



Conversations: Find your Niche



Firefighter Lieutenant

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Executive Summary: Firefighter Lieutenant, Joshua Beaulieu

Typical Education Level:

Pass a physical agility test, pass required department training and written tests, On-the-Job Training, Associate's or Bachelor's Degree in Fire Technology, Emergency Medical Service or equivalent.

Annual Salary Range* (Hourly Rates):

Base salary range for first line supervisor career firefighters:

Entry Level = \$36,000 - \$45,000 annually (\$17.31 - \$21.63 per hour)

Mid-Range = \$45,000 - \$70,000 annually (\$21.63 - \$33.65 per hour)

Upper Range = \$70,000 - \$100,000+ annually (\$33.65 - \$48.08+ per hour)

Job Description:

Firefighters train to fight fires, provide emergency rescue services and provide emergency medical services to the community they work in. Firefighters need to be strong individuals both physically and emotionally. They train to maintain a high level of proficiency and readiness in fire fighting skills, rescue skills and emergency medical skills. A Lieutenant firefighter provides administrative leadership for his crew and serves as a public spokesperson for the fire department.

* The Salary Range presented here is derived from U.S. Department of Labor data and other credible sources, but should be considered approximate and used for reference only. Salaries for specific jobs vary widely depending on company size, locale, economic conditions and other factors.

Professional: Joshua Beaulieu

1. Please tell us about yourself and what people, influences, events, or desires led you to your profession.

I've been working in this field for eight years now. I was recently promoted from firefighter-paramedic to firefighter-lieutenant about four months ago. My first interest in emergency services actually came from a friend of mine about twelve years ago. He was taking an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) class and he encouraged me to take it with him. After finishing the EMT class we both went on to get full time jobs with a commercial ambulance company. That opened my eyes to emergency services.

I met a lot of people in the local volunteer fire department. I started volunteering there and decided that was what I wanted to do for a career. I wanted to be a full-time firefighter. I subsequently went to paramedic school while I was working for the commercial ambulance service. I worked there as a paramedic for about two years while I was volunteering as a firefighter. Eventually, I got hired by the town of Manchester. That's where I work now as a Firefighter-Paramedic.

The one person who probably is most responsible for getting me into the field would be my friend Eric, who was

a volunteer firefighter at the time. Other officers in the department have been influential in helping me get to my current job of Fire Lieutenant.

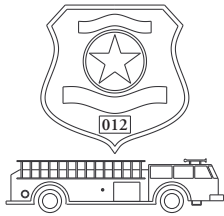
2. How would you describe the job of a Firefighter Lieutenant?

The job of a Fire Lieutenant is a supervisory position in the fire department. I am responsible for a station that houses an engine company and a medic unit. Those two units are staffed by a total of four people including myself. I'm responsible for what my company does in responding to emergencies. I act as an incident commander on smaller emergencies and as a task leader on larger emergencies where a senior officer is in charge. In our down time, my job is to make sure that both our equipment and our station are up to par and we're ready to respond to emergencies.

On emergency calls my job is one of a supervisory nature. I make sure everything that needs to get done is getting done effectively. I am also responsible for training and drilling with my company. I keep the members of my company and the other members on my shift where they need to be in terms of orientation and training. The lieutenants are responsible for periodic drills and re-familiarization with equipment.



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We work a rotating schedule in my department. We work two day shifts which run from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM and two night shifts which run from 6:00 PM to 8:00 AM. So, we work two ten hour days, two fourteen hour nights and then we're off for four days. When we come to work in the morning, we check out our equipment to make sure it is ready to go. I check the department journal to see what we have scheduled for training and other activities. We do some housework to keep our station clean. We empty the garbage, mop the floors and keep things looking sharp. During the day we typically get together for meals.

The most important part of the job is responding to emergencies. Our department is fairly busy. Department wide we cover about eight thousand calls a year out of five stations. Dividing that up, we go out the door anywhere between two and six times a day from our station. That keeps us fairly busy.

The night shifts are similar. We come in and get our gear checked out. I brief the company on whatever is expected of us for the evening and we go about our business in much the same manner. That's the routine end of it.

