

# **Oral Interview Preparation Tips**

## ***The Opening Statement & The Closing Statement***

By Steve Prziborowski

### **The Opening Statement**

The opening statement of an oral interview is probably the most important opportunity you will be provided with to make a positive and lasting first impression. This is your chance to set the stage for the rest of your interview and to hit the ground running so that you can come out on the top of the final hiring list. Most fire departments grade the oral interview as 100% of your total oral board score for entry-level and some promotional processes; starting out on the right foot with a solid opening statement can help you obtain a high score in the oral interview.

What is an opening statement? It is your chance to reduce the nervousness, to get a little comfortable (don't get too comfortable!), and to let the oral board know something about you – the most important person during the allotted time frame of your interview! An opening statement is your chance to provide the oral board with information about:

- Your personal characteristics, traits, beliefs, career goals, etc.
- Your educational background (formal education – don't include high school, it shows your age)
- Your training background (certifications, licenses, etc.)
- Your experience (paid and volunteer)
- Your special skills / talents (bilingual ability, mechanical ability background, etc.)
- Basically all of the information that you have listed on your resume (without being too specific that you bore them to death)

Your resume needs to be memorized and you need to be able to talk about all of the things you are offering to the department that makes you the best candidate for the job or the promotion. Only you can properly market and sell yourself! Your opening statement is a way to get the oral board motivated to listen to what you have to say during the time you are being interviewed.

#### **EXAMPLES OF OPENING STATEMENT QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE ASKED INCLUDE:**

- Tell us how you have prepared yourself for the position of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tell us how your education, experience, and training have prepared you for the position of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tell us about yourself.

I suggest you take the time to write out a response to each of the above questions (and the responses can be very similar and modified as needed) and then save them on your computer as a document you can modify as necessary. An opening statement is typically going to be anywhere between two minutes up to about four minutes in length.

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Any less than that, and you're depriving the oral board of hearing as much as they can about your key attributes. Any more than that, and you risk the chance of boring them to death, putting them to sleep, or having them lose all interest in you and the rest of what you have to say.

A Chief Officer who is a friend of mine, stated he had recently sat on his Department's oral board panel for entry-level firefighters. I was asking him for some feedback regarding their interviews, so I could pass on some "lessons-learned of what not to do during an oral interview" to other folks. He stated they had one candidate with an opening statement lasting approximately 19 minutes. Then, a couple of days later, another candidate beat that record with one lasting almost 25 minutes! Even the person with the best resume in world can't fill 25 minutes worth of opening statement material. He told me he had lost interest at the point both candidates were about five minutes into their opening statements, but they had to let the candidates continue anyway. They finally had to stop the second candidate because they were running out of time, and they still had more questions to ask, and more candidates to interview.

You want the oral board to remember you for being unique, in a positive way. These two candidates will be remembered for being unique, just not in a positive way. In case you were wondering, neither received job offers.

Since most oral interviews are on a tight schedule, it is paramount to use your time wisely! I had a time when I was interviewing for an entry-level firefighter position with the City of Daly City Fire Department and I was doing my typical three-minute opening statement. After about two minutes, one of the board members politely advised me that I had better be careful and cut my answer short because they still had four other questions to ask me and that candidates were scheduled for every ten minutes! I reluctantly abbreviated my opening statement, summarizing the remaining information, and went on to answer the other questions. When I walked out, I thought I had blown the interview. Turns out, I ended up ranking number one on the hiring list (no ties that I was aware of); the only firefighter entry-level test I ever ranked number one on.

Having your opening statement on the computer is a valuable tool I am glad I utilized, and I will explain why. When I was testing for the position of firefighter over the course of 4 1/2 years, I probably had the opportunity to participate in approximately 40 oral interviews. While I didn't have an opening statement on the computer at the time, I did have it written down and virtually memorized. I had it down so well I could regurgitate it at a moment's notice, modifying it to fit the agency I was applying to.

Now before you say "I don't want to memorize an answer because it will sound rehearsed," wait a second. Having an answer memorized will make you sound like you have practiced and prepared for the interview. I would rather listen to someone that has practiced their opening statement than to someone who is just winging it or throwing

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things out at random and in no specific order. Lack of practice can increase your odds of leaving out key points about you.

