

The Best Damn Proby, Period.

When I came into the fire service there were a lot of cultural behaviors that were unique and very unfamiliar. Knowing this culture will help you during your probationary period. After finishing my probation, I wrote this to help others during their probation and here's my best advice for you.

On the 1st day to any new house bring Donuts. Guys tend to like Lamar's. If you're going to a single company house get a dozen, or if you're going to a double company, get two dozen assorted. Make sure you bring your checkbook, or some cash to pay the house bill (usually \$20-\$30 a month) and \$10-\$12 for the daily league (lunch and dinner). Before you get to your house try to learn the crew's names on all shifts. When you answer the phone (often in the morning), you will be expected to know who they are.

At the Firehouse

In the Morning

Before you get to the firehouse, set the alarm on your phone/watch to vibrate at 6:28.

Arrive around 6 (no later than 6:15)

Bring newspaper in and lay it out on the table, Make the coffee, empty dishwasher, open gates for vehicles, and raise the Flag.

Relieve your guy before 6:25

At 6:28 (when your alarm goes off) go to the watch desk and tidy-up, fill out the tab, and standby for the vocal alarm. (Stay busy, don't just stand at the desk) Make sure you are the one that hits that vocal alarm (Guys will mess with you)

As soon as the vocal alarm goes off and you've acknowledged, turn on the lights in the bay and kitchen, and begin inventory of the rig. *Know the rig.* Know where everything is.

For Truck companies, especially know the location of:

Irons (compliment your senior)	Pike pole
Lightwater	Thermal imager/gas meters
extrication equipment	

For Engines companies especially know the location of:

200' 1 3/4" preconnect	200' 2 1/2" preconnect
hose packs (for box alarms)	high rise purse
irons (compliment your senior)	shovels
absorbent	lightwater

You will use at least one of these on your first day, but again, know where EVERYTHING is. In addition, be familiar with the med bag and O2. Know where the nasal canulas and NRB's are. Make sure the O's are at least at 800. If any lower than 800, get a new bottle.

Know where the BP cuff and stethoscope are.

While doing inventory, set a few benchmarks that you go and fill coffee for the other firefighters. When you fill up the ice in the cooler is usually a good time to go. When you pour coffee, don't just pour for the guys in the kitchen. If you see a cup sitting somewhere (in the bay, the bathroom, wherever) fill it.

As the inventory is getting done talk with the off-going crew. Ask if there's anything new with the rig. When you were standing at the desk waiting for the vocal alarm and you checked the tab, did they go on fires? If so, maybe they used AFFF that needs to be filled; maybe the rig needs to get topped off with water. Maybe you have some hose to roll later. If it was a car accident, maybe they used absorbent.

As soon as the inventory is done start the house chores.

Clean the bathrooms:

Clean all toilets, wash the sinks, counters, and mirrors and if you need to, use a paper towel on anything that needs to shine (faucets, mirrors, etc.)

If there is a soap rack, wash the rack as well. Refill the paper towels, and empty the trash. When all of the bathrooms are clean and all the trash is taken out. Mop all bathroom floors.

Throughout the whole morning, don't forget to pour coffee. Bathrooms should be clean by 7:30. That's when roll call is. Some houses have everyone sit down and go over roll call, other houses are more lax, but in either case, be done by 7:30 so you'll be ready. (Roll call is when everyone meets in the kitchen and the officer will relay any important info.)

If the house has a watch tab, write down "0730 Roll Call ' _ ' Shift On." If you need an example, look at the previous days tab.

As soon as the bathrooms and roll call are done, check to see what the house chore of the day is (kitchen day, floors, windows, etc.) Typically these are done as a crew, especially kitchen day, but if it's something that you can get a jump start on, like laundry, do it!

If you are at a chief's house, wash the chief's car and make sure the oxygen bottles in the back are filled (should have tape on them if they're good.) Check with your senior man about when it's a good time to do this. (Usually first thing in the morning).

Now the day begins. Some companies run stairs or work out, others don't.

The first day at a house I like to re-stripe as much as I can. I do this so that I can get familiar with where everything is.

Re-striping and cleaning the tools can get boring, so quiz yourself on district colors (RGWOBBY) or run through streets and houses in your head because officers will quiz you on that stuff, and you'll look like a stud if you can rattle off the answers. Re-striping should take most of the day.

Going to the Grocery Store:

At some point you'll go to the grocery store. Probies generally aren't expected to cook, but I've heard of guys that have cooked every shift on probation. Have a couple recipes for lunch and dinner ready and on a notecard in your pocket so when you get to the store and they ask "what are you cooking!?" You won't look like a deer in the headlights. Make sure you grab a radio before you get off the rig, and be the first in the store so you can get a shopping cart. Follow whoever the cook is. When you get back to the house, try to grab all the bags and empty them on the counter.

Cooking

Help with the cooking. Ask what needs to be done (typically chopping or stirring or something.). Even if they say they don't need help, wash dishes when they are done with them. (There should be dish soap in a container beneath the sink). If it seems like they REALLY don't need help, just keep checking back in with them.

If you're the cook, guys will ask to help you. If you need them, take the help! Cooking and medicals are the only two times that you get to call the shots, so don't hesitate to delegate if they volunteer.

