

# The psychology of becoming a firefighter

**Frank R. Myers**

Thursday, September 28, 2017

---



My lifelong dream was to become a pilot, either military or commercial. However, the financial situation in my household — being raised by my mother in a single-parent household with two other siblings — was not conducive to pay for college or take flying lessons.

I looked to achieving something feasible and stable. My uncles had always instilled in me that if I was not going to go to college and seek employment in the private sector or corporate America, then I should get a civil service job. You can get all your benefits, and you will get a pension after working there the required amount of years.

Once in high school, I set my goal on becoming a firefighter. I felt it was somewhat achievable and had career aspects I sought. A cousin already on the job could not say enough about how much he enjoyed it and the fact that it was a great job. I enrolled in community college and entered the associate's degree program for fire science technology.

Halfway through the schooling, I received the call to get hired. I eventually went on to finish my degree after completing my probationary period with the fire department. One motivating factor repeated several times during training was that there were 20 other willing candidates out there for each of us in the recruit class.

Once in the training academy for the department I was hired for, I sincerely felt this was going to be my career of choice. I felt a sincere passion for what I was doing and the ability to help people. Plus, you really get to do cool stuff and work with cool equipment. Some self-satisfaction also came from being recognized as a person who has achieved the privilege to wear the patch and/or uniform.

I've faced many challenges over the years. Probably one of the hardest was to get my paramedic certificate. The lecture, labs and clinics exposed me to a vocabulary and unfamiliar world that I did not know existed. I had a taste of it with EMT training, but never as in-depth as with paramedics.

Shortly after receiving my paramedics certification, I joined my department's urban search and rescue team, FEMA, FLTF2 (Florida Task Force 2). As it turned out, there was a need for logisticians (logistics specialists). After many years and many deployments, it was one of the most rewarding experiences in my career and life.

However, it does bring a lot of inconvenience to your family, especially when you have young children. Having to deploy during or after a hurricane that may be making landfall where you live and not being there for your loved ones can create challenges. Having to leave at inconvenient times for earthquakes or terrorist attacks when there are milestones occurring in your child's or wife's life is a tough decision to make.

As a firefighter, you take on that responsibility and accept it. Your family also should understand.

Another aspect of the fire service and the role of a firefighter is taking promotional exams, if one so desires. If you want to move up in your career, obtain some recognition, receive an increase in pay or for whatever reason, it is something everyone should attempt in their career.

I wasn't the greatest at academics, but I was persistent. In my department, firefighters studying for promotion would give up about four to six months of their lives. We're talking about 12- to 16-hour days (around 1,200-2,000 hours total study time). And reading anywhere from 6-10 books, at a minimum four times each up to eight times each.

After dedicating so much time, you prayed you would not get into an accident driving to the location where the exam was being administered. After finishing the exam, it took some time to adjust back to a "normal" routine. It took me four attempts at the lieutenant's exam before I finally got promoted — not for the faint of heart or impatient candidates.

After all this, I came to the realization that I was not going to attempt any more promotional exams — despite wanting to achieve captain or chief prior to retiring. I was satisfied that I was serving a good cause in my position and accepted my accomplishments.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be writing articles and doing so much in my retirement based on the relationships, knowledge, skills and abilities that came from the fire department. The fire service provides ample opportunity and a great track to run on while employed, and it can help set the tone for the future after the formal career is over.

---

#### About the Author



Frank R. Myers is a retired lieutenant with the City of Miami (Florida) Fire Rescue, where he served for 32 years. He works as a consultant for [PSTrax.com](https://www.pstrax.com), a technology service that helps fire departments across the country automate their apparatus, equipment and inventory checks.

---