



2026 Texas Fire Chiefs Association Annual Conference

# Building an Effective Leadership Training Program for Newly Promoted Officers

By: Mike Clements MPA, EFO, CFO, SHRM-SCP

# About Me: Mike Clements

- Assistant Chief

- Cy-Fair Fire Department, Houston, TX.
  - 22 years of service
    - Assistant Chief
    - Deputy Chief
    - Driver/Engineer
    - Firefighter/Paramedic

- Battalion Chief

- College Station Fire, CS TX
  - 18 years of service
    - Battalion Chief
    - Captain
    - Lieutenant
    - Driver/Engineer
    - Firefighter/Paramedic
    - 4 years IAFF Local President

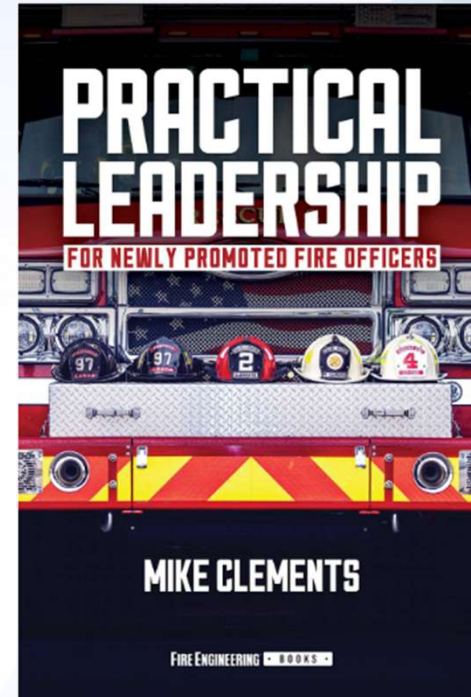


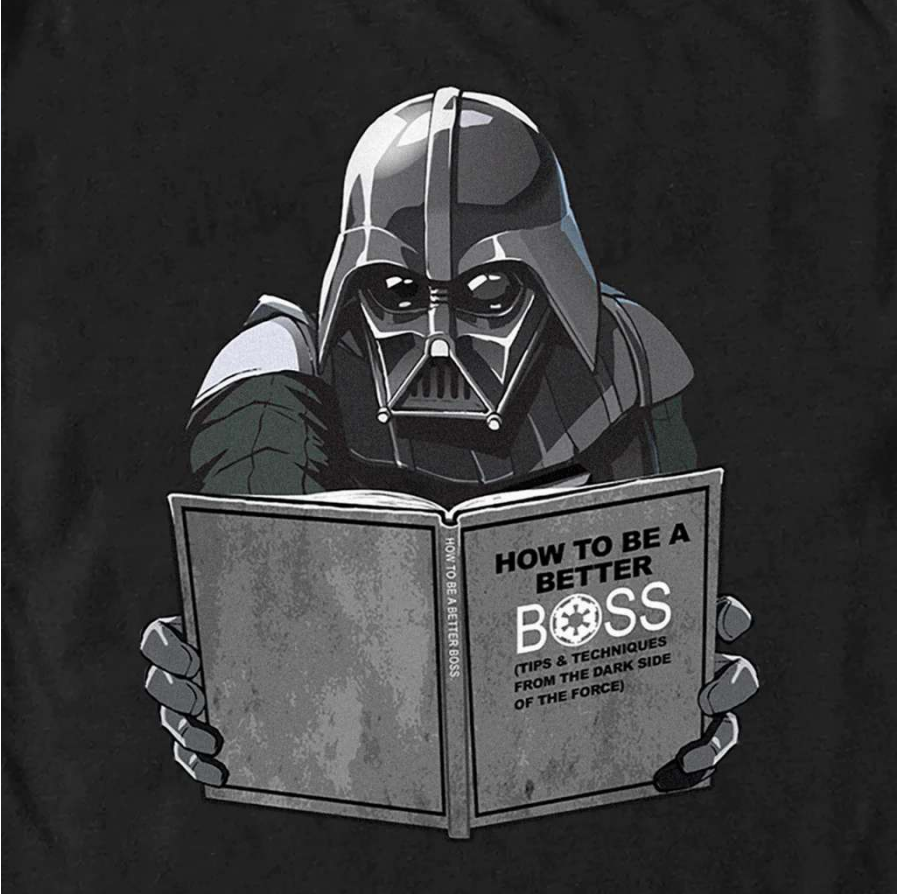
# About Me: **Mike Clements**

**FIRE ENGINEERING**  
• BOOKS •

- ***Practical Leadership for Newly Promoted Fire Officers***

***“Leadership isn’t about the badge. It’s about how you show up, set the tone, and serve your people. Lead well. Make a Difference”***







**Why it's so  
important to  
provide  
leadership  
training early.**

# Promotions are happening faster than leadership development.

- Texas Growth
- New officers may be technically acceptable but have little experience managing people, handling conflict, or **coaching others**.
- Rapid growth + seasoned leaders retiring, new officers have a short runway.
- With fewer mentors, new officers are left to figure things out on their own.

