

## **“The Probie’s Guide to the Engine Company: Lineman” A review of what should be the basics**

**By Bill Carey**

This is the final article in the “Probie’s Guide” series, and will review areas that are important to the nozzle team, especially the Lineman. The intent is not to rehash what should have been taught and learned in introductory firefighter training, but to remind us that there is more to simply pulling on the bale and tossing water around. For this article we will have to provide a few definitions that allow both the urban and rural firefighter to be on the same page. Depending upon where you are located, the terminology may be different. Lineman: Firefighter assigned to the nozzle position; Nozzle Team: composed of the Lineman, Backup Firefighter and Engine Company Officer; Fire Room: for the purpose of this article, Fire Room refers to a ‘room and contents’ fire in a private dwelling. Many training discussions fall into the trap of trying to ‘what if’ the subject matter to every hypothetical problem. To understand the key points in this article, start out by keeping it simple. The probie must understand that failing tasks that are personal to him, shouldn’t contribute to why the fire attack was not successful. These tasks are: having all your PPE; doing your assigned equipment checks and correcting any problems; learning your response area; properly estimating the stretch; and selecting the proper size and length hoseline. With that said, we’ll look at sizing up the fire room, operating the nozzle, communication and problems specific to the lineman.

### **Sizeup the Fire Room**

The last thing the lineman needs to do after entering the fire room is to put water on the fire. Of course there are exceptions based upon conditions encountered, but in this instance we are talking with regard to a firefighter’s inexperience and panic [1] [2] [3]. So long as fire conditions do not indicate flameover and rollover, the lineman should use the light from the fire to sizeup what is actually burning. This only takes a few seconds, if that, calming the lineman and allowing him and the rest of the nozzle team to see what is actually burning. This slight pause also allows the nozzle team to see any hazards such as holes in the floor or booby traps; possible victims in the fire room; and identify areas of refuge or means of egress if conditions instantly deteriorate.

### **Operating the Nozzle**

Rather than review what you should have already been taught early on, we’ll reiterate two basics:

- Open the nozzle up all the way when directed to. Keep your hand off of the bale. This way, if you stumble or fall, the flow of water will not be shut down.
- Try to keep the nozzle slightly out in front of you and not up under your armpit. This allows a better range of motion when directing the stream and is less fatiguing.

## Communication

Depending upon your department's SOPs (or the lack thereof), the communication among the nozzle team is to be learned and understood during training. The engine company officer should be the person to call for the hoseline to be charged or the lineman if no officer is present. The reason for this is to ensure that the hoseline is properly stretched and in position to quickly attack the fire. Being fast has no advantage if you are in the fire room and still have two lengths kinked up at the front door. The basics have to be mastered first and then adapted to how your department operates. When it comes to the topic of charging the hoseline, we shouldn't become led astray in the debate about entering with a dry or charged hoseline. Again, as your SOPs state is how you should operate, however I'm not saying that the nozzle team should crawl right up underneath the fire with a dry line. I am saying that you should **use common sense**; one length of charged 1 3/4-inch hoseline weighs approximately 80 pounds. A dry length weighs approximately 40 pounds. It is obvious to see the choice that will be easier to stretch, based upon conditions present. Add this to the understanding of what should be a safe refuge. In the one-story private dwelling, this may be the front door. In a multi-story private dwelling, where our sizeup leads us to believe the fire is on an upper floor, the safe refuge may be the bottom or top of the interior stairway. This ensures a rapid attack on the seat of the fire and minimizes the fatigue on the members advancing the line.

Other than encouragement from the engine company officer, there is really very little talk among the nozzle team; however in my experience, I have seen three areas that are worth noting:

- Water flow and nozzle problems. The lineman must immediately communicate any problems he is having with the flow, pressure or problems with the nozzle itself.
- More Line, Move Up. An area of confusion comes from when the lineman calls for more line and the rest of the nozzle team move the line and themselves forward. The lineman may find himself as a spot where he wants to ready himself and open the nozzle, or he may see a glimpse of a hole in the floor. Moving the line forward, along with the excitement to 'get in there and get some' could push the lineman into a precarious position. Again, training among the nozzle team will solve this problem.

## Problems Specific to the Lineman

- Entering the fire room without water. Reiterating what was mentioned earlier, if you advance a dry line into the fire room and continue to wait while the line is charged, or while water supply problems are being corrected, you will burn. The fire does not pause and greet you in a line of battle like the French and English in the 1700's. It is still eating the building, still radiating heat, and still bringing everything else, including you, to the point of flashover.
- Failure to communicate attack with other crews. The lineman has to be aware of where other crews are operating. Depending on your department, this may be addressed by the engine company officer or the lineman himself. Companies need to know the confirmed location of the fire as well as where each other are operating, to avoid problems in the fire attack.

Review this article along with the past "Probie's Guide" articles and determine what can be used personally and what can be adapted to your department. If you have any questions or significant points that relate to your department, email me and I'll present them in a later training article for others to learn about.

**Next Article:** "The Initial Stretch. How the First Line Goes, So Goes the Fire"

## References

1. "Toward a Typology of Dynamic and Hazardous Work Environments" Scharf-T, Vaught-C, Kidd-P, Steiner-LJ, Kowalski-KM, Wiehagen-WJ, Rethi-LL, Cole-HP NIOSH, 2002  
*"Such hazards can cause the greatest of problems when a worker sees what he or she expects to see and does not identify the hazard as feature requiring attention."* Referring to how hazards can be obscured and blend into the background, disappearing into the normal scene.
2. "Why Do People Do What They Do?" Schnieder and Sears, 1992. Information to make decisions, based on past experiences; imagination; good and bad hopes.
3. Ibid. An individual's behavior at any particular time is dominated by his strongest need. Any lower need not satisfied will take precedence over higher ones, if the lineman is scared, then self-preservation will overcome everything else, proper training included.

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