



MARYLAND
VOLUNTEER

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

MSFA Guide to Creating &
Implementing a Mentorship
Program in Your Volunteer
Fire/EMS Organization

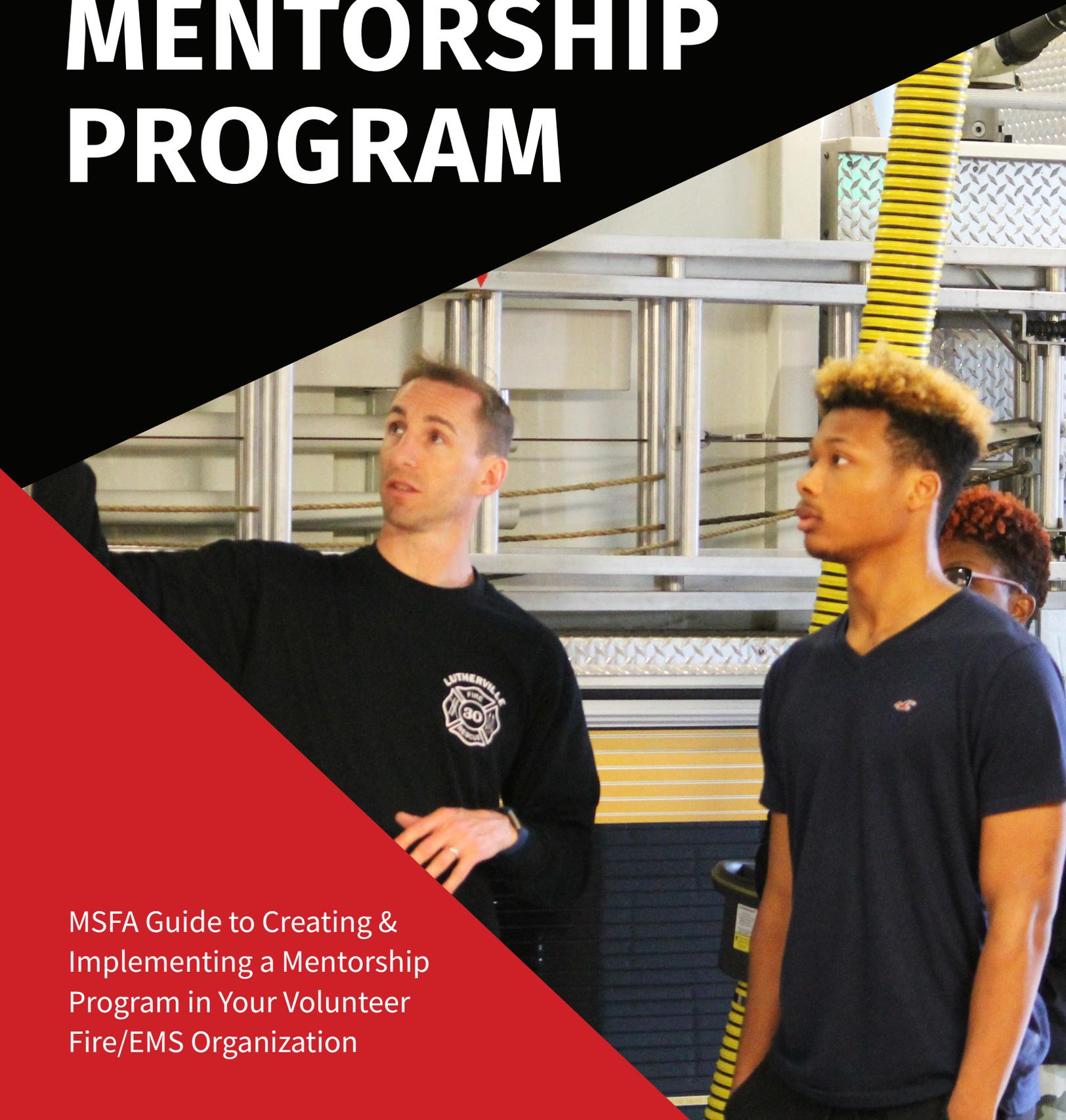


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SECTION 1:

MSFA Guide to Creating & Implementing a Mentorship Program in Your Volunteer Fire/EMS Organization



The rich history of the fire service combined with the firehouse environment and the knowledge and highly technical skill sets of its members create many opportunities to foster mentoring relationships.

Mentors help their learners transition through the phases of their life. They lead candidates towards taking on more responsibility by helping them read and interpret various situations, encouraging them to take ownership of roles and responsibilities, and building confidence in their judgment. The best mentors don't just give them the answers, they lead them towards them. Mentoring combines learning, purpose, and participation – three things motivated firefighters value in their work experience.

Mentorship is defined as:

noun

the guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution.

Ex.: "He is revered by his employees for his mentorship and problem-solving qualities."

a period of time during which a person receives guidance from a mentor.

Ex.: "A two-year mentorship with an entrepreneur in a tech start-up"

While the definition of mentorship is clear and straightforward, what it means to be a mentor can take on many definitions, depending on who you ask and what their relationship is with the mentor and/or mentee. When firefighters and first responders talk about mentorship, they tend to use words like guidance, impact, influence, direction, and inspiration.

What we'll deal with in this guide is largely focused on what goes into identifying the qualities we look for in an appropriate and effective mentor candidate; how to match a mentee with their mentor, and how to build, organize and measure the effectiveness of a mentorship program.

Some believe that the best form of mentorship is when neither party realizes that mentoring is taking place until they have an aha moment, which sometimes happens when the mentee loses the person who they didn't realize was mentoring them. Most categorize mentorship programs as informal or formal. This guide will largely focus on the formation and execution of formal mentoring programs.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

–John Crosby I

Informal Mentoring

According to the Journal of Leadership Education, informal mentoring is a natural part of relationships that occurs throughout society, in the workplace as well as in social, professional, and family activities. The journal states that “informal mentoring occurs in a relationship between two people where insight, knowledge, and wisdom is gained, a friendship shared, and support provided by the mentor.”