## Many new officers struggle with questions like:

- *When do I step in and when do I let my crew handle it?*
- *How do I correct someone who used to be my peer?*
- *How do I lead experienced firefighters who know more technically than I do?*
- **Early training helps officers understand their new role: not doing the work, but developing the people who do.**

**Early training gives new officers a framework before poor habits form.**



**They step into their role with an understanding of basic leadership principles.**

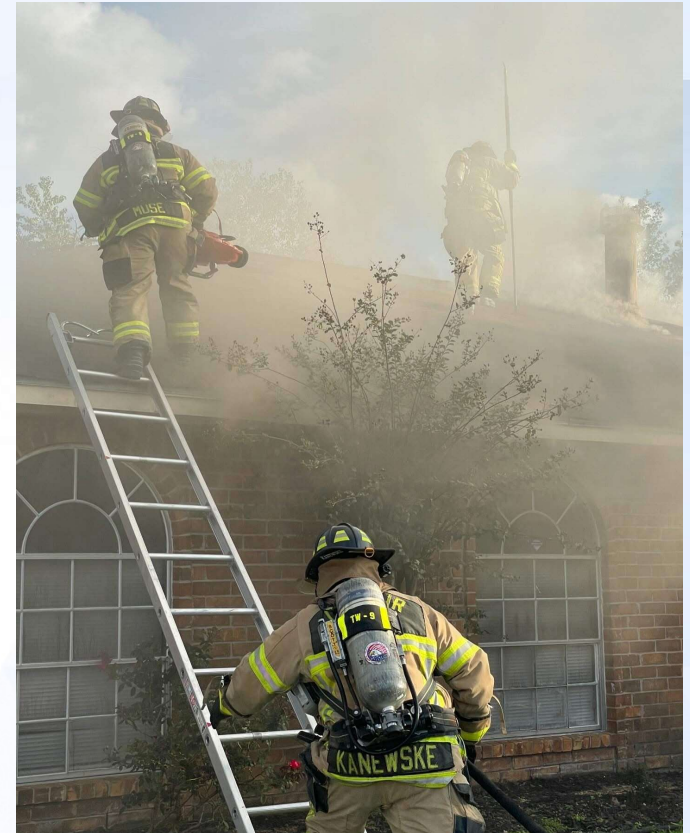
**It creates consistency and a shared leadership language across the organization.**



- **Shared training builds a common language, consistent expectations, and stronger culture across shifts and stations.**

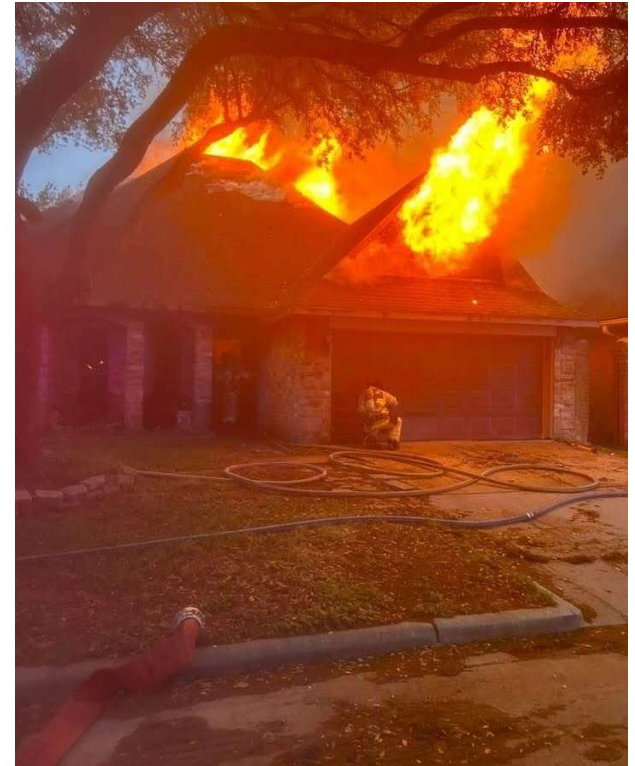
**Early involvement from senior leaders results in stronger relationships across the organization.**

**It's important to build these early in their journey.**



# It strengthens the leadership pipeline for the future.

- Officers who receive early development are more confident, more effective, and more likely to grow into strong captains, chiefs, and command staff later in their careers.



