
 - **Brithany:** Expose your family to the fire department and really let them see what life in the fire service is all about. Showing them around the department on a regular basis can really spark their interest.
- Are there any exposure programs that fire service organizations should be utilizing, should not be utilizing or are under-utilizing?
 - **Keith:** Exposure is key and there cannot be enough of it. In the case of someone who has a family member in the fire department, the exposure happens very easily because they see the job through their parent's eyes. Any other programs such as reserve programs, ride-a-long programs, etc. are extremely valuable.
- Is there a multi-generational message you would suggest back to the fire department to use when recruiting from within families?
 - **Keith:** Let the members of your department know that you do want to recruit their family members to the fire service. Make them aware of the recruitment opportunity.
 - **Brithany:** Send out the members of your department who look like the people they want to recruit into the community. Many kids respond positively to messaging that centers around 'they look like me and can do that job, so why can't I?'
- Are there any pressure or expectations that you perceived because you had a family member in the fire service? If yes, how did you deal with them?
 - **Keith:** There were definitely pressures, especially when he got to the point of having interviews because his family name was well known. The pressure did help him, it made him work harder because there was the expectation that he would get the job because it was in his family. His father's good name and reputation did help Keith when it came to getting hired in the fire department.
- Did having a family member who was in a command-level position offer additional pressures?
 - **Brithany:** Yes, especially as an African-American woman who's dad was the Fire Chief, there was extra pressure. She doesn't think that other people who also had their father's on the job felt as much pressure as she did.
- Did the perceived pressure hinder you from encouraging other people to join?
 - **Brithany:** It did for a little bit, but at this point of her career, she sees a different side of things and would encourage others to pursue a career in the fire service. Now that she knows what to tell recruits and has been through it, she would recruit other people.
 - **Keith:** Any of the pressures that he perceived or any of the obstacles that he had to overcome were worth it. The end justifies the means and he will always encourage others to join the fire service because he loves what he does. Nothing would negate him from encouraging anyone else to become a firefighter.
- Recruitment Points of Summary:
 - Everyone should be out recruiting, either from within your family or your community.
 - Showing others that you love your job is one of the best recruitment messages.



Creating Opportunities:

- Benefits of being a firefighter:
 - **Keith:** Personally saw how a career in the fire service had a positive impact on his life. You are able to lead a good, healthy lifestyle, you are able to go out and help your community every day and get paid for it, you can garner some great relationships through work, and you get a steady pay check.
 - There are also many different promotional opportunities and career paths that are made available within the fire service.

Participant Questions:

- Gregory's Question: What technique do you use to convince African Americans that the fire service is something they should consider?
 - **Keith:** Exposure. You are not going to get everyone you recruit, but if you expose them to the fire department they will be able to make an informed decision to see if they want to pursue a career in the fire service.
- Gregory's Recruitment Concept:
 - Greg was part of a recruitment team in the past that came up with the concept to have a member from each of the under-represented communities come together as a recruiting team. The team had female, Asian, African-American, Hispanic and Native American members who worked for the fire department. The team recruited from churches, universities and cadet programs and was very successful. Their strategy was to use mass exposure of the fire department and they were able to reach their target numbers. Unfortunately, the team was disbanded due to budgetary issues.
 - **Keith:** It takes women to recruit women and Asians to recruit Asians. This strategy has proven to be a successful recruitment tool. It does take time and money to recruit.
 - **JB:** Only having one active recruitment period per year is not enough time to generate interest and find recruits who meet the standards of the department. Departments that recruit year-round and do 'pre-recruitment' develop more pathways and applicant pools to choose from when it comes time to test and hire new individuals. Because we know that we are losing current African-American members, it is important that we use them while they are still active in the fire service to recruit new members from the family and friends.
- Duane's Question: Why do African-Americans not actively recruit from within their own family into this profession?
 - If you won't recruit your own family members into the profession, how do you expect to go into the community to recruit African-Americans into the profession? You have to start within your own household and family structure to provide an opportunity to have a multi-generational legacy within this industry. People should be looking at their family and friends first when recruiting because they trust you and will be more likely to become involved than someone who has no connection to the fire service.
 - **Bob:** He always shared a positive message with his family, even if he had negative experiences at work. He never saw any benefits in sharing his war stories or wounds, when what he wanted to teach them was about how serving and helping others was important. The message you tell/show your children is very important because you are always transmitting to them. As Bob moved up the ladder at work, his children were also able to see the benefits of his career choice as they were able to have 'bigger pieces of meat on the table and better vacations.'

