

BUDDY TO BOSS · THE OFFICER'S CHECKLIST

First 90 Days as a Company Officer

A practical checklist for new lieutenants and captains

You pinned on the bugles. Now the real job starts. Your first 90 days in the seat set the tone with your crew and your battalion chief, and they'll stick for a long time. Nobody gets all of it right, and you won't either. But the officers who start well tend to do the same unglamorous things: they show up prepared, they say out loud what they expect, they check the rig themselves, and they deal with problems early and in private.

This checklist breaks those three months into four phases. Work through it at your own pace and adapt anything that doesn't fit your department. Where your department's policies, SOPs, or SOGs say something different, follow them.

HOW TO USE IT

- Print it and keep it with your officer's notebook.
- Check items off as you finish them, and write the date next to the big ones.
- Come back to it at day 30, 60, and 90 to catch what you skipped.

PHASE 1

Before your first shift in the seat

11 items

PHASE 2

Weeks 1-2

18 items

PHASE 3

The first 30 days

20 items

PHASE 4

Days 31-90

19 items

PHASE 1 OF 4

Before your first shift in the seat

Do your homework before you ever ride the front seat. The crew will know whether you came prepared.

Get your own house in order

- ☐ Reread the policies you'll now be held to as an officer: discipline, leave and trades, overtime, injury and exposure reporting, and taking apparatus out of service.
- ☐ Find out exactly which reports, logs, and sign-offs belong to the officer on your shift, and when each one is due.
- ☐ Get your logins working before day one: incident reporting, staffing, email, training records. Don't find out at shift change that your password expired.
- ☐ Check your own gear: PPE clean and in service, SCBA fit test current, radio, light, gloves, pocket notebook.

Know your crew and your district

- ☐ Learn every name on your roster, plus each person's assignment, time on the job, certifications, and side duties.
- ☐ Get a straight handoff from the officer who had the seat before you: what's working, what isn't, open issues, anything pending with the BC. Take notes. Form your own opinions later.
- ☐ Drive your district. Note target hazards, big commercial and multi-family buildings, water supply problems, tight access, and anything a GPS won't tell you.
- ☐ Pull the pre-plans for your area and flag the ones that are missing or out of date.

Plan your first line-up

- ☐ Write down three to five expectations for day one. Keep them short. Only pick ones you'll enforce, on yourself first.
- ☐ Decide what you won't change yet. Unless it's a safety or policy problem, big changes can wait until you've seen how the shift actually runs.
- ☐ If you can, call your battalion chief before your first shift. Introduce yourself and ask when you can sit down.

PHASE 2 OF 4

Weeks 1-2

Your crew is watching everything right now. Be early, be consistent, and be the first one out on the apparatus floor.

Your first shift change

- ☐ Come in early. Get a face-to-face turnover from the off-going officer: rig status, equipment out for repair, staffing, and anything that happened on their shift.
- ☐ Run your first line-up. Introduce yourself as the officer, even if they've known you for years. Lay out your expectations and how you'll make decisions.
- ☐ Tell them what you owe them in return: fairness, straight answers, having their back up the chain, and training worth their time.
- ☐ Before the shift is over, ask each person one question: "What's one thing you need from me?"

Apparatus and equipment checks

- ☐ Do a full rig check with your driver/engineer on day one. Not to catch anybody. To learn the rig and show the crew it matters to you.
- ☐ Check every SCBA yourself: cylinder pressure, facepiece, PASS, low-air alarm, and spare bottles. Know where the RIT pack lives and that it's ready.
- ☐ Open every compartment until you could find any tool in the dark: irons, hooks, saws, extrication gear, EMS bags, thermal imager, gas meter.
- ☐ Start the saws, test the thermal imager and gas meter, and check radio batteries. Report anything out of service the way your department requires.
- ☐ Set the standard for daily checks: who does them, when, and how they're documented. Then follow up and make sure they happen.

Leading former peers

- ☐ Accept that the relationship changed. You're still their brother or sister. You can't be their buddy on the clock.
- ☐ Don't pretend nothing is different, and don't swing hard the other way to prove you're in charge. Be the same person doing a different job.
- ☐ Talk one-on-one with anyone who also tested for your spot, and with your closest friends on the crew. Say it plainly: "This is different now. Here's how I'm going to handle it."
- ☐ Watch the group chat, the off-duty talk, and the jokes about officers. Some things you said as a firefighter, you can't say now.
- ☐ Hold everybody to the same standard, your best friend and the person you don't click with. The crew notices who you let slide.

Meet your battalion chief

- ☐ Sit down face-to-face with your BC in the first two weeks. Ask what they expect from their company officers.
- ☐ Ask what they want to hear about right away, what can wait until end of shift, and how they want it: phone, text, email, or in person.
- ☐ Ask what they already know about your crew, your station, or your district that you should know.
- ☐ Bring a couple of good questions, not a list of complaints. Leave knowing how they'll judge your work.

PHASE 3 OF 4

The first 30 days

Now you build habits, yours and the crew's. Slow down, listen more than you talk, and fix small things early.