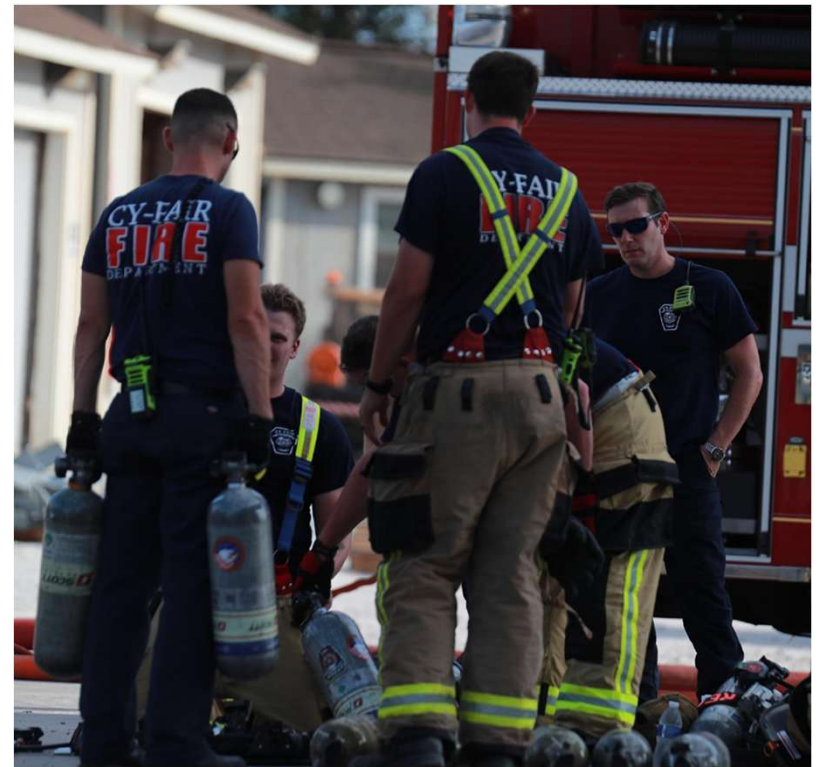
**This training ensures that rapid organizational growth does not outpace leadership capability.**



**What are some of the  
biggest issues NPOs  
face?**

# When leadership training is delayed, NPOs are often forced to learn through experience alone.

- **If officers are left to figure leadership out on their own, they naturally fall back on what they have seen before-good or bad.**



**They develop bad habits, which become ingrained.**



**Over time, ineffective communication styles, avoidance of conflict, or inconsistent leadership behaviors can become deeply rooted.**

**Difficult to correct later.**

## **New officers can struggle to navigate the shift from peer to supervisor.**

- **One of the most difficult adjustments is supervising people who were recently friends or equals. (Buddy to Boss)**
- **Officers must set expectations, hold people accountable, and sometimes correct behavior.**
- **Without guidance, they may swing between being overly strict or trying too hard to remain “one of the crew.”**
- **This can weaken their standing with their crews, cause tension, and create confusion about boundaries and role.**

## **New leaders may not know how to manage difficult conversations, drama, and conflict. Small problems become big problems.**

- **New officers who lack leadership tools may ignore early warning signs of conflict, performance issues, or morale problems.**
- **Many officers have never been taught how to address these situations directly and professionally, so problems either get avoided or escalate.**

## **They may be unsure of how to balance operational leadership with personnel leadership.**

- Fire officers must lead during emergencies while also managing day-to-day station life:
- Many are well prepared for incident command but less prepared for the ongoing leadership responsibilities between calls.



# Many new officers struggle to manage ego, fear, and pride.

- Officers feel they must prove themselves immediately, which can lead to defensiveness, overconfidence, or reluctance to ask for help.
- Others hesitate to make decisions because they fear making mistakes.



# Leadership mistakes are amplified in close-quarters work environments.



- Crews live and work together in close quarters- personality conflicts, poor communication, and tension spread fast and can affect emergency performance.