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- **JB:** He can count how many African-American firefighters he knows whose lifelong career goal was to become a firefighter. Not many people have an inherent love for the profession; many people like JB walked into it and learned to love it. A lot of time it's about getting the people into the process and helping them through it and they will develop a deep love for the profession as they get more exposure.
- Darrien's Comment:
 - Darrien was one of the people who weren't interested in being a firefighter, but he grew to love the profession. The realities of the dangers of the profession hit home for Darrien when two of his co-workers died in a structure fire. He had to wrestle with promoting his career to his children. He knew that firefighting was a great profession and it was very fulfilling, but his hesitation came from a protective standpoint because he wasn't sure if he wanted his children to face that kind of danger. Darrien's children both want to be firefighters and he actively recruits his nephews and cousins by bringing them to the station. He also talks with community members and exposes them to the profession. Darrien feels that it is important to hold on to the people who have shown a real interest because when the numbers going down everyone has to use all recruitment methods they can.
 - **Keith:** Prepare your recruits for the reality of the job. There are dangers associated with the job, but the positive aspects of the profession are much greater.
- Suzanna's Question: How do I engage persons who are so disheartened with their organization that they don't want to bring others into it? How do I overcome 20+ years of what they have had to live with to aid in changing our culture for future members?
 - **Keith:** It is very frustrating to go out and recruit for new members and have no one apply, or get through the testing process. In addition to time and money, you also need to have your hiring authority committed to recruitment. Keith has also found that finding an informal leader within your community that is willing to recruit for you is an invaluable resource. There was a minister in his area who would talk about the fire department and how to become involved and when he had some interested parties a representative for the department came to give them more information.
 - **JB:** There are other entities that are successful recruiters. If you have an individual who doesn't want to go out into the community and recruit, see if you can just get them to be a conduit, so they can get you into the arena where the connections are. From there you can find someone who has the skillset to become the active recruiter.
 - **Bob:** Look at your 'stories/wounds' and see how can you turn your bad experiences into lessons and words of wisdom for new recruits. Turn your experiences into stories that can be used to motivate and teach new members how to overcome obstacles they may face.
- Carol's Question: Does anyone have a plan in place for Retention?
 - **Bob:** In Phoenix, all of the retired firefighters get together once a month and plan ways they can help with recruitment. They have formed a support system for new firefighters to help give them survival tips, and mentor them through the process and through promotions. When he was still active in the fire service when Brithany started, she was able to call him and talk about any problems she had and he was able to help her strategize how to deal with what she was going through or give her resources that she could also consult.



- **Keith:** In his department the management team wants to make sure that the firefighters they take the time to recruit stay in the department. It's part of the management's job to look out for them, so the retention process is equal and fair. He personally looks out for the minority fire fighters who come into the department.
- **JB:** There are auxiliary organizations that exist that are there to support the interests of the fire service, retention being one of them. Look at creating something like that to create the system of support that is needed. It needs to be more systemic rather than on the fringes. Creating and supporting an environment where people know that they will have people to back them up is crucial.
- What does diversity really mean to an African American firefighter?
 - **Keith:** He doesn't have a specific answer since the question is so broad. Personally, his idea of diversity has changed. Diversity no longer just refers to just diversity in race or ethnicity, it also means diversity in applicant pools. Traditionally the fire service has recruited from the military and other agencies that focus more on the physical aspect. He feels that we should also recruit from computer fields and show them the benefit of life in the fire service.

Closing Comments:

- **JB:** Data is crucial. Many departments do not know how many African American multi-generational families are in their department. You cannot tap into a resource if you do not have a good data set. Firefighters ABC is an organization that is seeking to create a data set on recruitment in the fire service if anyone is interested in researching that.
- **Keith:** He hopes he was able to share some light on recruiting and retaining for a multi-generational fire service family.
- **Bob:** Don't bar your recruitment efforts from your family/community even if you have bad experiences. Turn your bad experiences into lessons so you can help new recruits experience and different and better fire service that what you experienced.

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