I used to carry the opening statement with me to the oral interview and review it while waiting to be called. Realize there was no way I could memorize word-for-word the entire opening statement. That's ok; memorizing it allowed me to picture it in my head and ensure that I could cover the major points I wanted to cover, and ad-lib as needed to fill in the blanks. The nice part about having it on the computer is that I could change it as needed, cater it to the agency I was testing for, add accomplishments or achievements as I received them, delete things that were no longer applicable or appropriate, and alter it as necessary. Consider your opening statement as a work in progress.

When I was preparing for the Captain's promotional examination, I mistakenly did not spend as much time preparing for the oral interview as I initially thought I should. I think I became complacent and felt I could just "wing-it" and go with the flow when they asked me a question. I had spent countless hours preparing for the written examination, the personnel problem, the fire simulation, the oral interview, and for the position of Captain itself, but not that much time (if any) preparing my opening statement. Yes, I had prepared for other questions in the oral interview such as my strengths and weaknesses, programs the department was offering, various situations they could ask me, etc. However, I spent virtually no time preparing an opening (or closing) statement.

Luckily, I had an eye-opening experience that kicked me in the pants and forced me to go to my computer and create an opening (and closing) statement for the position of Captain. Something different from when I was testing for firefighter, primarily because I could not find the notes I had utilized at that point. Here is that eye-opening experience that was embarrassing at the time it occurred, but very critical I believe to my overall success on the Captain's exam: About a month prior to the Captain's exam, our department had opened up a firefighter position in our training division, and I was very interested in applying for the position. I had been instructing classes for a while and I felt it would be a valuable position for career development purposes and also a position where I could give something back to the department (I had recently completed my Fire Instructor 1, 2 and 3 training through the State Fire Marshal's Office – 240 hours of instructor training that now allowed me to not just instruct classes, but instruct the firefighters who aspired to be instructors within the department and the State Fire Marshal's instructional system).

The process for the position of firefighter in training consisted of filing an application and completing an oral interview with the Training Captain and the EMS Coordinator. There was only one other person that had applied for the position, a firefighter with more experience and also prior training division experience (he had held the same spot about ten years prior). One day while working on shift at the fire house, the Training Captain called me up and asked if I wouldn't mind coming in that afternoon for an interview, since they wanted to complete the process before I went on vacation the next week. I

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said fine, and didn't think it would be that big of a deal, especially since he had told me that it would just be a casual / informal interview, and just a formality.

I went into the interview thinking that it wouldn't be that big of a deal; I had done really well on oral interviews in the past, why should this one be any different? Famous last words! They started by asking me the standard opening statement question, "tell us how you have prepared for the position of firefighter assigned to the Training Division?" Here's my chance to shine, or so I thought. I was able to get about one sentence out of my mouth before I realized that I had not prepared, and I really did not have all of my qualifications packaged into a clean, well-prepared opening statement. I was so embarrassed at myself for not having an organized opening statement, that I had to stop my opening statement and apologize to both of the oral board members, both of whom I believed to have a great working relationship with and both of whom knew my qualifications well. Both of them told me to not worry about it, and to just continue on.

Continue on I did. I answered the rest of the questions they asked me adequately, but not superbly. I ended up not getting the position, and I firmly believe it was because of my oral communication skills (or lack thereof) that I had presented that afternoon. Now I can live with not getting that position; what I could not live with was that in about two months, I was potentially going to have an oral interview for the position of Captain (assuming I made it that far in the assessment center). Had this been my Captain's oral interview, I would have been dead in the water. This was the epiphany that made me get my act together for the upcoming Captain's assessment center. Had I not had the opportunity to participate in that oral interview, I might have not seen my shortcomings and lack of preparation in time to secure a spot high enough on the Captain's promotional list to get promoted on my first try (which I did).

The one good thing that came out of that embarrassing moment was that I went back to the fire station that night and literally wrote out my opening statement and put it on computer. It took me a couple of days to get it really where I wanted it to be; a positive and powerful representation of my key selling points. I was able to turn that embarrassing moment into a turning point in my preparation for the Captain's test.

Because of that embarrassing moment, and the preparation that followed that moment, I ended up coming out number one (out of 11 candidates) in the assessment center, and also being the only candidate to score 100% in any phase of the assessment center. I scored 100% on my oral interview and I correlate that score primarily to the preparation I had done at the last minute, thanks to my "crashing and burning" at the other interview I had participated in for the training position. Had I not had that other interview, I strongly believe I might have fallen into the false sense of security that many candidates have with certain areas of their abilities.