# The “first supervisor effect” is real—and important to get right.

- A poorly prepared officer can unintentionally create a negative environment, while a well-prepared officer can shape firefighters into future leaders.
- Early training helps ensure the first leadership experience firefighters have is a positive one.



**Which skill sets should  
you focus on?**

**A few fundamentals, but  
don't overload them.**

# Communication and clarity

- **A common issue for new officers is assuming people understand what they mean. Leadership training helps officers communicate with clarity rather than assumption.**
- ***If your crew is confused, it's usually a communication issue- not a motivation issue.***

# Managing the Toxic Triad: Fear, Ego, and Pride

- One of the biggest internal challenges for new officers is managing their own **emotions and reactions**. Promotion can bring pressure to prove oneself, which sometimes shows up as defensiveness or overconfidence.



# Managing the Toxic Triad: Fear, Ego, and Pride (cont.)

- Leadership training should teach officers how to recognize and reduce:
  - **fear** of making mistakes
  - **ego** that prevents listening or learning
  - **pride** that keeps leaders from asking for help
- Officers who learn to manage these forces tend to make better decisions and maintain stronger relationships with their crews.

# Building trust and credibility

- New officers have a short window to establish credibility. Firefighters watch closely to see whether a new leader is consistent, fair, and dependable.
- Trust is not built through authority alone. It is built through daily leadership behavior.
- Relationship building skills are a must.

# Psychological safety and team culture

- A strong crew culture allows firefighters to speak up, ask questions, and share concerns without fear of embarrassment or punishment.
- When psychological safety exists, firefighters are more likely to raise safety concerns and share important information during incidents.



**Provide lots of tactics.**

**Don't just admire the  
problem, give solutions.**

# Frequency

# The most effective programs are not one-time events.



- Leadership skills develop through repetition and practice- the best approach is regular intervals, not a single class.

# Early training immediately after promotion

- Training within the first few months helps officers avoid early mistakes that damage relationships and establish bad habits before they set in
- Also helps set expectations



***We would never train firefighters on a critical skill once and assume they have mastered it.***

***Leadership should be treated the same way.***

**Length of training  
sessions.**

- **Session length needs to be long enough to allow meaningful discussion and practice, but short enough to fit realistically into operational schedules.**
- **A well-designed session includes: a concept introduction, real field examples, small-group discussion, breakouts and report backs and time for discussion.**
- **Shorter sessions become lectures; longer ones lose focus.**
- **Should encourage discussion of real challenges officers are facing**

**Who should teach it?**

# Combination of internal leaders and experienced instructors.

- The key is credibility.
- Officers are far more likely to engage with the material when it comes from people who understand the realities of the fire service and the department itself.



# Experienced command staff

- Battalion chiefs, deputy chiefs, and other experienced leaders are good primary instructors. They bring credibility because they have faced the same challenges the new officers are about to encounter.
  - Command staff can provide:
    - real examples from their careers
    - practical lessons learned from successes and mistakes
    - clear explanations of the department's expectations and values

## Experienced command staff (cont.)

- Their involvement also sends a strong message that **leadership development matters** to the organization.
- Another advantage is relationship-building. When command staff teach these sessions, new officers begin to see senior leaders as mentors and resources rather than distant authority figures.



# Highly respected company officers



- In many departments, the best teachers are well-respected captains or lieutenants who are known for leading strong crews.
- Because they work in the same role as the trainees, their examples often feel immediately relevant and realistic.

# External instructors or subject-matter experts



- Outside instructors can also add value, particularly when they bring specialized expertise.

**Breakouts are key.**

# **Leadership is learned through reflection and discussion.**

- **Technical skills can often be taught through demonstration and repetition.**
- **Leadership skills are different. Officers need to think through judgment calls, people problems, and communication challenges.**
- **Breakouts give them a chance to process these issues and hear how others approach them.**

# Officers bring valuable experience to the room.

- In most leadership classes, participants come from different departments and back-grounds.
- Breakouts allow officers to learn from one another's real-world experience.



# Discussion makes leadership concepts more practical.

- If only a lecture, officers may understand the ideas intellectually but struggle to apply them.
- Breakout discussions encourage participants to translate concepts into action by asking questions like:
  - “How would you handle this situation on your shift?”
  - “What has worked, or not worked, in your department?”
- Moves training from theory to practice.

# Breakouts keep participants engaged.



- Firefighters and officers tend to learn best when they are actively involved.

