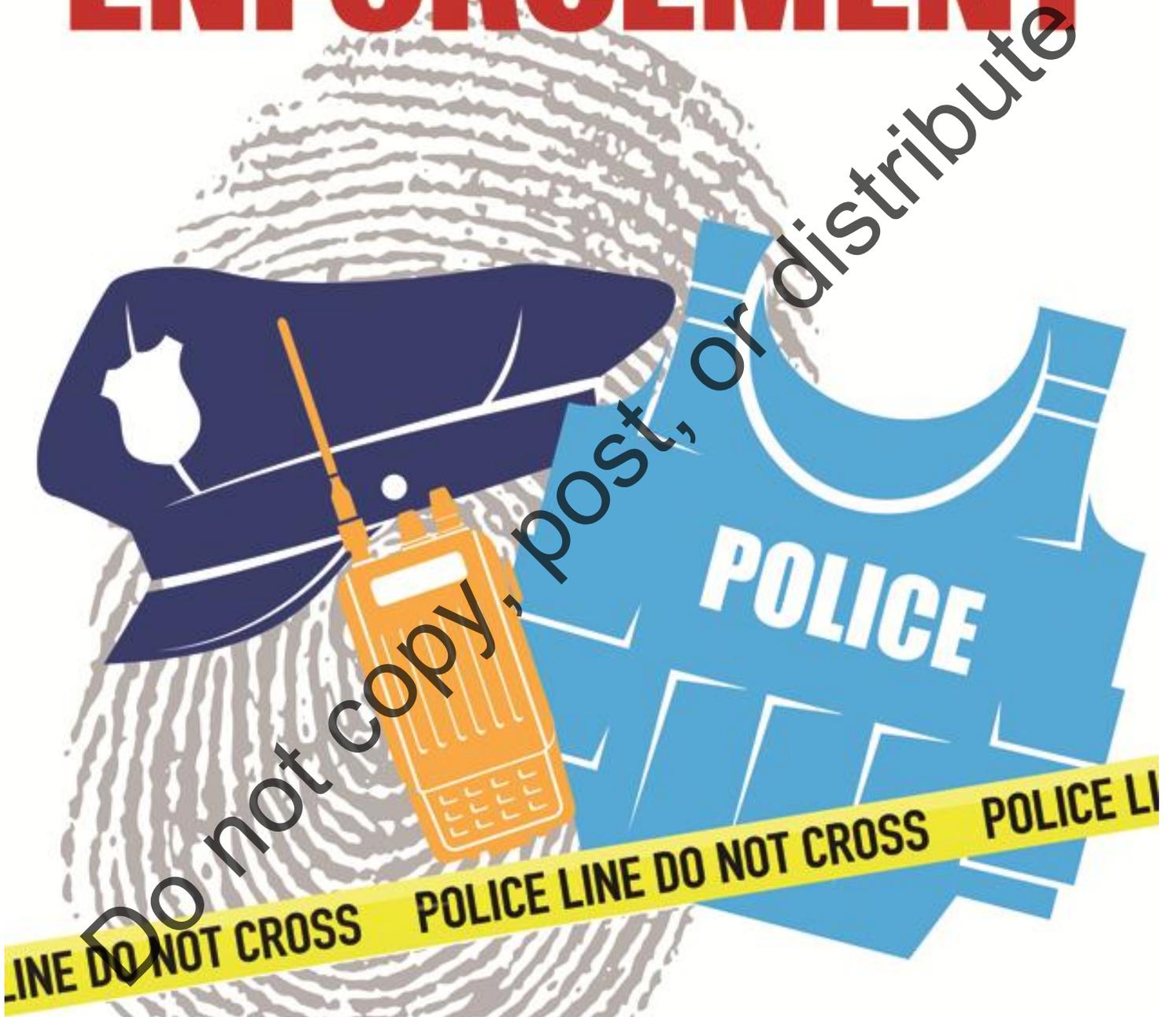


CAREERS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT



Coy H. Johnston



11

The Interview

Introduction

Not many jobs require written tests in the hiring process. Rarely does the process include a physical test or a polygraph exam. But almost every job in the United States involves some type of hiring interview in the selection process. Would you do the same thing if you owned your own business? What would you hope to accomplish in your interviews with applicants? What would you be looking for? Is it safe to say that you would want to know as much as possible about the applicants so that you could choose the best one possible for your open position? What types of things can you reasonably expect to learn about a person in a 20- to 30-minute interview?