### **SAMPLE OPENING STATEMENT:**

Below is the opening statement I utilized when I took the Captain's examination:

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*Members of the board, I have been in the fire service for over 8 years, and with the Department for almost 5 years. I am presently assigned to Engine 11-serving the citizens of the City of Campbell as a Firefighter/Engineer-Paramedic. Let me take a few minutes and explain how my education, training and experience have prepared me for the position of Fire Captain.*

*First, regarding education, I have completed my B.S. degree with a major in Criminal Justice and a minor in Business Administration from California State University at Hayward, and also my A.A. degree in Fire Service Technology from Chabot College in Hayward. One thing that is not on my resume is that 2 weeks ago, I started working on a Master's Degree in Emergency Services Administration through California State University at Long Beach. It is being hosted by the San Jose Fire Department and should take 2 to 3 years to complete.*

*As for training, another addition that is not on my resume is that last month, I completed my last 2 chief officer classes through the California State Fire Marshal's office. Although I am competing for the position of fire captain, I believe completing the chief officer certification classes makes me more prepared for the position than just having done the fire officer certification classes (which I have already done). A mentor of mine, once told me to always prepare myself for one position above what I'm applying for, and this will allow me to be better prepared and better rounded. Something else that is not on my resume is that in late May, I completed the Master Instructor course at the California State Fire Academy at Asilomar. There are only about 140 people in the state of California that are certified as Master Instructors.*

*This certification allows me to teach Instructor 1A and 1B, the two required courses for firefighters that want to be certified by the California State Fire Marshal to teach within their respective fire departments or who want to become certified fire officers. Certifications I have obtained through the California State Board of Fire Services include Fire Officer, Fire Instructor I and II, Public Education Officer, Prevention Officer I, and Fire Investigator I. I have also completed various other California State Fire Marshal classes such as all three level two Fire Prevention classes and both level two Fire Investigation classes, just to provide me with a well-rounded background.*

*Now allow me to talk about experience. Some of the highlights of my almost five year career with the Department include being a member of the Safety Committee, the Standard Operating Procedure committee, the EMS committee, and the Public Speaker's Bureau. I have been certified/qualified to drive and operate two of our Truck companies and have spent almost three years as an on-call and shift Fire Investigator/P.I.O. I have also been performing fire and life*

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*safety inspections during the annual County Fair for the past four years and have been a CPR instructor, and Paramedic/EMT skills instructor within the department since I was hired.*

*On my days off, I am employed by Chabot College in Hayward as the EMT program director and primary instructor, and also as an adjunct faculty member within the Paramedic and Fire Service Technology programs. As the EMT program director, I am responsible for scheduling, planning, budgeting, organizing, and coordinating all aspects of the EMT basic and refresher programs and also for supervising, motivating, and training a staff of 20 instructors.*

*I also spent 13 years with Longs Drug Stores. I mention this for two reasons. One being that I spent 3 1/2 years as a manager: ensuring optimum customer relations, and supervising, motivating, and training a staff of up to 40 employees; and the other being that they taught me a great deal about Customer Service. Longs prides themselves in their customer service, as does our Department. Besides this preparation, I am a dependable, motivated, loyal, and flexible person that is ready to take on the challenges of the position and continue maintaining and improving on the Values of our Department, which are customer service, diversity, integrity, teamwork, and most of all, our employees.*

I have provided that information not for you to use the same closing statement for yourself, but for you to see how powerful and impacting your opening statement needs to be. I think I was able to properly set the stage for the rest of my interview and to also stick out above the other candidates, based on my opening statement.

### **TWO WAYS TO ANSWER AN OPENING STATEMENT QUESTION:**

1. Categorizing - The way I did it above, by categorizing each of my key areas of preparation - education, training, experience, and personal characteristics, and then taking the time to discuss each of them. If done properly, it makes each of them stick out and be highlighted.
2. Chronologically - For example, telling a story of when you were first attracted to a career in the fire service up until now, including everything you have done to prepare yourself for a career in the fire service (education, training, experience, etc.). This way of answering an opening statement is your way of taking the oral board on a journey. Be careful though; do not take them on a journey that does not have a destination! Rambling on and on, without any structure or organization, will surely doom your score and keep you from getting the badge.