# The Value of Peer-to-Peer Learning

# Officers realize they are not alone in their challenges.



- Many officers hide uncertainty under pressure to appear capable. Peer discussions surface shared struggles, reducing anxiety and building confidence.

**It builds professional relationships across stations.  
They get to know each other.**

- **These connections can become valuable professional networks where officers continue to share ideas and advice long after the training session ends.**



# Reinforces leadership culture.

- When officers talk through leadership issues together, they begin to develop shared expectations about professionalism, accountability, and leadership behavior.



# The best leadership lessons come from other officers who have already faced the same challenges you are about to encounter.

- Peer learning allows you to tap into the collective experience of the room, making leadership training more practical, relatable, and impactful for newly promoted officers.



# **Best Practices/Lessons Learned**

# Best Practices/Lessons Learned

 <b>Leadership Training Agenda (Day 1)</b> 		
Time	Presentation	Presenter
8:00	Welcome / Who Are We? And Why Are We Doing This? (30 mins)	Introduction: Chief Reed Presenter: Chief Ramon
8:30	Mission & Values (20 mins, 10 mins Q&A)	Introduction: Chief Witt Presenter: Chief Reed
9:00	Employee Engagement Survey Overview (15 mins)	Introduction: Chief Grayson Presenter: Chief Clements
9:15	Break (15 mins)	
9:30	What To Expect In 2026 & Beyond (45 mins)	Introduction: Chief Clements Presenter: Chief Scallise
10:15	Budget Overview (30 mins)	Presenter: Chief Clements
10:45	What To Expect In 2026 & Budget Breakout (20 mins)	Presenter: Chief Reed
11:05	Break (10 mins)	
11:15	Expectations For Officers & Leaders (40 mins)	Presenter: Chief Grayson
11:55	Expectations For Officers & Leaders Breakout (20 mins)	Presenter: Chief Clements
12:15	Working Lunch & Town Hall / Open Forum (75 mins)	Presenter: Everyone
1:30	Mike McCall Lecture (2 hours & 45 mins - breaks provided)	Presenter: Mike McCall
4:15	Wrap Up / Evaluations	Chief Ramon

- Spend a lot of time in the planning phase.
- Our agenda looked very different in the beginning.
- Print the agenda so everyone knows what to expect. Don't rush your sessions.

## Best Practices/Lessons Learned (cont.)

- Run it professionally as possible. They will take it more seriously. Start on time, stay on schedule and end on time.
- De-cluster people. Assign tables randomly to encourage interaction between people who don't know each other..
- Make it fun where you can. (INTROS)
- Give adequate breaks.
- Do an evaluation. Make them anonymous and mandatory. Automate them so you can get the feedback quickly. Use feedback to improve.

# EVALUATION- K.I.S.S.



## 2026 Leadership Training Evaluation (Day 1)

Based on the day, what information did you find most valuable?

What are some areas where you would like to do a deeper dive?

What are 1-3 things you will do differently after today's training?

What sessions (if any) would you eliminate?

How long have you been an officer or manager at Cy-Fair Fire Department \*

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how likely would you be to recommend this type of training to others? \*

If you rate below a 7, what would you recommend to make it better?

Submit

# AI Tools For Evaluation and Dashboard



Combined March 31 April 1 April 6 April 7

Overall Satisfaction

8.52 / 10

Net Promoter Score

44.5

Total Responses

182

Promoters

98 (53.8%)

Passives

67 (36.8%)

Detractors

17 (9.3%)

## NPS Breakdown

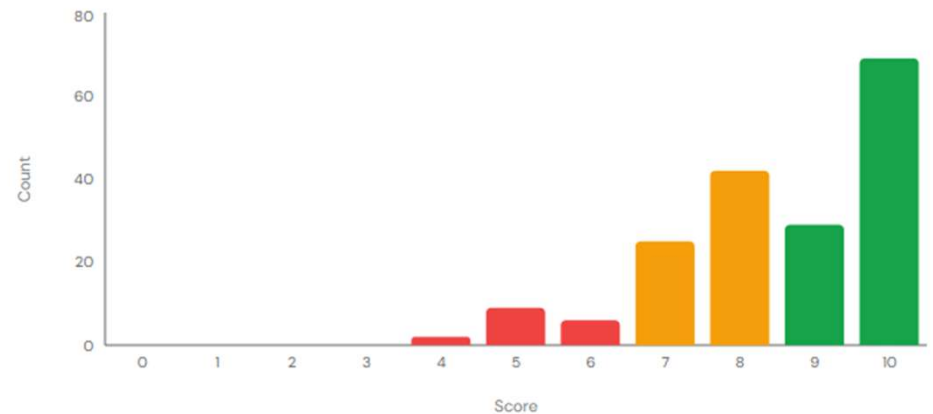
Visual proportion of Promoters, Passives, and Detractors

