

Firefighter Probation

15 Things to Know During Your First Year

1. Your Reputation Starts Immediately

People decide fast whether you're dependable, coachable, and trustworthy.

Show up early. Stay late when needed. Carry your weight without being asked.

In the fire service, effort is noticed long before talent.

2. Be the Most Coachable Person in the Room

You are not expected to know everything. You **are** expected to listen, accept correction, apply feedback quickly, and avoid repeating mistakes.

Defensive firefighters struggle. Humble firefighters grow fast.

3. Know Your Equipment Cold

You should know apparatus layouts, hose loads, SCBA operations, tools, appliances, and daily checks.

If someone asks for a tool, your answer should never be:

"I think it's somewhere over there."

4. Fitness Matters More Than You Think

Probation is physically demanding. Your fitness directly affects safety, confidence, performance, recovery, and crew trust.

Train consistently, not occasionally.

5. Learn Firehouse Culture

Every station has its own rhythm and expectations. Pay attention to communication styles, routines, cleaning expectations, and chain of command.

Being technically good but culturally difficult creates problems fast.

6. Your Attitude Is Always Showing

People remember complaining, excuses, laziness, and poor effort.

They also remember initiative, positivity, consistency, and calmness under stress.

7. Ask Questions — At the Right Time

Questions show engagement. Timing shows maturity.

Ask thoughtful questions and learn from every correction.

8. Details Matter

Uniform appearance, organized gear, clean apparatus, radio etiquette, and tool accountability all matter.

Attention to detail builds trust on emergency scenes.

9. Nobody Cares About Your Academy Stories

Your probation year is where real learning begins.

Learn your department's way first. Earn credibility before offering opinions.

10. Your Crew Must Be Able to Trust You

Probation is about trust.

Can your crew trust you to stay calm, know your role, keep learning, and perform at 3AM?

11. Be a Good Roommate

You now live with other people for 24 hours at a time. Hygiene, cleanliness, flexibility, and respect for shared spaces matter.

Being easy to live with builds trust and camaraderie.

12. Don't Wait to Start Taking Classes

Most firefighters wait too long to start career development.

Many certifications can be completed online. Opportunities favor prepared people.

13. Your Fitness Is Probably the Best It's Ever Been

Academy fitness fades fast if you let it.

Get in your gear. Get on air. MOVE.

Minimum: 30 minutes every shift.

14. Golden Rules You Cannot Break

There are mistakes you can recover from in the fire service. These usually are not:

- Stealing
- Lying
- Physically harming or threatening another employee

These destroy trust — and trust is rarely rebuilt once broken.

15. Reputations Are Easy to Earn and Hard to Change

Your reputation is being built every day by how you train, work, talk, and treat people.

People stop listening to what you say and start watching your patterns.

First-Shift Tips

A practical checklist for your first shift

- Show up early and meet everyone coming and going.
- Bring some food, but plan to eat with the crew. Keep some cash for the community kitty or station meals.
- Bring toiletries, towel, bedding for a twin bed, extra socks, extra uniforms, notebook and pens.
- Ask for expectations and performance feedback.
- Take criticism and move on. Excuses and explanations rarely help you.
- Read SOGs, protocols, the CBA, EPR training, and study apparatus whenever downtime appears.
- Introduce yourself to everyone — firefighters, engineers, captains, medics, admin staff, and maintenance personnel.
- Stay off your phone unless necessary.
- Don't disappear during cleanup, chores, or station work.
- Learn your station layout, radios, laundry, supply locations, and kitchen expectations.
- Hydrate before you're thirsty. Eat before you're starving. Recover before you're exhausted.
- Never pass up an opportunity to shower. You never know when the next call becomes a long-duration incident.
- Change your socks and/or shoes if they are wet. Dry feet improve comfort, performance, and morale during extended operations.
- Be someone people want on their crew at 3AM.
- You control two things every single day: effort and attitude.