In the case of police officers, the various types of written tests and psychological tests can weed out those who don't have the necessary intelligence. The background investigation and polygraph test can weed out those who are an integrity risk. Anything else that is important must be determined in the short dialogue of the interview. Therefore, the interview can (and does) weed out applicants for a variety of reasons. It also serves as the best opportunity to move ahead of other candidates who may be less prepared or just aren't right for a position.

In a perfect world, the most qualified person would be hired for an open position, but the truth is it's the best interviewees who are getting the callbacks. You may be the ideal person for the position you seek, but it is unlikely that you could just walk into an interview, tell that to the interviewer, and ask when you start. Part of being that ideal person is to know how to perform well in an interview. Knowing the answers to interview questions is significant, but there are additional factors to consider if you want to have the edge over other candidates. In this chapter, we will explore some generic and specific interview hints, followed by common questions and appropriate answers. Some of the upcoming information is relevant solely to police or detention jobs. As in many areas in life, there are a good, a better, and a best. Let's go for the latter!

Punctuality

Your goal should be to show up at the office lobby about 10 minutes early. It is a good idea to be even earlier to the building and use the extra time to get focused, pray or meditate, and review this chapter and any other helpful items you brought with you. About 20 to 30 minutes of reflection and review could be beneficial after your drive. If you are driving from a long distance, you should factor in some of the predictable holdups, such as rush-hour traffic, accidents, or a long line at your habitual coffee stop. If you haven't already seen the building you are driving to, you should plan some time to find the location and a parking spot. You also should plan a restroom break. These are just the things you can plan for. Now add another 10 minutes as a cushion for unpredictable obstacles. It is best to spend your drive focused on your interview rather than on the long lights, heavy traffic, and those drivers who do not belong in the fast lane. You will likely feel some anxiety about the interview, so why add to it by having to rush past bad drivers to get there? It could be difficult to calm down after feeling so much anger toward those who choose to drive the speed limit for whatever reason. If nothing goes wrong, you may have 45 to 60 minutes to sit in your car and prepare. Is that so bad?

Appearance

As mentioned earlier, there are a good, a better, and a best for almost everything. This is true with the routes we choose to take, the products we buy, the careers we choose, how we cut our hair, and the clothes we wear. One thing you can't avoid is making a first impression. You are stuck with that! This is especially critical for interviews. Why not shoot for the best you can?

Men need a suit in a dark color. Black, dark blue, and dark gray are power colors. These colors are always best if you want to influence others. A white shirt with a tie is best. Wear a conservative tie of either a plain color or a symmetrical design, such as stripes. The color of the tie can make a difference in how you are perceived. Consider a blue, burgundy, green, or yellow tie. You can also get away with wearing a red tie, but it can come across as too emotionally strong. As far as hair, wear it short. If it is extremely long and you are interviewing for a job in which long hair is okay, wear it back in a ponytail. It is best to be clean shaven, but you might be able to get away with neatly trimmed facial hair for some jobs. Cover as many of your tattoos as possible. Remove your earrings, nose rings, lip rings, tongue studs, and any other face metal.

Women need a dark-colored dress, a dark skirt, or dark pants. It is best to wear a white top and possibly a dark, matching jacket over the top. The dress or skirt should be no shorter than just above the knee. In general, your apparel should not be overly revealing; at the same time, you shouldn't come

across as too conservative. It is best to wear black, closed-toe heels that are no higher than 2 inches; you might be able to get away with stylish, open-toe shoes. When it comes to makeup, keep yourself looking as natural as possible. Avoid anything that would bring too much attention and cause distractions. The eyes are the most important, because that is where you want the interviewer to be focused the most. Wearing your hair up or back is the safest approach. It needs to look as if you put a lot of time into it, even if you didn't. Having your hair up or back will look professional and keep you from absently playing with it, revealing nervousness, during the interview. Wear nice earrings or studs, but nothing that catches the attention of the interviewer too much.

Attractiveness is one of the most important factors in influencing others. Attractiveness goes beyond your facial features. Attractiveness includes the totality of your look and your aura. You want to exude confidence. That is easier done if you know that you look good. It also helps to know some tricks of body language.

Body Language

Imagine a boss who tells her recruiters something like this: "We are looking for people who think they are all that, and then some. Try to find us someone who has the 'I'm too cool' look on her face. We want someone who doesn't smile, someone who acts like he has nothing left to learn. We're looking for someone blasé, with a negative point of view, and an uncaring demeanor."