### **WHAT IF YOU AREN'T OFFERED A CHANCE FOR AN OPENING STATEMENT?**

Not every fire department allows candidates to provide an opening statement. Some fire department oral boards start out by asking you simulation questions or other questions

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that are not as open-ended as an opening statement. This requires you, the prepared candidate, to be able to think on your feet and be able to “fill in the blanks” regarding your qualifications, in each of the oral board questions. This can be very difficult to do, especially if you are not 100% familiar with the knowledge, skills, and abilities you have to offer (which should be on your resume and also the majority of your opening statement), or if you do not have your opening statement committed to memory.

If you do not adequately recognize the fact that you were not given the opportunity to provide an opening statement during the course of your interview, you stand a great chance of losing the one of the best (and only) chances to sell your knowledge, skills, and abilities and let them know why YOU are the best candidate for the position!

So here is a tip for you to remember. If the first question the oral board asks you is not one of the three typical opening statement questions that I mentioned earlier, then you have to almost believe they will not give you an opportunity to make an opening statement. There are many oral boards that don't let candidates provide an opening or closing statement; they want to hear your answers on the other questions. I remember testing with a big-city fire department in California. They didn't want any resumes from the candidates, they didn't want the oral board to know your name, and they didn't want the candidates to have the opportunity to have an opening statement or a closing statement. They asked about six or seven questions (most of them scenario-based) and it appeared they did not want the candidates to be able to offer their knowledge, skills, and abilities to the oral board. Well then, if there are 2000 candidates interviewing for 100 positions, and you are faced with a similar situation, what are you to do?

This was a learning experience for me because I did not handle the situation as good as I could have. It was not until they had asked most of the questions that I realized that I was not going to have the chance to provide my opening statement. I had gone on answering their questions to the best of my ability (or so I had thought), without getting into much of my key selling points. I knew I was doomed when after the last scenario question, they advised me that there were no more questions and that I would find out my results in the mail. After picking up my jaw off of the ground, I thanked the oral board for their time, shook their hands, and walked out the door. I had just completed an interview, and had only provided about 10% of my knowledge, skills, and abilities to the oral panel.

What did I learn from that situation and what did I do in the future to prevent a similar situation from ever occurring again? Anytime I had an interview and the first question was a “non-opening statement question,” I had to assume that there would not be an opening statement and there was a good chance there might not be a closing statement either. If that was the case, I knew I had to sprinkle in all of my experience, training and education, community service, personal characteristics, etc. (my knowledge, skills, and abilities) into EACH of the questions. This was risky because I never knew how many questions there were going to be and I also had to ensure I covered as much of background as I could over all of the questions.

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So if the first question was “tell us your greatest strength,” and you said “dependability,” then you could maybe add one of your work experiences to this answer. For example, you could say “my greatest strength would have to be my dependability. Presently I work for XYZ plumbing in San Jose. In the ten years I have worked there, I have never called in sick, never been late to work, and never missed a day of work due to injury. I realize how much my employer depends on me to be there every day, so that his customers can have the best service they deserve. Since there are only five other plumbers in our company, having one employee off work can lead to a delay in the customers’ problems solved on an expedient basis.” See how I was able to sprinkle a part of my background into one question?

Then say the next questions is “provide us with a time when you had to mediate a dispute?” You could answer something to the effect of “last year, while at Chabot College in Hayward – where I received my A.A. degree in Fire Technology as well as completed my EMT and Firefighter 1 academy training, I came across a situation where two students in one of my fire technology classes were almost on the verge of punching each other over the last textbook in the bookstore. Both of them felt they had gotten their hand on the book first, and neither was planning on giving it up. The book was probably going to be ripped in half before one or the other student would have been able to purchase it.

Tensions were tight since certain books can be hard to come by, and also because this was the first day of class and their instructor was very adamant about each student having their books on the first day of class. I could definitely sympathize with both students, since I had taken that class last semester. Knowing that I still had my book from last semester’s class, I offered to sell my book to either student at a slightly lower price. While it is not always the safest thing to try and get into the middle of disputes, I felt that I could try this one idea that all parties would benefit from. After a little bit of convincing, the students agreed to have me flip a coin to determine who would get the book at the reduced price.” Not only was I able to answer the question, I was able to also provide something about my education (the fact that I have an A.A. degree in fire technology and that I have also completed my EMT and Firefighter 1 academy training) in a way that tied into the question.

