The Firefighter Personality
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This is an extremely important article for all TRN Members to read prior to working with First Responders.

- Many firefighters are extraverts. They are friendly and willing to do anything for their “brothers.”
- They love to build things and solve problems. While they are locking in tradition, they would rather find practical solutions. There is skepticism about new ideas or products.
- Firefighters are hands on people and become easily bored with instruction that is all lecture.
- If something is done wrong, it could cost a life. There is a real need to be in control. If a new probationary firefighter is not living up to snuff, they will tease mercilessly until the “probie” shapes up.
- There is a gallows humor that makes light of serious calls. It’s a way of coping nasty stuff.
- Firefighters live for the “big one” and are upset when they are off shift when it happens. There is a sense of adventure. They get a great adrenalin rush that feels great.
- If they have had too many bad runs and the adrenalin gets depleted and the body starts using serotonin to make the adrenalin, that they get run down and feeling depressed or cranky.
- They keep conflicts in the firehouse. Each firefighter must feel that the others will be there for that firefighter in a crisis situation, and that firefighter will have the others backs. The members of the department become another family.
- In working with firefighters after a critical incident they often measure themselves on how well they contributed or not to the team effort.
- If firefighters let others down or even just feel that they did, it produces a sense of guilt. Guilt over things that they really couldn’t change becomes a grasp for a sense of control.
- Firefighters are quick to blame themselves. Conversely, there is pride in handling very difficult situations with expertise and being of service to others. Firefighters hope that when all is said and done that they can say that they “did their job.”

Tips on Introducing Clinical Services

You can appeal to the firefighter’s loyalty to the others and their ability to do the job. You are bucking the tradition of “elbow therapy” in the bar room, to handle the stress. Newer firefighters will be more willing to try something else, but you need to do it right the first time because you won’t get another chance. Use a Fire Chaplain to get you in the station to start with. They are highly respected by firefighters. What are they going to get out of working with you? Be to the point. Above all, be honest. How will this be a benefit to the “job?” Emphasize that they are helping their brothers by helping themselves. Ask about how the firefighter’s reactions are showing up at home. What would there significant other say about how they are doing? When firefighters feel the relief, they will sell others, so you only need to find a few that will try it to start.