Is there any job out there for which you would prefer someone who is unfriendly or unapproachable? If you are thinking of correctional officers or probation officers, you are misinformed. In these jobs, you want your employees to be firm and careful of the boundaries they set, but you also want someone who is part of the solution, not the problem.

If you don't naturally smile, start practicing. It needs to be part of the new you. Smile at every person you pass. Smiling makes you likable. When you are being interviewed, your body language needs to coincide with your assertions. Smiling is the easiest and most effective body language you can use. If you are a friendly person, show it. If you are not, maybe you could be a custodian or a warehouse worker, with minimal interaction with others.

The first impression you make includes the person working the front desk. Sometimes the person who greets you and asks you to have a seat will make comments to the interviewer before or after your interview. It may be something sarcastic before the interview, such as "You guys are going to love this one." It could also be something after the interview, such as "Did that blonde girl with the nice dress suit do well? I really liked her!" If the receptionist doesn't like you, he or she is not going to push for you if the opportunity arises. You should smile at everyone, but especially the receptionist.

Make eye contact with everyone involved in the interview as evenly as possible. Be careful not to stare too deeply or too long. Keep the eye contact to short intervals so that the other person doesn't feel uncomfortable or get distracted. If someone gets left out of your conversation, he won't feel enough connection to you. Looking at people will make them feel that you respect them individually.

Introductions

Let the interviewers dictate your behavior. In most cases, someone will come to get you and walk you to the interview room. When that person approaches you, stand and listen carefully to everything said. In almost any other circumstance, it would be an appropriate gesture to offer a handshake. For job interviews, it is usually best not to offer your hand unless an interviewer offers hers first. People have different comfort spaces. The safest way to learn another's comfort space is by letting him dictate how close you get. Sometimes handshakes are not practical because of a room's layout.

The eye-contact rule is especially important in the introduction phase. Look at each individual as you are introduced, and at least nod your head in acknowledgment. Let the interviewers dictate your behaviors. If they haven't yet asked you to sit, remain standing during the introductions. Again, do not walk around the table and reach your hand out to shake hands unless the interviewers invite it. Hugs are out! Just a smile, a nod of your head, and a response to whatever they say. If they say something such as "Thanks for coming," just respond succinctly with something such as "Thanks for this opportunity." If they say something along the lines of "Nice to meet you," it is best to either say "Likewise" or "Nice to meet you, too." Your eye contact lets them know you are acknowledging them individually. Clichés are fine. It's best not to try to say something clever or witty at this time. The interviewers' job is to study you and learn as much as they can about you. Let them ease into it at their pace. You will have 20 to 30 minutes to present your personality.

When you are seated at the table and ready to go, what do you do with your hands? If you naturally use your hands to articulate, set them on the table and clasp your hands so that you don't fidget. After each answer, clasp them back in place. If you don't need them to articulate, set them in your lap. That way you can fidget with them out of sight if need be to hide your nervousness. Women also need to moderate jewelry on their wrists and fingers, making sure any bracelets and rings are not distracting. Sit as calmly and comfortably as possible. The interviewers will be looking at you and will notice nervous movements. You want them to be paying attention to what you are saying.

Although it is important to be comfortable, you will want to sit up and lean in slightly toward the interviewers. This body language makes you appear interested. Folding your arms or sitting back could make you look

uninterested, defensive, and/or less welcoming. Look at the person talking, and try to stay focused on the entire question. While answering, share eye contact with everyone.

A more advanced body language trick (used with one-on-one interviews) is called mirroring. The idea is to subtly behave or speak in the same way as the person you are visiting with. Subconsciously, this sends a message to the person that you are on the same level. This can help build rapport faster. However, mirroring is not something you want to do in an interview until you get good at it. When you are in a conversation with someone with whom you want to connect, try practicing this technique. If the other person crosses his legs, wait just a moment and then cross your legs. If the other person leans on the palm of her hand, do the same thing a moment or two later. If the other person talks quietly, keep your own voice at a lower level. Skilled law enforcement interviewers use this technique on suspects and victims to break through defenses and build a rapport as quickly as possible. As a side note for you future interviewers, mirroring works well when interviewing children.

In a hiring interview, it is best to use the words *sir* and *ma'am* sparingly. Do use them, because it is an easy way to say "I respect you," but overdoing it can have an adverse affect. These words are often used too much in response to closed-ended, yes-or-no questions. It is perfectly fine to just say "yes" or "no."

Sample Questions

Can you answer these three questions with unmistakable articulation?