Formal Mentoring

Formal mentoring is different from informal mentoring because it takes place in a structured program and follows a process established for mentoring to occur. Formal mentors are usually volunteers, but they're still chosen, and both parties of the mentoring relationship may not choose each other.

Mentoring Statistics

- Higher retention rates - (72%) for candidates, (69%) for mentors (49%) for non-mentoring participants (Sun Microsystems).
- Losing an employee costs 100-300% of the replaced employee's salary (Society of Human Resource Management).
- People are 77% more likely to stay in a job if they are in a mentoring relationship. 35% of employees who do not receive mentoring are likely to start looking for another job in the first 12 months. (Emerging Workforce Study by Spherion, 2012).
- Mentoring increases learning retention. With mentoring, managerial productivity increased by 88% compared to 24% with those who trained alone. (ASTD).
- Mentoring helps fill the leadership pipeline; Employees who receive mentoring were promoted 5 times more often than those who did not. (Forbes). Mentors were 6 times more likely to promote. (Forbes).
- In The Colony Fire Department, the retention rate of mentored members is 100%. (The Colony Project 2018).
- 75% of millennials want a mentoring relationship in the workplace (HireVue)
- 75% of millennials believe mentoring is essential for their success. (Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2016).
- 78% of executives in the private sector credit their mentors with helping them reach their current position.
- 81% of firefighters believe mentoring is necessary for developing future successful officers. (FOOLS survey, 2017).

In the guide: “*Formal Mentoring for the Fire Service*” created by Chief Scott Thompson of The Colony TX Fire Department and author of the *Functional Fire Company*, he lists the following among the many benefits of mentoring:

For Candidates (new member or newly promoted)

- Improves skills at the technique level
- Increases knowledge
- Promotes positive attitudes
- Supports the chosen culture
- Accelerates learning and professional development
- Increases confidence

For Mentors

- Two-way learning
- Sense of accomplishment
- Recognition
- Provides an opportunity to give back
- Improves communication and people skills



For the Organization

- Great tool for improving volunteer engagement, reducing friction, and increasing contribution
- Reinforces vision, the chosen culture, mission, and core values
- The learner has been exposed to experiences, stories, and tricks of the trade, and not just book knowledge
- The learner has been provided insight into the chosen culture and subculture
- Increases operational capabilities

Questions to ask before embarking on a mentorship program in your Volunteer Fire/EMS Agency include but are not limited to:

- What are the gaps or issues you're trying to address by implementing a mentorship program?
- What are the desired outcomes of implementing a mentorship program?
- Will you select a formal or informal mentorship program?
- Who will manage and monitor the mentorship program and the individual relationships?
- How will you decide who is an appropriate candidate to serve as a mentor?
- Will the mentor be selected by the organization, or the mentee?
- What training will you provide to a novice mentor, and who and how will you deliver the training?
- What expectations will you establish for the mentor and mentee?
- What criteria will you use for pairing ("matchmaking") a mentor with an appropriate mentee?
- What will you do if a mentee does not want to be mentored?
- What mechanisms or processes will you have for a mentor or mentee to report out on the status or effectiveness of the relationship?
- What timeline and expectations will you set for program development, mentor selection, program implementation, and progress reporting?

This guide will outline five key steps to starting and maintaining a mentorship program in your volunteer Fire/EMS organization:

1. Define the 'why' of starting and maintaining your mentorship program
2. Choosing the right mentor
3. Pairing the mentor and mentee
4. Create a timeline for program development, implementation and monitoring
5. Program pitfalls to avoid

Consistency and continuity are often the bane of our existence in the volunteer fire service. We're great at starting programs but often not as good at following through and keeping them going. We hope that this guide motivates you to see the value in starting and maintaining a mentorship program in your volunteer agency and to keep training new and existing members to become mentors to keep the program alive and prosperous.

This guide uses a variety of resources and insight gleaned from companies and individuals inside and outside of the fire and emergency services community.

SECTION 2:

Define the Why?



If we say that our people are our greatest asset, then they deserve our best investment in their training and growth.

Fire stations, apparatus, and equipment, the “widgets” of the fire service, are 100% useless without the proper quantity and quality of people to staff and operate them. So, if we agree that people are our greatest asset, then we need to invest in their future by providing them with all the support they need to be successful.

Why is your volunteer organization considering starting (or restarting) a mentorship program? Is it to fix a problem you’re currently experiencing, or is it to prevent a problem that doesn’t exist yet? Some firefighters and fire officers think their organization needs a mentorship program because:

- New members lack basic life, mechanical, social, and other skills; and need mentoring
- There is a disconnect between generations in our fire department
- There is a general lack of communication across our organization
- We need to get more seasoned members re-engaged, sharing their knowledge and experience with those who don’t have knowledge or experience yet
- Member progression is slowed by a long and complicated onboarding process, creating the need for supportive mentoring
- We want to give our newest members the greatest opportunity for success in our organization, the fire service, and in life
- We want to provide effective and rewarding mentoring to our newest members in hopes of grooming them to be mentors themselves when the time is appropriate

Whatever your core motivation for starting a mentorship program, your priorities should first be on the benefits to the mentee, secondly the benefits to the mentor (retention), and lastly the benefits to the organization as a whole. As we master the first two priorities, the third will be a natural outcome of prioritizing our people first.

An article by Pritika Padhi on trainingindustry.com (2019) offers several key points to a successful program, these among them:

- The program must have defined goals and objectives, developed together by the mentor and mentee.
- The program must support both mentor and mentee if challenges arise during the process.
- The program should encourage participants to keep in touch even after the program ends to maintain their bond and continue sharing their experiences.



A safe and effective mentorship program can positively impact both volunteer retention and recruitment. Existing volunteers and candidates for volunteering often cite that they're seeking (or getting) a sense of value, and a sense of belonging as their reasons for joining (and/or staying active) in a volunteer fire department or rescue squad.