The kitchen-table talk

- ☐ Sit the whole crew down at the kitchen table, away from the rig and the TV. Phones down, coffee up.
- ☐ Ask them straight: what works on this shift, what doesn't, and what they'd change if they were in your seat. Then mostly listen.
- ☐ Explain how you'll handle discipline, time off, trades, and station duties so nobody has to guess.
- ☐ Write down what you heard. Pick one or two things you can fix fast, fix them, and tell the crew you did.
- ☐ Follow up one-on-one with each person: their goals, what they want to learn, their promotion plans, and anything going on at home they want you to know.

Build a training plan

- ☐ Find out what training your department requires, how it's documented, and when the deadlines fall. Put them on your calendar now.
- ☐ Start company training with the basics: stretching lines, forcing doors, throwing ladders, SCBA emergencies, and mayday procedures. Train with them, not from a lawn chair.
- ☐ Sketch a simple 90-day plan: one topic per shift or per week, who teaches it, and how it gets documented. Let crew members teach what they're good at.
- ☐ Walk at least one pre-plan a month with the crew, in the building, not just on paper.
- ☐ Be honest about skills. Know who can run the pump, who's solid on ladders, and who needs reps. Train to the gaps, not to what's easy.

Paperwork and admin

- ☐ Get your reports in on time, and get them right. Write them so someone who wasn't there can follow what happened.
- ☐ At first, read every report your crew writes before it goes in. Fix it with them, not for them.
- ☐ Keep an officer's log: dates, conversations, corrections, and praise. If it isn't written down, it didn't happen.
- ☐ Learn the staffing, leave, and overtime process well enough that you're not guessing when someone asks.
- ☐ Stay on top of company assignments like inspections, hydrants, and pre-plan updates so they don't pile up.

Fireground role and size-up

- ☐ Know your job on arrival. You're not the nozzle anymore. You own the big picture, the crew's safety, and the radio.
- ☐ Practice your initial radio report out loud: unit, building, problem, actions, needs. Use it on every call, even the dumpster fire, until it's automatic.
- ☐ Get a look at all sides of the building whenever you can, following your department's procedures. Look for basements, rear exposures, victims, and changing conditions.
- ☐ Keep accountability tight. Know who's with you, where they are, and what they're doing. You go in together and you come out together.
- ☐ Run a short tailboard debrief after significant calls: what went right, what we'd do differently, what we need to train on. Keep it about the work, not about blame.

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Days 31-90

The newness wears off. Now the test is staying consistent and dealing with the problems you've been noticing.

Handling conflict

- ☐ Deal with problems early, while they're small. A quiet word on shift beats a formal write-up later.
- ☐ Praise in public. Correct in private. Document both.
- ☐ Before a hard conversation, get the facts, know the policy, and decide what needs to change. Have it in the office before the shift, not in front of the crew or on the street.
- ☐ Talk about the behavior, not the person: what happened, why it matters, and what you expect from here on. Then listen.
- ☐ Know what's above your pay grade. Harassment, serious safety violations, and substance problems go up the chain. Bring your BC in early, with facts, not surprises.
- ☐ Don't let friction between members, or between shifts, turn into the station's culture. Get the right people in a room and set the standard.

Keep building the crew

- ☐ Keep training on the calendar, even on busy shifts. Short and regular beats long and rare.
- ☐ Help each person pick one development goal, like a certification, a new skill, or an acting-up opportunity, and help them get there.
- ☐ Revisit your day-one expectations at a line-up. Say what's working, what you're adjusting, and own anything you missed.
- ☐ Recognize good work by name and by specifics, not just "good job." Put it on the record when it counts.

Check in with your chief

- ☐ Somewhere around day 60 to 90, ask your BC for honest feedback: what you're doing well and what to work on.
- ☐ Bring solutions with your problems. If you need equipment, staffing, or training time, make the case clearly, in writing.
- ☐ Back decisions from above in front of your crew, even when you'd have made a different call. Disagree up the chain, in private and with respect.

Take care of yourself

- ☐ Sleep, eat, and work out like it matters, because it does. Your crew picks up your habits, good and bad.
- ☐ Find a mentor, a seasoned officer inside or outside your department you can call when you're not sure.
- ☐ Know your peer support team and EAP, and use them after the bad calls. When you use them, your crew sees it's okay.
- ☐ Watch your own stress and your family's. Talk to the people at home about what the new job asks of you.
- ☐ Set boundaries on your days off where you can. Not every text needs an answer before your next shift.
- ☐ On day 90, sit down and look back: what you'd do differently, what you're proud of, and what's next. Write it down.

Keep going



Ninety days won't make you a finished officer. Nobody's finished. But if you've worked this list, you've built the habits that matter: clear expectations, a crew that knows where it stands, a chief who trusts your word, and a rig that's ready to go.

Company Officer Forge is kitchen-table leadership training for new and aspiring lieutenants and captains, from the fire service, not the classroom. More free tools are at companyofficerforge.com, and all of it is built the same way: tools you can use next shift.

Where company officers are made.

This checklist is general guidance, not policy. Always follow your department's policies, SOPs/SOGs, and chain of command. Company Officer Forge is not affiliated with or endorsed by any fire department.