

Leander Fire Department Customer Service Guide

**“Our job is solving your
problem no matter
what it may be.”**



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Introduction

The Leander Fire Department is starting into a new era with the addition of stations, equipment, volunteers, and staff. This era will create a legacy that is reflective of the organizational values and passion for serving the citizens of Leander. This will hopefully become a tradition of which we can be very proud. It is a tradition that we build on every day - a tradition that must be continued by the next generation of Leander firefighters and the next and so on.

As employees of the City of Leander and members of the Leander Fire Department, our mission is to provide the best service possible to the citizens of Leander. We have a personal, professional, and a contractual obligation to be physically and mentally ready every time the alarm sounds.

Most members of the Leander Fire Department understand and embrace this goal. The purpose of this guide is to emphasize and explain our mission for those who may not have learned it or for those who may have forgotten it. This should also help reinforce the importance of our mission for all members.

Our jobs are multifaceted. However, the bottom line must always be “customer service.” A positive attitude is clearly a must. Seventy percent of our calls are for some form of medical assistance, 20% are for fires ranging from brush to buildings and 10% are various service calls. Every call is very important to the person who called. Each of those calls is an opportunity to interact with the public. That experience must be a positive experience for the person who called. Although we cannot solve every problem, we should make an honest, good faith attempt, using all of our resources to assist each person who calls.

In most cases we are only four to six minutes away from any resident in Leander. That places us in a unique position. We can and should be viewed as the principal safety net for our citizens.

Emergencies occur 24 hours a day. It doesn't matter if we are doing our physical training, if we just sat down for dinner or if it is four o'clock in the morning. We exist as Leander Firefighters to respond quickly, any time, day or night, and to arrive on the scene safely with a positive attitude and provide the best service we can. This is our charge as defined by the Fire Chief, the City Manager, the Mayor and Council and the citizens of Leander. Any member who cannot comply with this objective should consider a different occupation.

Routine Calls Important

Our job is more than just getting up for the “big one.” When there is a major fire, people trapped at an auto accident, or a child drowning, we get pumped up. We run to the truck, drive as fast as we can and usually do an outstanding job. But a professional does a good job on every call.

It's the routine call, shift after shift which separates the professional from the amateur. As the volume of calls continues to increase, it is easy to become complacent. Each call is our most important call at that time. We must be professional in our demeanor and treatment. We exist in a fish bowl. What we do is subject to the scrutiny of our peers, the person who called us, our supervisors, the elected officials, and the taxpayers in general.

Competition for Scarce Resources

The private sector has gone through a decade of downsizing. Millions of jobs have been eliminated. The public sector has not escaped entirely. From Pittsburgh to Fresno, fire stations have been closed and firefighters have been laid off. Demands on government are increasing faster than revenues. Competition for tax dollars is fierce. Our ability to progress will depend on our ability to relate to those who call us at four in the morning or during our dinner or while we are doing our fitness training.

The pressure on all sectors of government is enormous. From the federal government to the local school district, taxpayers will not tolerate waste and they are not willing to increase taxes. Today's tax burden is already perceived as too high. State legislators and City Councils encourage competition from the private sector. The demand for greater efficiency is the norm.

Customers

Viewing those who receive our services as "customers" is a major cultural change for many of us. Every interaction with the public is an opportunity to positively impact public perception of the Leander Fire Department and its members. We respond to over 1400 calls each year and growing. On average, each call is viewed by the person who called and two or three friends, relatives or bystanders. In 3-4 years, every person in Leander will receive assistance or view us treating a patient or watch us at a fire or other emergency. That places us in a truly unique position to educate the public through our appearance, attitude and actions.

Customer Needs

Understanding our customers and their needs allows us to maintain a seat at the table when decisions are made regarding City revenues. One of the more difficult things for some of our members to grasp is that we don't get to define our job. I sometime hear, "I was signed up to be a firefighter, not an EMS person" That, unfortunately, is the cry of the dinosaur. Imagine someone at Intel, Motorola, or Saturn telling their boss that they were hired only for this or that. They would be mumbling to themselves in the unemployment line. We may have been hired to be firefighters, but the duties of firefighters in Leander and around the country have changed. Our continued value and compensation is dependent on our ability to recognize and implement those changes. Our job is to serve the citizens of Leander in any manner that enhances their safety and well

being as defined by the Fire Chief together with City Management, the Mayor and Council and the electorate.

If we can make the children of Leander safe by teaching safety behaviors in grade school classes, then that is our job. If we can increase the survival rates of heart attack patients by learning and using state of the art equipment and the latest medical techniques, then that is our job. If fires in high rise buildings are a threat to the occupants in those buildings, then we must preplan and train to fight high rise fires. The importance of fire fighting and emergency medical service will continue. But we should not be afraid of or adverse to new and different demands for our services.

Customer Service

The LL Bean Company is often used as a customer service model. They answer more than 10,000 customer inquiries a day! It is a 600 million dollar a year outdoor and sports products company. One hundred percent satisfaction is not just a goal with them; it's a guarantee. Their guarantee states, "All our products are guaranteed to give 100% satisfaction in every way. Return anything purchased from us anytime that proves otherwise."

