

Running head: FUTURE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF CHIEF OFFICERS

Recruiting the Future Administrative Staff (A-Staff) Chief Officers  
of the Santa Clara County Fire Department  
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**CERTIFICATION STATEMENT**

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

The Santa Clara County Fire Department (SCCFD) is facing significant turnover at the Administrative Staff (A-Staff) chief officer ranks due to retirements, with very limited numbers of SCCFD personnel who appear to desire to promote into those ranks. The purpose of this research was to identify solutions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promote into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks in the near future.

Descriptive research, including a literature review and an internal survey, was used to determine the level of interest of SCCFD personnel in promoting into the A-Staff chief officer ranks, the advantages and disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer, whether the requirements for those positions was comparable to other departments, what barriers may exist in preventing personnel from promoting to those ranks, and what incentives may be offered to personnel to participate in future promotional examinations. The results showed that a significantly low number of personnel are interested in being A-Staff chief officers, and that the SCCFD could benefit from a succession or career development plan to ensure sufficient SCCFD personnel are not only interested, but also prepared and qualified to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future. Recommendations such as creating a career development committee, a succession plan, and revisiting the mentor program were made to assist the SCCFD in ensuring sufficient numbers of personnel are interested, qualified and prepared for future A-Staff chief officer vacancies. Getting sufficient numbers of personnel interested in promoting past the rank of captain is still going to be an on-going challenge; however, without a plan in place to address the issue, the potential exists that a number of things may occur, many of which SCCFD personnel may not find desirable.

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Recruiting the Future Administrative Staff (A-Staff)  
Chief Officers of the Santa Clara County Fire Department

Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been an extreme lack of interest by Santa Clara County Fire Department (SCCFD) personnel in promoting to the battalion chief ranks - the gateway to the Administrative Staff (A-Staff) chief officer ranks. As recently as five years ago, the SCCFD would typically have approximately ten personnel apply for a battalion chief promotional examination, with only one or two actual promotions occurring over the life of the eligibility list. Most recently, the SCCFD has seen those numbers drop to typically five or less personnel apply for a battalion chief promotional examination, with at times only one or two personnel actually making the final eligibility list. This would result in the entire list being abolished almost immediately after being certified due to the number of positions available met or exceeded the number of candidates on the eligibility list (Prziborowski, 2007). This decrease in interested candidates for battalion chief positions has occurred while the SCCFD has actually been increasing in size due to additional contracts for service with various communities.

Now, couple this situation of declining interest in battalion chief positions with the fact that five of the six SCCFD A-Staff chief officers are currently eligible for retirement, either by age or years of service, with the sixth A-Staff chief officer being eligible for retirement in five years and anticipated to retire in seven years (SCCFD, 2010a). Because of the lack of interest in promoting to the battalion chief ranks and the large number of upcoming retirements in the A-Staff chief officer ranks, the potential exists in the near future that there will be a very limited pool of personnel to select from, to fill those A-Staff chief officer ranks vacated by retirements. Instead of having a sufficient candidate pool to select from, this situation could possibly force the SCCFD to do a number of things that may or may not be in the best interest of the department,

such as hold an outside recruitment to allow qualified individuals from other fire departments to apply, lower the qualifications, or even promote someone from the inside who may not be ready for the position in the way of education, training and/or experience, but by process of elimination, they are the only one left on the eligibility list.

The problem is that the SCCFD is faced with a high amount of turnover at the A-Staff chief officer level in the near future due to retirements and there is a very limited number of personnel interested in promoting to those ranks.

The purpose of this research was to identify solutions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promotion into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future. Descriptive research, including a literature review, and an internal survey, was used to answer the following research questions:

- a. What is the level of interest of current SCCFD personnel to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks?
- b. What are the advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?
- c. What are the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?
- d. Are the requirements to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks within the SCCFD comparable to what other fire departments require?
- e. What can the SCCFD do to encourage personnel to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks?

### Background and Significance

The County of Santa Clara is located in Northern California, in the Silicon Valley portion of the San Francisco Bay Area. The SCCFD, legally known as the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, has been doing business as the SCCFD since 1997, when the department

adopted the new name to more accurately reflect the service area. The SCCFD was created in 1947 evolving through the years to a regional fire department primarily funded through property taxes and contracts for service with various communities (SCCFD, 2010b).

The SCCFD provides fire and life safety protection services to 251,950 people within 114.5 square miles, to eight separate communities and to certain unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County. The eight communities served include Campbell, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill and Saratoga. The SCCFD is authorized for 307 full-time positions and up to 40 volunteer positions, all of whom are working out of 17 fire stations and 6 support facilities. A minimum of 71 personnel are on duty each day staffing 21 Advanced Life Support fire companies, including 14 engine companies, 3 rescue companies, 2 truck companies, 1 hazardous materials company, and 4 command vehicles (SCCFD, 2010b).

The fire service in general has traditionally been a paramilitary organization comprised of various ranks of personnel, ranging from the fire chief at the top of the organizational chart to the firefighter at the bottom of the organizational chart, with various ranks in between. The smaller the department, the less ranks there typically are; the larger the department, the more ranks there typically are. There are typically three groups of firefighters within most fire departments: chief officers, company officers and firefighters.

The term chief officer is usually used to describe those individuals filling such middle or top level ranks such as fire chief, deputy chief, assistant chief, division chief and battalion chief. Depending on the size and structure of the department, the chief officer is typically a middle management to senior executive level position. A chief officer typically supervises major divisions within a fire department and/or a number of fire stations, and will usually have program management responsibility. The term company officer is used to describe those individuals



filling the first-line supervisor ranks such as lieutenant or captain. A company officer is typically supervising a crew of firefighters assigned to a specific company, such as an engine company or a truck company, and will usually not have any program management responsibility. The term firefighter is used to describe those individuals filling the lower level ranks such as firefighter, driver, engineer or apparatus operator. Chief officers may supervise other chief officers of lower ranks or company officers, while company officers typically supervise firefighters.

The SCCFD has two levels of chief officer: A-Staff and B-Staff. A-Staff stands for the administrative staff ranks of chief officer, particularly the fire chief, the assistant chief and the four deputy chief positions, and B-Staff stands for the battalion chief ranks. Of the 307 authorized full-time positions within the SCCFD, there are currently 20 chief officer positions: 1 fire chief, 1 assistant chief, 4 deputy chiefs, 11 battalion chiefs, 1 chief arson investigator (battalion chief equivalent position), 1 assistant fire marshal (battalion chief equivalent position), 1 Bay Area Super Urban Area Security Initiative (SUASI) battalion chief (battalion chief equivalent position). Of the 20 chief officers within the SCCFD, 6 are considered A-Staff and 14 are considered B-Staff (SCCFD, 2010a; SCCFD, 2010b).

To promote into the A-Staff ranks, an SCCFD employee must either be a current B-Staff member or a lower ranking individual on a B-Staff (or equivalent) promotional list. The word equivalent is used because traditionally, within the SCCFD and the fire service in general, there are two primary career paths: suppression and fire prevention. In years past, because of the specialty of the position, the fire prevention deputy chief position has been filled from personnel inside the fire prevention division while the other three deputy chief positions (training, operations and support services) have been filled from personnel coming up within the operations division.

The A-Staff chief officer is a critical rank within the SCCFD and the fire service in general. The A-Staff chief officer typically oversees a major division such as training, fire prevention, operations, emergency medical services, administration, or support services, and serves in a rank such as deputy chief, division chief, or assistant chief; they may also oversee the entire department while serving as the fire chief. Within the SCCFD, the A-Staff chief officers are as follows: 1 fire chief; 1 assistant chief, and 4 deputy chiefs – training, fire prevention, support services and operations.

When a person dials 9-1-1 to report an emergency, the face of the fire department they will see is found on the fire apparatus that arrives in an attempt to solve their problem: a group of firefighters that are supervised by a company officer. Depending on the scope of the incident, they may also see a battalion chief supervising a number of fire companies. Rarely does the public see the A-Staff chief officer as they work in the headquarters administrative facility in an administrative role, managing major divisions, establishing and maintaining budgets, performing administrative functions, performing strategic planning, and coordinating activities with their A-Staff counterparts. All of these necessary administrative functions are done with one goal in mind: to ensure the suppression personnel in the field working at the fire stations have personnel trained to handle the multitude of different types of responses they may be dispatched to; apparatus and equipment that is up-to-date and functioning; a fire station that is safe, comfortable and livable; all of this to ultimately be able to provide the highest level of service to the customers they protect and serve.

The SCCFD is facing a significant challenge in that three of the six current A-Staff chief officers have established tentative retirement dates this year - 2010, and the remaining three in the relatively near future: one in 2011, one in 2013 and one in 2017. Additionally, four of the

battalion chiefs have declared tentative retirement dates between now and 2012, eight of the battalion chiefs have declared tentative retirement dates between 2015 and 2020 and one has declared a tentative retirement date of 2026. Only one chief officer out of the current twenty chief officers is expected to still remain in the chief officer ranks after the year 2020, and one battalion chief position is currently unfilled pending the outcome of a personal matter (SCCFD, 2010a).

This significant challenge is not just limited to the SCCFD. Cochran (2007) described how the fire service across the country is facing a drastic changing of the leadership guard:

The trend is evident in the number of retiring tenured fire chiefs and fire service association executive directors. Approximately 50% of the current fire service leaders are eligible for retirement. The top one-third of fire department and association leaders can be expected to retire in the next six years. The days of chief fire executives serving more than 20 years are gone (p. 38).

This research project was chosen because of its direct relation to the course goal of the fourth-year course of the Executive Fire Officer Program, Executive Leadership: “The chief fire executive will develop the ability to conceptualize and employ the key processes used by effective executive-level managers” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005, p. v). Recruitment and retention of personnel of all ranks, especially executive or senior staff managers, is critical to the long-term success and survival of a fire department, including the SCCFD. The completed research project will be a tool for the SCCFD to utilize to ensure that there are sufficient, qualified personnel available to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks upon the retirements of the current A-Staff chief officers.

This research relates to three of the four U.S. Fire Administration Operational Objectives: 2—“Improve local planning and preparedness”; 3—“Improve the fire and emergency services’ capability for response to and recovery from all hazards”; and 4—“Improve the fire and emergency services’ professional status” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2009, p. II-2).

The SCCFD A-Staff chief officer is expected to be an active participant in local planning and preparedness, in addition to improving the fire and emergency services capability for response to and recovery from all hazards. Examples include participating in community planning sessions; building relationships with community members and leaders well in advance of an actual emergency; participating in committees specific to local planning and preparedness; participating in disaster preparedness exercises and training sessions; and staffing a local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in the event of an emergency.

Also, the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer is expected to continuously improve the fire and emergency services’ professional status in various capacities such as participating in local, state, and national level committees, associations and organizations such as the California Fire Chiefs Association; attending local, state, and national training and educational opportunities such as the Executive Fire Officer Program; achieving formal educational accomplishments such as a four-year or graduate level degree; and achieving formal certification accomplishments such as the Chief Fire Officer Designation through the Center for Public Safety Excellence and Chief Officer certification through the California State Board of Services.

### Literature Review

The purposes of the literature review for this Applied Research Project (ARP) were to review relevant information on (a) succession planning; (b) career development; (c) mentoring; (d) recruitment and retention; and (e) educational and experience requirements for fire service

executive level chief officer positions from other fire departments and compare them to what is required at the SCCFD for A-Staff chief officer positions.