Pairing a new member with a more seasoned member demonstrates to the recruit that we are committed to supporting their success and that they are worth investing in. It also offers the more seasoned member the opportunity to be the coach they may have always wanted to be but didn't think there was anyone to listen with interest as they shared their knowledge, experience, and values, often disguised in the form of stories. It adds value to the lives of both parties and mentoring is a core value that sisterhood/brotherhood/fire hood was founded on.

“

South Media Fire Co. Deputy Chief Ellen Yarborough, a gifted education teacher and program coordinator at Strath Haven High School near Philadelphia PA is the founder of <https://schoolhousetofirehouse.com/>, a consultancy committed to fostering positive youth programs in school partnerships. She shares this take on teens and mentoring: “Teens NEED to make connections with others for their psycho-social growth. In a quick poll I did of students (admittedly small sample) that I teach, the expressed desire for mentors proved significant. Volunteer fire companies play a tremendously positive role in helping teens develop confidence, critical thinking, adaptability, and resilience. They are introduced to new hands-on skills, given graduated responsibility based on proven competency, and develop a marketable resume.”

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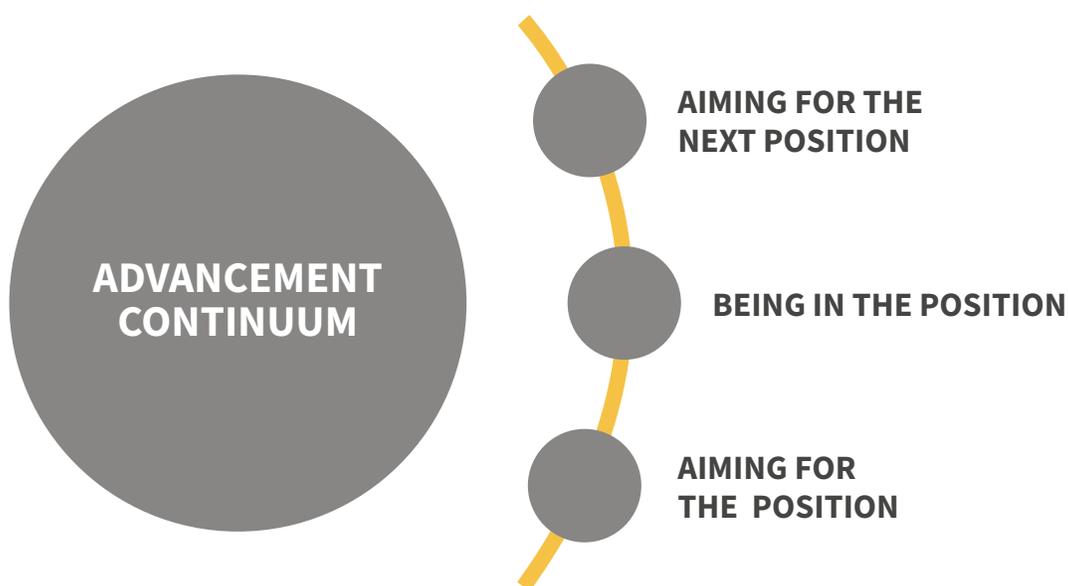
Action Steps

- Define what the result should look like. What will the person who has gone through your formal or informal mentoring process look like compared to the one that has not been involved in a mentoring relationship? How will their attitude towards work and the organization differ? What knowledge and skills benefits will one have over the other? Finally, how do we hope those that have been mentored process information and make decisions different from those who are developed by current programs and interactions?
- Identify the problems with the existing personal development process. What must remain the same? What must change?
- Once you have a clear understanding of what you want your mentoring efforts to achieve, work backward and identify the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and short and long-term investment necessary to achieve the vision of success. What must the culture value?
- Make sure your vision of mentoring success can be communicated so that others can understand what mentoring success looks like, and so others can share in the vision.

Adopt a “Train Your Replacement” Mindset

So when you think about training your replacement, you should also be thinking about how to train yourself for the next step in your life. It’s easy to get caught up in the conundrum of constant personal advancement and organizational evolution.

Once in a given rank or position, many immediately turn their focus towards the next title or step in the advancement process, losing sight of two important pieces necessary for true success, focusing on being the best they can be at the position they’re in, and also turning their focus on preparing those who will be their successors to be successful. Training in the moment, training for their future, and training the future of those who you will serve – all needs to take place simultaneously.