The emergencies that the Fire Department responds to range from structure fires down to general calls for service. We respond to motor vehicle accidents for rescue work and we respond to medical emergencies. Our fire department is a first responder and a paramedic provider for all medical calls in the town. Our people are trained in motor vehicle rescue and other types of technical rescue. Of course, being a fire department we also go to fires. We also get a lot of calls for things like house lock-outs, lift-assists for elderly people who may have fallen and can't get up. There's a variety of public services that we do everyday.

On occasion, our day shifts also include public relation events. Every now and again a station or company will get detailed out to give a brief talk to a citizen's group on a safety topic. In the fall, there are fire safety events that need to be supported. We do a lot of things that people don't typically think of when they think about the fire department.

3. What are the *most enjoyable aspects* of your work? Why?

One aspect of my job that is very enjoyable and rewarding is seeing the positive difference we can make in somebody's day or life. For obvious reasons, the gratification you get

from helping somebody else and the gratification of seeing that impact on someone's well being is certainly an enjoyable aspect of the work. There is also an excitement factor in this line of work. A lot of people get into fire or emergency services because there are periods of very intense work and excitement. Those can be very enjoyable too. Nobody wants to see anybody injured or lose property in a fire, but the fact remains that fires happen. That's what firefighters train for. Anybody who has been in the fire service for any period of time will tell you that they enjoy going to fires because that's what they're trained to do and it's exciting.

4. What are the *least enjoyable aspects* of your work and why?

As a lieutenant, being in a supervisory role, I'm in a position where at times I'm supervising people who are my friends outside of work. Every now and again I have to enforce a rule or regulation. Separating the professional from the personal can be a little difficult at times and less than enjoyable.

Also, on the emergency end of it, we're a fire department. We go to some things that are less than pleasant. We see people sometimes at their worst and we are exposed to things that can be considered disturbing. Sometimes you see things or do things that stay with you for a while because they are deeply disturbing. That's certainly one of the less enjoyable parts of the work. Nobody likes to see anybody else in significant distress.

5. What is the *most common misconception* that people have about your line of work?

Oh, I think there are at least a couple misconceptions. There are people who think that firefighters just sit around the station playing cards, sleeping, watching TV and waiting for that one big fire a month to go to. They think fighting fires is the only thing we do. The fact of the matter is that when we're not going out on calls for assistance, we are maintaining our equipment, we are training and we are handling station duties. Today's firefighter and fire service is not what it was forty or fifty years ago. We stay fairly busy. Our expected level of readiness requires us to do a lot of training and preparation in our down time.

6. What parts of your formal education, work experience, or personal hobbies were the *most helpful* in preparing you for your profession?

I started off in emergency services on the EMS (Emergency Medical Services) side of the business. I became an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician), then I went on to paramedic school. The fire department that I work for provides EMS service to our town. Almost all fire departments have a requirement that new recruits come in with some EMS background. I could not have gotten my job without going to paramedic school.

I spent a significant amount of time preparing myself on the EMS end by taking classes, getting certified and



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eventually getting licensed as a paramedic in the state. That put me in a position to get hired by a fire department that offered paramedic service.

The other thing that I did, which most of our new recruits do as well, is volunteer first. I signed up with a volunteer fire department. That allowed me to see how I truly felt about the field in general. Volunteering with a fire department allows you to get your hands wet and see if the line of work is really for you or not. It certainly is not for everybody. Volunteering is probably one of the best ways to find out. The skills and experience that you get from volunteering certainly set you apart from people who don't do that when you are interviewing for a career job.

7. How open is your field? Are there *good opportunities* for determined newcomers?

Currently, for people who are willing to put in the time and go to paramedic school, there are a lot of openings. A lot of fire departments, especially in Connecticut, are moving towards offering paramedic services. The number of paramedics in the state competing for those jobs are becoming fewer and fewer every year. Locally and nationwide, the majority of fire departments are still volunteer. My department probably hires between two and four new people a year. We're right in the middle in terms of size of department.

If you are really determined and you put in the time to set yourself apart from others, you will find many opportunities in the fire service. You can set yourself apart by getting good volunteer experience, taking fire service related courses, getting some college level fire service courses under your belt and having a good EMS background. The field is very open if you put in the work ahead of time. I would imagine that it takes somewhere between a year and a half and three years for somebody who's just starting out fresh to get themselves in a position where they are truly marketable in the career fire service.

