

Organizational Change of the Nashville Fire Department:

Complying with the National Fire Incident Reporting System

Presentation



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CHANGE & STABILITY MANAGEMENT

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Slide 1 - Introduction

Hello, I would like to thank everyone for joining me. Today we are going to discuss the Nashville Fire Department's journey in improving its reporting and also discuss how the department can continue to improve into the future.

Slide 2 - About Me

I would like to start by introducing myself. My name is Jad Dotson. I am from Nashville, Tennessee in the United States. I am a second generation firefighter for the NFD. I joined the department in 2012 and am currently an Engineer assigned to Engine 17.

Slide 3 - The Nashville Fire Department

The Nashville Fire Department was established in 1860 and serves Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County (Nashville Fire Department, 2024). The NFD responds to more than 150,000 fires, rescues, and emergency medical calls per year (Napier, 2023). It is comprised of more than 1,400 personnel dedicated to making the city a safer place (Sain, 2023).

Slide 4 - Issues in Reporting

Every emergency call is reported and sent to both the state and federal governments for documentation purposes. In 2015, leadership of the NFD decided to look into the departments reporting. It was found that the department was vastly underperforming compared to its peer jurisdictions. We will briefly discuss what was done to reach this point, analyze where we currently are, and give direction on how to continue to improve in the future.

Slide 5 - What is the NFIRS

So what is the National Fire Incident Reporting System? NFIRS is data collection system utilized by thousands of fire departments around the country. Its purpose is to collect data for use in improvements in fire safety. Its origins date back to 1973 when the America Burning report highlighted the country's fire issues at the time (Moore-Merrell, 2023; U.S. Fire Administration, 2019).

Slide 6 - How We Got Here

The State of Tennessee requires participation in the NFIRS system per state law. Back in 2015 It was found that the city had 42% of all reports rejected by NFIRS due to incomplete or incorrect data. Peer jurisdictions had rejection rates of only 1/10th to 1/2 of a percent, it was at that point that management decided to prioritize this issue (Napier, 2023).

Slide 7 - How We Got Here

Management created new Operational Procedures and Guidelines (OPGs) and tasked Chief Kelton and Captain Napier as well as the Assistant and District Chiefs with the rollout and day to day management of the change initiative (Kelton, 2023; Napier, 2023; Tomlinson, 2024). Today, this has resulted in a 100% reporting score.

Slide 8 - What's the Problem?

So if we have achieved 100% what is the problem? The problem lies in the quality of our reporting. In 2022 and 2023 it was found that the NFD responded to over 11,000 false fire alarm calls equating to a cost of over \$1.46 million (Hutchison, 2024). This does not take into account the added risk to personnel and the public when an emergency vehicle responds with lights and sirens. The National Safety Council found in 2021 that there were 198 fatalities in crashes involving emergency vehicles, 56% of which were the occupants of the non-emergency vehicles (NSC, 2023). The Nashville Fire Department's Fire Marshalls Office which enforces the city's fire codes has used this reporting data to write over 2,000 citations in the last year (Hutchison, 2024). Higher quality reporting is paramount in the Fire Marshall's Office's ability to enforce codes on buildings that are dangerous.

Slide 9 - Standings

The NFD is one of the top departments in the country. However, after analyzing NFIRS data on overall quality score, Nashville lags behind the other largest cities in the state. This chart shows how the NFD has performed over the last three years compared to the cities of Memphis, Knoxville, and Chattanooga (Tennessee State Fire Marshall's Office 2, 2024).

Slide 10 - Standings

In this slide you can see a comparison of each of the cities performance metrics in 2022 (Tennessee State Fire Marshall's Office 2, 2024).

Slide 11 - SWOT

This slide shows our SWOT Analysis. For our strengths we have a fully supportive leadership team that is willing to support the needed changes. We also have an experience program management team that is able to modify and analyze the program and provide training.

Our weaknesses include the learning curve required to write better reports. There is a need for more staff to manage and review the reports. Lastly there is a culture of making the newest, least experienced person write the reports. We will need to motivate the more experienced personnel assisting in training new employees.

A few of the opportunities include reducing the false calls and increased safety through better training. Reducing false calls would use less fuel, put less wear and tear on the heavy equipment, and decrease accident risk.

Resistance from the union is a large threat that could be faced. Complaints about more time required to write reports could result in a large opposition. Lastly, budget constraints. This program will require more employees to monitor and provide feedback. Support from the Mayor and other politicians will be critical in gaining increased funding.

Slide 12 - Stakeholder Analysis

The Assistant and District Chiefs are high power, less interest. They have the power to influence but follow the direction of upper management.

Firefighters are low power, low interest. More experienced employees will have more power and interest than new one so they are placed closer to the center and must be watched more closely.

The union would fall in the high power, high interest category. This is a group that must be worked with closely. Rogue management is also a possibility. These managers may be supporting the cause around leadership but take a different message back to the employees.

Lastly, our Captains are low power, high interest. These are the first line managers, they only reach 1-4 employees, however they have higher levels of influence on that group.

Slide 13 - Culture and Resistance

It has been said that the fire department is "100 years of tradition, unimpeded by progress." Retired Fire Chief Bashoor said, "we all know those people in the fire service who use "tradition" as the daily rallying cry to fight change, aka progress" (2018). In all actuality, the fire service is very progressive in adapting to the latest technologies and seeking to evolve from performance critiques. However as in any organization, there will be those who resist change and stand behind tradition as an excuse (Bashoor, 2018).

Slide 14 - Force Field Analysis

The force field analysis helps us to visually depict who might be for our change and who might be against it. Our leadership is our biggest asset and supporter followed by the NIFRS program team. Our Assistant Chiefs will be the leading force on each shift. Lastly our District Chiefs will be our field managers taking the vision out to the employees. The union could be our largest resistance. Firefighters will likely resist due to training, peer pressure, or motivation. Captains could prove to be supportive but some will likely resist. Lastly, there is a chance of having rogue managers who support the cause to management but relate a different message.

Slide 15 - Lewin's Change Model

So how will we implement this change? Kurt Lewin created a change model of unfreeze, change, and freeze. In this process, the old ways are “unfrozen” to create urgency, develop a new process, and communicate that so that people are ready to change (Connelly, 2023). The middle processes of communicating, developing, empowering, and improving represent the change/transition phase in Lewin’s model (Connelly, 2023). The last step involves the “refreezing” process. This step involves making the changes a permanent part of the departments culture (Connelly, 2023).

Slide 16 - How We Will Get There

Kotter’s 8 Steps will serve as the guide for how we will implement and management this change process (Kotter, 1995; 2024). Kotter pointed out that developing strategies was an essential part of achieving the vision (1995). Thats why creating a plan for each step is so critical for success.

Slide 17 - Goals for Change

In conclusion, the Captains, must buy in. More oversight is needed from the immediate supervisors (Caward, 2022; Hubbart, 2023). Implementing a required signature from Captains on reports this would establish a first line of quality improvement. Find a group of employees to be your early adopters and champions (Sinek, 2020). Integrate Gen-Z into an early adopter coalition, their tech knowledge and desire for growth/inclusion could be a winning factor (Campbell, 2023; Sinek, 2020). Institute a fire reporting quality improvement team that gives continual feedback and training. Increase communication, show how this data is helping the employees. Create short term wins and goals (Kotter 1995; 2024). Stay the course, do not give up until the changes are cemented into the department’s culture.

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