

ORANGE PEEL

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ENGINE COMPANY OPERATIONS

Is It A Lost Art?

We all know that the primary goal of the Engine Company is to quickly and efficiently put a line into operation to either extinguish the fire or to try and hold it in check to protect the Truck Company while performing search and rescue of occupants from rapidly extending fire. We've all heard the phrase "the fire goes as the first line goes". I don't know if I've ever heard a more true statement. So why is it that we don't practice like we play?

In today's fire service we have to deal with a lot of things, Politics, decreased staffing levels, hotter fires due to increase in plastics, not as many fires, light weight roofs, the list goes on and on. With all that said, it is more important than ever to not lose sight of the Basics and train on them! Why is it if you're an E.M.T. or Paramedic you have to have so many hours of continuing education every 2 years, but no one says you have to train so many hours a day or week or month on firefighting? Don't most departments run way more medical aids than fires? When was the last time you heard of someone going into a house, or apartment, or commercial building, on a medical aid and being killed? It doesn't happen!

Let's talk about training. I said earlier that we have fewer fires than before, much to our disliking, but it's a reality. That being said, Training is more important than ever. So get out of the recliners and your comfort zone. And I'm not talking about taking your probie or engine company to a vacant parking lot and just pulling hose, I'm talking about putting some thought into what you're doing and making it challenging and realistic. When was the last time you saw a fence in a parking lot, or a set of stairs that led to a door after you had to go around a car and only had a few feet on each side of you? Concentrate on things like size-up; it's not just the Captains or Chiefs responsibility. Talk about things to look for such as building dimensions, doors, windows with bars or without and where they are. Smoke and fire conditions upon arrival will tell you a lot about what is going on within the building, as well as whatever information you get while enroute, such as multiple calls, reports of people trapped etc. Next time you're on that medical aid in the apartment complex that's filled with kids take a look around to see where the stairways are and how much hose you'll need to get into an apartment. And don't be afraid to pull hose to find out! Who cares if you have to reload it and it takes 30 minutes out of your day. It's better than living with the fact that your crew could have made a rescue of one of those kids if you wouldn't have come up short on your hose stretch!

How about discipline while on that engine company? And I'm not talking about someone not wearing a uniform shirt when they're supposed to either. I'm talking about people having an assignment at the beginning of the shift so your Company "just doesn't figure it out when you get there". Discipline is knowing your job and making sure it gets done to the best of your ability. Not everyone on that engine company can be on the nozzle!

I don't care if you have a two-person engine company or a five-person engine company; you have someone on the nozzle and you Have To Have a back up position pulling hose as well. You can call them a corner man, you can call them back up it doesn't matter but they need to understand their roll on that hose line. If the nozzleman doesn't have the help he needs getting that hose line to the seat of that fire things can go wrong in an instant. It is the nozzleman's responsibility to control and direct the line while fighting fire. (Relax Officers, I know that ultimately you direct the line and where it goes and the nozzleman operates it). I'm talking team approach. As the back up firefighter or firefighters you have a few things you need to do depending on where you are on that hose line. If you are directly behind the nozzleman your jobs include but are not limited to the following. Lightening up on the line, by this I mean holding the line and helping the nozzleman. If he wants to go right you pull slightly to the left, if he goes left you push slightly to the right, if he wants the stream to go up you push slightly down etc. The other job you have is to monitor conditions around you. What's the fire doing? What's the smoke doing? Are conditions improving or deteriorating? Company Officers, just because you have a radio doesn't mean you don't touch the hose, especially in today's world of decreased staffing. The Company Officer may be the back-up person. The Officer may or may not be the most experienced member on the crew. That doesn't matter, what matters Officers, is that you are in there with your men especially if everyone doesn't have a radio.

If you are not directly behind the nozzleman and find yourself as a corner man or third or fourth guy on the line you may not even be in the same room as the nozzle team. Does this make your job any less important? Absolutely not! A little less glamorous maybe but just as important and it also requires a lot of discipline. So how do you know when the nozzle team has enough hose?

Obviously through communication, if your radio is working or if you can hear it. Maybe you can see they have enough, or, you can advance the hose until you see a slight bend in it. If they need more, that hose will go straight, just keep feeding until you see a slight bend again. You will probably be able to feel the hose line being opened and closed by the nozzleman depending where you are on the hose line as well. If the back up firefighters or firefighter doesn't do his/her job the nozzleman will take an absolute beating trying to advance the hose line by himself. He may also not be aware of certain things that are going on during the fire. Whether it's fire above him, behind him or a radio transmission he may have not heard. You are a second pair of eyes and ears for the nozzle man. The back up position is key in an effective engine company operation. If you don't think so, switch positions with the nozzleman and find out how difficult it is for yourself when the back up firefighter doesn't do his/her job.

Please get out there and train realistically with your crews, stretch hose, flow water, practice your positions and become a well disciplined, well trained engine company. Train like your lives and the lives of your Brothers and Sisters depend on it. Because they do!