8. Beyond the obvious work of being a Firefighter Lieutenant, what *other activities or skills* does your profession require you to do well?

As a supervisor for the fire department, I am required to do a lot of reporting. I report on emergencies through an incident tracking system. We write medical reports. I'm required to file injury reports and that sort of thing. There's an administrative aspect to my job that requires lieutenants

to be reasonably computer literate. The ability to interact with the public is important. As a lieutenant I am the mouth piece for the company. When we are out in public and people have questions or have something to discuss with us, it's typically the lieutenant's job to do that. That is also the case for public relations events and any other kind of public education. Typically the lieutenant handles that end of the work. So, computer literacy and good interpersonal skills are very important. I think those are probably the two big ones.

9. How would a young person with aspirations to become a Firefighter Lieutenant *best prepare* himself or herself?

Number one, obviously the first step, is getting into a career fire department and that's going to require good physical ability. Connecticut right now is a state in which most career departments are using a CPAT (Candidate Physical Ability Test). It's a standardized physical ability test that you have to be able to pass before you can get hired in many fire departments. Don't underestimate the preparation needed for this test.

Right now there are several community colleges that offer Associate Degrees in fire administration or fire technology. That degree looks great on an entrance application and will certainly set a new candidate apart from the rest of the field. An EMS background is important. Like I said, most fire departments require the candidates coming in their door to have a substantial EMS background. Most require at least an EMT certificate. Many require a Paramedic license. Any that require one of the two usually look for some actual experience on an ambulance or some other emergency service where you are using your certification.

In the fire fighting field we like to hire candidates who have a positive outlook and a good, solid can-do attitude. We want people to come in the door who are going to portray the department in a good light when they interact with the public. We want candidates to look the part physically, keeping reasonably fit and well groomed. We wear a uniform and we expect people to come in with enough self-discipline to keep their uniform neat and promote a positive public image for the department.

10. What do you believe are the *keys to enjoying work*?

On a day-to-day basis, for me to enjoy my job, it's important that I get along with the people that I'm working with. In the fire service, we tend to be a fairly tight-knit group. When you spend ten to fourteen hours a shift with three or four other people in a small station, you get to know those people fairly well. If you are going to enjoy being at work, it's important that you have a good working relationship with them.

Even more important than a good working relationship is believing in what you are doing. For me that's easy.



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I certainly believe that day in and day out we are doing our best to do the right thing for the public. I can go home and feel very good about what I do for a living. Regardless of what field you are in, I think it's very important to be doing something that you feel good about.

Another key to enjoying your work is staying on top of it. People who go years without taking classes or keeping abreast of the latest developments in fire technology or EMS will not enjoy their work as much as those who do stay current. They get into a position where they are catching up with the rest of the group.

11. What is the *most important or significant thing* that you have accomplished in your work to date? What do you hope to accomplish?

For me, personally, one of my most significant accomplishments is just getting to where I am now as a lieutenant. The hiring process to get on as a new firefighter was difficult.

I went up against a lot of people. Then the promotional process, going from a firefighter paramedic to a fire lieutenant, was also grueling and the competition was stiff to say the least. For me, getting to where I am at this point in my career in just over eight years has been a large accomplishment.

In the future I hope to continue climbing the ladder in the fire service. I would like to move on to be a battalion chief and I am training for that at some point in my career.

12. Additional thoughts?

Whatever you choose to do, make sure you are choosing the field you are getting into for the right reasons. To me, the right reasons would be something that you enjoy doing, something that you feel good about doing, and something you can be proud of doing.

Set reasonable goals to get there. Like I said before, for me to get to where I am now, there were many, many steps. I had to set small goals to accomplish my bigger goals. Somebody starting out in any field will find themselves in a similar position.

Looking back, if I could make a recommendation to a young person in high school, it would be to get any additional schooling done early. If you feel that you're going to need a degree, do it now. It only gets more difficult to do it later. Believe in yourself and keep a positive attitude. If you want it bad enough and you are willing to put in the work, then I think just about anything is possible.

Use this space to record impressions and observations about this interview and ideas it may have given you.