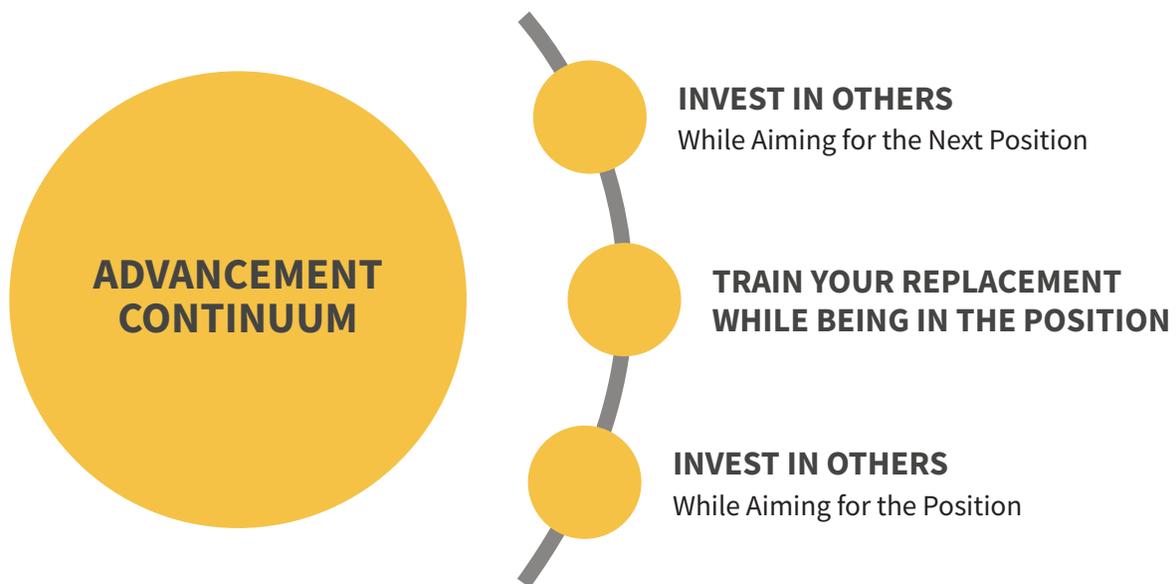


It's only natural that your focus will not be split equally between those three missions at various times in your position or career (volunteer or paid) in the fire service, but achieving balance at the most appropriate moments will help to ensure not only your success, but that of others in the organization, and the organization itself.

The "Train Your Replacement" mindset focuses on the thoughts and frameworks needed to create a successful succession plan.

Using the anecdote of you being a new member in your volunteer fire department when an even newer member is accepted into the organization, if all you did was show them how to use the key-fab to get into the firehouse, you just committed an act of... "training your replacement."

Imagine a firehouse environment where every time you learned something, you immediately turned and sought out the opportunity to teach it to someone else. Imagine the possibilities for personal and organizational growth! This concept is a paradigm shift from the "knowledge is power" approach that too many in officer positions take, hoarding their knowledge and experience and the perceived or real power that then holds over their subordinates.



Hopefully you will get to a point in your life where you realize, like many others have, that your greatest success comes only from helping others be successful. That's a privileged position to be in, liberating you from the confines of formal advancement and allowing you to focus on developing others, mentoring and coaching, training your replacements. The earlier in your fire service career you realize that, the longer and more successful careers we will all enjoy.

Today's recruits want to see expectations in a job description, in a training path, an education path, and what scares some senior members or officers, they want to see a path to advancement too. Telling them is not enough. They want it in writing, and yes, they need frequent and positive reinforcement.

Therefore, expectations for the mentorship program should be clearly defined before the pairing is initiated.

SECTION 3:

Choosing the Right Mentor & Mentee



Choosing the Right Mentor.

But how do you figure out if they're the right fit to be a mentor?

To be a mentor is to be a servant-leader, dedicated to the success of others and the organization.

Scott Thompson outlines three basic ways to choose mentors:

- Clearly state the qualifications and required commitment, and ask for volunteers
- The organization can choose mentors
- Mentees can be chosen at the company or battalion level

And he stresses: "Organizations should carefully consider the types of mentors they choose. The role of a mentor should not be forced on anyone who does not want it or is incapable of playing it effectively; nor should the privilege be granted to someone who would be a negative influence."

Choosing the right candidate to serve as a mentor can be summarized in three core attributes:

- Availability – A mentor must have the time to spend the time with the person they're responsible for mentoring
- Attitude – An effective member should maintain a positive attitude towards the mentee, their role as a mentor, and the organization as a whole
- Accountability – A responsible mentor will take accountability for the success and failures of the mentee, at least to the level of their availability and attitude, their commitment to the relationship

In their mentorship program roadmap, AUTM, an association of over 3,100 technology transfer professionals, shares that a mentor must be accessible and able to fulfill the minimum time commitment agreed upon by both parties.

Tony Correia, a working paramedic and retired director of fire services for the Burlington Township NJ Fire Department shares his definition of what it means to be a mentor:

- Someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person
- A trusted counselor or guide

- To be a mentor in the fire service falls halfway between being a drill sergeant—and Mother Theresa, having the skills of a teacher and a psychologist at the same time.

He goes on to remind us that everyone is a mentor, intentionally or unintentionally, so beware of the impact you're having on others.

Below are some qualities of successful mentors:

- Experience with the organization
- The ability to turn events into experiences
- The ability to sustain a positive attitude
- Demonstrates a commitment to the vision and success standards of the organization
- Be an advocate for the process
- Someone who cares about the success of others
- Is able to explain tasks at the technique level
- Takes pride in being part of the solution; demonstrates the ability to solve problems
- Is not determined by seniority, popularity, or by whose turn it is
- Is emotionally mature
- Has their ego in check
- Has no sense of entitlement
- Can offer something more than book smarts



Mentor Checklist

Character

- Personal values align with the organization's core values
- Strong work ethic
- Positive and optimistic
- Committed to duty
- Demonstrates respect
- Has integrity
- Do not take shortcuts

Desire

- To teach others
- To invest in the future of the organization
- To make a difference

Ability

- The knowledge base is current
- To demonstrate above average performance, especially while performing critical tasks
- To communicate effectively
- Correctly demonstrate skills at the technique level
- To recognize wrong
- To demonstrate the courage to act and do the right thing, and not the popular thing
- Is above average

Attitude

- Demonstrates a proactive approach towards meeting expectations
- Supports the chosen culture of the organization
- Supports the operational and leadership philosophy
- Sends concerns up the chain of command, and not down
- Views change as growth
- Can resist getting caught up in negative or destructive communications

Passion

- Demonstrated for the fire service and the work that firefighters and paramedics do
- For helping others succeed
- For learning

Zach Hottel, a 16-year member of the Woodstock VA Fire Department and their Training Captain and Recruitment & Retention Coordinator, was recently published in *Commonwealth Chief Magazine*. Zach outlines his 7-habits for being a viable mentor:

- Long term dedication
- Time
- Empathy
- Communication skills
- Knowledge
- Openness
- Toughness

Dr. Jason Decremer, Ph.D. paints a picture of what the mentor should look like too, in his article titled: *“Mentorship Programs for Volunteer Fire Departments”* was written for the NVFC-National Volunteer Fire Council’s Firefighter Strong publication in September of 2021.