- What word describes the asexual reproduction of a genetic carbon copy of a plant or an animal?
- Which Kurdish chemical element has the shortest name?
- What three impugations in the 18th century best refute Einstein's theory of relativity?

If you're not prepared for your hiring interview, it will feel as if you're answering questions such as these. Reading through this chapter will be valuable before an interview, but also consider visiting with at least one person in the agency you are applying to or at least someone in the same field of work. Ask every question you can think of, and take notes. Do this type of preparation within a couple of days of the interview, each time you interview.

Interviews for law enforcement jobs generally consist of two types of questions. You will normally start out with generic questions about yourself and about your goals or intentions. The interviewer will then transition into scenario-based questions to assess your knowledge and thinking process. Scenario-based questions generally cover topics of ethics, teamwork, and the use of force. In this section, we will look at questions that have actually been used or are similar to questions actually used in oral board interviews. You are also provided here with comments and reasonable answers that might be helpful.

1. What have you done to prepare yourself for this position, and what goals have you established for your professional life?

Hopefully you have a list of examples to offer for the first part of this question, such as college classes, ride-alongs, interviews with others in the field, tours of relevant facilities, court observations, volunteer or internship opportunities, and any extra trainings or studies. Each of these should already be listed in your portfolio for easy review. Some agencies will ask for a portfolio or curriculum vitae prior to or during your interview, but even if they don't, it is best to bring it, review it in the car, and then carry it into the interview.

You can be somewhat relaxed with questions about your goals or what you want to accomplish. Answers to these types of questions aren't meant to make or break you. It is fine to be predictable and ordinary. Interviewers hear the same things over and over. It is better to stay on the safe side and not try to be too creative. Let them hear the same things again. There really isn't a lot of variety you can add to your answers to questions such as these. One piece of advice for this question, and throughout the entire interview, is to focus on what sounds good for the agency and not too much on what is best for you. Obviously, you should avoid answers such as "I plan to be your boss someday" or "I hope to ride motorcycles." Use this opportunity to articulate well, because this is a predictable question to which you should have a well-rehearsed answer. Consider an answer such as this:

My goals are to become a well-rounded and well-trained police officer. I've reviewed the department's mission and vision statements, and I understand that the chief expects her officers to be well rounded, dividing their time between responding to calls for service, investigating crimes, conducting high-visibility patrols in residential, commercial, and retail areas, making positive contacts with citizens, using person and vehicle stops to detect and deter criminal activity, addressing neighborhood traffic concerns, and making crime prevention contacts with citizens and business owners. My goal is to become proficient in as many facets as possible to best represent my department.

This answer can be modified to fit other criminal justice jobs. Impress interviewers by letting them know that you did your homework.

2. What attributes do you feel are important for a law enforcement officer to possess, and how would you apply these attributes to your performance as a police officer?

Just as with the first question, there are generic answers to this question, and it is best to not go off on tangents. Include things such as honor, integrity, courage, and professionalism, but avoid attributes such as being a good shooter, a good pursuit driver, proficient in martial arts, or physically

strong. With good articulation in the early, predictable questions, interviewers will be hopeful for you before you even get to the scenarios. For a question such as this, it would be best to name just the main attributes and then spend a little time relating each one to your performance. Spending too much time coming up with attributes will only make the second part of the question more difficult. Stick with three or four, and give an example of each one in order. Use acronyms or phonetics to help you remember what you plan to say and to help you remember the order. For example, the attributes listed above could be remembered using the word *hiccup*, for HICP. Then, when you start to give examples of how you would apply these attributes, you would be well organized. An example could be something like this:

I know that as a police officer, I represent the city, the chief, and all other brothers and sisters in blue. I would conduct myself ethically at all times in a way that would bring honor to my profession. I would use the empowerment and trust given me with honesty and integrity by adhering to all federal, state, city, and department guidelines. I know that part of my job is to protect citizens and their property. I would face those who challenge the safety of our citizens with courage and steadfastness. I would perform professionally in all my encounters with citizens, attorneys, judges, supervisors, and fellow officers. I would keep myself physically fit and neatly groomed, and wear the uniform with pride.

Questions such as this might be used in interviews for courts and corrections as well. If you have a planned answer, it can be easily adjusted to fit the way the question is asked. Again, why not prepare for these predictable questions? Write down answers for questions you expect, and then go over these answers in your mind while you drive, between classes, in the shower, and on the treadmill.