A lot of houses will insist that if you cook, you eat first. They will not eat until you serve yourself first. Attempt to be the last one to grab a plate, but if they insist, go ahead and dig in. All other times you should be the last one to get a plate. This is not only courteous, but if everyone else sits down first, there will only be one chair left for you to sit in. Guys can be very particular about where they sit but eating last ensures you won't sit in someone else's spot. (You won't always sit in the same spot depending on rovers, and guys on Kelly day)

I have heard stories about guys that will race the proby to eat. It never happened to me, but just remember that you could go on a fire in the next 10 minutes and scarfing might not be a good idea. Try to finish eating first though. After you eat, guys will sit around for "happy hour." When you are done eating, get up and finish the dishes, put leftover food away and get the mop bucket ready outside the door (at dinner). Make sure you're the one that cleans the stove and mops the floor. Guys WILL wrestle you for the mop, so don't be afraid to get physical to keep it.

When to study

Typically after dinner is a good time to study. Talk with your officer and make sure it's cool. If you're on a company that didn't work out in the morning, now or during the afternoon is a good time to do that too. Again, check with your officer.

When to go to sleep

There's a grey area as to when to go to sleep. Chances are, your first few shifts you will be so on edge you will be the last one up regardless. But if you're not, a good rule to go by is don't be the first one to sleep. If it's pushing 10:30, there are only 1 or 2 guys up, and you can barely keep your eyes open, hit the sack. They probably had a nap during the day anyway, and won't be to bed for a while.

Before you go to bed:

Start the dishwasher, tidy up the kitchen & watch desk, refill sugar, get the coffee ready for the next morning, make sure all the doors are locked, fill out the next day's watch tab and turn off the main lights (Houses will usually keep on certain lights. Ask which ones they are). Set the alarm on your phone to vibrate at 6 the next morning and put it under your pillow. If you wake up and someone is already there and awake, wake up earlier the next shift. At most houses, 6 o'clock gave me plenty of time to get everything together. I always wanted to be the one up to start the coffee and get the paper. At one house that meant that I was up at 5:30 every morning because one guy came in at 5:45...sometimes that means you won't get as much sleep but you've got 2 days to recover. In any case, this is way better than the academy. Getting up at 5:30 should still feel like sleeping in.

Night calls

If you're on a company that runs any volume of calls, you are bound to get a couple night calls. Just like you do all day, make sure you hit the vocal acknowledgement button. Don't hit the machine start, unless you're at a house where you're supposed to. Some houses on busy intersections will hit machine start every call, but if you get a night call at a double house, the truckies just got done doing their roll, and you hit that bell while they are sleeping, they probably won't be very happy with you. (If for some reason you do hit it, there should be a machine silence button too.) It can be an easy mistake to make when you're tired.

If you're at a double house, every time the other rig gets a call, get up and hit the acknowledgement button and bring the exhaust hose back after they leave. They may tell you that you don't have to do it. Do it anyway.

When you wake up the next morning, go through the same routine you did the morning before. Get the paper, start coffee, unload the dishwasher, make sure you set your alarm, hit the vocal alarm...all that. When the oncoming shift relieves you, be there to take your own stuff to where they store the gear. Nobody will mess with your stuff. Leave it there at the firehouse. Start right in with the chores. Clean the bathrooms, take out the trash, mop, vacuum. You have 1 hour to stay busy and fill coffee. It will go by pretty quick. Guys will tell you that as soon as you're picked up you can leave. Stay. Do the chores the next morning. The oncoming shift will love you for doing their chores. They will tell you that you don't have to do them. Do them anyway. Just because you are doing chores, don't forget to pour coffee.

Quick tips

If you ever don't know what to do, ask your senior guy first. The senior guy is your buddy and will help you out if you have any questions. Wear your class B's all day. Some officers will tell you to take it off after dinner. That's fine, but put it in a safe place, or you could be missing pins or badges. Any time the phone rings, RUN to answer it. You won't make it every time, but make a legitimate effort, and don't be afraid to get physical if someone else races you to it.

If the Chief stops by:

Stop whatever you are doing. Notify the house on the intercom that the "Chief is in quarters." If there are oxygen bottles that need to be changed out, get the empty ones and exchange them. (Fresh bottles are in the back of the chief's vehicle. Open up the rear hatch and you can't miss it). Introduce yourself and offer the chief something to drink. This is the only time you won't be expected to look busy, but don't sit down. Stand up, pour coffee, and listen to the chief. Before the chief leaves, make sure he gets the outgoing mail and you get any incoming.

If a guest arrives:

If a visitor comes by the firehouse stop everything, get on the PA and say "Big Hammer" If they want a tour, you're the guide. A lot of houses will have plastic fire helmets, coloring books, and other stuff for kids. When kids come by, put all your gear on for them too.

On Calls

If you don't have any medical experience, don't worry. After a few calls you'll get the hang of it. Just ask the questions that are on the engineer's sheet, and give a clear handoff to the Paramedics when they arrive.

At the station

Double houses and single houses are different. In double houses, you keep your mouth shut. The less you say in a double house, the better.

In Single houses guys tend to talk to you more and that's ok, but the best thing in both scenarios is to keep your comments to yourself and learn.

This is a huge step-by-step of what to do and you're welcome to take what you want from it, but whatever you do keep busy. If you go above and beyond everything mentioned you will get a great reputation as an awesome proby, people will want to work with you in the future, and getting to a good house will be easier. Like it or not, the reputation you earn during your probation can follow you for your whole career, so get started on the right foot. Good luck, and remember, this isn't forever.