Promoters Passives Detractors

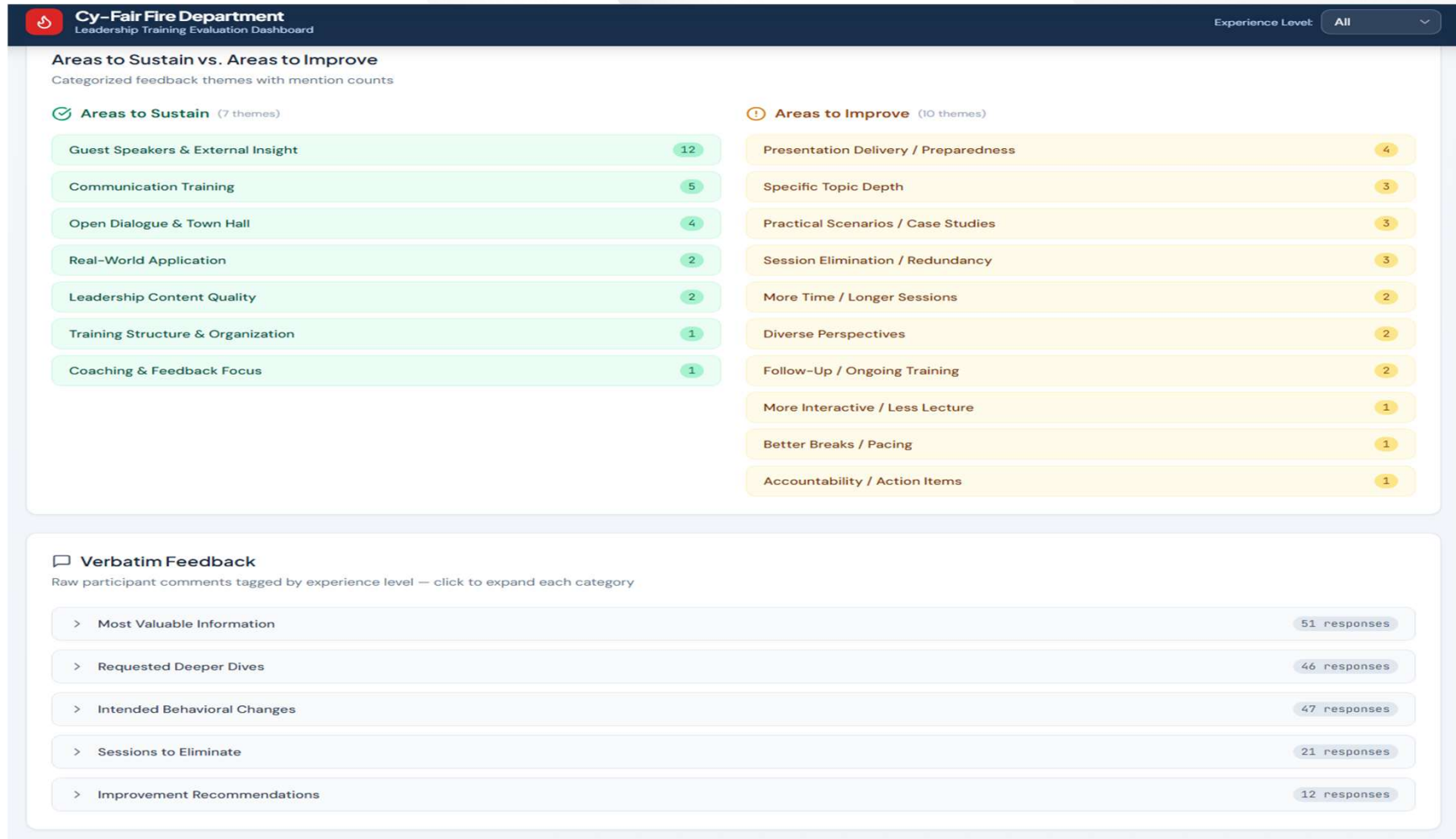


## Score Distribution

Count of responses for each recommendation score (0-10)



# AI Tools For Evaluation and Dashboard



# Thank you!

## Let's stay connected.



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*Practical Leadership for Newly  
Promoted Fire Officers*

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