LL Bean assumes that a customer:

- is the most important person ever in the company.
- is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him.
- is not an interruption of our work – they are the purpose of it.

That philosophy would serve us well. **The people who call us with their problems are not interruptions to our work. They are our work.** In our case they are dependent on us, but we are also dependent on them. They are the most important persons in our company.

Attitudes

Attitudes are infectious. Each day we have an opportunity to reinforce positive attitudes and attempt to correct negative behavior. We are customers every day in our personal lives. Whether we are going to the store, eating at a restaurant or purchasing a pair of socks we expect quality service in our personal lives. We should provide nothing less in our professional lives.

If you witness an occasion of poor customer service, it is your obligation to point it out either at the time or when you get back to the station. If poor customer service is not dealt with at the time, then it becomes the norm. We have little room for negative attitudes or behavior on the Leander Fire Department.

Internal Customers

All members are important. Each is responsible and accountable for his or her action or inaction. We are all members of the same team, but each of us is an individual with different beliefs and opinions. We are made up of men, women, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, Asians and other cultures. Each of us is unique with our own feelings, ideas, hopes and ways to do things. We should respect our diversity. From that diversity we gain strength.

There is zero room for prejudice and intolerance on the Leander Fire Department. Our treatment of the public begins with how we treat each other. Each of us has a right to be treated with dignity and respect. In turn, we have an obligation to treat others with the same dignity and respect.

Summary

The Leander Fire Department is building a history of providing quality service to the citizens of Leander each year. Because we respond to increasing numbers of calls each year, some calls may seem routine to us. Each call however, is important to the person who called. As professionals we must provide excellent service on each and every call, to each and every customer. Our customer service begins with our respect for and how we treat each other. It never ends. We have an obligation to providing the best service possible to those who need our assistance. That philosophy must be continued by each successive generation of Leander Firefighters.

General Rules for Providing Good Customer Service

Calls for Service

- Respond quickly but safely.
- Approach intersections moderately to avoid causing accidents.
- Shut off the siren one or two blocks away when possible.
- Be professional in your dress and appearance. No un-tucked shirttails or unlaced boots.
- Demonstrate professionalism and competency during dismount and while approaching the scene.
- Approach the scene in a calm and organized manner.
- Don't be laughing or talking loudly when you approach the scene.
- Create a cooperative, professional working environment.
- Avoid stereotyping. Approach each person as an individual.
- Don't speak harshly or with a condescending tone.
- Try to reduce barriers to patient communication. Establish eye contact.
- Eliminate controllable noises (TVs, radios, etc.).
- Place yourself at the appropriate level to enhance communications (stand, sit, kneel or squat).
- Try to build trust with patient and his/her family.
- Calmness is very important, especially with seriously injured children. Give injured children a stuffed animal.
- Explain what you are doing in lay terms.
- Respect people's homes and possessions.
- Be careful with the placement of equipment. Don't place our equipment on the customer's furniture.
- Take complete and thorough sets of vitals.
- Always conduct a thorough primary and secondary evaluation.
- Proper documentation is most important.
- Use good judgment in all situations. Don't get upset or emotional.
- Don't use unprofessional language, gestures or behavior that could be considered as insensitive or inappropriate.
- Don't allow abusive patients to injure you or your crew. Use appropriate restraint when dealing with such individuals.
- Use appropriate social service agencies when needed.
- Use the Connectors as a resource.

Other Considerations

- The station is our home. We should treat it that way.
- Maintenance of our stations and apparatus is a responsibility for all of us.
- When anyone comes into the station, greet him or her cordially. Find out what they need and help them if you can.
- A visit to a Leander fire station should be a positive experience for everyone.
- Answer the phone courteously and promptly. Give your name and station number.
- Provide assistance to the caller.

- Be cautious, courteous, and considerate when driving to and from calls. Kids of all ages like “Big Red Trucks.” Smile, wave back.

Driving

- **Always** follow our driving/parking/backing safety guidelines.
- Current Leander traffic dictates we drive closer to the conservative part of the guideline – pushing the outer edge is nuts.
- Use every apparatus movement as an opportunity to impress spectators with the responsible, safe, patient, courteous management of your machine.
- Forecast and be considerate of the reactions of your driving neighbors – avoid scaring or surprising them.
- Be considerate of crewmembers – avoid scaring or surprising them.
- Kids (no age limit) love BRTs and you. They smile/wave – you smile/wave back; better yet, you smile/wave first (simple).

Telephone Etiquette

- Answer phone promptly.
- Initial LFD phone answer: Leander Fire Department location/Callee's name/"Can I help you?"
- Use positive, polite (nice) tone/style/language.
- If the call is for someone else or you must get information, ask the caller to please hold."
- Try to solve the caller's problem. If solution will take time, or if you need more info, get the caller's number and return the call. Don't leave the caller hanging on the line for a long time.
- If callee is not there, get the info required to complete the phone message note.
- Complete the note legibly and leave it in the standard message place.
- Lots of people use the station phone, so don't be a blab hog.
- LFD little kids' parents should always phone home before nighty-night.