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FIREFIGHTER, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Advice for applicants:

- believe in yourself
- do your research
- talk to the people at your local fire station

I remember seeing those huge shiny red trucks tearing down the road with their sirens blaring, blue lights flashing on every side, and being hugely impressed that the firefighters at the windows were on their way to do something big, something extraordinary, something life-changing maybe... Those faces I had just glimpsed flashing past me might be about to dash into a raging inferno and drag someone out. It doesn't get more impressive than that!

And now, that's me. Ok, so there aren't infernos every day, but I get to be one of those faces. I get to be the face you remember for the rest of your life because on the day you most needed help, when you felt more helpless than you've ever felt before, it was my face you saw and you knew help had arrived. Do you know how amazing it feels, how good it feels coming to the end of your day knowing you have turned up on the worst day of someone's life and made a difference, or, even better, saved a life?

But that isn't how my career started. I worked in the City. I wore suits, shirts, high heels and cufflinks and spent an hour getting ready in the morning. I was an insurance broker. I talked to plenty of people every day, I did deals, socialised, had fun – but I never really made a difference. I enjoyed my job and it paid well, so I never thought about changing career.

That was until I moved. My 40-minute commute became a 2-hour one and suddenly I wasn't enjoying the work so much anymore. I was on the train at 6am and sometimes wasn't home until 10pm. It wasn't sustainable or enjoyable, so I quit.

And then I was stumped. I lived in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside, my days were suddenly my own and my husband supported my decision – but something was missing.

I was bored. I needed to do something, to be part of something and feel useful again. I needed to stretch myself.

I got work in a local insurance brokers but it wasn't the same. It was far too easy. Then one day I walked past my local fire station and saw a sign in the window for part-time firefighters. Wow, I thought to myself. That would be amazing. But I could never do it, so off I went.



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I passed the same sign for a few months. The voice in my head that had said 'I could never do that' had slowly changed to saying 'I wish I could do that'. I started to do a bit of physical training in my spare time and the voice in my head started saying 'I wonder if I could do that'.

One day I picked up the telephone. I called the station, and they asked me to pop in to see them. I was 5ft 4 (and a half, which is always important to add) and less than 9 stone and I was about to walk into a fire station to tell one of those serious-faced firefighters that I wanted to be a firefighter. Surely they would just laugh at me.

But they didn't. And they weren't serious-faced at all. They were just people like you and me. And they thought I could do it too!

A few months later I found myself at the firefighter role-related test day. Possibly one of the scariest events I've ever attended. I had trained hard to be there and I wanted to pass so much but as I saw other people failing I thought there was no way I was going to be able to pass the tests. But, one by one, the tests came and I was still there. Then came the test I was dreading the most: the ladder lift simulator. This involves lifting a weighted metal bar above your head past a marker point and lowering it down again under control. I had seen others fail it that day and I thought, 'Well, I'll try my best but I think this will be it for me'. The instructor gave me a few words of advice and then it was down to me. I took a deep breath and stood over the bar. As I started to lift I had no idea how I was going to get it up to the marker point. I gave it all that I had and as I started to struggle the other people in my group started to call out encouragement: 'Come on - 2 more inches and you're there', 'You're going to do it', 'Dig deep - one last push'. And, somehow, I did... just. The role-related test day was a pass.

I trained even harder for the rest of the recruitment process now that my dream was close to becoming a reality. I passed and became an on-call firefighter at my local station in Oxfordshire. From the very first moment of my training course. I loved it - the job itself, the people, the teamwork, the sense of satisfaction. I had never known anything like it and I couldn't imagine a better job.

I stayed on-call for about a year and then heard they were recruiting wholetime firefighters across the border in Buckinghamshire. Suddenly that voice was back, 'I wonder...'