International Fire Service Training Association (2004) described succession planning as a “proactive approach that ensures that personnel hired, trained, and promoted today will have the skills to meet the challenges of tomorrow; it involves matching the job requirements with the skills of the applicants for the position” (p. 198). Cochran (2006) felt succession planning “is the process of identifying and preparing suitable employees for future leadership roles” (p. 84). If a department does not have qualified individuals to promote into the senior chief officer ranks, Cochran (2006) believed a fire department is then either forced to promote unqualified and/or unprepared individuals with outdated skills or hire from the outside which will only force current members within the department who may be talented and who want to advance, to become frustrated and leave for other opportunities.

Haigh (2010) reported that it is critical for a fire chief to not only look at those individuals who may succeed them tomorrow, but also who will be the fire chief 25 years from now. “With fire service careers spanning 25 years or more and most promotions coming from the lower ranks within the local department, the hiring decisions we make today will significantly impact the candidate pool years after we are gone” (p. 76). To help develop those future A-Staff chief officers, Haigh (2010) offered three primary mechanisms:

- a. Future leader required skills sets.
- b. Knowledge, skills and experiences for each fire department rank.
- c. Determination of techniques to develop future leaders; how can the fire department best prepare it’s personnel.

Compton and Granito (2002) described the obligation a fire department has for ensuring succession planning occurs:

Whatever the source of the education and training, each fire and rescue organization has an obligation to the community to provide high-quality leadership. Grooming those within the department to manage effectively not only addresses that obligation at the particular time but also provides an investment in future leadership (p. 276).

The success of a fire chief can be measured when the time has come for them to retire and they need to pick a successor. Graner (2006) determined that there ideally is not one, but many employees within a fire department that are interested, qualified and very prepared to step into the role of fire chief when it comes time for a fire department to choose a replacement fire chief. He added that too many times this does not occur; a fire chief does not adequately ensure their position can be successfully replaced upon their separation from the department, forcing the department to have to either open up the recruitment to the outside or even worse, choose a candidate from within that is not prepared to become the fire chief. Bringing in a fire chief from outside the department is not necessarily a bad thing, and at times may be needed to change policy, provide a fresh outlook or just modify the status quo. Regardless of the reason for bringing in someone from the outside, “the action is always a traumatic experience for the people in the department” (Graner, 2006, p. 21).

Johnson (2010b) stressed without solid succession plans in place, fire departments are being faced with a dire situation when faced with the increased possibility of a mass exodus of leaders in today’s times when the current economy is actually enticing some leaders to retire, especially if they are being faced with the possibility of their pension systems reducing their benefits or their salaries being frozen or reduced. He compared the fire service to private

industry, showing how the fire service has traditionally been reactive, while private industry has had more instances of being proactive, when it comes to succession planning. A primary example he used is the on-going success of many long-standing, successful businesses and athletic teams, “because their executives know that leading a team to success is only half the formula. The other half is filling the pipeline with the next generation of top performers” (p. 84). This in comparison to the fire service, who has traditionally waited for the leader to advise they are retiring and “only then do we glance at the promotional list to see who is on it” (Johnson, 2010b, p. 84).

In summary, succession planning should be considered a necessary component of every fire department’s day-to-day operations as well as strategic, long-term planning, to ensure there are sufficient numbers of qualified personnel to step into all ranks of an organization, not just the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

Is opening up recruitment to the outside for A-Staff chief officer positions the right thing to do? This would allow candidates from other agencies across the country that may be just as qualified (if not more) and prepared as the personnel within the department to compete for the position. Traditionally the only position the SCCFD has opened up to the outside is entry-level firefighter; on only one known occasion, the fire chief vacancy was opened up in 2002. Many fire departments are forced to open up company officer and chief officer positions due to the limited (or lack of) interest or qualified personnel from within the department. Graner (2006) believed it is a good thing to open up the recruitment for chief positions (with the assistance of a private company who specializes in such), to ensure the best candidate is actually being selected for the position and it is not just a political appointment.

Why would a fire department even consider going to the outside for an A-Staff chief officer position? Some of the most common reasons may include:

- a. The department is currently looked at as ineffective, inefficient, or not cost-effective.
- b. Nobody in the department is perceived to be able to adjust to the position.
- c. There is too much emphasis on status quo and necessary improvements or modifications may be impossible to achieve if current personnel are promoted.
- d. Current department staff for whatever reason may be unwilling to implement policies or direction from the elected or appointed officials overseeing the fire department.
- e. The previous fire chief supported the outgoing regime, such as a former mayor.
- f. Political reasons.
- g. There is currently a lack of confidence from the union and department personnel in the department leadership (Graner, 2006).

Can someone from the outside successfully come into a fire department? Of course, but it may not be an easy transition. Graner (2006) discussed bringing in a chief officer from the outside as well as the challenges placed on that individual:

Every new chief brought into an agency from the outside will certainly have a knowledge gap regarding local conditions. It will take time to learn the union/association infrastructure and for them to know the chief. It will take time to learn the real details of the budget, staff relationships, and political relationships, even if the candidate has one a thorough job of prior investigation of the local conditions before accepting a job and between appointment and assumption of command (p. 23).

The SCCFD can be considered a complex organization, different from the typical city or county fire department for a variety of reasons: the department is a dependent fire district; there



are eight, distinctively different communities and unincorporated areas served, as opposed to just one community; the funding sources come from primarily property taxes and contracts for services; the SCCFD takes a regional approach to providing fire protection services, unlike some other fire departments; and each of the cities the SCCFD has contracted with has a contract that is unlike the other contracts. The SCCFD does not have one, standard contract for each city desiring to be absorbed into the SCCFD. Each contract has been carefully written to reflect the needs of the community, the desired levels of service, the available funding, and most importantly, a desire to provide the highest level of service at a reasonable cost (SCCFD, 2010b). All of these factors could be considered challenging to learn, especially for someone coming from the outside that has not had the opportunity to learn and understand over time.

To ensure a fire department has adequate candidates that are prepared to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks without having to do an outside recruitment, Johnson (2010b) suggested:

- a. Start looking now at who is likely to retire and move into all of your ranks; create a timeline for the estimated promotional process.
- b. For each of the ranks, determine the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities and make sure they are actually being evaluated in the promotional process.
- c. Personally contact the individuals you believe will be the future leaders of your organization, encouraging them to prepare.
- d. Ensure the personnel that will be filling those high ranking positions have a balance of experience of all aspects of the organization; this may require personnel to critical positions earlier in their careers so they have time to learn the positions, instead of being thrown into the fire.

In summary, while opening up the A-Staff chief officer recruitments in itself might produce a larger pool of qualified candidates, hiring someone from the outside may not be the best long-term solution for a fire department, especially if there are qualified candidates from within.

In the summer of 2009, the SCCFD hosted external and internal participants over three days to participate in the strategic plan update process. This process was created to assist with determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the SCCFD, with the intention of creating an updated strategic plan that could guide the SCCFD for the next five years. One of the outcomes of this process, which was an area of customer and employee concern, was the issues of succession planning, as well as training and retaining excellent personnel. Participants felt that two of the weaknesses relating to succession planning, career development, recruitment and retention were a) the “lack of acting time prior to promotional position,” and b) “succession planning – inadequate employee development is not proactive” (SCCFD, 2010c, p. 23). Additionally, the strategic planning process (SCCFD, 2010c) took those weaknesses and opportunities and created a tangible list of “critical issues” and “service gaps” noted by external and internal participants with the hopes of identifying goals and objectives to demonstrate improvement in the future.

The SCCFD strategic planning process identified four major “critical issues” at the SCCFD were identified: a) “communications,” b) “policies and procedures,” c) “workforce management and planning,” and d) “emergency preparedness and planning.” Under the workforce management and planning section were four major areas relating to succession planning, career development, recruitment and retention: a) “division staffing,” b) “employee

development/mentoring,” c) “recruitment and retention,” and d) “accountability” (SCCFD, 2010c, p. 26).

The SCCFD strategic planning process identified five major “service gaps” at the SCCFD were also identified: a) “communications,” b) “infrastructure/physical resources,” c) “administration,” d) “workforce planning,” and e) “training.” Under the “workforce planning” section were three major areas relating to succession planning, career development, recruitment and retention: a) “career ladder,” b) “succession planning,” and c) “staff recruitment and retention.” Under the “training” section there was one major area relating to succession planning, career development, recruitment and retention: a) “staff development and the training of supervisors” (SCCFD, 2010c, p. 26).

The SCCFD strategic planning process identified the following three objectives – objective 4A, 4C and 4D, relating to succession planning, career development, training and education (Tables 1, 2 and 3):

Table 1

*SCCFD Strategic Plan Objective 4A – Evaluate a formal workforce plan for employee development; inclusive of coaching, job shadowing, and mentoring (timeline – 18 months)*

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Items

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Create two (2) focus groups: one safety and one non-safety.

Conduct a Department-wide survey.

Identify deficiencies in the Department’s current mentor program.

Review and establish an active mentor program.

Formalize and implement the new mentor program (p. 34).

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Table 2

*SCCFD Strategic Plan Objective 4C – Develop a succession management plan, and create opportunities for employee career paths and career change (timeline – 24 months)*

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Items

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- Assess Department attrition trends.
- Identify employees as a resource, and identify career path plans.
- Develop an interactive performance evaluation geared towards employee development.
- Assess the ability to maximize work out of class opportunities.
- Report assessment findings (p. 34).

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Table 3

*SCCFD Strategic Plan Objective 4D – Identify and develop a training and education plan for each position and assignment (timeline – 12 months)*

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Items

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- Identify each position and assignment within the organization.
- Review actual job duties and qualifications for each position and assignment.
- Develop and update required KSAs for each position and assignment.
- Identify available training and education resources.
- Assess/evaluate policies/procedures for employees to access available opportunities.
- Create curriculum if not already available and determine program delivery methods.
- Document the training plan implemented for each position/assignment (p. 34).

Another outcome of the SCCFD strategic planning process was the opportunities that may be available to the SCCFD. Four of the opportunities noted by participants which relate to succession planning, career development, recruitment and retention were a) “career development training” at the state and national level, b) “external mentoring opportunities,” c) “sponsor continuing education classes for fire and EMS in order to generate revenue,” and d) “professional relationships, nationwide, state and local (associations)” (SCCFD, 2010c, p. 24).

While there are a variety of ways to create a succession plan, “effective fire department training and professional development don’t just happen” (Wallace, 2009, p. 111). Also, the key ingredient is that the governing body, the administration and the employee/labor organization has involvement and buy-in, and that the plan is actually carried out and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure it is meeting the needs of the department (SCCFD, 2010c). Wallace (2009) determined to be effective and to have those necessary forms of continuing education occur, it is critical to place the professional development and training of all personnel, especially chief officers, into the strategic plan. Putting succession planning into the strategic plan as the SCCFD has done above (Tables 1, 2 and 3), demonstrates the importance of succession planning, not to mention a method to not only advertise it, but to also ensure it occurs. Granted, anything on paper is only as good as it is evaluated and as people are held responsible and accountable for completion.

In summary, the recent SCCFD strategic planning process produced a number of objectives that the SCCFD can utilize to improve upon succession planning and mentoring, not to mention career development, to ensure that the SCCFD adequately recruits and retains employees of all ranks. These objectives were based on the critical issues and service gaps noted by the internal and external attendees.

