

# FIREHOUSE®

## Weekly Drill

### DRILL #119: WHEN THINGS CHANGE

#### Introduction

For some in the fire service, it would seem that each day, when you report in for work, something has changed. This is more real today than it has been in the past as things are always changing. How are you handling the changes taking place in your department? For some firefighters, accepting change is not easy; however, it is very important that the department be able to change.

In more instances than not, most of the changes that take place are for the good, even though some take longer to develop and accept. And the ones that are not so good in time change again. For the most part, changes are made to keep up to date on new modern ideas, not to mention the high technology that seems to be invading the fire service. For the most part, change is something that we can't plan for, because everyone's acceptance to change is different.

On the fireground things are constantly changing and the firefighters are constantly reacting to these changes. It is no different in the fire station, but in the station the firefighters have more time to think about the changes that are coming and their reactions can be quite different than on an incident. At times under these situations it is common for individuals to resist change. The primary reason is because people become comfortable with the current way things are being conducted. Additional reasons could be rumors being heard as it pertains to the change or just outright intimidation to the upcoming change.

#### Leadership Role

As changes come in your career, how will you handle them with your subordinates? It takes leadership. This leadership requires an established link in communication with your people. Keep in mind that communication goes both ways, so you have to be able to listen as well as provide advice. Make no bones about it, the more controversial the change, the more work it will require to introduce and implement.

I have found over the years that the fire service is made up of hard-working, dedicated people. While some take their jobs more seriously than others, they all want what is best for the community they serve. As a leader, if you hear of changes that might be coming, try and get some information on what affect they are going to have on your



operations. Once you get this information, don't hold on to it, share it with your members and seek their input, as they may have a better way of doing things.

There are times, however, when your suggested recommendations will not affect the changes. In these cases, you are going to have to sell the changes to your firefighters. The last thing anyone wants is to have changes shoved down their throats. I'm not saying that you will not hear a lot of negative comments from your firefighters, but listen and allow these comments to be heard.

As a supervisor, you are going to be asked to support the changes and have your firefighter support them as well. The only way you are going to be able to do this is by providing honest information.

Additionally, you are going to have to stay positive and supportive, even if you don't agree with the changes. No matter how strongly you feel, disagreements should only be communicated to your immediate supervisor and not with your subordinates.

*—Prepared by Russell Merrick*