



**ALAMEDA COUNTY  
FIRE DEPARTMENT**

*Philosophy*

*Designed as a philosophical guide  
for the members, by the members.*

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# Mission Statement and Our Core Values

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## Mission Statement

We will provide the highest level of service to our communities by valuing our members, promoting positive leadership, and dedicating ourselves to excellence.

## Our Core Values

**Members:** We promote an atmosphere of trust and respect that encourages individual growth, participation, creativity and acknowledges the achievements of our members.

**Organization:** We support an organization built on a foundation of initiative, collaboration and commitment to efficiency, consistency and results, while attaining the goals of the organization.

**Customer Service:** We are dedicated to providing superior customer service.

**Strategic Management:** We plan for change and develop management strategies to meet the challenges of our future.

**Regional Cooperation:** We promote, encourage and participate in partnerships that provide all communities with the highest level of service.

Sheldon D. Gilbert, Fire Chief

# History

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A dynamic thought process was used to create the Alameda County Fire Department's Philosophy. The development of this Philosophy was an actual task in the Strategic Plan, which is itself a living document.

**Under the organization goal:**

*"We will create an organization built on a foundation of individual initiative and a collective commitment to efficiency, consistency, and results."*

**Pertaining to the objective:**

*"We will meet all the expectations (current and future) of the individual initiative at a rating of 95% by January 1, 2000."*

**Connected with the strategy:**

*"We will learn the importance of individual initiative and going the extra mile by communicating expectations and recognizing that each individual does make a difference."*

The task of developing the Philosophy was undertaken by a group of individuals who documented the values and ideals that are contained within the Philosophy. These values and ideals were solicited from the Strategic Planning Teams and the Department's membership. The Philosophy was then presented to the Strategic Planning Team and then to the Department as a whole, allowing input from all individuals. Upon receiving input, the document was modified and formally distributed.

# Introduction

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The Alameda County Fire Department is an organization committed to excellence. This commitment is derived from each individual, positive leadership, and pride of its members.

The Philosophy of the Alameda County Fire Department is not meant to be a procedure, but rather a vision of how we want our department to function. This Philosophy deals with the standards, principals and ideals that **we**, the members of the Alameda County Fire Department, are committed to achieving.

We are a proud, close-knit organization. This Philosophy is a result of our members' attitudes, ideals and dedication, as well as the relationship between the Union and Management.

# Making the Commitment

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Being a member of the Alameda County Fire Department is more than just a job. It includes a commitment to other department members and to the citizens of our jurisdiction.

The Alameda County Fire Department is made up of members from a variety of economic and social backgrounds. We have in common, the sincere desire to serve the public in Alameda County. We are a professional organization dedicated to meeting our mission and commitment to excellence. We have realized our obligation of protecting the public and the environment at all times, on or off duty.

By achieving this high level of public service, we are exhibiting our commitment. "Going the extra mile" is evident by our actions.

*This document describes the Philosophy of the Department and is intended to communicate to all members and the communities we serve, the expectations of the organization and of one another.*

This document is intended to clearly state the general approach that **all** members will use when interacting with our communities and with each other.

Every individual is considered important and shall be treated as such, leaving no doubt that the most important resource our Department has is its members.

This document exists for all members of the Department and the acceptance of this Philosophy is your commitment to the Alameda County Fire Department.

# Being Responsible for Ourselves and Each Other

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The Alameda County Fire Department is only as good as we, the members, are committed to making it.

As in any organization, there are leaders and followers; however, all are members. The statement “*We will be known for keeping our word and doing what we say we will do*” is a major part of providing the proper foundation for the Department

Being a member you are expected to be responsible and accountable for your actions, take the initiative to positively solve problems at your level, and to seek assistance when needed.

It must be realized that the manner in which we treat ourselves has a direct correlation to how we treat our public. Therefore, as a major part of our Philosophy, it is expected that we will treat ourselves with the respect we give our customers.

Our Mission Statement provides general direction for the organization and contains the Core Value of “*Members*”. This goal has six behavioral practices that we should remember and perform on a daily basis:

- *Trust*
- *Respect*
- *Individual Growth*
- *Participation*
- *Creativity*
- *Acknowledge Achievement*

In the day-to-day operations of our organization we work closely with people of various personalities and traits. Realizing this, we must be tolerant of others.

The effectiveness of our organization suffers greatly by petty personal and emotional conflicts. It is encouraged that individuals will instead:

- *Communicate*
- *Ask questions*
- *Gather relevant information*
- *Offer input and alternatives*
- *Initiate an appropriate process for change*

# Being Self Disciplined

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We are all aware that to accomplish an attitude of pride, excellence and individual initiative, the first step must be self-discipline. This should be designed to promote an individual's healthy attitude to a positive, productive position in the Department. This positive attitude, once started, must be maintained. Success in the Alameda County Fire Department will largely depend on our sustained willingness to show this *Individual Initiative*.

Every member is expected to manage their own behavior in a manner that is consistent with the well being of the Alameda County Fire Department. The effectiveness of this should result in the need for minimal supervision.