Bruegman (2005) felt that the individual wanting to promote to the position of executive chief officer needs to be proactive early in their career in order to be successful. “Successful leaders made their declaration early in their career, understood the enormity of the position, and made the commitment to prepare themselves, from both a relational and an educational perspective to succeed” (p. 23). Smeby (2006) discussed the need for chief officers, especially A-Staff chief officers, to continuously improve themselves in the form of education and experience to be effective. A chief officer that wants to be successful and perform at the highest level needs higher education, in addition to additional career development such as attending or presenting at conferences and workshops, attending the National Fire Academy, reading professional periodicals, not to mention on-the-job training and experience (Smeby, 2006).

Graner (2006) felt that anyone desiring to become a company officer or chief officer should prepare very early in their fire service career, to allow adequate time to grow into the leadership roles of the fire service ranks you will be eventually occupying. Instead of completing all of your formal fire service education before you enter the field or at the late stage of your career after you reach the top and are ready to retire, in a perfect world, the successful chief officer will steadily complete their formal education as they progress through the ranks. Not rushing, but also not procrastinating; “as a senior fire service leader, you must have the tools you need to professionally serve your personnel and the public successfully and ethically” (Graner, 2006, xvi). Obviously this type preparation is primarily in the hands of the individual; even if the department provides tuition reimbursement or time off to assist with completing the education and training, it is still up to the individual to actually take the first step and start preparing. Even more importantly, it is up to the individual to actually complete the path they started and to not give up. A fire department cannot force a person to finish what they started, unless there was a

prearranged agreement such as having to complete a class if there was tuition reimbursement or time off allowed.

Why is career development necessary? Compton and Granito (2002) discussed how “fire and emergency response managers continually point to the lack of high-quality staff-type development programs, opportunities for employees and volunteers to grow, as a significant problem in their organization” (p. 275). They expand on the fact that the chief officer of today is faced with an overwhelming and increasing level of demands on their time and their abilities, resulting in an on-going challenge of the chief officer to have outstanding leadership, management, problem-solving and organizational skills. The value of formal education for the chief officer cannot be overlooked; if a chief officer wants to relate to their counterparts and superiors, especially elected or appointed officials who typically possess a four-year degree or higher, they should at least possess a four-year degree. “To be on an equal footing professionally, the chief needs an equivalent education” (Smeby, 2006, p. 115).

Graner (2006) discussed his experience of knowing some successful fire chiefs without any advanced formal education and training. How did they become fire chiefs? Some had become fire chiefs because of their political ties, while some had become fire chiefs because of their demonstrated leadership. Those with the knack for leadership without any formal education or training learned their leadership traits through the “school of hard knocks,” which provided success for some, but not all (xv). Ascending to the top in this fashion doesn’t work for everyone, especially in today’s world where more and more municipalities, not to mention the private sector, are requiring advanced education and training for A-Staff chief officer or equivalent positions.

Snodgrass (2009) discussed the importance of higher education as he interviewed a variety of fire chiefs from around the country. One of the items that stood out was a discussion with Jim Clack, Fire Chief of the Baltimore, Maryland Fire Department, who felt that one of the benefits of higher education included increasing your written communication skills, something that is clearly lacking at the chief officer level. He requires each of his appointed chief officers to take at least one class per semester, regardless of the level of college they may have already completed. He is promoting higher education “so I will be the last chief this department will hire from outside” (Snodgrass, 2009, p. 108).

What types of training and education programs are available for chief officers to assist them with preparing for A-Staff chief officer positions? Per Compton and Granito (2002), it is critical to not solely rely on staff development programs that are instructed or even created by in-house personnel, and to even think about using non-fire service instructors, especially from the private sector. They encourage including outside instructors who are subject matter experts in certain areas, to ensure that a diverse and all encompassing approach is taken to provide the most exposure to future leaders and managers and to different techniques or philosophies to solving problems.

Some fire departments have promoted personnel based on the “merit badge approach,” whereas the an evaluation of the candidate’s resume is done to check the box to ensure certain certifications or training classes have been accomplished, not to mention certain years of experience in a position without any evaluation of how well or how above-and-beyond the individual performed, when compared to their peers (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010, p. 4). Unfortunately this approach does not take into account whether any specific learning objectives have been met.



How can a fire department best prepare personnel for promotional positions, particularly A-Staff chief officer positions? International Association of Fire Chiefs (2010) discussed the difference between how public safety agencies have addressed personnel career development, and how they actually should be addressing personnel career development. When preparing personnel for promotions, their research showed public safety agencies put 10% of their effort into experience, 20% of their effort into mentoring and 70% of their effort into education when in fact the experience and the education should be switched. Their research showed that what works best for personal development, was 10% for education, 20% for mentoring and 70% for experience, primarily because individuals learn best by doing things, as through experience.

Some of the techniques a fire department can employ for personal career development to prepare for A-Staff chief officer positions include:

- a. Lateral assignments in other areas of the department, not limited to different fire stations, but expanded to administrative duties or responsibilities on a 40-hour week.
- b. Project, committee assignments (as a member and as a leader) in different disciplines (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010).

Since 1990, the State of Massachusetts Firefighting Academy has offered training specific to the chief officer, covering the necessary National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021 - Standards for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications for Fire Officer III (Administrative Fire Officer) and IV (Executive Fire Officer). This 13-day program uses the International Fire Service Training Association Chief Officer as its text, requires the student to complete a research paper, prepares the student for Fire Officer III and IV certification, and provides continuing education and college credits that can be applied to undergraduate or graduate degree programs as well as Emergency Medical Service requirements (Pierce, 2008).

Butler and DiDomenico (2009) discussed how the Fire Department New York (FDNY), like some other fire departments, has been providing training to newly promoted company officers and battalion chiefs, but has failed to provide any training or education to members above battalion chief, such as deputy chief. Since individuals at the rank of deputy chief and above tend to have to think bigger picture, something that company officers and battalion chiefs typically do not have to do, the FDNY felt it was critical to create a program focusing on the differences between being a battalion chief and now having to be a deputy chief. Ultimately a two-week program containing the following subjects was created for newly promoted FDNY deputy chiefs: (a) fire management, (b) emergency management, (c) communications, (d) safety concerns, (e) Con Edison scenarios, (f) haz mat scenarios, (g) fire dynamics, (h) office building fires, (i) special operations command capabilities, (j) collapse management, (k) emergency medical service operations, (l) citywide incident management system concerns, (m) building construction, (n) mayday management, and (o) public speaking skills (p. 11).

In regard to how to best create well-rounded future leaders in a fire department, Johnson (2010a) suggested the following:

- a. Create a utility infielder: expose personnel to as many core functions and/or divisions of the department to ensure they are well-rounded and that they gain an appreciation of everything the department does, not just fire suppression.
- b. Trust them: give personnel the opportunity to take on projects, programs, budgets, etc., to allow them career development opportunities.
- c. Make the link: get your captains and battalion chiefs into the community, and have them start interacting and closely working with their city council, elected and appointed officials, citizen groups, etc.

- d. Expose them to other leaders: locate leaders in the fire service, the public sector and even the private sector and attempt to have them interact with your personnel to give them a more global perspective.
- e. Value formal education: while a 2-year degree may be acceptable for a company officer, it is critical for chief officers to have at least a 4-year degree, upon promotion or within a mutually agreed timeline after promotion (p. 62).

There are numerous local, state and even national fire academy programs and higher-education opportunities, not to mention private sector opportunities to expose the chief officer to. Bruegman (2005) discussed the change he has witnessed over the years, particularly with the shift in fire departments requiring more qualifications, especially in the form of education and certifications, when a fire chief vacancy opens up. Many fire departments are now requiring at least a four year degree with a graduate degree being preferred. Today, it is not uncommon to see fire departments requiring credentials such as a graduate degree, completion of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program and/or the Chief Fire Officer Designation through the Center for Public Safety Excellence for its A-Staff chief officer positions (Barr and Eversole, 2003; Bruegman, 2005; Carrizzo, 2005; Buckman, 2006; Graner, 2006; Smeby, 2006; Carter, 2007; Harnes, 2008; Poulin, 2009; Wallace, 2009; and Snodgrass, 2010).

Smeby (2006) believed that one of the biggest challenges facing the fire service is the lack of a standardized approach or system for someone aspiring to be an A-Staff chief officer. He went on to discuss a series of articles written by the Denis Oniel, the Superintendent of the National Fire Academy, who posed the question "Mom/Dad, I want to be a fire chief. What do I need to do?" (p. 185). Had this question been modified to reflect someone who aspired to become a doctor or lawyer, the answer would be very specific and there would be a path for

someone to take that would include training and education, and possibly even experience. The problem with that question of how to prepare to become a fire chief, is that there is no one best answer as the fire service is without a standardized approach at what level of training and education, in addition to experience does an A-Staff chief officer need, especially a fire chief.

One of the most thorough references for an aspiring A-Staff chief officer is the Officer Development Handbook, created by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. This document is in essence a road map for anyone interested in promoting above the ranks of firefighter or engineer and into the ranks of fire officer, partnering the responsibilities of both the organization and the individual desiring to promote. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021 – Standards for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications, is addressed in the Officer Development Handbook: Fire Officer I – Supervising Fire Officer, Fire Officer II – Managing Fire Officer, Fire Officer III – Administrative Fire Officer, and Fire Officer IV – Executive Fire Officer. Each of those four ranks is specifically addressed, demonstrating the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities for each, and more importantly, providing examples of experiences an individual can participate in, inside and outside of their department, to meet and/or exceed the expectations for each rank (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010).

Regarding credentials, it is apparent that an A-Staff chief officer would benefit from the completion of the Chief Fire Officer Designation (CFOD) program through the Center for Public Safety Excellence and also the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) through the National Fire Academy. Barr and Eversole (2003), Bruegman (2005), Carrizzo (2005), Buckman (2006), Graner (2006), Smeby (2006), Carter (2007), Harmes (2008), Poulin (2009) and Wallace (2009) all confirm and emphasize the importance and relevance of a chief officer obtaining higher education, in addition to successfully completing education and training such as the EFOP and

the CFOD to ensure they are well rounded and as prepared as they can be for their leadership roles and responsibilities as they progress higher within the organization.

In summary, career development can be viewed as a two-way street; in order for career development to be successful, the employee and the department have to be in agreement how a aspiring promotional candidate gets from where they are today to where they want to be in the future. Also, to ensure an A-Staff chief officer is well rounded, career development should include a combination of education, training, and experience.

Broman (2009) described mentoring as “a developmental relationship wherein a more experienced person (mentor) fosters growth in a less experienced person (protégé) in certain capacities” (p. 58). Carter and Rousch (2008) consider a mentor the same as a coach, someone who can assist an individual with career development in the way of one-on-one interaction and building upon goals determined by the protégé. They felt that many fire officers discard the necessity for coaching or mentoring to round out their training and education, “yet without effective coaching, fire fighters and officers will not necessarily move aggressively toward enhancing their competencies” (p. 236).

In 2005, the SCCFD attempted to implement a formal mentor program to assist personnel with career development for the following reasons:

- a. To encourage cross-divisional sharing of ideas, knowledge, skills, and experiences.
- b. To promote a safe environment to support risk taking and learning.
- c. To increase morale and decrease workplace apathy.
- d. To acknowledge the importance, value and leadership potential of all personnel.
- e. To encourage and increase communication within the organization.