“The individuals that are selected as mentors should be experienced members of your volunteer fire department. They should be goal oriented, calm, caring, and have a positive attitude. A good mentor is also an individual that is a great communicator and is willing to spend time with a new member at least on a weekly basis.” Jason is the recruitment and retention coordinator for the Southbury CT Volunteer Fire Department and a recruitment and retention instructor for the IAFC-International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Once you’ve identified the core knowledge, skills, abilities, experience and interests you’re looking for in your mentors, it’s important to interview potential candidates and ask the right questions to determine if they’re truly the right fit.

A blog on ignitenational.org addresses “Interviewing your future mentor: Questions to ask and questions to avoid.” It suggests you start by asking the prospective mentor about themselves:

- What are your professional goals? What values drive you?
- What are some defining moments in your career that formed your leadership style?
- What’s the most important leadership lesson you’ve learned, and how has it proven invaluable?
- Why do you want to be a mentor?

A similar article on the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation site encourages you to ask questions like:

- How do you encourage innovative ideas?
- How would you describe your personal style?
- Do you have a mentor? ...
- What do you do to constantly challenge your underlying beliefs and assumptions?

The IAFC offers a free online mentoring course. See the Appendix section to learn more.

Choosing the Right Mentee.

But how can you determine if someone is a good fit as a mentee?

Mentors and mentees should be a good match in terms of personality, motivations, and aptitudes. The mentee should be someone who you would be willing to help with any aspect of his/her development, including career goals. They also need to be willing to take advantage of the opportunity.

We must teach our members what it means to be effective mentors and what responsibilities come with being a mentee.

As a prospective mentee, you must have a sense of what you're after. For example:

- What do you hope to get out of mentorship?
- How much time you can dedicate to the relationship
- What you need from a mentor to help them be successful
- How you plan to communicate (e.g., email, phone calls, in-person)

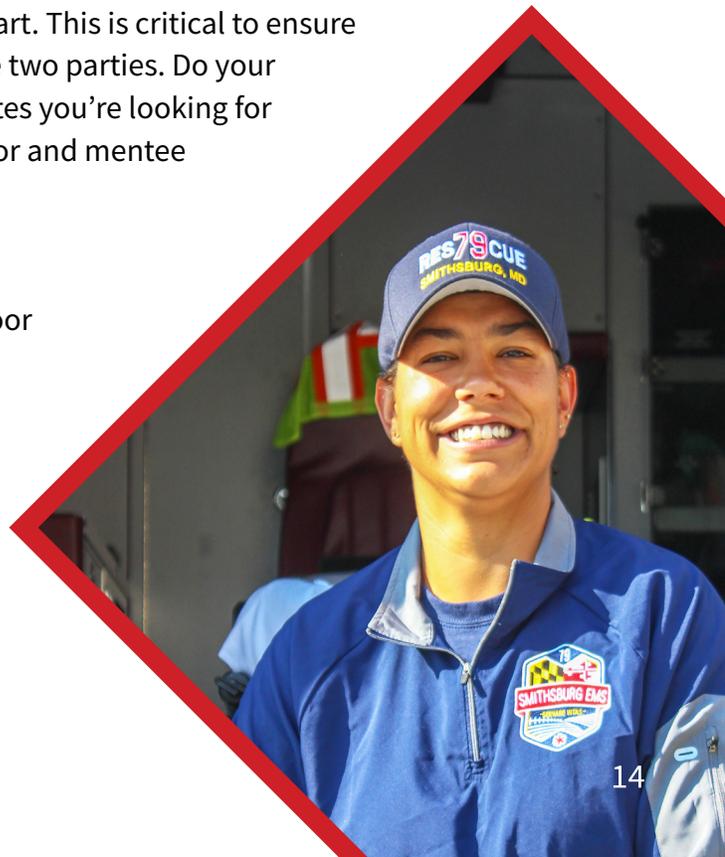
“While this list isn't exhaustive, it will help the mentee organize thoughts before approaching or connecting with a potential mentor. Doing so ahead of time will help the mentee clarify their goals and save everyone time,” Thompson adds.

Thompson goes on to share that a mentee must demonstrate commitment, flexibility, open-mindedness and the initiative to take charge without external motivation. Furthermore they must value their mentor's time, be loyal and trustworthy, curious and engaged, and realistic in their expectations and resourceful to find the answers on their own before asking their mentor.

Whichever model you follow, it's imperative that you establish criteria for choosing the right candidates, (and disqualifying the wrong ones) before you start. This is critical to ensure the sanctity of the program and the relationship between the two parties. Do your homework and outline the characteristics, traits, and attributes you're looking for in your firefighters, and create a job description for the mentor and mentee positions that mimic that list.

Failure to do so can result in unmet expectations, misaligned value systems, increased conflict, failed relationships, and poor retention of all those affected by the mismatch.

Helpful Resource - See [How to be a Successful Mentee](#) in the Appendix section.



SECTION 4:

Match-Making the Mentor and Mentee



Setting up volunteer firefighters in a mentor/mentee dynamic that works for everyone ensures everyone is happy and engaged with the job of helping others.

Making the right matches of mentors and mentees has both tangible and intangible benefits for the participants and the organization. Improved morale can improve performance and participant retention so in matching the sender and the receiver in the mentorship relationship, it's important to ask more of the right questions:

- Will you take an “opposites attract” approach to matching your mentors and mentees or one where the mentee and the mentor are mirror images of each other?
- What tools will you use for marrying the two parties in this relationship?
- Will you assign the mentor to the mentee, or will you allow the mentee to choose their mentor from the available candidates?
- Will you mix and match males and females?
- Should there be a minimum or maximum age difference between the two parties?
- Will you assign family members as both mentor and mentee?

However you answer these questions, the best match will likely occur organically when both parties bring a similar value set to the relationship, enhanced by varied experiences and the willingness to broaden themselves beyond their comfort zone on or off the incident scene.

