



# **OFFICER PROTOCOL**

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS**

## **SECTION 10**

## **OFFICER PROTOCOL**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contents of this section are intended as a general guide to all officers, but especially for those newly-appointed.

The points made and suggested are by no means exhaustive — a person's appreciation of such matters never ceases to grow, but rather feeds on common sense, good taste and alert observation of the good and bad habits of others.

The hackneyed phrase, "An Officer and a Gentleman", is timeless and unchanging in its application to all who hold officer rank.

### **GENERAL ETIQUETTE AND CONDUCT**

The word "etiquette" is believed to be derived from the "ticket" of entrance to court ceremonies in France, on which the rules of court behaviour were written.

The primary point of etiquette is how to apply such "rules" to our own conduct in the fire service.

Etiquette concerns all officers and their relations to one another. It is a system for the complex business of living and working in a relatively small working community, and applies particularly to the fire service where customs and traditions still hold an important position.

Every officer should become familiar with the peculiar requirements of the department and their municipality. With few exceptions, departments and fire stations do not vary dramatically, but a thorough knowledge of what is expected is mandatory. If a question arises on conduct, custom or tradition, the advice of senior officers should be sought.

### **PERSONAL ADJUSTMENTS**

Most officers have enjoyed the experience of living and working in close comradeship with other firefighters. Command does not necessarily change all this, but nevertheless it does mean things will never be quite the same.

By its very nature, rank and assumption of command means a separation, though not necessarily a divorce, from station routine. Camaraderie is fine but new officers should ensure it never oversteps propriety.

Human nature is such that new fire officers will undoubtedly detect an air of hesitation among firefighters. You will need to appreciate that you are being assessed.

## SECTION 10

## OFFICER PROTOCOL

Two points need stressing.

The first: Do not let the newness of command lead you into a popularity contest among your crew(s) or department. You are being paid to make decisions, some of which will be hard ones which may affect the lives of your people. Command requires respect and this you can only gain through performance.

The second: You earned your rank, you were not given it. Your department and community have confidence you can do the job. Get on with it.

Remember: the community looks on all officers as representing their departments at all times. Your attitude is important, as well as your overall deportment.

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Proper relationships between officers can best be illustrated by drawing an analogy between them and a large family — not an ultra-modern family in which the parents have no authority and children no manners, but a friendly, more traditional family.

Here, everyone gets on well together and the parents **expect** to be, and are, obeyed and the children respect their elders. The chief is, of course, the father figure of the family, sometimes rather a stern Victorian father, and sometimes the kind of father who seems only slightly older than his sons/daughters. The father addresses everyone by their first name, but is always addressed and referred to in a manner appropriate to the dignity of his/her position. As head of the family when the chief first enters the room, officers (and men/women) who are seated should rise. It is not necessary, of course, to rise when he re-enters the room, having left it only a few moments before.

Although relationships between members of a department are generally informal — and certainly far removed from the strict formality of military rank — it is natural that informality is greatest between those of approximately the same age and seniority.

The family analogy could even be extended to include out of town officers who visit the department. They should be regarded in much the same way as visiting kin. These officers may be likeable or tiresome, but politeness and etiquette demands that all members of the family should treat them with consideration.

Any officer who treats them otherwise is giving little thought to the prestige of his fire department or station, or, for that matter, to his own interests.

The easy informality among officers — and firefighters — is one of the most pleasant features of our profession. It should go without saying, however, that this should never become a pretext for a casual attitude towards superior officers on duty. Officers should

## **SECTION 10**

## **OFFICER PROTOCOL**

never misunderstand this friendly spirit and assume such an overly casual attitude towards their superiors that they do not bother to follow the dictates of ordinary politeness.

### **CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS**

In the fire station, as in most places where people live and work together, harmony depends upon the consideration that each individual shows for others. During times of stress, or in any circumstances when department members are constantly in one another's company, little things can be very irritating and sometimes produce serious friction.

Officers must be alert at all times to avoid a serious buildup of tension and to ensure all staff are thoughtful and considerate of others in the station.

When a new officer is assigned to a fire station, all officers should ensure that he is made welcome and informed of the customs and procedures followed at that location.

### **SOCIAL INTRODUCTIONS**

The question of when and whom to introduce is the subject of unnecessary debate and mystery. The simplest answer is: whenever it seems natural and sensible, or whenever it makes a social situation easier.

The rules concerning how to perform introductions are simple and invariable.

- A. Gentlemen are presented to ladies.
- B. The younger or junior person is presented to the senior.

An officer always stands when he is being introduced. A lady should rise when introduced to a woman obviously older than herself and, as a matter of courtesy, should rise or shake hands when a considerably older man is being introduced.

When a lady enters a room, all officers should stand and remain so until she is seated.

### **METHODS OF INTRODUCTION**

It is fundamental that the name of the one to whom the introduction is being made must be mentioned first. The basis for this rule is that the one who is doing the introducing addresses himself first to the more senior or lady. For example:

"Chief Black, may I introduce (or less formal, I would like you to meet) Captain Green of XYZ Department."

## SECTION 10

## OFFICER PROTOCOL

Mrs. Green, may I present Chief Black.”

A simple “How do you do” is quite sufficient in acknowledgment both by the one who is being introduced and by the one to whom the introduction is made ( a less formal “It is a pleasure to meet you” is also appropriate). Take your lead on whether to pursue small talk by the conversation — or otherwise — of the senior person.

Important: the person who is being introduced should not be the first to offer their hand. Shaking hands should be a friendly act — not a contest of strength. A firm but relaxed grip is all that is necessary.

At a formal social function, the time that a receiving line will function is directly related to the time announced on the invitation. An officer always precedes his/her lady/gentleman in order to perform the necessary introductions in the receiving line. In doing so, the person clearly states to the person acting as announcer or performing introductions, his/her rank, name and the name of his/her lady/gentleman.