- f. To reinforce the need for the employee to be responsible for personal and professional career development.
- g. To broaden the knowledge and perspectives of issues relating to the department.
- h. To create and maintain informal organizational relationships within formally established parameters (SCCFD, 2005, p. 2).

While the SCCFD formally established the mentor program in 2005, it really never got off the ground, nor was it met with any form of acceptance from SCCFD personnel. However, based on the feedback obtained through the internal survey sent to SCCFD personnel (see Results section for more details), there appears to be evidence of the need for a mentor program. Additionally, based on the feedback obtained during the SCCFD strategic planning process, there is evidence that it is time to determine why the SCCFD mentor program was never accepted by personnel, and what needs to be done in order to re-establish the mentor program to have it best meet the needs of SCCFD personnel and ultimately the communities served (SCCFD, 2010c).

In summary, a mentoring program can be a valuable tool to assist with career development, succession planning, and ultimately ensuring personnel are being guided and directed in the right direction. A quality mentoring program will assist with the long-term growth and success of any organization, including a fire department.

What are some challenges to getting personnel to make the leap into the senior staff chief officer ranks or more specifically what are some disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer? Bruegman (2005) pointed out how someone who becomes a chief officer is no longer part of the fire station life anymore. This point is echoed by many of the respondents in the internal survey of SCCFD personnel (see Results section for more details). This ultimately results in a division between rank and file personnel, whether it is around the fire station or even off-duty during

social events. This division or even separation can be a very challenging process for many chief officers, especially the higher they go up the chain of command. While some may try to keep a balance, or even one foot on each side of the fence – straddling the line between the rank and file, and try to remain one of the guys or gals, it is not advisable. In showing how doing this does not work, Bruegman (2005) felt that the senior staff chief officer who try to straddle the fence eventually have their command authority reduced, eventually losing respect from everyone below, above and around them.

Going from a 24-hour shift schedule (typically working 10 days per month) to having to work an 8-hour day, on a Monday through Friday schedule (typically working 20 days per month) can be quite the adjustment or even quite the challenge at getting individuals to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks. Having multiple days off is expected when someone is working as a firefighter, company officer or even a battalion chief. However, when one steps into the A-Staff chief officer ranks, the requirement to be available around-the-clock is an issue that may keep some personnel away from promoting into those ranks. Bruegman (2005) stressed that it is a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week, 365 day a year commitment to be a senior staff chief executive, and “for many, that can be an overwhelming burden and one that can cause a great deal of stress at home” (p. 24).

Smeby (2006) discussed a similar issue regarding the challenge of getting middle managers in the fire service to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks:

In many departments, some of the brightest employees resist a transfer to a staff function or promotions above the rank of battalion or district chief because it usually means going to day work. These employees don't want to give up their part-time jobs and adjust their off-duty family and social commitments (p. 24).

Another disadvantage, challenge or barrier for some individuals going into the A-Staff chief officer ranks is the lack of overtime compensation and the potential reduction in pay for an increased workload. Faced with the challenge of attracting and recruiting top notch leaders to fill A-Staff chief officer ranks of the Baltimore, Maryland Fire Department (BFD), Fire Chief James Clack proposed a formula to ensure that his senior staff chief officers (eight deputy chiefs and one assistant chief) were fairly compensated. This was primarily because their salaries have not kept up with the raises offered to the personnel protected by the union, at the ranks of battalion chief and below. His proposed formula was 15% above the pay of a battalion chief. To make matters worse, two BFD deputy chiefs recently asked to be demoted to the rank of battalion chief, which is still a union protected position, because of the pay disparity and the lack of union protection offered to the deputy chief (and higher) ranks. Chief Clack was recently forced to open up a recent deputy chief recruitment to the outside and hire two individuals from the outside because no internal candidates were interested in the promotions (Fenton, 2010). This situation in Baltimore is very similar to situations faced in other fire departments across the country, including the SCCFD, especially when a battalion chief may still be eligible for overtime (or at least straight-time compensation for extra days worked) whereas a deputy chief or A-Staff chief officer is not since they are considered to be management.

Industries outside of the fire service appear to also be having challenges when attempting to recruit individuals into the top ranks of an organization. In an interview with a high school principal, Cusack (2010) wondered “why are teachers hesitant to move into administration?” Answers provided by the principal included being away from the students leading to a possible disconnect with the students and the instructional staff; the longer work hours and the extra



workload; the increased amount of paperwork and responsibilities; the added stress; and the fact that he is always on the clock when in the public eye, representing the school (p. 2).

In 2004, the fast-food conglomerate McDonald's was faced with two of its chief executives succumbing to fatal illnesses in a very short time frame; at the time, McDonald's apparently had properly completed succession planning to ensure there was a smooth transition of future leadership. However, in 2009, McDonald's was not as fortunate when their number two person in command suddenly retired, coming as a surprise to all. This unfortunate situation also occurred a few years prior that in 2006 when the number two person in command also suddenly retired. Why this was a surprise is that everyone at McDonald's had considered both of these individuals who had retired in 2006 and 2009 as the heir apparent for the top job. Industry experts felt that the sudden departure of the number two executive may not be coincidental, and may have some significant meaning (Neuman, 2009). What can fire departments learn from the McDonald's situation? Don't put your eggs in one basket, or assume that the number two executive will be the next number one executive. Ensure there are a number of qualified and prepared individuals at the lower ranks that can step up to the top if and when the time arises.

Wilmoth (2010) addressed some additional challenges for encouraging individuals to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks: the increasing liability and the need to address the financial hardships the state of the economy is posing to the fire service across the country. Williams (2006) discussed the potential disconnect that can occur between administrative staff and the line personnel in the field, something that is very common and was noted by a number of SCCFD personnel in the internal survey (see Results section). For a variety of reasons, including a lack of understanding of what each side is actually doing or not doing; a lack of time management or organizational skills on the side of the administrative staff who do not have or make the time to

visit with line personnel on a regular basis; or just a lack of effort on the side of the line personnel to actually get in touch with administrative staff to find out how challenging their jobs are. Regardless of what causes this disconnect, the ultimate problem is that “the glass partition, both figuratively and literally, is often a major obstacle to meaningful and respectful relationships between senior administration and front line personnel” (Williams, 2006, p. 49).

Instead of focusing on just succession planning, Coleman (2008) offered a different take, and figured fire departments should instead focus on hiring the correct people at the firefighter level, that have the potential to eventually rise to the top ranks. He discussed how there are numerous individuals who have shown us their lack of desire to promote to the top ranks, especially that of fire chief. Of interest he felt “it is fair to say that we literally have paid people to stay off the career ladder by making working conditions more appealing at the bottom than we have at the top of the fire service” (p. 34).

What are some advantages to being an A-Staff chief officer? An obvious answer because of the higher ranking positions could be increased pay and better benefits, but that is not always the case as seen above with the situation occurring in Baltimore, Maryland. Cusack (2010) noted that being an administrator in a non-fire service position is ideal for someone who likes to be challenged, who really enjoys being a strong problem solver and being able to make a difference with the bigger picture. Johnson (2010b) felt there were a few primary reasons fire service personnel would want to promote up the ranks, including “money, greater control, needing a challenge, wanting to make a difference, and my personal favorite, fear of who might be managing you if you don’t promote” (p. 84).

In summary, there are numerous challenges a fire department such as the SCCFD is faced with when trying to inspire or encourage personnel to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks,

and the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer seem to outweigh the advantages based on the amount of information found within the literature review.

In order to apply to the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks, a candidate can qualify as follows (Table 4):

Table 4

*SCCFD A-Staff Chief Officer Promotional Requirements*

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Item	
Fire Chief	
Education	4 year degree
Fire service experience	10 years
Administrative experience	4 years
Assistant Chief	
Education	4 year degree
Fire service experience	8 years
Administrative experience	3 years
Deputy Chief	
Education	4 year degree
Fire service experience	6 years
First-line supervisor experience	4 years

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A review of 123 A-Staff chief officer (or equivalent) job flyers from fire departments across California as well as similar size or type of fire departments across the country showed

numerous commonalities. Sixty-eight were for fire chief positions, 14 were for assistant chief positions, 24 were for deputy chief positions and 17 were for division chief positions. Included were the flyers for the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks of fire chief, assistant chief and deputy chief. What one fire department requires for being promoted to an A-Staff chief officer position can slightly vary from another department, even in the same region. See appendix A for a detailed list of job flyers reviewed, and Tables 11 through 18 in the Results section for specific information related to the experience, education and training required by those various fire departments.

The SCCFD does not have the rank of division chief, but that rank was included in the job flyer review because many departments utilize that rank as a rank above battalion chief and below the fire chief. Also, in the SCCFD, the assistant chief is directly below the fire chief and the deputy chief is directly below the deputy chief. However, in some fire departments, the deputy chief is directly below the fire chief with the assistant chief below the deputy chief. Since there is no one-size-fits-all approach to determining where the rank order of A-Staff chief officers, this has to be taken into consideration when comparing the promotional requirements of one A-Staff chief officer rank versus another. Regardless, the information discovered through the job flyer review was not that drastically different from department to department.

Another challenge for the SCCFD is that to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks, an individual must either be a current battalion chief or a captain that is on the current battalion chief promotional list. As noted in a previous applied research project by the author, the SCCFD is having a problem getting sufficient numbers of candidates to not only apply for the battalion chief positions, but to eventually end up on the battalion chief promotional eligibility list (Prziborowski, 2007). Initially in 2006, the SCCFD had drastically increased the requirements to

promote to the rank of battalion chief; however, due to a variety of reasons, the actual requirements did not take effect until December 2008. While the requirements to take a battalion chief promotional exam have been increased to reflect more current knowledge, skills and abilities, the requirements for the A-Staff chief officer ranks have remained virtually unchanged over the last 21 or so years, when the fire chief job description was last updated (the assistant chief job description was updated in 1995 and the deputy chief job description was last updated in 1998). This has resulted in a significantly less number of qualified individuals eligible to participate in the battalion chief promotional process which ultimately decreases the number of eligible personnel to participate in A-Staff chief officer promotional examinations (Prziborowski, 2007).

In summary, the review of the job flyers of A-Staff chief officer positions around the country did not provide any results that showed the SCCFD is asking for anything out of the norm for A-Staff chief officer positions.

Overall the literature review did not provide any results that were drastically different from the results of the internal survey as noted in the Results section of this paper. The common theme noted in the literature review is that a fire department should have some form of succession planning, career development, and mentoring programs to ensure there are sufficient numbers of qualified personnel ready to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

#### Procedures

The purpose of this research was to identify solutions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promotion into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future.

Descriptive research was used to address the following research questions:

- a. What is the level of interest of current SCCFD personnel to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks?
- b. What are the advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?
- c. What are the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?
- d. Are the requirements to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks within the SCCFD comparable to what other fire departments require?
- e. What can the SCCFD do to encourage personnel to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks?

The first part of this ARP began at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center (LRC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland in May 2010, where the LRC staff assisted the researcher with collecting books, journals, and articles related to succession planning, career development, mentoring, recruitment and retention. The literature review continued in California with an online search, via the World Wide Web, of journals, books, and articles, as well as materials from the researcher's personal library, the SCCFD Training Division library, the City of San Jose public library, and lastly the review of A-Staff equivalent job flyers from around the County of Santa Clara, then the State of California, and then of other areas around the Country. Key words used for searching purposes were *chief officer, fire officer, training and education, career development, recruitment and retention, mentoring, professional development, jobs, and succession planning*.