It is realized by the Department that its members will, from time to time, have inner turmoil resulting from personal and/or work related problems during their careers. When this occurs past the point that self discipline is no longer effective, they are *expected to seek assistance* thus returning their attitude to that of a healthy, productive, positive way of life.

The welfare of other coworkers is another critical issue pertaining to self-discipline. It is important to understand how a coworker with a negative attitude can affect a crew or how a positive crew can turn around a coworker with a negative attitude.

A positive attitude helps build cooperation in the team, and a positive team effort radiates a good work value to the public we serve. *To cooperate with each other is to effectively serve the public.*

# Being Responsible Leaders

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Leadership is the most critical element of maintaining a positive image and high standards.

All leaders of this organization must take an active role in developing, expressing, and defending values of both the individual and of the Department. What happens today is a result of the Department's membership and what will happen tomorrow is a direct result of how the membership is led.

As with all members of the Alameda County Fire Department, you are expected to carry out your duties in a considerate, respectful manner. Positive reinforcement is a preferred method of motivating an individual and has proven to be much more effective than identifying negative behavior and expecting others to learn from that.

In the Alameda County Fire Department there are many leaders of different types with varying styles. Some of these leaders would be considered "*formal*" by their position as supervisors and/or their responsibilities. Others are looked upon by their peers as leaders for "*stepping up to the plate*" or taking initiative on their own; these leaders are considered "*informal*".

Leaders are obligated to provide and maintain momentum for those they lead.

*Positive behavior or performance should be rewarded in some way at every opportunity, while unacceptable behavior or performance should be corrected.*

All supervisors and members of the Alameda County Fire Department should be up front and share their expectations with other members. These expectations need to be realistic and in accordance with those of the Alameda County Fire Department. There should be no doubt as to what one's responsibility, behavior, performance, and accountability are.

Supervisors must manage various types of personnel. This can be a delicate situation and must be addressed regardless of the personal relationships. A supervisor, who is proactive with the work group in order to head off problems before they occur, will see very few situations getting to the point that corrective action is required.

Supervisors/Leaders, when faced with problems involving people, must develop a solution that not only solves the immediate problem but also creates improvement for the future.

Supervisors/Leaders are expected to keep problems in perspective and seek solutions from the proper level. It is important for a supervisor to practice:

- *Good listening skills*
- *Ask strategic questions*
- *Display empathy*
- *Coaching and counseling*
- *Encourage*
- *Direct individuals*
- *Be proactive*

**It is the responsibility of the Alameda County Fire Department and its leaders to develop “POSITIVE”, competent leaders for the future.**

A leader's performance and involvement when problem solving will fall into one of three categories:

- ***POSITIVE INVOLVEMENT***: The leader's involvement contributes to a positive, effective outcome.
- ***LACK OF INVOLVEMENT***: The leader's lack of involvement results in no outcome.
- ***NEGATIVE INVOLVEMENT***: The leader's involvement actually makes the situation worse.

***Positive involvement will create loyalty and commitment from the member.***

Another important role in leadership is “followership”. Every leader has been, and will continue to be, a follower in some way. To be a good leader, you must be a good follower.

***Treat your followers as you would want to be treated as a leader.***

# Communication in the Department

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**At all levels of supervision, information is critical. Everyone must be kept informed as much as possible.**

For an organization to operate efficiently there must be effective communication. This includes:

- *VERBAL*: actively listening, understanding, and replying.
- *WRITTEN*: clearly stated, direct text.
- *IMPLIED*: projecting a positive, self-assured image.

Competent communication will exist throughout all levels and divisions of this organization. The very definition of managing is "to get things done through other people". This can be accomplished if you are able to efficiently communicate what needs to be accomplished.

All information must be communicated up and down the chain of command.

The first impression you get when you meet someone usually sticks with you, as does the public's first impression of us. The desired impression we wish to make upon the public must communicate our professional, positive attitude. All members are expected to know this and conduct themselves in a manner that will "*Project the positive image of our Department*".

# Conclusion

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This Philosophy depicts how we, in the Alameda County Fire Department, “**Do Business**”. It illustrates the way members are to perform and interact with the communities we serve and one another.

To live by this Philosophy requires constant care and a conscious effort must be put forth from all of us each and every day. It is not intended to smother internal disagreements in the organization, but rather to maintain an environment in which the Alameda County Fire Department can accomplish its “**Mission Statement**”.

We will view problems as opportunities to improve the organization for the good of all.

It must be remembered that “***You are not just an employee here, you are a member***”. You are a critical part of the team, and to be an exceptional team, everyone must take care of everyone else. We should refrain from using the terms “us” and “them” and instead use the term “***we***”. Being disrespectful of other members in the Department breaks down the feeling of unity and is unacceptable.

It is understood that we need to be respectful of the Fire Service traditions and the organization we are building. Our organization is ever-changing and growing; we need to be fluid in that understanding.

We have the responsibility to pass along to future generations the traditions, values, skills, knowledge, and determination that have moved our organization forward, and to personally give back to this organization. ***Each member of this organization has the responsibility to leave this Department better than he/she found it in some way.***

It is our positive commitment to our public and each other that has made us what we are today: a dynamic organization committed to a high level of service. This, along with constant assessment and change, will make us what we want to be tomorrow.



## **Alameda County Fire Department**

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