Don't forget about chemistry! Assigning a mentor/mentee dynamic with no consideration for how compatible these two people will be is likely to create tension between team members and result in miscommunication and mistakes on the job site. It's tempting to just pick two random individuals whose skills seem evenly matched and hope that they like each other, but don't do it: you'll quickly regret it once one of these volunteers starts complaining about how much they dislike working with their partner. Remember, it's all about happy volunteers!

You should also give your mentee the proper amount of room to grow. While you have a lot of valuable experience and advice, you mustn't get too caught up in giving or receiving criticism. It can be easy for a mentor to fall into the mode of being overly critical or unsupportive, but a good mentor should know how to balance advice and encouragement.

Setting an example is also essential to being an effective mentor. Your mentee will look up to you, so make sure that you're acting like someone they should want to emulate. Being a good listener is also crucial; if your mentee knows that they can come to you with their questions and concerns, they'll be more likely to open up about them when they arise. When your mentee comes to you with these issues, focus on solutions rather than problems—you can help them overcome obstacles by brainstorming ways around them rather than dwelling in frustration or despair over them.

Volunteer firefighters can be as old as 65 or as young as 17, so it is important to keep age and experience in mind when matching a mentor and mentee. It's also crucial that the student-mentor relationship is a two-way street—both parties should get something out of the mentorship that they can apply to their professional lives.

The mentor plays an important role, but the mentee has certain responsibilities too. To get the most out of their experience, both members need to prepare for their meetings in advance—mentors should think about what points they want to cover with their mentees, while mentees should have questions ready for their senior partner mentor if one or both are uncomfortable or fail to communicate effectively then neither will benefit from the time spent together.

However you answer these questions, the best match will likely occur organically when both parties bring a similar value set to the relationship, enhanced by varied experiences and the willingness to broaden themselves beyond their comfort zone on or off the incident scene.

In *“Formal Mentoring for the Fire Service,”* Chief Thompson reinforces: “The organization must be very careful when choosing mentors. Focus on quality over quantity. The role of a mentor should not be forced on anyone, be someone’s ‘turn’, nor the privilege granted to someone who may volunteer, but would not be a positive influence. In other words, leaders need to display a little leadership courage when choosing members, and not choose the path of least resistance.”

He goes on to share, “Mentoring should be seen as an honor for both mentor and mentee. It should be a partnership, stretching the mentor in his or her role and area of expertise while developing the professional skills of the trainee.” Of note, Chief Thompson’s fire department has had a 0% attrition rate for the past 14 years, a feat he largely credits to their comprehensive mentoring program.

And just in case it’s not a good match for whatever reasons, be sure to establish a guideline for identifying the issue, breaking off the mentor/mentee relationship, and reassigning the participants as necessary.



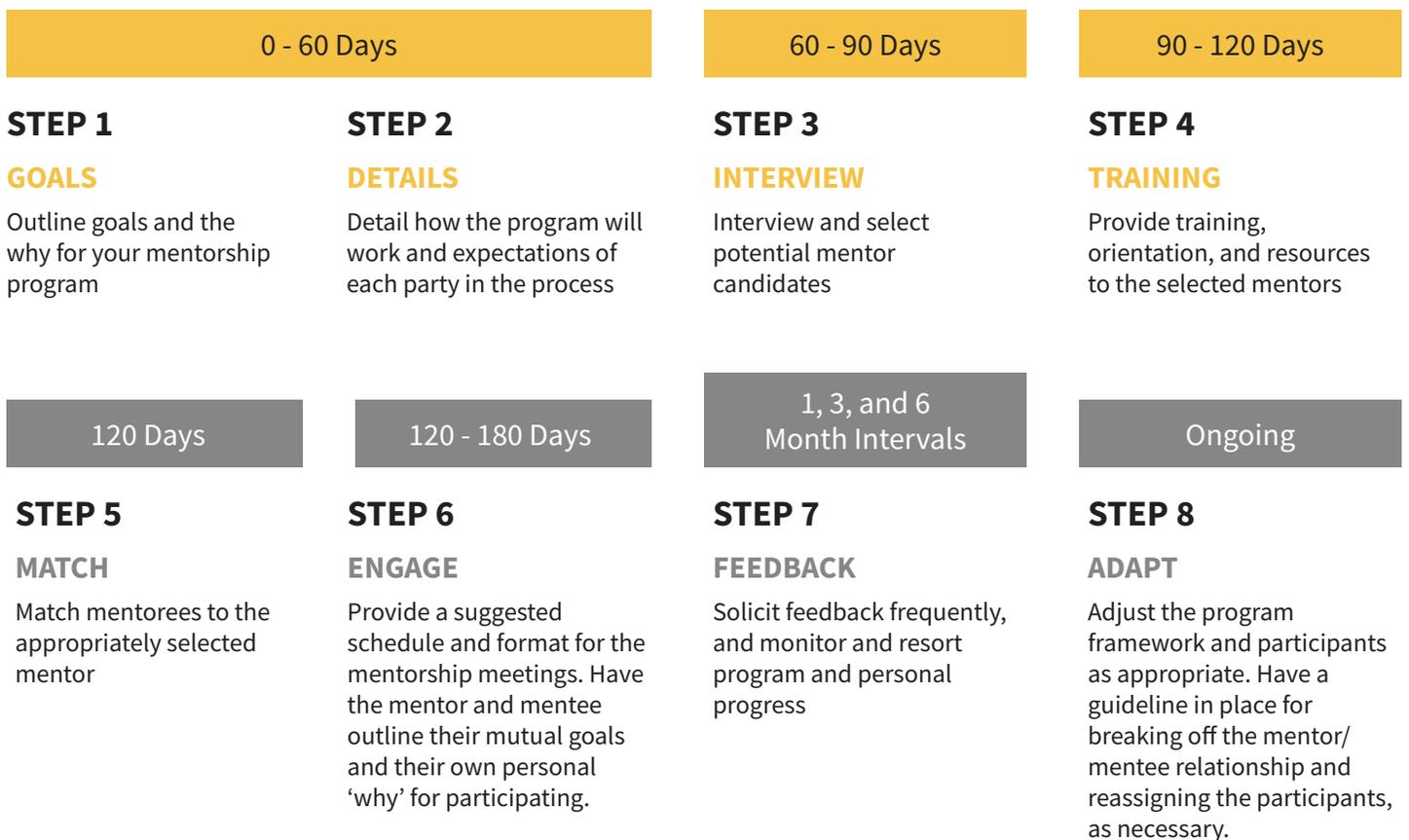
SECTION 5:

Program Development



The following is an example of a timeline for a formal mentorship program. This can be adapted based on available manpower, time, and energy available to organize and implement the program. Be realistic in your expectations and take the time you need to get it right before presenting the details of your program to your membership.