### **SUMMARY:**

It has been said that a candidate has about 30 seconds to make a lasting impression on the oral board, once they walk through the door, and I firmly believe that. Besides your own demeanor and body language, your oral communication skills have to be at an excellent level, and you have to be able to hit the ground running once you get asked that first question. If you cannot get the interest of your oral board in the first 30 seconds, your chances of getting a top score are very limited!

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### **The Closing Statement**

Next to the opening statement, one of the most important questions of an oral interview is the closing statement. The closing statement, if you are provided the opportunity to do one, is your last chance for you to sell yourself and the best chance for the oral board to remember you in a positive and unique way. Although the question itself may not be scored or have any point value, it is still an important way to provide some closure to your interview, ask for the position, and end on a very high note.

When a fire department is hiring entry-level firefighters, it is not uncommon for interviews to occur for one week or more, and for hundreds of candidates to be interviewed by the same oral board panel. Even if you are participating in a promotional process, there are usually a decent number of candidates for the same oral board to have to interview. An entry-level firefighter candidate (like the promotional candidate) is getting rated during their interview and immediately after their interview concludes.

Another thing that may occur after all of the candidates have been interviewed and ranked (based on their oral board scores), is that all candidates are then re-ranked, based on what the oral board can remember about each of them and based on the needs of the department. If the oral board is re-ranking candidates after the interviews have ended (and your interview occurred on the first of ten days of interviews), it is critical that you leave the oral board on a high note and with a good taste in their mouth.

Most of the candidates being interviewed during any oral interview have very similar backgrounds and experiences. For entry-level candidates: EMT and/or paramedic training, certifications such as firefighter 1, education such as a two-year degree in fire technology and having completed a firefighter academy, volunteer experience, etc. For promotional candidates: college education, fire department experience, committee involvement, various training and certifications, etc. The list goes on-and-on, and this can make it tough for candidates to stick out and be remembered after the last interview is concluded. That is why having a strong closing statement that the oral board members can correlate to you after the interviews have ended is so important.

#### **A TYPICAL CLOSING STATEMENT QUESTION:**

1. That concludes all of the questions. Is there anything else you would like to add or felt that you may have left out?

#### **THERE ARE THREE WAYS YOU CAN ANSWER A CLOSING STATEMENT:**

1. You can just thank them for their time and then get up to leave (some candidates utilize this method).

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2. You can just ramble on, repeat things you've already said, and sound disorganized and unprepared (most candidates utilize this method).
3. You can have a strong, powerful, jaw-dropping closing statement that has been prepared and rehearsed (very few candidates utilize this method – and I think this is the best way to handle the closing statement).

### **HOW LONG SHOULD A CLOSING STATEMENT BE?**

In a perfect world, it should be anywhere from 30 seconds to 90 seconds. Any more than that and you're going to bore them to death and have them contemplate reducing your overall score you have tried so hard to do your best at.

### **WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD YOUR CLOSING STATEMENT CONTAIN?**

Your closing statement is not, I repeat not, an opportunity to repeat everything you have said in your opening statement and in your interview. While it can be true that people learn through repetition, and also remember things through repetition, the goals of your closing statement are to:

1. Include things you may have left out in your opening statement (important accomplishments, knowledge, skills, and / or abilities).
2. Let the oral board know that you really want the position you are applying for (surprisingly enough, many candidates fail to let the oral panel know that they really want the position they are applying for and that they really want to work for the agency they are applying for).
3. Leave the oral board wanting to hear more about you (as opposed to the opposite – their wanting you to leave the room as fast as you humanly possible).

Does every agency allow candidates to have a closing statement? No; but it is better prepared to have one than not have one. If they don't allow you the opportunity to make a closing statement, you better hope you were able to cover all of the bases in your previous questions. Since some departments do not permit closing statements, this is why I feel it is important to state all of your key accomplishments, your pertinent knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as your desire and motivation to become a member of that agency you are applying for in your opening statement and in your other questions you are answering.

When I was testing for the position of entry-level firefighter, I quickly learned I had to have a closing statement that would just drive home the fact to the oral board that I was the best candidate for the position. I also learned I would have to provide some form of "shock-value" to my interview. When I say shock-value, I mean it in a positive way. Virtually every candidate has something positive and unique to offer the fire department

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in the way of knowledge, skills, and / or abilities. However, most of the candidates typically do not know how to make themselves stand out and be remembered in a positive way.