3. What can you tell us about our agency, and what factors influenced you to apply here?

The U.S. Marshals Service is one agency that puts a lot of weight on how well an applicant researched the organization. Many other agencies use this type of question as well. Try to memorize some important facts about the department or firm, including size, leadership, mission statement, and job description. The more the better! This is a make-or-break question. Always, always research the agency, and be prepared for a question of this nature.

When asked why you chose a particular agency, honesty is really the best way to go. The criminal justice field is very competitive, and students are always advised to apply for all openings that come along. If you apply only at the agency you prefer, you may miss several other opportunities and never get the job you are waiting for. The truth is, you want to be in law enforcement or law or corrections. Where you do the job is secondary. You

might prefer another agency just because it is a shorter drive, but be honest with the interviewer. The person doing the interview already knows the truth and will be more impressed if you tell it like it is. After listing several facts about the agency, you could answer the second part of the question like this:

I have set my goal to become a police officer. I have enjoyed ride-alongs at four different police departments, and although they are different geographically, the work is similar. I know this field is very competitive and that I am competing with hundreds of other candidates. I also realize that departments are not always hiring. I have prepared myself the best I can and hope that I am hired here and can start my career. However, if I am not hired here, I plan to continue applying to other agencies until I succeed. I am prepared to move to another city or state if necessary to work in law enforcement. I am loyal, and whoever hires me will get my best effort. If I am not hired here, I will follow up by asking what I need to improve on, and I will use that information to continue my self-improvement. I have a lot to offer the agency that gives me the chance, and I hope it is this one.

4. Being a police officer can be a stressful job. Please identify some of the aspects of this job you believe would be stressful, and explain how you would cope with the stress of the job.

This kind of question is relevant for any type of work. There has been more emphasis on stress in recent decades. Officers have high suicide and divorce rates. Stress affects health both physically and mentally. Attorneys and correctional officers face similar stresses, with internal politics, heavy workloads, and deadlines. Law enforcement personnel, court personnel, and correctional officers are constantly performing their duties in situations that trigger anxiety. Mandatory stress management trainings have been instituted at many agencies. Your answer could be similar to this:

Putting aside personal feelings and dealing with criminals and their victims can be challenging. Many police officers see examples of human indecency and pain on a day-to-day basis. Seeing people, particularly the elderly and children, who are the victims of murder, beatings, robberies, rapes, and other violent acts can be causes of stress. Police officers also work different shifts. Having to appear in court may interfere with an officer's sleep, personal time, and current work assignments. Changes in work hours can cause the body stress. In addition to working with the public, a lot goes on inside a police department. Dealing with administrative issues, paperwork, and internal investigations can all cause stress.

Police work is also a dangerous job. Officers never know when they show up for work if they'll return home that evening. An officer's day may fluctuate from slow boredom to a sudden dangerous

situation. Dangerous encounters can trigger the fight-or-flight response when presented with a threat. It is important to recognize this condition and to know how to respond to it. The fight-or-flight response has a lot to do with perception. Regular training can help officers manage perceived threats. I deal with stress in a variety of ways.

Exercise has been proven to have a beneficial effect on a person's mental and physical states. For me, exercise is an extremely effective stress buster.

I eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, and I make sure I have a healthy and balanced diet.

I make sure to set aside some time each day just for me. I use that time to organize my life, relax, and pursue my own interests.

An effective breathing technique slows down my system and helps me relax.

I talk to my family, friends, and work colleagues. I try to always express my thoughts and concerns.

There are other stress management tricks you can use that might be substituted or added. Writing your to-do list before retiring to bed can help you sleep better at night. Curbing your caffeine intake can help with sleep. Procrastination can be a stress enhancer. Getting assignments done early and leaving early for appointments can help relieve stress. Doing service for others can help get your mind off your own problems. You can keep a better perspective by having enjoyable events to look forward to, such as vacations or special date nights. Getting sunshine can increase serotonin and improve mood. Self-talk can be helpful. Counselors use this technique as an intervention to help people change self-destructive thought processes.

5. Officers must complete accurate and detailed reports yet still be available to respond to calls for service or perform proactive patrol activities such as monitoring the flow of traffic. Please provide a specific example that demonstrates your ability to multitask.

Questions in which you are asked to give examples are difficult. You will start to think back and try to come up with the best example possible, and you will feel rushed. You know you have several, but your interview is short, and the interviewer is waiting to hear your answer. Similar questions in which you might be asked for examples include the following:

- Tell us about a time when you had difficulty with a coworker or group member and how you handled it.
- Tell us about a time when you had to perform under pressure and how you handled it.
- Tell us about a time when you had to work with a partner or a team and what you did to help the project succeed.