The second part of this ARP involved an internal survey designed to elicit objective responses from study participants to facilitate consistent and accurate data collection and analysis. This survey design produced data for addressing the research questions and helped to delineate criteria that could be used to evaluate the current requirements to promote into the

SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks, to identify what barriers may be keeping SCCFD personnel from aspiring to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks, and offer suggestions for improvement to ensure there are sufficient candidates who are interested and qualified to eventually promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future due to expected retirements. The internal survey was intended to provide answers to all of the research questions.

A 10-item survey instrument (Appendix B) was created by the researcher to sample persons currently holding the ranks equivalent to battalion chief and below at the SCCFD. The survey sample was limited to the ranks equivalent to battalion chief and below, as those ranks were either the current or future target audience of the A-Staff chief officer positions. The items were a combination of forced-choice design (*yes, no, unsure, etc.*) and open-ended design, with clarification allowed for most questions. The respondents were asked to provide their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of being an SCCFD A-Staff chief officer, whether they were interested now or possibly in the future to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks, their perception of whether the current A-Staff chief officer promotional requirements were reasonable, and what they felt the SCCFD could do to encourage personnel to participate in future A-Staff chief officer promotional processes. The expected time to finish the survey would be less than 10 minutes.

The internal survey was sent to a total of 248 personnel: 13 Battalion Chiefs (1 position was currently unfilled), 68 Fire Captains, 148 Firefighter/Engineers (including paramedics), and 19 personnel filling various positions within the Fire Prevention Division. The internal survey was administered to 4 persons inside and outside of the SCCFD, as a pilot study prior to its distribution to the SCCFD personnel. One of the persons was an SCCFD volunteer firefighter, and the rest were from other fire departments: one was a firefighter, one was a fire captain, and

one was an assistant chief. These individuals were chosen to obtain a variety of opinions, beliefs, and points of view. All pilot test participants completed the survey without difficulty, and their comments were incorporated into the final version of the survey, which was subsequently distributed to the SCCFD personnel at or below the rank equivalent to Battalion Chief.

The internal survey was sent via email using the Survey Monkey software to the 248 SCCFD personnel on June 19, 2010. The plan was to allow the respondents no more than 24 days to complete the survey. The advantage to using Survey Monkey was that the results could be exported and downloaded for tabulation and review much easier than having to input the data from each survey into a separate template. After the data from each of the completed surveys were transferred to the results section, the final data from the surveys was placed in a folder in a locked cabinet for archival purposes. A total of 76 out of a possible 248 surveys were returned, for a return rate of 31%.

### *Limitations*

After reviewing the completed surveys, it was noted that very few fire prevention division personnel completed a survey. After discussing the issue with some SCCFD personnel, it was determined that some of the fire prevention staff did not think that they were even eligible for any A-Staff chief officer positions other than the deputy chief of fire prevention and to the best of the author's knowledge, nobody from the fire prevention side has ever gone above deputy chief of fire prevention to the assistant or fire chief positions. Other limitations of the internally provided survey were that since it was electronically sent to the all of the above mentioned personnel as a group, and because each link was not uniquely tied to a specific person, nor were the names of the respondents asked for; there was no opportunity for specific follow-up or clarification.



Since it was not exactly known who had actually completed a survey, it was impossible to actually send out a reminder, specifically targeted at those who had not completed the survey. Instead, the only option was to send out a general reminder asking personnel to complete the survey. Lastly, other items that may have limited the final number of respondents is that there were a number of personnel who were off on approved time off, who must not regularly check their email, who choose not to complete such surveys, or who did not have sufficient time to complete the survey. Had the time limit to complete the survey been extended, and had the author followed up each fire station with a phone call to encourage personnel to complete the survey, there may have been an increase in respondents.

#### *Definition of Terms*

The following terms are defined in the context of this research.

*A-Staff chief officer:* A term used at the SCCFD to delineate the fire chief, the assistant chief, and/or one of the four deputy chiefs.

*Chief officer:* A term used to describe an individual within a fire department with not only supervisory experience, but also management and administrative experience. Fire chief, assistant chief, deputy chief, division chief and battalion chief are the most commonly used ranks at the chief officer level.

*Company officer:* The first-line supervisor within a fire department, typically supervising a crew of two to four personnel on a piece of fire apparatus, such as an engine or a truck. Captain and lieutenant are the most commonly used ranks at the company officer level.

#### Results

The purpose of this research was to identify solutions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promote into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer

ranks in the future. The analysis and interpretation of the internal survey included a review of (a) demographics of the respondent; (b) the respondent's level of interest in promoting to the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks; (c) the respondent's preference of SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks if they were to promote; (d) the respondent's perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of being an SCCFD A-Staff chief officer; (e) the respondent's perception of what the SCCFD could do to encourage personnel to participate in future A-Staff chief officer promotional examinations; (f) the respondent's perception of the appropriateness and relevance of the current SCCFD A-Staff chief officer promotional requirements; (g) the respondent's perception of what options the SCCFD should consider if there are insufficient numbers of personnel interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future.

Table 5

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 1 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
1. Years of fire service experience		
Less than 5	9	11.8
5 to 9	16	21.1
10 to 14	14	18.4
15 to 19	9	11.8
20 to 24	13	17.1
25 or greater	15	19.7

Item 1 of the internal survey asked how many years the respondent had been in the fire service. Nine (11.8%) of the respondents who answered the question reported *less than 5 years* of experience, 16 (21.1%) of the respondents who answered the question reported *5 to 9 years* of fire service experience, 14 (18.4%) reported *10 to 14 years*, 9 (11.8%) reported *15 to 19 years*, 13 (17.1%) reported *20 to 24 years*, and 15 (19.7%) reported *25 or more years* (Table 5).

Table 6

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 2 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
2. Current SCCFD rank		
Assistant Fire Marshal	1	1.3
Battalion Chief	6	7.9
Decline to State	0	0.0
Deputy Fire Marshal	3	3.9
Fire Captain	31	40.8
Fire Protection Engineer	0	0.0
Firefighter/Engineer	16	21.1
Firefighter/Engineer-Paramedic	17	22.4
Haz Mat Program Supervisor	1	1.3
Haz Mat Specialist	1	1.3
Other	0	0.0
Senior Deputy Fire Marshal	0	0.0

Item 2 of the internal survey asked what rank the respondent currently filled. Thirty one (40.8%) of the respondents chose *Captain*, 17 (22.4%) reported *Firefighter/Engineer-Paramedic*, 16 (21.1%) reported *Firefighter/Engineer*, 6 (7.9%) reported *Battalion Chief*, 3 (3.9%) reported *Deputy Fire Marshal*, and 1 (1.3%) reported either *Assistant Fire Marshal*, *Haz Mat Program Supervisor* or *Haz Mat Specialist* (Table 6).

*Research Question 1*

Research question 1 asked, *What is the level of interest of current SCCFD personnel to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks?*

Table 7

*Summary of Responses to Survey Items 3-4 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
3. Interest in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks		
Yes	11	14.5
No	33	43.4
Unsure	18	23.7
Not at this time, but possibly in the future	14	18.4
4. Interest in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks		
Deputy Chief	21	27.6
Assistant Chief	2	2.6
Fire Chief	2	2.6
Unsure	22	28.9
None	35	46.1

Item 3 of the internal survey asked the respondent whether they had the interest in ever promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks. Thirty-three (43.4%) respondents who answered the question responded *no*, 18 (23.7%) respondents reported *unsure*, 14 (18.4%) respondents reported that *not at this time, but possibly in the future*, and 11 (14.5%) respondents who answered the question reported *yes*, they would be interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks (Table 7).

Additional responses included 5 (7%) of the respondents who stated they had *too little time left on the job*, while 5 (7%) of the respondents who stated they had *too much time left on the job* to become an A-Staff chief officer. Two (3%) of the respondents answered that *they enjoyed the hands-on aspect of their current job too much and had no desire to work a 40-hour work week*.

Item 4 of the internal survey asked the respondent to choose which, if any, of the A-Staff Chief Officer ranks they may be interested in aspiring to in their career. Thirty-five (46.1%) of the respondents answered *none*, 22 (28.9%) answered *unsure*, 21 (27.6%) answered *Deputy Chief*, 2 (2.6%) answered *Assistant Chief*, and 2 (2.6%) answered *Fire Chief* (Table 7).

Additional responses provided included 4 (5%) of the respondents answered that they would enjoy being the *Training Chief* and 3 (4%) of the respondents answered they would enjoy being the *Operations Chief*.

### *Research Question 2*

Research question 2 asked, *What are the advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?*

Item 5 of the internal survey asked the respondent to provide what they felt to be advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer. Sixty-six (86.8%) respondents stated the advantages include *making a difference, affecting change, being involved in the future of the department as well as*

*the big picture, and the potential for positive leadership.* Seventeen (22.4%) respondents stated the advantages include items relating to the *increased wages, the increased benefits and the working conditions, specifically being able to be at home on the nights, weekends and holidays with your family.* Ten (13.2%) respondents stated the advantages include *personal and professional career development and the sense of personal accomplishment.* Seven (9.2%) respondents stated the advantages include *being able to make a difference in the way of mentoring, succession planning and with the career development of other department personnel.* Five (6.6%) respondents stated the advantages as *none*, and 3 (3.9%) respondents were *unsure* as to the advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer (Table 8).

Table 8

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 6 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
5. Advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer		
Making a difference/affecting change/involved in department future and the big picture/leadership potential	66	86.8
Wages/benefits/working conditions	17	22.4
Personal career development/achievement	10	13.2
Mentoring/succession planning/career development	7	9.2
None	5	6.6
Unsure	3	3.9

Advantages noted during the literature review primarily mirrored the items found above via the respondents answers during the internal survey. Cusack (2010) noted that a person best suited for an administrator position equivalent to an A-Staff chief officer was someone who enjoyed being challenged on a regular basis, as well as someone who enjoyed being a part of the bigger picture. Additional advantages to becoming an A-Staff chief officer would be “money, greater control, needing a challenge, wanting to make a difference, and my personal favorite, fear of who might be managing you if you don’t promote” (Johnson, 2010b, p. 84).

### *Research Question 3*

*Research question 3 asked, What are the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?* Item 6 of the internal survey asked the respondent to describe what they felt to be disadvantages of being an A-Staff Chief Officer. Thirty-three (43.4%) of the respondents answered *not responding to calls/separation from the customer and the crews/lack of camaraderie*, 25 (32.9%) of the respondents answered *potential communication issues/disconnect from line personnel*, 22 (28.9%) responded *40-hour work week/not working 24-hour shifts*, 20 (26.3%) responded *internal/external politics and/or bureaucracy*, 19 (25%) responded *personal time commitment/workload*, 17 (22.4%) responded *stress/responsibility/liability*, 10 (13.2%) responded *office duty/meetings/paperwork*, 8 (10.5%) responded *unsure*, 4 (5.3%) responded *having to deal with personnel issues* and 3 (3.9%) answered *none* (Table 9).