When I have to participate in an oral board (as an interviewee), I know that one of the best ways to have the oral board remember me is to have strong opening and closing statements. I also know another way is to provide some form of “shock-value” so that they will remember me for at least the rest of the time the oral boards are in existence. Why is this so important? Well, oral boards are expected to be non-biased and objective, and are not supposed to judge one candidate to another candidate. They are supposed to objectively grade candidates against a pre-determined and standardized rating form. Well, I think we all can agree it is virtually impossible to do this, because we all are biased in one form or another. Even if the oral board members are briefed and trained in advance to help reduce bias and subjectivity, it is still impossible for them to not be influenced by you in some form or fashion; that is human nature and something you should try to work on to go in your favor. Now providing “shock-value” is nothing that is illegal, immoral, or unethical. It is providing the oral board with information that will hopefully show them how UNIQUE you are as compared to other candidates.

For example, when I first started testing to become a firefighter, I was working full-time at a retail drug store chain. I was getting paid a decent wage (so I thought at the time) and was having fun working there. However, I soon realized it was not the career for me to continue in for the next 30 years. When I made the decision to put as much time as I could into becoming a firefighter, I knew I would probably have to go back to part-time status so that I could have more time to take tests, educate myself, go to paramedic school, perform volunteer work, etc. Going part-time was going to cost me about \$20,000 per year in lost wages, but I knew it was going to be worth it in the long run.

I ended up packaging that into my closing statement as a form of “shock-value” to prove to the oral boards that I was motivated and dedicated to becoming a firefighter, and that I was willing to make sacrifices to get into the fire service.

### **SAMPLE CLOSING STATEMENT #1:**

Here is the closing statement I used when I was testing for entry-level firefighter:

*I would like to first thank the members of the oral board for your time and for allowing me to be here today. In the short time we have been together, I hope I have shown you how much I want to become a firefighter for the \_\_\_\_\_ fire department. Becoming a firefighter is something I have wanted since I was a little kid. I realize that sounds cliché, but it is true. At a young age, I was visiting fire stations on a regular basis, I was a subscriber to firehouse magazine in it's first year of existence, I was listening to the local fire departments on my scanner, and I was talking about a career as a firefighter with a couple of family*

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*friends who had worked for the San Leandro Fire Department – one is now a captain and the other is a deputy chief. Both of those officers have helped me realize that I want a career in the fire service.*

*Lastly, I hope I have been able to show you all how motivated and dedicated I am to becoming a firefighter. I have been testing now for the last few years; I have been driving around the state taking firefighter examinations and participating in fire related educational and training opportunities so that I can best prepare myself for the career of my dreams. However I am ready to settle down and get on with my career.*

*I have also made many sacrifices to become a firefighter, the biggest one being the \$20,000 pay cut when I stepped down from my management position at Longs Drugs to a part-time position, so that I could have more time to take tests, further my education, and better prepare for a career in the fire service. Becoming a firefighter with the \_\_\_\_\_ fire department would be a dream come true; please give me the opportunity to work for the \_\_\_\_\_ fire department and I will do my best to be an asset to the department!*

If you were on the oral board and you heard a closing statement similar to the one above, do you think you would remember the candidate? You bet you would. Would that closing statement help you stand out above the other candidates? You bet it would!

Shortly after I mentioned that I took a \$20,000 a year pay cut to better prepare myself for a career in the fire service, it was not uncommon to see the jaws of the oral board members hit the table (or so it appeared) and see them start smiling and showing some enthusiasm? Why would they act this way? Partly because they could maybe relate and/or appreciate what I was doing, partly because I had maybe shown them truly how motivated and dedicated I was at becoming a firefighter, and partly because they had probably not heard many great closing statements in their time on the panel.

Think about that. The same oral board is interviewing candidates for two weeks straight, for eight hours each day, and seeing new candidates every 30 minutes. Is it tough for the oral board to remain focused and motivated? Of course it is. Besides being hard work for them to have to sit and stay focused and objective, it doesn't help when the majority of the candidates come through their panel sounding like each other (clone answers, unenthusiastic, boring, unprepared, unmotivated, unable to validate what they say, unorganized, etc.). Do what you can to be the candidate that is the one that stands out for the day (and the entire length of the panel) so that you make them compare you against the other candidates.

