

### *Playground, training ground, proving ground*

Learning a skill set takes repetition under supervision from a skilled teacher. If practice makes permanent, be sure you are in fact practicing as perfectly as possible. If that is a firefighting skill, then shouldn't that be with other firefighters?... more on that later. To move from the training ground to the proving ground is often done too early by necessity, but we should be very careful about setting loose our newly "trained" people into the fire. Yes we can measure how fast they can don their equipment, or how well they throw a ladder. We can measure how fast they can drag a hose, but sometimes the easiest things to measure are not what has the largest impact on achieving the goal.

Having an extensive skill set that covers a vast horizon of fire/rescue seems to be a universal goal, but these advantages will diminish greatly when put into a low frequency event. Something like a building fire for the majority of the fire service. The way through this scenario is to stick the basic principles of the job. Namely to have good nozzle mechanics, a quality fire stream, and a crew that has practiced together at a realistic pace, and in a realistic place. Spending a lot of time on complex techniques is mostly a waste, unless you truly have mastered the basic skill sets that solve 90% of your scenarios. The reality is that you will not have the luxury of time or the pre thought process in a gritty situation.

I work with a guy whose mantra is "It's that simple". He seems to have boiled down an ethos that got him through 3 decades of firefighting. If you are out there teaching skills that can't be reinforced by on the job experiences, or get skill retention through moderate but regular practice, then you have lost most of the crew (and your reputation) in the first 10 minutes of your class.



Am I telling you to that as a firefighter, you need to reduce your skill set? In a word – YES. If you are likely to face building fires from a hoseline, then you

should be very focused on that threat. Consider all of this past years training experiences you may have had. What percentage of those where about your initial job title of “fire suppression specialist”? You need a few basic skills mastered to the point where you can apply them to a majority of your possible incidents. Conscious apathy leads to cognitive atrophy.



Reliable skills feel familiar under stress. Pulling a hose line into a building fire can be a stressful thing, and you should be concentrating on your decisions rather than your actual motions and actions. That is why it is important to train how you will work. I am from the camp of staying smooth rather than fast when it comes to line deployment. I see a lot of go getters running out the lines and masking up in 12 seconds, only to cross the threshold alone. So what else are you expected to do alone? That mindset is not reliable or realistic for me. I like the hustle but not at the sacrifice of teamwork. Teamwork is an essential part of your effectiveness and safety. If you practice like you're in the engine Olympics, your medal maybe the one we give to your next of kin. I would prefer to walk with a lean - assess, make decisions, and move as a **team**.

Practicing in an environment that is different than your reality will also cause you to bare training scars. These are habits that will impede your decision making at an incident due to your un-realistic expectations. Stick with basic skills and practices while supervised by those that have done it. When those guys see you trying one of those youtube worthy tricks, and tell you “that looks like bull shit”. That’s because it likely is.



After learning some reliable skills to a higher level, then ramp up the stress conditions.

My wiser contemporary has us train people in cycles. We review basic skills and his vision of principles and practices. This is the who, what and why of our job, and it is sorely glossed over by so many others. I have seen it very useful for the younger folks to make the connections for their purpose and place on the attack line. We work in a static position, then move the line horizontally. After satisfaction we can go vertical and through some obstacles. We ramp up the difficulty to find the spots that need improvement and practice those. Introducing stress after a reasonable level of competency actually assess the decision process of the crews as well as re-enforces the skill sets. I would like to express some caution here. Don't seed overconfidence at this point. The trainees are better than they were, but remind them of staying in the decision making mind set - not the "beat the stop watch" mode. Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast.

The proving grounds are your first due area, not the parking lots behind the fire station. We need to find those buildings where we can pull a line. "It's that simple".

Every shift should be droppin' cotton to find out what their equipment and people can do. Just pulling a pre connect on the black top will offer you little in contrast to being at a place where some decisions need to made. This is the "advanced" skill some fire officers asking for. Basic skills being carried out with tried principles are the advanced firefighting techniques we are looking for.

"Firefighting is circumstantial", and so is the training. Your expected situations, strengths of your crew/equipment, and your experience all play a roll. There is a lot of gray area in the training realm. So find someone with a bit of gray to help you through it.