

My name is Jeremiah Cook. I currently work at Indianapolis EMS as a logistics support professional, and I am the Division Training Coordinator at the Gregg Township Fire Department in Morgan County. I've been in the fire service since July of 2007. My path to the fire service has been similar to most men and women who get bitten by the fire bug. From the Flood of '08 to deployments on Indianapolis EMS Medic Zero, I've had the opportunity to be on some of the most major emergent and planned incident responses in Morgan and Marion counties, in both Operations and Logistics roles. I've built a reputation as the first fire instructor in Indiana to present state-wide certification in a hybrid/online modality, and I served the State for two years as a contractor in the Academy, both as a content developer and as a program coach.

According to the IDHS website, the Academy was established in 2007, "to meet the training needs of career and volunteer firefighters across the state." My experience is primarily in the operations and response of two small, volunteer agencies in central Morgan County, with a limited experience at a combination agency in northwest Hancock County. This experience has ranged from an EMS lift assist call at 4 in the morning, to multi-agency residence fire responses involving mobile water supply and elevated master streams. I have participated in many IDHS and Academy sanctioned certification courses. Additionally, I graduated from a two-year FESHE degree program Magna cum Laude. I have the benefit of many different perspectives on the fire service from both my own personal experiences and those of friends on both sides of the aisle, career and volunteer. I am a member of the Indiana Volunteer Firefighters Association and the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 416.

My experience in distributed education technology spans 24 years of experience in academia, the private sector, and the fire service. I am a highly capable audio and video engineer who has a proven track record of working for IDHS and the Indiana Fire Instructors Association. I was the first Indiana fire service instructor who developed, planned, and executed online content for a statewide audience with the goal being state certification. I have experience mainly with Moodle LMS from both Jones and Bartlett and IFSTA, and also as a Moodle systems administrator.

At Indianapolis EMS, I made an open-source electronic commerce solution called Zen Cart work to support IEMS, the Indianapolis Fire Department, and almost every EMS provider in Marion, Hendricks, and Morgan counties. I am part of the IN-TIME initiative, sponsored by USDOT, FHWA, and INDOT, and I serve that mission as one of Indiana's master trainers, teaching others how to take the traffic incident management focus back to their home districts, counties, or agencies. I am certified by IDHS as an Emergency Vehicle Operator Instructor and instructor trainer. I will be recertifying my EVOC Provider certification soon.

Unique for my age, I have 28 years of experience as an educator. I started teaching basic Scoutcraft and leadership skills to my peers in 1995, at 15 years old. I have taught children, pre-teens, young adults, and adults in that time in subjects spanning basic leadership development (described in *Team Leadership Skills for Teens: Youth Leading Youth* by Brian Phelps), instructor development, new technology in the fire service classroom, and EMS topics like basic Cardiac Arrest Management and response. I am a life-long student of the fire service, and I continue to expand my skill set at every opportunity possible.

I am a skilled troubleshooter. Prior to my current career path, I was a restaurant manager. While never a General Manager, I was sent to restaurants with troubled balance sheets and Profit and Loss reports and told to fix problems. My strength was my ability to spend a few days inside the restaurants, pick up on their issues, and develop an aggressive action plan to bring them back to profitability.

Based on the information made available from the Governor's mandate for the NextLevel Firefighting Training initiative, I have compiled an initial plan for what I would want to see happen within the first three to six months as the Fire Training Section Chief for the Academy.

