**The Little Things That Matter**

We all have those things, those little things, in life that can make your day or ruin your day. Whether it’s not having enough fuel in the car to get to work or forgetting your cellphone charger before going on a trip. Those little things can change the course of your plans or even your life. The same is true for the fire service, little things that you don’t think are a big deal can make or break a fireground operation or your company’s ability to properly operate. We all have our pet peeves, some are minor, some major but they matter, in one way or another there is a reason for having a “pet peeve”, whether it’s a past experience or the way they were trained. Those “pet peeves” may seem like little things but when all is said and done, they matter to the effectiveness and efficiency of a fire company or fire department. In this article, I will bring up some “little things or pet peeves” that I believe matter and if not done correctly or even at all will have an overall effect on the operational performance of your company. I will break this up into Engine Company, Ladder Company and then personal actions that can affect the mission.

**Engine Company**

1. **Booster Tank is not full**—having a less than full tank will reduce the amount of water available prior to establishing a water supply
2. **SCBA cylinders just below full**—having less than a full SCBA cylinder may mean the difference between life or death, running out of air to early or having to change the cylinder prior to making entry.
3. **Hose lines not packed correctly**—This can delay or even prevent proper stretching of handlines to entrance to fire building.
4. **Apparatus Placement**—Utilize your dept policy, if apparatus is not placed properly the first time, chances are that it will be very difficult, if not impossible to move apparatus later in incident.
5. **Flushing of Hydrant**—MUST be done, failure to flush hydrant may cause damage to pump. Flushing the hydrant will determine whether the hydrant is good or bad, a bad hydrant will change the dynamics of the incident. It’s better to find out early than find out when you got 600’ of LDH on the ground and guys are inside the fire building.
6. **Fog Nozzle checked for damage**—Missing teeth, inoperable pattern adjustment or inoperable gallon adjustment can make the hose line inoperable or insufficient to handle the fire conditions. Check your nozzles, adjust your patterns, check your bales. Your nozzle is your pistol in a gun fight, make sure it works.
7. **EMS equipment is adequately stocked**—This equipment is unmistakably the most used equipment on the rig. Make sure the EMS bags are stocked, glove boxes are full and Oxygen tank is full
8. **Adjustable Hydrant Wrench**—Make sure the adjustment part works and spins freely. If it doesn’t, it may make the wrench unusable. You don’t want to be at the hydrant and the wrench don’t fit
9. **Laying Supply Lines**—Make sure you lay the supply lines against the curb on the hydrant side (if at all possible). Laying lines down the middle of the street will most likely block the incoming truck company and/or later arriving companies.
10. **Gaskets in Couplings**—Be sure that gaskets are not missing/damaged in hose couplings. A missing/damage coupling will cause connections to severely leak causing water loss.

T**ruck Company**

1. **Fuel/Batteries**—Make sure the gas powered equipment (saws/extrication) has full fuel tanks, nothing worse than being on roof and the saw runs out of fuel. Be sure your batteries on your equipment are fully charged.
2. **Hand tools**—Make sure the hand tools are clean, properly marked and maintained. Having a chipped axe blade or a loose head on a sledgehammer can cause injury or improper tool operation. If tools have custom markings (Halligans with squared shoulders or dept markings), make sure they are well marked.
3. **Electrical Pigtails**—Make sure you have the correct pigtails to make the connections for your lights/fans. Having the wrong pigtails can place the equipment out of service due to being unable to make the connections
4. **Halyards**—Be sure the halyards on extension ladders are in good shape. A frayed halyard can break leaving the ladder unserviceable
5. **Saw Blades**—Make sure the chainsaw blades are placed in the correct direction of cut. Make sure that the teeth are in good condition and the chain doesn’t come out of the groove in the bar.
6. **Pinnable Waterway**—Be sure the waterway is set to the “rescue position”. Most of our aerial work is for access to a roof or window. The nozzle, if place at the tip will just be in the way, making sure the nozzle is set back will eliminate the need to reset the nozzle back to the “rescue” position.
7. **Using the Tillerman**—Use the tillerman in tractor drawn aerial to help spot the turntable. They have a great view of the building, the turntable and overhead obstructions.
8. **Rope at aerial tip**—A piece of rope/prussic, approx. 18” long and a bright color at the aerial tip on the turntable side will help with depth perception. Once the rope moves past the roof line, you know you’re on the roof.
9. **TIC**—Make sure the battery is fully charged, a valuable search tool but if the battery is low to begin with, it’s not going to last long.
10. **Ladder Tunnel**—Make sure, through training and dept. policy that later arriving apparatus don’t park so close to the rear of the truck that you can’t get the portable ladders out. Give at least 20’ to be able to get your longest ladder out of the ladder tunnel.

**Personnel Considerations**

1. **Rest**—Many of us have busy lives; family, second or even third jobs, personnel commitments. But we must try and get adequate rest, this helps reenergize us and prevents injuries, sickness and helps with clear thinking
2. **Diet**—OK, yes we are all firefighters and love a great meal, but we need to eat as healthy as we can. Having a balanced diet helps with daily activities both in the fire service but everyday life.
3. **Exercise**—Yes, we should all workout, not all of us can bench press the world but some type of physical fitness program should be followed. Mixing cardio with strength training including stretching.
4. **PPE**—Properly fitting, properly maintained PPE will help with your job performance. No one likes baggy or tight fitting gear. Holes in pockets or other parts of your PPE may make it unserviceable. Reflective stripping that torn or missing may reduce your visibility and can lead to injury or death**.** O ya, make sure you have all your PPE. Nothing is worse than going to a structure fire and asking the driver “hey you got an extra pair of gloves or hood”.
5. **What’s in your Pockets**—Have you been asked for a flashlight, a screwdriver, a door chock? Carry these and whatever else you think you’ll need to perform your duties, but don’t overload yourself with “stuff”.
6. **Know your order of arrival**—If you have riding positions based on order of arrival, know which “due” you are. It’s not good having to ask the officer, with all the other things going on, “What are we due boss?”**.**
7. **Check your tools/SCBA/Radio**—En route to a job is not the time to see if your assigned tools are there and in working order. Your tools and SCBA should be checked prior to responding or when placing your gear at the beginning of the shift. Be sure your radio has a full battery, it’s a bad time to find out your radio is dead en route to or inside a fire.
8. **Arriving early for duty**—Being early for your duty shift, whether volunteer or career speaks volumes about you. It shows that you look forward to getting to the job, look out for your brother or sister firefighters by getting them out early and it’s a good way to get ready for the day by not being rushed.
9. **Be a mentor, Mr. Senior Firefighter**—As we progress through the years the younger guys will, or should, look up to the senior guys for knowledge, direction and support. Be that guy, teach them, listen to them, guide them. Be the informal leader that you are expected to be. A well known company officer once said, “If you’re not teaching the younger guys as a senior fire fighter, you’re not doing your job”.
10. **Off Duty Time**—As stated earlier, we are all busy in our personal lives, but there’s nothing wrong with hanging out off duty with the guys/gals even if it’s once a month. This can be a prearranged date every month or just a spur of the moment thing. We use to meet for lunch on the first day of our five day break after a cycle, just to bond and have fun away from work. It brought the guys together and made the team stronger.

As you can see, there are a lot of “little things” that can make a big difference in how we perform our jobs. If we pay attention to things that don’t seem a big deal, when it comes time, the “big deal” things will come naturally.