



Fire Training Toolbox "No one of us, is as strong as all of us!"

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## SIZE UP: Take Your Time, Do It Right!

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I can remember when the trend in the fire service started to shift and emphasis was placed on things such as riding assignments and coming off the unit, fully geared and masked up, tools in hand, and ready to hook on air and be at the door in seconds flat. However, I often questioned one fundamental thing many folks forgot, and that is a good size up, including an even more thorough 360 degree size up by the first arriving officer (or senior crew member). Don't get me wrong, I am not saying it's not good that arriving fire crews be prepared to go to work. I often did question, however, if this could create tunnel vision among first arriving crews. This is a question I then started asking my classes, and it really got students thinking.



Going one step further, I asked students if it is not indeed each and every crew member's responsibility to size up the situation. Which, absolutely, it is! I was surprised to see how many departments out there were forgoing a good size up because they were so concerned about getting in and going to work fast. I have even had the misfortune to witness it in person on occasions.



Just think of some of the many issues that could be missed. Was the officer only seeing things from the address side, or possibly from the approach and address side? If the officer was so intent on getting crews in the building quickly, he or she could miss so many vital things! What if a good size up and 360 was not done? Did the officer miss seeing civilian victims hanging out a window perhaps on the Charlie side of the building? Did the officer mistakenly miss the fact that fire was in the sub level (basement) and only saw smoke or fire coming from the first division of the building? Did the officer not recognize signs of potential hostile fire events such as Backdraft or Flashover? Was there something in regard to construction features that the officer missed, such as lightweight construction for example? Did the officer consider potential setbacks such as water supply issues, long hose stretches, limited access to the building with apparatus? Did the officer miss the fact that the building was equipped with fire protection features that could make the job easier such as Knox boxes, standpipes, or sprinkler systems just to name a few? These are just some of the many considerations that could be missed without a proper size up. The list could go on and on. The most vital, however, being issues of situations that could put the crew's safety in jeopardy.



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Consider what we know today as well in regard to topics like reading smoke, flow paths, and ventilation limited fires. If a proper size up is not performed prior to allowing crews to enter, all of this vital information is useless. Worse yet, without taking these items into consideration, we really are putting our folk's lives in jeopardy more than ever with today's fire environment!

Think of things in terms of being on the first entry crew as well. Again, size up is everyone's responsibility! Instead of being apt to rush inside like Superman, crews should be sizing up the construction, predicting fire travel paths, looking for egress points in case things go bad, how they will maintain crew integrity, and so many other things! Crews should also be reading smoke. After all, no one is perfect, and what the officer might not see, a crew member might. If we have the mindset that crews should be rolling off the apparatus, ready to go to work in seconds flat, how are these vital size up points getting done?

Please don't get me wrong, I am not saying crews should mimic Mister Rogers, slipping out of their shoes and sport jacket in exchange for Bunker gear and boots versus slippers and sweater, all the while singing merrily once they arrive on scene. After all, time is of the essence more than ever in regard to fire spread and growth. I am saying we should all take our time a bit more, and do it right. Crews should take the time to assure needed tools are gathered, check each other's gear quickly, assure radio frequencies, and all the while doing their own personal size up of the building and situation. This in turn will give the first in commander time to perform their size up, including a 360, and start developing strategies and choosing tactics.

Know as much about the situation as you can prior to making entry, or in command's case, before sending crews inside. Take your time, do it right!

