The Value of a Fire Protection Engineering Degree

BY CRAIG H. SHELLEY

Today's chiefs must be knowledgeable in many disciplines. They must be familiar with accounting practices and budgeting, personnel counseling, personnel issues, leadership, ethics, regulatory matters, and other legal aspects relating to the fire service, to name a few.

A chief's educational experience now must be much more extensive than in previous years. Many recruiting advertisements seek chief candidates who possess the Executive Fire Officer Designation (EFO) and the Chief Fire Officer Designation (CFOD). At a minimum, a bachelor's degree is required with a master's degree highly desirable. Some postings even require a master's degree. But, as a prospective chief, in what field of study should your degree be concentrated? As more and more fire service personnel obtain educational degrees, it may be the field of study that sets you apart during the selection process.

Many in the fire service have general business degrees. As far as fields of study are concerned, this degree will help in the performance of a chief's duties. Some people have fire service administration degrees. This type of degree may be more desirable to the selection committee evaluating a candidate.

Benefits of a Degree

What about a fire protection engineering degree? First, let's look at what fire protection engineering is. It is the application of science and engineering principles to protect people and their environment from the destructive effects of fire. It includes the analysis of fire hazards; mitigation of fire damage by proper design, construction, arrangement, and use of building materials, structures, and industrial processes; design, installation, and maintenance of fire detection, suppression, and communications systems; and postfire investigation and analysis.

According to the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, fire protection engineers use the latest technologies to design systems that control fires, alert people to danger, and provide means for escape; evaluate buildings to pinpoint the risk of fires and the means to prevent them; conduct fire safety research on consumer products and construction materials; and investigate fires to discover how fire spreads, why protective measures failed, and what measures could have been different.

A fire protection engineering degree may be just the ticket for moving ahead in a fire department or career.

Reference

analytical thinking process may be very useful in these situations. I recently was watching a television program that showcased a woman's house. She was an artist, an architect, a musician, and an engineer. She stated during the interview that she used the analytical thinking and skills obtained during her engineering career to learn how to play the piano. I am not saying that all engineers or chiefs will be able to play the piano but that analytical skills are useful in solving complex problems.

The fire protection engineering degree is one more option in degree choices for the aspiring firefighter and chief. In today's society, it may be the one item that sets one individual apart from another. It may be the completion of an advanced academic degree, analytical thinking skills, or added value to an organization. A fire protection engineering degree may be just the ticket for moving ahead in a fire department or career.

REFERENCE

CRraig H. SHELLEY, EFO, CFO, MIFireE, a 40-year veteran of the fire service, has served in volunteer fire/EMS, career municipal, and career industrial fire departments. He served for 26 years with the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), retiring as the chief of marine operations. Shelley is an adjunct associate professor for the University of Maryland University College, teaching the Managerial Issues in Hazardous Materials course, and for Charter Oak State College, teaching strategic planning. He is a fire protection advisor with a major oil company operating in the Middle East. Shelley has B.S. degree in fire service administration and an M.S. degree in executive fire service leadership. He is a frequent contributor to industry trade publications, speaks at national and international conferences, and is a coauthor of Industrial Firefighting for Municipal Firefighters, soon to be published by Fire Engineering.

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