Mentorship Program Implementation Roadmap



Here are some key steps in the process:

- Define roles and responsibilities for mentors, mentees, and administrators
- Identify mentors who are active members of your organization or who have experience working with people from diverse backgrounds

- Identify mentees who are interested in learning more about your organization or becoming involved in its activities
- Create an application form for both mentors and mentees
- Develop a list of questions that will help determine whether someone is a good fit for this type of program
- Schedule meetings with potential mentors/mentors and mentees/mentees

If you set out to do what you're about to read about, you will establish an exciting mentorship program that not only adds value to your new member training and member productivity but also helps increase your team morale. Consider implementing the following eight steps in your department but be very realistic in how much you can accomplish in a given timeframe, especially in a volunteer fire department where members have so much else on their plate.

Eight Steps to Implementing a Mentorship Program:

1. Outline goals and the 'why' for your mentoring program
 - Communicate the need, opportunity for, and benefits of a mentorship program to your membership and leadership
 - Gain buy-in to lay the foundation for participation and support
 - Don't implement without support and commitment at all levels of the organization
2. Detail how the program will work and the responsibilities of each party in the process
 - Identify the characteristics and value set you're looking for in the participants, and roles and responsibilities for mentors, mentees, and administrators
 - Create job descriptions for candidates interested in being a part of the mentorship program
 - Communicate the program details to your membership and solicit interest
 - Create an application form for both mentors and mentees
 - Develop a list of questions that will help determine whether someone is a good fit for this type of program
 - Schedule meetings with potential mentors and mentees
3. Interview and select potential mentor candidates
 - Identify mentors who are active members of your organization or who have experience working with people from diverse backgrounds
4. Provide training, orientation, and resources to the selected mentors
5. Match mentees to mentors
 - Identify mentees who are interested in learning more about your organization or becoming involved in its activities
6. Provide resources to support the mentorship relationship
 - Provide a suggested schedule and format for the mentorship meetings
 - Have the mentor and mentee outline their mutual goals and their own personal 'why' for participating

7. Solicit feedback frequently from all parties, and monitor and report mentee's progress
8. Monitor and report program progress to all stakeholders. Pause, adjust, and reboot the program as necessary.
 - Measure the effectiveness of the relationship against the program goals and the unified goals each mentorship pair established
 - Have a guideline in place for breaking off the mentor/mentee relationship and reassigning the participants as necessary.
 - Make adjustments to the program framework and pair participants as appropriate.

Having and communicating time-based goals for program development and implementation is critical to keeping all participants engaged, and maintaining the continuity and consistency of the program.

The mentor and the mentee should set common goals and realistic expectations of one another. They should feel comfortable speaking up during their time together to avoid misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and resentment. Both parties should take notes throughout the process, as Chief Thompson suggests.

Having and communicating time-based goals for program development and implementation is critical to keeping all participants engaged, and maintaining the continuity and consistency of the program.

Rather than reinvent the wheel here, Chief Thompson's Formal Mentoring for the Fire Service guidebook provides comprehensive resources for monitoring and measuring progress and for providing feedback for continual program improvement.



SECTION 6:

Avoid Program Pitfalls



This section is intended to provide a list of some of the “don’ts” of failed mentoring programs.

Some of the “don’t” of failed mentoring programs include:

- Force the participants to participate
- Match “oil-and-water” individuals you know are not a good match
- Only put all the “good people” together
- Leave someone without a mentor
- Allow the mentor/mentee to form a clique that deteriorates the organization
- Choose mentors based solely on rank, title, or years of service
- Not communicate program objectives and details to all stakeholders
- Sign up to be a mentor but don’t follow through with the mentee
- Cast your negative attitude on those you’re supposed to be mentoring
- Let anyone be a mentor, just because they want to
- Not communicate a program implementation timeline to the membership
- Withhold knowledge or experience, or don’t help your mentee succeed for fear they will replace you in your position
- Take the attitude that “I already raised my kids; I don’t care to raise someone else’s!”

We’re sure that you can come up with your list of “worst-case scenarios” of program pitfalls based on your own experiences in and outside of the fire service. Most importantly, focus on the positives that a quality mentorship program can have on you, those you serve, those you serve with, and the entire organization.



SECTION 7:

Summary



A mentorship program is an effective way of pairing new members with experienced ones. Mentors can help their mentees develop existing skill sets and learn new ones, and can assist them in assimilating into the firehouse environment. In return, mentees offer their mentors the opportunity to stay connected and relevant in their organization and industry, can help improve their job satisfaction and retention, can assist them in embracing and learning new technologies, and may even be able to help them learn new ways of doing things they've been doing for years.

One of the opening questions posed in this guide was “Who will manage and monitor the mentorship program and the individual relationships?” Who is the right person for that job and do they have the time and energy to commit to maintaining motivation and engagement for all parties? What other responsibilities does that person carry in the department and is it reasonable and achievable that they can take on these added commitments?

It has long been the M.O. of the volunteer fire service to give the next project to the already busiest person. A common pitfall is to continually keep throwing hats on the racks of those already overloaded, often unfairly rendering them poor at a lot of things instead of good at a few. Choose your mentorship program manager wisely and consider bringing in someone from outside your organization with the appropriate Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSA) to effectively build, implement and coordinate this critical program.