### **SAMPLE CLOSING STATEMENT #2:**

Here is the closing statement I used when I took the captain's test:

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## **The Opening Statement & The Closing Statement**

*First of all, I would like to thank you, the members of the board, for your time and your effort. Second, I hope I have been able to show that I have the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the position of Fire Captain and how my education, training, and experience have prepared me for the position of Fire Captain. Something I have believe that sets me apart from the other well qualified candidates is my motivation, dedication, desire, and most of all, enthusiasm in becoming a fire Captain for the Department. A promotion to Fire Captain would be a dream come true for me.*

*My preparation began even before I was hired here as an entry-level Firefighter/Engineer. I figure I have spent over 1500 hours taking classes anywhere throughout the state from Chico down to San Bernardino. While the department pays for the tuition, I have spent thousands of dollars, out of my own pocket, on motel rooms, have driven thousands of miles in my car, and have spent countless hours away from my wife (I'm very lucky that she supports me 100% and also works in the fire service). All of this just to prepare me to be the best fire officer I can be. I have made a lot of sacrifices to get where I am at today. Give me the chance and you can count on me to continue my motivation, dedication, desire, and enthusiasm to the fire service, to the community, to the Department, and to the position of fire captain. When the going gets tough, I plan to be the Captain that my Battalion Chief has to worry about the least. I have prepared myself to be the best that I can be so that I can provide the best possible service to the members of the department and the citizens that are served by the Department. Thank you very much!*

The closing statement above must have worked; I scored 100% on the oral interview and came out number one in the assessment center!

### **SUMMARY:**

The key thing to remember about the closing statement is that you want to leave the board wanting to hear more and to have them smiling and talking about you (in a positive way) after you have left the room. Correlate a closing statement to the music world. When a band has finished their main set, they say goodbye to the audience and the lights go down. "San Jose – you've been great! We'll see you soon! At this point, the lights go down and the audience will usually start clapping for an encore (typically one, two, or three additional songs). If you have ever been to a concert, you can appreciate the energy in the air when the band is ready to do an encore and when they have finished their encore. If the band did their jobs, you left the concert feeling great and with a very positive feeling of the band, and you usually talk about the concert the next day at work or at school to your friends. This is no different from someone in an oral board.

The oral board wants everyone to succeed and they want to hear and see everyone at their best. However, since nobody is perfect, the oral board usually sees people from

# Oral Interview Preparation Tips

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their best to their worst; and most people are at their average. Use the closing statement to your advantage and strive to be one of those candidates that the oral board is talking about for days after the interview (in a positive way – there are enough candidates oral board members talk about that were not at their best performance level – try not to fall in that category).

Take the time to write out your closing statement and to put it on your computer (just like I suggested doing with your opening statement). That way you can modify it as necessary and also print it out to review with your opening statement while you are waiting to be called in to the oral board. Most candidates come across as average candidates – that is why it is so critical for you to have a strong closing statement; it is an additional tool for you to use when you are in an oral board interview to help score the most points you can so that you don't have to take another test in your career!

### About the Author:

Steve Prziborowski has over 20 years of fire service experience, currently serving as the Deputy Chief of Administrative Services for the Santa Clara County (Los Gatos, CA) Fire Department where he has worked since 1995. Steve is also an instructor for the Chabot College (Hayward, CA) Fire Technology Program, where he has been instructing fire technology and EMS classes since 1993. Four and a half years at Chabot were also spent as the Fire Technology Coordinator, and seven years as the EMT Program Director and Primary Instructor. Steve was named the 2008 California Fire Instructor of the year, is a current Board Member of the California Fire Chiefs Association serving as the Area 5 North Director, and is a Former President of the Northern California Training Officers Association. Steve is a state-certified Chief Officer and Master Instructor and has earned a Master's degree in Emergency Services Administration, as well as a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and an Associate's Degree in Fire Service Technology.

Steve has completed the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, and has received Chief Fire Officer and Chief Training Officer Designation through the Commission on Professional Credentialing. Steve is a contributing editor to Firehouse.com and FireNuggets.com, is a regular speaker and presenter at fire service events and conferences across the country, and has authored over 100 articles in all of the leading fire service publications. Steve recently published three (3) books: one (1) for the fire service promotional candidate: "How To Excel At Fire Department Promotional Exams," and two (2) for the entry level fire service candidate: "Reach For The Firefighter Badge," and "The Future Firefighter's Preparation Guide," all of which are available on his websites below in either soft cover or eBook format.

For more information on becoming a firefighter, or getting promoted in the fire service, visit his websites at [www.chabotfire.com](http://www.chabotfire.com) and [www.code3firetraining.com](http://www.code3firetraining.com)

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