Disadvantages noted during the literature review primarily mirrored the items found above via the respondents answers during the internal survey. Two of the items that stood out the most as being disadvantages were no longer being an integral part of the fire station life and going from the traditional 24-hour shift to a Monday through Friday 40-hour work week (Bruegman, 2005; Smeby, 2006). Additional disadvantages included the lack of union

protection, the lack of overtime compensation, the potential pay reduction from not being able to work overtime or for working additional hours, and not being compensated (Fenton, 2010).

Wilmoth (2010) discussed how the increased liability and the need to address the current financial hardship faced by the economy were two disadvantages, while Williams (2006) believed the potential disconnect between administrative and field personnel was a disadvantage.

Table 9

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 6 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
6. Disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer		
Not responding to calls/separation from the customer and the crews/lack of camaraderie	33	43.4
Potential communication issues/disconnect from line personnel	25	32.9
40-hour work week / not working 24-hour shifts	22	28.9
Internal/external politics and/or bureaucracy	20	26.3
Personal time commitment/workload	19	25.0
Stress/responsibility/liability	17	22.4
Office duty/meetings/paperwork	10	13.2
Unsure	8	10.5
Having to deal with personnel issues	4	5.3
None	3	3.9



The fire service is not the only industry having challenges with recruiting personnel to promote into the senior, executive level ranks due to perceived disadvantages. In an interview with a high school principal, Cusack (2010) discovered that the increased workload and additional hours, not to mention the other administrative responsibilities such as increased paperwork and responsibilities, and the resulting stress appeared to be barriers faced by school districts when attempting to recruit teachers into the senior administrative ranks, which is parallel to problems the fire service is facing.

#### *Research Question 4*

Research question 4 asked, *Are the requirements to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks within the SCCFD comparable to what other fire departments require?*

Item 8 of the internal survey asked the respondent whether they felt the current SCCFD requirements to promote to the A-Staff chief officer positions were reasonable. Forty-one (53.9%) of the respondents answered *yes*, 21 (27.6%) of the respondents answered *no*, 14 (18.4%) responded *unsure*. Other significant responses provided by respondents included 17 (22.4%) who answered *increase experience*, and 7 (9.2%) who answered *modify educational requirements* (Table 10).

The information obtained through the review of the 123 A-Staff chief officer job flyers mirrored what the majority of SCCFD personnel below in Table 10 answered when posed with the question of whether the current requirements are reasonable. If anything, a number of departments actually required more training, education and/or experience for their A-Staff chief officer positions, as compared to the SCCFD (Tables 11 through 18).

Table 10

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 8 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
8. Determining whether current A-Staff chief officer requirements are reasonable		
Yes	41	53.9
No	21	27.6
Unsure	14	18.4
Additional comments offered by respondents		
Increase experience	17	22.4
Modify educational requirements	7	9.2
They are reasonable	4	5.3
A-Staff chief officers should have a graduate degree	3	3.9
Degree should be relevant to the fire service	3	3.9
Allow for flexibility in choosing promotional candidates	2	2.6
Decrease experience requirements	2	2.6
Change Battalion Chief requirements	1	1.3

Table 11

*Fire Chief Promotional Requirements – Education and Training (N = 68)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Graduate degree		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	32	47.1
Four-year degree		
Required	57	83.8
Desirable	8	11.8
Two-year degree		
Required	1	1.5
Desirable	0	0.0
Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Designation		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	9	13.2
Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	22	32.4
California State Fire Marshal's Office Chief Officer		
Required	2	2.9
Desirable	7	10.3

Table 12

*Fire Chief Promotional Requirements – Experience (N = 68)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Years as an assistant chief		
1	1	1.5
5	1	1.5
Years as a battalion chief		
1	3	4.4
2	5	7.4
3	12	17.7
4	11	16.2
5	15	22.1
10	6	8.8
15	1	1.5
Years as a deputy chief		
5	1	1.5
Years as a division chief		
1	1	1.5
5	3	4.4
7	2	2.9
10	1	1.5
Unspecified	5	7.4

Table 13

*Assistant Chief Promotional Requirements – Education and Training (N = 14)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Graduate degree		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	2	14.3
Four-year degree		
Required	5	35.8
Desirable	4	28.6
Two-year degree		
Required	4	28.6
Desirable	0	0.0
Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Designation		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	1	7.1
Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	3	21.4
California State Fire Marshal's Office Chief Officer Certification		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	2	14.3

Table 14

*Assistant Chief Promotional Requirements – Experience (N = 14)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Years as a battalion chief		
1	1	7.1
2	1	7.1
3	3	21.4
4	1	7.1
Years as a captain		
2	2	14.3
3	2	14.3
5	2	14.3
7	1	7.1
Unspecified	1	7.1

Table 15

*Deputy Chief Promotional Requirements – Education and Training (N = 24)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Graduate degree		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	5	20.8
Four-year degree		
Required	16	66.7
Desirable	4	16.7
Two-year degree		
Required	5	20.8
Desirable	0	0.0
Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Designation		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	3	12.5
Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	7	29.2
California State Fire Marshal’s Office Chief Officer Certification		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	3	12.5

Table 16

*Deputy Chief Promotional Requirements – Experience (N = 24)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Years as a battalion chief		
1	3	12.5
2	8	7.1
3	3	12.5
5	3	12.5
Years as a captain		
2	1	4.2
4	2	8.3
5	3	12.5
8	1	4.2
Off probation	1	4.2



Table 17

*Division Chief Promotional Requirements – Education and Training (N = 17)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Graduate degree		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	1	5.9
Four-year degree		
Required	8	47.1
Desirable	5	29.4
Two-year degree		
Required	7	41.2
Desirable	0	0.0
Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Designation		
Required	0	0.0
Desirable	1	5.9
Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program		
Required	1	5.9
Desirable	4	23.5
California State Fire Marshal’s Office Chief Officer Certification		
Required	3	17.6
Desirable	8	47.1

Table 18

*Division Chief Promotional Requirements – Experience (N = 17)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
Years as a battalion chief		
2	1	5.9
3	3	17.6
Off probation	1	5.9
Years as a captain		
2	3	17.6
3	4	23.5
4	2	11.8
5	2	11.8
6	1	5.9

Upon reviewing the job flyers (Tables 11 through 18), and then comparing the position requirements – training and education, as well as experience, to those of the SCCFD (Table 4), there were no significant differences. The overall requirements to promote into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks appear to be reasonable when compared to other fire departments, with the only exception being some fire departments placing some value on the completion of the EFO program and CFO designation. Although the SCCFD does not currently require any certifications such as completion of the EFO program, CFO designation, or even California State Fire Marshal’s office certifications of either Chief Officer or Fire Officer, a sizeable number of

departments are requiring those certifications, or at least stating they are desirable or highly desirable. While the SCCFD does not require California Chief Officer or Fire Officer certification for A-Staff chief officer ranks, to promote into the captain or battalion chief ranks, a candidate must possess those certifications or at least a portion of the required coursework.

#### *Research Question 5*

Research question 5 asked *What can the SCCFD do to encourage personnel to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks?*

Item 7 of the internal survey asked the respondent to identify techniques the SCCFD could employ to encourage personnel to participate in future A-Staff Chief Officer promotional examinations. Thirty-four (44.7%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should implement a mentor program and provide a better understanding of the job of an A-Staff chief officer*. Sixteen (21.1%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should accommodate education in the sense of either providing opportunities on or off duty, allowing more flexibility to attend educational classes*. Sixteen (21.1%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should modify the promotional requirements to allow some flexibility if a candidate did not currently meet the requirements*. Fifteen (19.7%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD A-Staff chief officers should improve communications and integration with the line personnel*. Thirteen (17.1%) answered *unsure*. Ten (13.2%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should provide positive reinforcement and encourage personnel to promote*. Four (5.3%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should make the A-Staff chief officer positions more desirable, either with more pay or less project/program responsibility*. Two (2.6%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should make the promotion to battalion chief easier*. One (1.3%) of the respondents answered *that the SCCFD should open the A-Staff chief officer*

*recruitment up to all employees, and not just limit it to battalion chiefs or acting battalion chiefs* (Table 19).

Table 19

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 7 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
7. How the SCCFD could encourage participation in future A-Staff promotional exams		
Mentoring programs / provide better understanding of the job	34	44.7
Provide on or off duty educational opportunities	16	21.1
Modify the promotional requirements to allow flexibility	16	21.1
Improve communications and integration with line personnel	15	19.7
Unsure	13	17.1
Provide positive reinforcement/encourage personnel to promote	10	13.2
Make the positions more desirable (more pay/less projects)	4	5.3
Make promoting to Battalion Chief easier	2	2.6
Do not limit the pool to battalion chiefs/acting battalion chiefs	1	1.3

Item 9 of the internal survey asked the respondent to identify options the SCCFD should consider if there are insufficient numbers of personnel interested in future A-Staff Chief Officer promotional examinations. Twenty-seven (35.5%) of the respondents answered *open up the recruitment to outside personnel*, 22 (28.9%) of the respondents answered *decrease the A-Staff chief officer educational requirements*, 21 (27.6%) answered *other*, 17 (22.4%) answered *unsure* and 4 (5.3%) answered *decrease the A-Staff chief officer experience requirements*. Other

significant responses provided by respondents included 13 (17.1%) who answered *encourage personnel/offer mentoring and educational assistance*, and 11 (14.5%) who answered *adjust educational requirements/allow flexibility to take classes* (Table 20).

Table 20

*Summary of Responses to Survey Item 9 (N = 76)*

Item	<i>f</i>	%
9. Options the SCCFD should consider if insufficient personnel interested in A-Staff promotions		
Decrease the A-Staff chief officer educational requirements	22	28.9
Decrease the A-Staff chief officer experience requirements	4	5.3
Open up the recruitment to outside personnel	27	35.5
Unsure	17	22.4
Other	21	27.6
Additional comments offered by respondents		
Encourage personnel/offer mentoring and educational assistance	13	17.1
Adjust educational requirements/allow flexibility to take classes	11	14.5
Hiring from outside could be beneficial	6	7.9
Don't modify requirements, they are reasonable	5	6.6
Hiring from outside could be harmful	3	3.9
Decrease experience requirements	3	3.9
Allow flexibility to meet promotional requirements	1	1.3
Increase experience requirements	1	1.3

## Discussion

An individual filling an A-Staff chief officer rank at any fire department has a tremendous amount of personal and professional responsibility, not to mention liability, to ensure the fire department is providing the highest quality of service, in a very safe and efficient manner, and for a cost-effective price to the individuals and the community it serves.

The SCCFD is going to have a challenging time recruiting personnel to participate in future A-Staff chief officer promotional processes. Only 11 (14.5%) of respondents actually committed to having any interest to participate in future promotional process. Question #3 of the internal survey asked respondents “are you interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks (now or in the future), even if you don’t qualify?” Nearly half of the respondents, 33 (43.4%), stated they had no interest in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks. On the bright side, 18 (23.7%) of the personnel responding to the survey stated they were unsure if they would be interested and 14 (18.4%) of the personnel stated they were not currently interested, but that they may possibly interested in the future. That makes a little over 42% of respondents who would not commit a firm yes or no, and could potentially be convinced to participate in future promotional examinations for A-Staff chief officer ranks.

