

ORANGE PEEL

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LESSONS LEARNED-PART 1

From time to time I will attempt to share lessons that I learn from actual fires that I go on. I am in no way trying to dictate how you and your crew should run your fires or even the right way to run fires. I will only try to enlighten by relaying things that I learn on different fires. These insights will usually result from mistakes that I make or see happening on the fire ground and how these mistakes affect the fire attack. These lessons are from the perspective of an engine guy. Sorry truck guys but it's what I know.

To help you understand where I am coming from let me explain how we run things on our company. We have a four-man company with a nozzle man, a back-up man, an engineer and an officer. (And to all of you east coast firefighters reading this, yes the engine guys carry irons. I know it goes against everything you guys do as engine guys but we don't have the manpower that you have and if the tool man can handle light forcible entry that frees up our four person truck company to handle some of the other tasks they have to complete).

The nozzle man handles stretching the hose, getting the hose ready to take interior, making sure there is adequate pressure in the line and a straight stream pattern if not using a smoothbore nozzle, and attacking the fire. Once the line is in place he may have to help the back-up man with forcing the front door. The back-up man takes the irons and a hook to the front door and forces the door if he can do it by himself. If he needs assistance then he usually will get it from the other firefighter or the officer. With the front door open the tool man's next priority is to get the nozzle man to the seat of the fire. This means he is to wedge the door, chase kinks and pull hose. If it is a difficult stretch he will position himself either at the door or at a tight corner where the hose could get caught up.

Once he gets the nozzle to the seat, and the nozzle man no longer needs his assistance to extinguish the fire, he is free to search or begin checking the attic with the hook that he left at the front door. The officer does officer stuff, whatever that is. Then will either assist with forcible entry and/or assist with fire attack by directing hose placement and sometimes pulling hose. The engineer does engineer stuff.

Okay, so here we go. Second Due...What to do?

In the world of firefighting it seems like everything we read is about what to do when you are first on scene. Which makes sense since the first arriving companies can do the most good if their tactics are true. But what about the second due companies, specifically second due engine companies. What do we do when the attack line is already stretched, the door is already forced and the search is complete? All the glory goes to first due attack crew, but a proficient second due engine can make all the difference.

I recently had a fire where we arrived as the second engine on scene. The first due engine had already begun stretching the attack line thru the front door. I was the nozzle man and proceeded to go up and see if they needed help getting the attack line in. My partner, the back-up man, came up with the irons and the hook, placed them at the front door and went in to help search. I noticed that one of the first due truck guys was holding open the security door as the line got stretched in. He then let go of the door and went in. As I followed the line in I wedged the door open. By the time I got up to where the nozzle was, the main body of fire was out and all that remained were some spot fires in rooms already covered by the nozzle.

And that's when I realized that I had made a mistake. Upon seeing that the initial line was advancing without problems I should have immediately pulled a second line, a "back-up line." Seeing the flare ups behind the attack nozzle was the clue that I should have had that back-up line in my hand, backing up the attack team and putting out any fire that still remained. More importantly, had the attack line needed help in extinguishing the fire, the back-up line would have been there. Luckily for me that was not the case. The initial attack line was all that was needed to extinguish the fire. The back-up line could have also been used to attack a fire in the attic as the initial attack line battled the main blaze.

The back-up also learned a lesson. Being second due changes the type of tool that the tool man needs to bring. It was obvious that forcible entry was not needed since the line was already going in. The irons should have been replaced with an attic ladder. We always check the attic in a working fire so the attic ladder is a must. Having it come in on the heels of the back-up line allows us to properly fight an attic fire, if that is where the fire progresses. Because the only correct way to fight an attic fire is to get up into the attic and attack the fire directly. Spraying water from down below only extinguishes the fire directly above the hole.

We also learned that wedging a door is still not a high enough priority in our department. The second due engine nozzle man should not be the first to wedge the door. It was obviously a problem since, as the line was advancing, a truck guy felt compelled to hold the door open. But no one took the time, or had the wedge, to correctly secure the door in an open position. Force it. Open it. Wedge it.

I hope that the lessons I learned from this fire will help some of you avoid making the same mistakes. If these mistakes that I made seem elementary to you, then you are on your way to becoming a well rounded and well trained firefighter. I personally try to learn something on every fire. That's how I become a better firefighter. Until next time, stay low, stay safe and never stop Bringing It.