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The **HOT** Sheet

By Chris Sterricker

First let me preface this article by stating that I am not an officer, I hold the rank of Firefighter/Paramedic within my organization. However, I feel that I have been preparing to one day become an officer basically since the first day I began on the job. In so doing I have taken classes, honed my skills and my craft and tried to become as good as I can be in many different aspects of my job. Part of this preparation has also been watching others, particularly officers, and how they approach and perform their jobs and learning for good or bad from them. Part of that observation over the years is the catalyst for this drill, a new officer taking over a company or station.

The term "Hot Sheet" was given to me by Captain (Ret.) Tony Tricarico, Squad 252, FDNY. It refers to a list of expectations that a new or new arriving officer to a company or house has of that particular group of individuals. The specifics of which we will get into in a minute. But why would an officer need such sheet?, you might be asking. After all, doesn't the departmental SOG/SOP's cover much of what is to be expected from the company? Aren't daily duties usually hammered out well in advance of the shining new bugle's arrival? Yes, those things typically are. But there are always little nuances to each officer and the way he or she runs his or her company, house or shift that the individuals now working for them may not be aware of.

In my experience a new officer's arrival to a house or shift has run the gamut from walking in at the beginning of shift and disappearing into the office as if nothing has changed to a formalized shift/ station/ company meeting with expectations and goals clearly (or not) spelled out and everything in between. Most often it has been a relatively informal meeting at the kitchen table where the new officer lets the troops know how he likes the chores done, what he likes and does not like to eat, how his seat assignments or rig rotations go etc. etc. There is usually little substance, shall we say. That is where the Hot Sheet comes in.



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The Hot Sheet, as the name implies, is what is going to get the officer hot. It is what is going to lead to at least a stern talking to and at worst formal discipline. It could be looked at as the "10 Commandments" of that officer, although the number is up to the individual officer. Because these items are viewed by the officer to be so important it is only fair that each member have a hard-copy of these expectations to keep. That way there can never be any "But I didn't know's", or "You never told us that's." Obviously some of the items on the Hot Sheet can, and should, be straight from departmental Rules and Regs and SOG/SOP's. These can be the R&R's or SOG's that the officer has a "zero tolerance" policy on or feels a particular emphasis towards for some reason, be it personal or practical or a combination of both. Other things to be included on the Hot Sheet are individual preferences of that officer pertaining to certain situations, how he wants his company to behave and perform on certain calls. Some may be having a difficult time understanding the difference between what an officer would want personally and what would be dictated already by a department through R&R's or SOG's. So here are a couple of examples.

In a certain department the SOG's may state that on accident scenes the Engine, Truck or Squad company(s) should position themselves to protect the area from traffic that crews will be working in. But it does not get into specifics as to how that will be accomplished. There has been some debate in the fire service as to how rigs should be positioned to shunt traffic around accident scenes, nose projecting into the flow of traffic essentially pointing oncoming traffic in the direction we want them to go or positioned the opposite way with the tailboard projecting out into traffic and the nose in to protect the crew as they exit the vehicle. A new officer may like the first method best and under that department's SOG's he has the latitude to make that decision. So he lets his Engineers know that when positioning their apparatus at an accident scene he wants them to face the rig in a way to shunt traffic in the direction of flow, nose into traffic and tailboard towards the barrier wall or curb. Another example would be hose line selection at commercial building fires. If a department does not specify by SOG that a certain size hose is deployed at a commercial building fire then the officer has the leeway to make his own decision. Perhaps this officer is of the mindset that a 2 ½" should be deployed on any commercial or industrial fire. He would



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include this on his Hot Sheet and essentially make it a standing order. So, rather than having to communicate this order every time his company pulls up on a commercial fire he can expect that a 2 ½” will be coming off as he is completing his 360 or urban-360. Of course, a Hot Sheet alone will not suffice. Drilling and repetition is needed as well, but the Hot Sheet gives the company something they can hang in their locker to review on an on-going basis. The Hot Sheet can also serve as an impromptu drill topic. On a regular basis the officer can simply do a tailboard or kitchen table review of the sheet to ensure everyone is on the same page with his or her expectations and that newer members have a full understanding of how they would like their company to operate.

The form of the Hot Sheet can really be left up to the individual officer. It can be as simple as a bullet point list or a longer letter form. Appropriate R&R, SOG or collective bargaining references should be noted so that members can cross-reference the information. It is also never too late to implement the Hot Sheet idea. Just because you have been an officer for a while does not mean you cannot use it. It is just a new form of what you probably have already done in the past. For newer officers I would make a suggestion that I learned from reading the book, “*It’s Your Ship; Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy*” by Captain D. Michael Abrashoff, U.S.N. Send out the Hot Sheet to your new crew or to new hires or transfers prior to your taking over or their arrival on your company/ station/ shift. This gives the crew or candidates a chance to get some insight into their new boss as well as prepare for themselves for what is expected of them. I have included a [link](#) to a copy of a welcome letter and Hot Sheet I have developed in advance of my own promotion as an example. Remember, this is highly individualized and mine may look nothing like yours.

The Hot Sheet should be a tool to help the crew and officer work together as a higher functioning, more efficient unit. While it could have its place in the disciplinary realm it should not be viewed as its primary role. The other goal the Hot Sheet looks to accomplish is to open dialogue between officer and crew. After all, Boss, just because you have that shiny new collar ornament doesn’t mean you know it all now.