While it is understood that people have the right to change their mind, it is at least encouraging to see the numbers of personnel with at least some interest in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks. Obviously everyone cannot rise to become the fire chief or the assistant chief, primarily because of the very limited number of openings, and the large potential pool to draw from. Have we as an industry even discouraged personnel from promoting up the chain of command? Coleman (2008) believed so, primarily because the working conditions at the lower ranks (firefighter, engineer, and even captain) have been made much more glamorous and

enticing than those higher ranks (chief officer). In some ways, it is hard to fault personnel for not wanting to leave their comfort zone, especially if we do not pay any attention to future A-Staff chief officer promotions at the time we hire personnel as entry-level firefighters.

The literature review exposed numerous instances of authors encouraging fire departments to start identifying their future executive officers early in their careers, shortly after getting hired or even during the entry-level firefighter hiring process if possible (Bruegman, 2005, Graner, 2006, Coleman, 2008 and Haigh, 2010). Why is this critical? Because if we wait until personnel have obtained the rank of company officer or even the entry-level chief officer ranks in positions such as battalion chief, these personnel are more than likely well into the second half of their career and have already been well established within their family and lifestyle. Some may even be so close to retirement that they do not want to go through the hassle of attempting to complete the necessary training, education and experience to compete in the A-Staff chief officer promotions. By capturing and identifying potential future key leaders within an organization earlier as opposed to later, we allow them to slowly, and progressively participate in career development opportunities as opposed to having to rush them through the process when they are already overwhelmed on the home front managing their personal life.

Of the current A-Staff chief officer positions, the rank of deputy chief appears to be the most appealing to respondents of the internal survey who were asked on question #4 which A-Staff chief officer position they would like to aspire to at some point of their career. Twenty-one (27.6%) stated that deputy chief would be their choice if they were to be an A-Staff chief officer with 4 (5%) adding that the deputy chief of operations would be their ideal position and 3 (4%) adding that deputy chief of training would be their ideal positions; no respondents added that they would enjoy being the deputy chief of support services or of fire prevention. Of equal desire

were the assistant chief and fire chief positions, where in both cases 2 (2.6%) of the respondents stated they would like to aspire to those positions. Since there is only one assistant chief and one fire chief, as compared to four deputy chiefs, these numbers at face value do not appear to be a significant challenge. Just having some personnel state they would be interested in those positions is half the battle. Now the other half of the battle is doing what it takes to get those personnel prepared for the future promotional examinations; unfortunately not everyone who has a desire to do something will ever get that opportunity, for a variety of reasons.

Bruegman (2005), Smeby (2006), Williams (2006), Cusack (2010), Fenton (2010) and Wilmoth (2010) all echoed the ever-increasing challenge fire departments across the country are having getting personnel to promote into the A-Staff chief officer ranks. In today's litigious society, being an A-Staff chief officer is not as glamorous as it may have been in previous years. Ever-increasing responsibility, liability, workload, longer work hours, stress, lack of union protection, and the potential for the compensation not being worth the hassle of working in an administrative capacity – without the ability to make overtime, were commonalities noted over and over again by the various authors.

What are the advantages to being an SCCFD A-Staff chief officer? When asked about the advantages of being an A-Staff Chief Officer, a majority of respondents, 66 (86.8%), believed a compilation of making a difference in the department, being able to affect change, being involved in the future of the department and the big picture, and the potential for having leadership ability to guide the department in the right direction were the primary advantages. The next item stated to be an advantage by 17 (22.4%) of the respondents was wages, benefits and working conditions. The results from the internal survey mirrored what was discovered during the literature review. Cusack (2010) and Johnson (2010b) both identified those items mentioned



by the SCCFD personnel as reasons why an individual would want to promote into ranks equivalent to the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

What are the disadvantages of being an SCCFD A-Staff chief officer? When asked about the disadvantages of being an A-Staff Chief Officer, the items most noted were a compilation of not being able to respond to emergency calls, being separated from the customer and the crews and a lack of camaraderie, was noted by 33 (43.4%) of the respondents to the internal survey. Next most noted items included 25 (32.9%) of the respondents who stated potential communication issues and the disconnect from line personnel as being disadvantages and 22 (28.9%) of the respondents who stated that the 40-hour work week and not being able to work 24-hour shifts were disadvantages. The results from the internal survey mirrored what was discovered during the literature review.

Maybe the type of individual we recruit or hire for the position of firefighter needs to be evaluated? It would be a safe bet that if you were to walk up to the majority of candidates who are applying for firefighter positions across the country and asked them why they wanted to become a firefighter, they would probably have an answer similar to I want to fight fire, save lives, and go on emergency responses. Then within that conversation it would probably come out that they like the idea of working 24-hour shifts as many fire departments do, and that they like the generous wages, benefits, and even retirement plans that many firefighters are fortunate enough to have. I say this because I hear this on a regular basis when I talk to prospective candidates who want to work for our department or any fire department, as well as prospective candidates at the community college where I have been teaching fire science and related courses for over 17 years. Very rarely do I hear someone who actually wants to eventually become a fire

chief or some other A-Staff chief officer; that is usually the last thing on most individual's minds when they decide to become a firefighter.

Here lies the problem: if you really evaluate each of those items mentioned above, they are the primary disadvantages noted by not only personnel responding to the internal survey, but also within the literature review. Many of the personnel we may be hiring today do not even have A-Staff chief officer positions on their radar screen, nor do they even have the desire to ever have them on their radar screen.

If a fire department such as the SCCFD wants to start identifying and preparing future A-Staff chief officers, then it may be ideal to start looking for those leaders shortly after they have finished their entry-level probationary period of 18 months after the recruit academy has finished. One tool that could be used to assist with a standardized approach to career development could be the Officer Development Handbook, whereas all four levels of Officer Development are discussed and examples of how to progress through the chain of command from the Supervising Fire Officer (company officer) all the way up to the Executive Fire Officer (fire chief) are provided (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010). There is a catch and a potential problem with identifying key leaders too early in their careers in that they may be enticed or even pushed to go up the chain of command too quickly, which could possibly lead to burnout or even being placed into a position they are just not ready to step into, which could lead to irreversible damage to their confidence, their reputation, and their overall credibility.

Upon reviewing the 123 A-Staff chief officer job flyers (Tables 11 through 18), and then comparing the position requirements – training and education, as well as experience, to those of the SCCFD (Table 4), there were no obvious differences or variances to note. The requirements to promote into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks appear to be reasonable when compared

to other fire departments, with the only exception being some fire departments placing some value on the completion of the EFO program and CFO designation.

Although the SCCFD does not currently require any certifications such as completion of the Executive Fire Officer Program, Chief Fire Officer Designation, or even California State Fire Marshal's office certifications of either Chief Officer or Fire Officer, a sizeable number of departments are requiring those certifications, or at least stating they are desirable or highly desirable. While the SCCFD does not require California Chief Officer certification for A-Staff chief officer positions, to promote into the lower captain or battalion chief ranks, a candidate must either possess those certifications or at least a portion of the required coursework.

What happens if the SCCFD does not have sufficient numbers of personnel ready to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future? That is a question that does not have an easy answer. Question #9 of the internal survey asked respondents "if there are insufficient numbers of personnel interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future, what options should the SCCFD consider?" Over one-third of the respondents, 27 (35.5%), answered that the SCCFD should open up the recruitment to outside personnel who meet the current qualifications. It is interesting to note, that to the best of the author's knowledge, the only time the SCCFD has ever opened up an A-Staff chief officer recruitment to outside personnel was in 2002 when the fire chief vacancy was opened up for a nationwide recruitment of personnel. However, this situation resulted in the current assistant chief, who had been acting as the interim fire chief since the retirement of the previous fire chief, being promoted to fire chief. Thus, there has never been an outside candidate selected for an SCCFD A-Staff chief officer position.

Is it wrong to have to open up a recruitment to the outside to get additional candidates to apply for A-Staff chief officer positions? Not necessarily. Graner (2006) felt opening up A-Staff

chief officer positions to the outside would assist with ensuring that the best candidate is selected and that the process does not appear to be simply a political appointment. While opening up the recruitment may not be a bad thing in itself, a progressive fire department should find themselves with multiple in-house personnel who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to step into the A-Staff chief officer positions and more importantly, successfully compete with those outside candidates (Graner, 2006). The last thing a fire department should do is end up hiring personnel from the outside, or even worse, hire from within someone who is either unprepared or unqualified as this may force those internal candidates who may be talented and with aspirations of becoming A-Staff chief officers to leave for other opportunities, or become disenchanted with the department (Cochran, 2006). A progressive and proactive fire department will ensure there are more than enough A-Staff chief officer candidates to select from, to provide as large of a candidate pool to draw from, so that it is not stuck with having to promote the only person who put in for the position and may not be the best fit.

What are some barriers to getting personnel to step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks? Well, one can look at the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer as discussed above as a starting point. To take it a step further, if we look at the internal survey, particularly question #7, which asked how the SCCFD could encourage participation in future A-Staff chief officer promotional exams. Almost one-half of the respondents, 34 (44.7%), added that the SCCFD should offer a mentor program or some form of similar program for prospective A-Staff chief officers to get a better understanding of the job. The need for a mentoring program was also documented in the literature review by participants in the 2010-2014 SCCFD strategic planning process as a critical issue and as a service gap (SCCFD, 2010c). Other strong responses by respondents included 16 (21.1%) suggesting the SCCFD provide on or off duty educational

opportunities, 16 (21.1%) suggesting the SCCFD modify the current promotional requirements (including the battalion chief requirements) to allow flexibility in obtaining the qualifications, and 15 (19.7%) of respondents suggesting that the SCCFD senior staff improve communications and integration with line personnel.

In today's world, it is hard to argue against requiring formal education and training, not to mention significant experience for senior executives of any public or private organization, especially fire departments. Increasing numbers of fire departments are requiring their A-Staff chief officer candidates to possess a variety of educational or training accomplishments, such as a four year degree, a graduate degree, completion of the EFO program, and even CFO designation (Barr and Eversole, 2003; Bruegman, 2005; Carrizzo, 2005; Buckman, 2006; Graner, 2006; Smeby, 2006; Carter, 2007; Harmes, 2008; Poulin, 2009; Wallace, 2009; and Snodgrass, 2010).

While some of the respondents to the internal survey did suggest lowering or even modifying educational and/or experience requirements to allow flexibility and to even increase the potential pool of qualified candidates, it would be in the best interest of the SCCFD to not necessarily lower the qualifications that seem to be on par with at least the 123 job flyers that were reviewed in Tables 11 through 18. A more appropriate technique might be to possibly either modify the requirements – which could include allowing personnel to participate in the promotional process, but not be promoted until they complete the requirements, or allowing personnel to participate in the promotional process and actually get promoted if they score well enough, but have a required timeline to complete the necessary education and training they may be lacking.

The fire service is not the only industry having challenges with recruiting personnel to promote into the senior, executive level ranks. In an interview with a high school principal,

Cusack (2010) discovered that the increased workload and additional hours, not to mention the other administrative responsibilities such as increased paperwork and responsibilities, and the resulting stress appeared to be barriers faced by school districts when attempting to recruit teachers into the senior administrative ranks, are keeping teachers from promoting into the senior executive ranks; this is very similar to the challenges the fire service is facing. The fast food conglomerate McDonald's had a valuable lesson for the fire service when it comes to succession planning and preparing personnel for future A-Staff chief officer equivalent positions, specifically do not put all of your eggs into one basket, by relying on one or two personnel to be the future senior executives, especially the individual who is currently serving as the number two in command when looking at the number one in command position. Instead, branch down the chain of command early in the careers of personnel to encourage and prepare personnel for promotions, and also attempt to maintain a pool of qualified and prepared individuals who could step into the senior executive ranks at a moment's notice, to ensure a seamless transition (Neuman, 2009).

