
Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Cheryl Horvath
- Lisa Sadowski

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International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services

A NATIONAL REPORT CARD ON WOMEN IN FIRE CAREERS

Marc Bendick, Jr.

Denise Hulett

Sheila Y. Thomas

Francine Moccio

Read our report at: www.i-women.org



THIS SESSION WILL COVER...

- How many?
- How kept out? How kept down?
- How change practices?
- How change culture?
- How about your department?



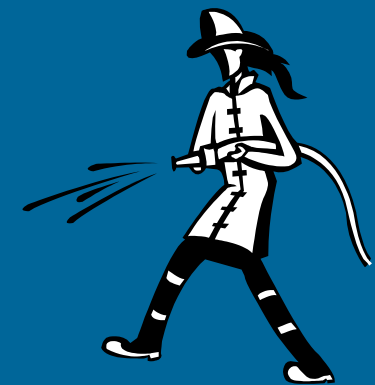
OUR STUDY LISTENED TO YOU

- **Surveyed 675 men & women firefighters**
- **Surveyed 114 departments**
- **Interviewed 175 women firefighters**
- **13 focus groups**
- **Case studies in 5 departments**



COUNTING WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS

- 11,000 women out of 350,000 -- 3.7%
- Still 0% in > 50% of departments
- 90% of occupations have more women
- First hired late 1980s, 14 years after 1st minority
- < 200 (?) above “glass ceiling”



17% IS A REALISTIC GOAL

- Women average 17% in 184 “demanding, dirty, dangerous” Census occupations
- Women are 17% in several leading departments
- 17% would mean 40,000 more than today’s 11,000
- At present rate, will get to 17% in 72 years



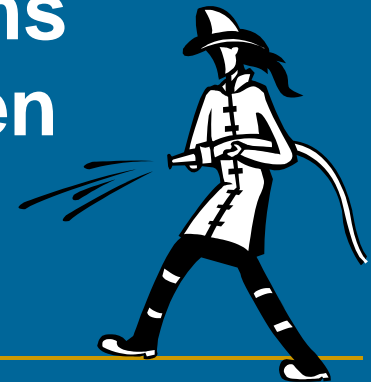
WOMEN IN SURVEY REPORTED

- Treated differently 85%
- Ill-fitting gear 80%
- No discrimination complaint process 65%
- Shunning/isolation 53%
- Gender challenges to authority 50%
- Problems with privacy 46%
- Verbal harassment 43%
- Gender barriers to advancement 37%
- Training problems 34%
- Unfairness in promotions 34%
- Pornography 32%
- Sexual advances 31%



THE DOUBLE DISADVANTAGE OF WOMEN OF COLOR

- 1 in 5 women firefighters are WOC
- Respondents of color report race problems parallel to gender problems
- WOC are 13% of expected, white women 26%
- Similar rate of post-hiring problems reported by WOC and white women
- WOCs feel particularly isolated



RECRUITMENT

- Women were enthusiastic about the job
- Invest in active recruitment
- Use same personal approach as for men
- Use volunteer, cadet, seasonal programs
- Recruit through: sports/fitness
medical occupations
campuses
- Aspirations form by age 11



PHYSICAL ABILITY TESTS

- In surveyed departments, 47% of women pass, 84% of men
- Training raise pass rates for both sexes & closes gender gap
- Need “criterion-validated” tests -- CPAT is not
- Should test whole body, full ability
- Equal testing conditions is key



FIREHOUSE LIVING

- Need to adapt bunkrooms & bathrooms
- Need zero tolerance for hostile pranks, hazing, isolation, sexual activity, pornography, homophobia
- Need serious system for complaints
- Need to control retaliation



ASSIGNMENTS & PROMOTIONS

- Need equal access to on-the-job training & mentoring
- Need equal access to formal classes
- Need to avoid “glass walls” assignments to non-fire duties
- Transparency (open postings & explicit criteria) opens promotions to all outgroups, not just women



CULTURE UNDERLIES SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

- Uniform/equipment issues signal desire to exclude, conscious or unconscious
- “Women don’t have the right stuff”
= protect my self image
- “Our job is defined by major structural fires” ignores 70% medical calls
- “Women means lowering quality”
– but real issues are EEO & non-harassment



THE KEY MESSAGE OF THIS SESSION:

- Permanent improvement requires changing the culture (cause), not just specific practices (symptoms).
- Departments must first *intend to include*, instead of *intend to exclude*.



5 ELEMENTS OF CULTURE CHANGE

1. Top leadership commitment
2. Monitoring & accountability for managers
3. Transparent, objective HR processes
4. Training to change individual behavior
5. Sustained effort—3-5 years



TURNING UP THE HEAT IN YOUR DEPARTMENT

- Expanding allies/mentors/diversity champs?
- Institute “teachable moments” - “ouch”?
- Common cause with white males?
 - pre-test training
 - anti-favoritism
- Strengthening women-minority alliances?
- Mobilizing mass media/public opinion?
- Litigation?
- How can iWomen help?