- The NextLevel Firefighter Training page specifically mentions: "Still, many rural communities, most staffed by volunteers, find it difficult to travel to training sites." I would posit that the difficulty in traveling to training sites is NOT physical distance - it is the time investment that I feel we are asking of our volunteer firefighters. When I made the decision to leave the restaurant business, I was willing to do whatever was necessary to make the change, but it came at a cost to my family life. We cannot expect to enroll and retain recruits when fire service education is done on OUR schedules as instructors, especially if we're not paying them. We should be thinking of every way that we can be consistent with the message but still respect our recruits' time, whether they are career, combination, or volunteer.
- We need to change our outlook about only implementing a typical Monday - Friday, 9-5 operation. Our firefighters, instructors, and public need us outside of those times. If I'm hired, I reasonably expect to be able to flex my schedule and travel to departments throughout the State. I don't expect to be working every weekend, nor would I expect the staff to do so, but we need to be out of the office and in the field as much as possible. I feel like a good part of the institutional reputation is that once you hit a State office, you're locked down to a desk. I want to change that mindset. I think there is value in a more hands on approach and technology allows us the freedom to work remotely on location as needed.
- I feel that between the lines, there's a lot of emphasis on the continued effectiveness of non-Academy operated training sites - "Additionally, the level of training may vary at sites not operated by the Academy." I ask, how can we expect the level of training NOT to vary? We as a state do a pretty weak job at instructor development, and in my honest opinion, we've done worse to support instructors who are NOT contractors. At best, fire instructors take a 40 hour class where we cover the bare-bones basics. There are places that will certify you as an instructor over two weekends INCLUDING psychomotor and written testing. As someone who has primarily taught Instructor I as a fire instructor, I cannot begin to embellish the times that I've had students (quite a few were Division, battalion, or senior company officers) tell me that I was expecting way too much from them and I needed to tone it down a notch. This is something real that every volunteer Training division has to deal with - and it's something that the Academy should provide resources to solve. If we want the training quality to improve, we have to do it across the board and make it available to everyone. That means starting with every training division in the State. We figure out who has an Instructor certification, and we figure out how to make them better. We also have to respect their time and be available when they need it. Scheduling training Monday to Friday, 8 to 4, isn't going to cut it for most of our firefighters.
- "Consistency and quality control" is a phrase used on the website. I've demonstrated how to make that work, and I did it in 2017. All lectures across the system get taped by the best instructors we can find, uploaded to the Web on Vimeo or YouTube, and then linked into a generic Moodle course maintained by IFSTA. The Academy retains control of the original Moodle course, and once a course is approved, the Moodle course instance is cloned and permissions are assigned to the Lead Instructor and his/her staff. We pick the curriculum, we pick the lecturers, we tape and control the material, and we build the Moodle instance that we want the Lead Instructor to use. When it comes time to psychomotor skills, we train every single instructor

in Indiana, again, using subject matter experts, and we provide a written rubric as to how the skill is completed. We conduct spot-checks at practical sites, we maintain a roster of 1403-qualified Live Fire Instructors, certified to the 1041 standard, and we assign them to individual districts or training sites. If a student doesn't meet the 1910 CFR 134 standards for SCBA fit-testing, they are excused. (That means that we'll have to work with local jurisdictions OR buy some PortaCounts and adapters.)

- Continuing on consistency and quality control, District 10 has already established this model, and it seems to be working well with the volunteers in that area. District 10's Fire Academy is completely lectured online while students travel to two or three satellite sites around the district, within a 45 minute drive. State-approved contractors are used, and there are two co-Lead Instructors that manage the program.

I know what strengths I can bring to the table, but I am also aware of my weaknesses. I may not be the best firefighter on the fireground, and I have character flaws that I am always trying to improve upon, but what I lack in physicality, I more than make up for with my intellect, work ethic, and dedication.

We're out here trying to do the job that the public asks of us, and for a lot of us, the Academy represents a thorn in our side, a mystical being from above that points the finger and throws all of these rules, regulations, and policies out at us. The waters are hard to navigate, and we're all fighting our own personal and mental battles, including massive amounts of PTSD, trauma, and our own mortality, while we go through the mental motions of making sure that someone is going to drag their butt out of bed at 4 when Mabel at the nursing home throws abnormal labs, Fred the neighbor falls out of bed and his wife Gladys can't pick him up, or the house with the five kids down the street catches fire.

For most volunteer firefighters in this state, that's reality, and the answer to improving the fire service in Indiana is to make it our mission to make sure that every firefighter in this state has access to a high-quality fire service education. We do that by coaching, leading, and developing every fire service instructor in this state to accept nothing and no one short of who they'd want riding the backstep, running IC, pumping while they're on the line, or pulling them out of a fire after a mayday call.