Feel free to use and adapt those resources to fit your department and program but, as with any of the resources freely shared in this guide for your benefit, be sure to include appropriate attribution to the original document as a sign of respect for the tremendous effort he and his team have put into developing their program.

And most importantly, if you're lucky enough to be selected to serve as a mentor to someone else, commit the time and energy necessary to be the best mentor you ever had, or that you ever wanted.

Let's take a look at some different ways to structure your formal program:

How to set up a program

- Determine what you want to achieve with a mentorship program
- Get buy-in from your team
- Define roles and expectations of the mentor and mentee
- Make a plan and establish a timeline

Finding mentees

Mentees may express interest in being a part of the mentorship program. Their interest could come from the interview or first member meeting. They could also be approached by their mentor to join the program. Mentors can ask people they know if they want to join as well.

Mentors don't need to check whether someone who expressed interest and then dropped out has found a new mentor, or if an interested person who wasn't assigned a mentor at first has now been connected with one. However, it is encouraged for mentors to ask their mentee(s) whether they know anyone else who would benefit from being a part of this program.

Making matches

It's time to start making matches by assigning a mentee to each mentor. Mentors and mentees should be matched based on their needs and interests. When you can, schedule meetings between mentors and mentees so they can get to know one another and their working styles.

If you have an odd number of mentors or mentees, consider pairing them with more than one person. If participants are in different locations or working remotely, set up mentor-mentee meetings via phone, email, or video chat platforms like Google Hangouts or Zoom. You may need to match your participants more than once if your program spans several months—make sure to check in with mentors regularly about how the program is going.

Giving effective feedback

- Begin all feedback, positive and negative, with a discussion of the mentee's strengths.
- When giving negative feedback, be specific about what can be improved upon.
- After pointing out areas that need improvement, offer concrete advice on ways to improve them.
- Give dates by which goals should be met or steps taken to achieve those goals.
- Face-to-face communication is preferable to email or phone call when it comes to giving feedback. If you are unable to meet in person, video chat is the next step down from face-to-face communication.

There are many things to consider when creating a mentorship program.

Departments looking to create an effective mentorship program should keep the following in mind:

- Focus on learning. Mentors and mentees can learn from each other. A mentor can be a way for someone to pass their knowledge on, while the mentee can gain new skills by listening and asking questions. A good mentor will have a willingness to share their knowledge, while a good mentee will have a strong desire to learn.
- Help with professional and personal development. Mentorships can help with job guidance and may even help people move up in their department or field as they develop new skills and contacts.
- Expanding networks is easier with mentorships. Mentorship programs give both parties access to larger networks of people within their industry, which can help expand business relationships or find opportunities in the future.

See the attached stories and anecdotes related to the good, the bad and the ugly of successful and failed mentorship programs. Share your own stories and resources with others to help them succeed.

APPENDIX: List of Resources, References & Source Credits

- “5 Rules to Mentor By” – Written by Chief (Ret.) Dennis Rubin for firerescue1.com <https://www.firerescue1.com/cod-company-officer-development/articles/5-rules-to-being-a-great-mentor-Hz6mkmArCHtusSPu/>
- “7 Ways to Structure Mentoring Programs to Improve Their Reach” by Pritika Padhi <https://trainingindustry.com/articles/strategy-alignment-and-planning/7-ways-to-structure-mentoring-programs-to-improve-their-reach/>
- AUTM – <https://autm.net>
- Anthony Correia – Is a working paramedic and retired director of fire services for the Burlington Township NJ Fire Department
Connect with him at: <https://acorr1954.com/mentoring-resources/> and acorr1954@gmail.com
- Chief J. Scott Thompson – “Formal Mentoring for the Fire Service”
Chief Thompson entered the fire service in 1981. He has been formally practicing leadership and coaching fire officers and firefighters for the last 25 years. Chief Thompson has practiced leadership as an operations officer, training chief, emergency manager, Chief of Department, and Director of Public Safety. Thompson has held a leadership position in 2 volunteer and 5 career fire departments. Connect with him at: <https://fireserviceleadership.com> or scott@fireserviceleadership.com.
 - https://fireserviceleadership.com/shop/ols/search?keywords=mentoring&sortOption=descend_by__match
- Dr. Jason Decremer, PhD – “Mentorship Programs for Volunteer Fire Departments”
<https://www.nvfc.org/mentorship-programs-for-volunteer-fire-departments/>
Jason Decremer, PhD – is now the full-time leader of MissionCIT’s Testing and Strategy Practice. Formerly, Director of Certification for the Connecticut Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. He was responsible for over 40 levels of national certification testing for approximately 20,000 firefighters statewide. Connect with him at: jason@missioncit.com
- Ellen Yarborough is deputy chief at South Media Fire Co. a gifted education teacher and program coordinator at Strath Haven High School near Philadelphia PA, and the founder of <https://schoolhousetofirehouse.com/>, a consultancy committed to fostering positive youth programs in school partnerships
- Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company-Angola, NY – <http://evanscentervfc.org>
- How to be a Successful Mentee – <https://www.clearvoice.com/blog/how-to-be-a-successful-mentee/>
- IAFC-International Association of Fire Chiefs free online mentoring course – <https://www.iafc.org/press-releases/press-release/mentoring-within-the-fire-service-course-released>
- “Interviewing Your Future Mentor: Questions to Ask. Questions to Avoid” – ignitenational.org
<https://ignitenational.org/blog/interviewing-your-future-mentor-questions-to-ask-questions-to-avoid>
- Tiger Schmittendorf – Vice President of Recruitment & Retention for First Arriving
Connect with him at <http://firstarriving> – tiger@firstarriving.com
- US Chamber of Commerce Foundation Article – <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/questions-ask-mentor-and-tips-successful-mentoring-session>

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



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