Johnson (2010b) summarized it best when he compared successful businesses and athletic dynasties, and specifically how those that are successful are continuously performing and practicing succession planning "because their executives know that leading a team to success is only half the formula. The other half is filling the pipeline with the next generation of top performers" (p. 84).

### Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to identify solutions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promotion into the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future.

Based on the responses to the internal survey, the information obtained from the literature review, and the analysis of the results of those processes, the following recommendations are offered to act as a starting point to assist the SCCFD with developing a plan to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel interested and qualified to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future, especially the near future when it is anticipated larger than normal numbers of A-Staff chief officers will be retiring.

The first recommendation for the SCCFD is identify key personnel from both the labor organization (Santa Clara County Firefighters Association Local 1165) and the management organization – A-Staff and B-Staff chief officers, to be a part of a committee to evaluate the current succession planning, career development and mentoring strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The make-up of the committee should include personnel of various ranks, as well as various levels of experience (from newly hired personnel to senior personnel) to ensure an objective balance of opinions and ideas. This committee should be an on-going committee, not an ad-hoc committee, as this topic is not going to be solved over the course of a year or two; it will more than likely be an on-going issue to address and modify as needed. There is already a sufficient amount of information the committee could use as a starting point, including the information contained within this ARP, the recent SCCFD strategic planning process, as well as additional follow-up to SCCFD personnel.

The second recommendation is to resurrect the SCCFD Mentor Program that was implemented in 2005, but never really gained any interest and has laid dormant without any obvious participants or experiences to build upon for the future. For whatever reason, the program was not initially successful. However, based on the number of respondents within the internal survey that stated there should be some form of mentoring program in place, now is a

good time to see what can be done to get the personnel to actually buy into and utilize such a program. Mentoring is an on-going process that in theory should begin with newly hired firefighters and continue all the way up the ranks to the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

The third recommendation is to create a formal succession plan that will identify the necessary education, training and experience required for the A-Staff chief officer ranks, in addition to providing a road map for someone with the aspiration to be able to successfully promote into those ranks. Since there is no one-size-fits-all approach for everyone, this plan should provide a variety of alternatives to allow flexibility in completing. A number of respondents to the internal survey made mention of the need for flexible time off to attend classes, of the need for the SCCFD to offer more training and education in-house, and to create on-the-job experience opportunities to better prepare and inspire personnel to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks. Once a succession plan is created for A-Staff chief officer ranks, the author suggests then working to include the rest of the ranks and/or career paths within the chain of command to ensure that there is a plan to address the needs of every rank and position within the SCCFD.

The fourth recommendation is to reevaluate the results that were discovered during the author's first applied research project, "Future Chief Officer preparation needs for the Santa Clara County Fire Department," (Prziborowski, 2007), and use those as a baseline for taking the this research to the next level. Since the future A-Staff chief officers will primarily come from the current battalion chief ranks as well as those on the current battalion chief promotional eligibility lists, it is critical to also determine why more personnel are not participating in the battalion chief examinations and work on increasing those numbers of personnel since that promotional examination is directly tied into the A-Staff chief officer promotional examinations.



While the SCCFD is challenged with having interested and qualified personnel to take future A-Staff chief officer examinations, the issue of not having sufficient battalion chief candidates is another critical issue that needs to be eventually addressed, especially since the battalion chief promotional examination is the gateway to the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

The SCCFD has prided itself in being a progressive fire department with the employee being the greatest asset. To ensure the continuity of those ideas, it is critical to create a succession plan that will ensure there are more than enough interested, qualified and prepared SCCFD personnel that could step into the A-Staff chief officer ranks on a moment's notice, should the immediate need ever arise.

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## APPENDIX A

## A-Staff Equivalent Job Flyers Reviewed

*Fire Chief*

Alameda (CA)	Garden Grove (CA)
Arlington (TX)	Hayward (CA)
Atlanta (GA)	Hemet (CA)
Aurora (CO)	Hermosa Beach (CA)
Benicia (CA)	Houston (TX)
Burbank (CA)	Huntington Beach (CA)
Carpenteria-Summerland (CA)	Imperial County (CA)
Central Santa Cruz County (CA)	Kern County (CA)
Chandler (AZ)	Las Vegas (NV)
Charleston (SC)	Little Rock (AK)
Chico (CA)	Livermore-Pleasanton (CA)
Chula Vista (CA)	Long Beach (CA)
Compton (CA)	Los Angeles (CA)
Contra Costa County (CA)	Lubbock (TX)
Coronado (CA)	Manhattan Beach (CA)
Costa Mesa (CA)	Manteca (CA)
Des Moines (IA)	Milpitas (CA)
Dixon (CA)	Milwaukee (WI)
Fairfield (CA)	Modesto (CA)
Fort Lauderdale (FL)	Montebello (CA)

Moraga-Orinda (CA)	Rialto (CA)
Mountain View (CA)	Rio Vista (CA)
Newport Beach (CA)	Saint Paul (MN)
Oakland (CA)	Salinas (CA)
Oceanside (CA)	Salt Lake City (UT)
Orange (CA)	San Antonio (TX)
Orange County (CA)	San Diego (CA)
Pasadena (CA)	San Jose (CA)
Peoria (AZ)	San Rafael (CA)
Piedmont (CA)	Santa Ana (CA)
Rapid City (SD)	Santa Barbara (CA)
Redding (CA)	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Redlands (CA)	Santa Clara County (CA)
Reno (NV)	Santa Monica (CA)

*Assistant Chief*

Berkeley (CA)	Oceanside (CA)
Central Santa Cruz County (CA)	San Bernardino County (CA)
Contra Costa County (CA)	San Jose (CA)
Dixon (CA)	San Ramon Valley (CA)
Eureka (CA)	Santa Clara County (CA)
Newark (CA)	Tualatin Valley (OR)
North Las Vegas (NV)	Vashon Island (WA)

*Division Chief*

Benicia (CA)	Orange County (CA)
Chico (CA)	Poway (CA)
Coronado (CA)	Redondo Beach (CA)
El Cajon (CA)	San Bruno (CA)
Gilroy (CA)	South Lake Tahoe (NV)
Half Moon Bay (CA)	Tracy (CA)
Hemet (CA)	Vacaville (CA)
Livermore-Pleasanton (CA)	West Sacramento (CA)
Merced (CA)	

*Deputy Chief*

Baltimore (MD)	Redding (CA)
Berkeley (CA)	Sacramento Metropolitan (CA)
Burlingame (CA)	San Jose (CA)
Chino Valley (CA)	San Mateo (CA)
Clovis (CA)	Santa Clara (CA)
Compton (CA)	Santa Clara County (CA)
Goodyear (AZ)	Santa Rosa (CA)
Livermore-Pleasanton (CA)	Scottsdale (AZ)
North County (CA)	South San Francisco (CA)
Pasadena (CA)	Vista (CA)
Peoria (AZ)	Woodinville (WA)
Rancho Cucamonga (CA)	Woodland (CA)

APPENDIX B

Internal Fire Department Survey

MEMORANDUM

June 19, 2010

TO:  
FROM: Steve Prziborowski, Battalion Chief  
SUBJECT: Executive Fire Officer Program Survey

I am completing the last year of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. One of the requirements of this two-week a year, four-year total program is to complete an Applied Research Project within six months of completing each year's curriculum, applicable to the student's own organization. In order to complete this research, I am asking your assistance by requesting you complete this feedback instrument found below.

The Santa Clara County Fire Department is facing significant turnover at all chief officer ranks, especially the A-Staff chief officer ranks (Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, and Fire Chief) in the near future. To help ensure a smooth transition into the future and to assist our Department with succession planning and career development, it is essential to have sufficient numbers of personnel aspiring to, interested in, preparing for, and qualified for those A-Staff chief officer ranks.

I would like to identify solutions to increase the numbers of interested (and successful) A-Staff chief officer candidates in the future, to ensure there are sufficient, interested and qualified personnel to choose from for our future A-Staff chief officer openings.

The results of this feedback instrument will be confidential. While the results will be shared in the final applied research project, the names of the respondents will not be published or related to each answer in the final results. If you would like a copy of the final ARP, feel free to contact me and I will be happy to send you one when it is completed.

This by no means commits you to anything in the future; your answers will be used to develop recommendations I will present to A-Staff, to ensure we have sufficient numbers of qualified and interested A-Staff chief officer candidates in the future.

Please answer the questions below by Monday July 12, 2010. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation with this project!

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Approved for Distribution:  
Ken Waldvogel, Fire Chief



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Executive Fire Officer Program – Applied Research Project Survey

1. How many years have you been in the fire service (County Fire and any other fire department experience)?

- Less than 5    5 to 9    10 to 14    15 to 19    20 to 24    25 or greater

2. What is your current rank?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Fire Marshal   | <input type="checkbox"/> Firefighter / Engineer             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Battalion Chief          | <input type="checkbox"/> Firefighter / Engineer - Paramedic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to State         | <input type="checkbox"/> Haz Mat Program Supervisor         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Fire Marshal      | <input type="checkbox"/> Haz Mat Specialist                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Captain             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Protection Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Deputy Fire Marshal         |

For the following questions, the term “A-Staff chief officer” is meant to include the ranks of Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief and Fire Chief.

3. Are you interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks (now or in the future), even if you don’t currently qualify?

- Yes  
 No  
 Unsure  
 Not at this time, but possibly in the future.

Additional Comments:

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4. Of the following A-Staff chief officer positions, which would you like to aspire to at some point in your career? (Check all that apply).

- Deputy Chief  
 Assistant Chief  
 Fire Chief  
 Unsure  
 None – I have no desire to promote to the A-Staff chief officer ranks.

Additional Comments:

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5. What do you believe are the advantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you believe are the disadvantages of being an A-Staff chief officer?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What can the SCCFD do to encourage personnel to participate in future A-Staff chief officer promotional examinations?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you feel the current promotional requirements to apply for the SCCFD A-Staff chief officer ranks (see below) are reasonable for what is expected of those ranks?

Deputy Chief:

- 4 year degree
- 6 years fire service experience
- 4 years first-line supervisor experience

Assistant Chief:

- 4 year degree
- 8 years fire service experience
- 3 years administrative experience

Fire Chief:

- 4 year degree
- 10 years fire service experience
- 4 years administrative experience

- Yes                       No                       Unsure

Please explain below what you feel should be added, modified or deleted (if anything) in the way of education and/or experience for the A-Staff Chief Officer ranks.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. If there are insufficient numbers of personnel interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer ranks in the future, what options should the SCCFD consider? (Check all that apply).
- Decrease the A-Staff chief officer educational requirements (listed above in #8)
  - Decrease the A-Staff chief officer experience requirements (listed above in #8)
  - Open up the recruitment to personnel working for other fire departments that meet the current requirements.
  - Unsure
  - Other (please provide details below)

Please provide additional solutions for the SCCFD to consider to ensure sufficient numbers of personnel are qualified and interested in promoting to the A-Staff chief officer positions in the future:

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10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Yes

No

Additional Comments:

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- Thank you very much for your assistance and cooperation!

Please complete this form by Monday July 12, 2010.