- Tell us about a time when you had to be in charge of a project and what you did to make sure you experienced success.
- Tell us about a time when something went wrong on a project you were involved with and how you handled the turn of events.

These types of questions can be somewhat predictable if you understand how interview questions are created. First, the interview team is presented with the goals of the interview. In other words, it is determined first what an interview is intended to reveal about an applicant. Someone or some group decides what they want to find out, and then they create the questions accordingly. If you look at the examples above, these are all important aspects to explore. If you think as they do, you will be able to have tentative answers prepared. A possible answer could be something like this:

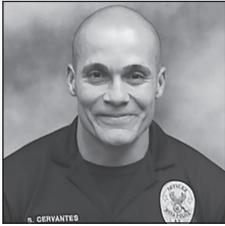
I have had many opportunities to demonstrate my ability to multi-task. I can honestly say that I am good at it and have provided you with three recommendation letters from professionals who have witnessed me handling multiple tasks and mastering my responsibilities. My approach to handling several responsibilities is to write everything down. I prioritize the tasks right away and make a time map of any important time-sensitive details. Writing everything down has improved my quality and timing. Once it is on my to-do list, I know I will be able to stay on task when something new or unexpected comes up. I have also been on three ride-alongs and observed how officers handle all their multitasking. One example that comes to mind is . . .

Make sure to have an example for each of the sample questions above. When you are faced with adversity, handle it well, and then use it to your advantage in future interviews. If you currently do not get along with a coworker, make the steps to correct the problem and use the experience as an example in your interview. If you are in a group in a college course, and one of the members is the worst person ever to walk on our planet, change your purpose, and it will change the outcome. Look at it as an opportunity instead of your awful luck of the draw.

6. Dealing with difficult and noncompliant people is an inherent part of an officer's job. Police officers must deal with people during emotional events and must take people into custody who verbally and physically resist arrest. Describe what actions you will take to deal with these types of situations.

This is the area that can make or break you. Learn the general use-of-force guidelines of the agency you are applying for. Justifications for the use of force are generally just a couple of clicks away on your computer. You can look up your state's statutes and find the section on justifications for

Steve Cervantes: Recruit Training Officer – Mesa Police Department



CJ: What is your current position?

SC: Recruit training officer (RTO) at the Mesa Police Academy.

CJ: What are your typical job duties?

SC: Act as a first line supervisor for police recruits, assist recruits with various problems or concerns. Instruct, educate, evaluate, and mentor recruits on basic police work and physical fitness principles.

CJ: How long have you been at your current assignment?

SC: One year.

CJ: What positions have you held prior to this one?

SC: Patrol officer for 7 years with 3 years as a field training officer.

CJ: What are the requirements/qualifications for your job?

SC: High school diploma for police officer and AZPOST General Instructor Certificate to be an RTO.

CJ: What steps did you go through during hiring?

SC: A written test with a passing score of 70% or better, an oral board interview, and a physical fitness test. All three of those tests are sometimes held on the same day. When I tested for Mesa PD in 2007, the physical fitness test was held on a separate day. The physical fitness test is the Cooper Test. I was tested on the Institute Assessment, which consists of a mile and a half run completed under 15:20, 29 or more push-ups in a minute, and 31 sit-ups or more in a minute.

Once I passed the three requirements, a background investigation was conducted; then a polygraph test was administered. When I was notified that I passed the polygraph test, I was instructed to get a medical physical and a psychological exam done. A short time later, I was sent an offer letter to attend the police academy. The whole process took about 3 months. It takes some applicants over a year to go through the hiring process.

CJ: What advice can you offer students who might be interested in pursuing a similar career?

SC: The hiring process can take a very long time and I suggest testing for multiple agencies. Volunteer or go through a citizen's police academy to get familiar with basic police work and to get your name known. Have some sort of general idea of what police officers do and their responsibilities. Police officers do more than just issue traffic citations. Integrity and having self-confidence is everything in this position. Know-it-all personalities, and the people who aren't willing to adapt to change or learn something new, usually don't do well in this field.

force. You need to know what you have the authority to do. If you also understand the atmosphere of the discretionary powers at the agency, the scenarios will be easier to answer. The nice thing about this question is that you are not asked to determine if you would make an arrest or not. Instead, you are being assessed for your thought process on problem-solving skills, human relational skills, safety concerns, mental control, and several other possible traits. The best advice is to answer the way the chief would want

to hear it. Remember that the purpose of all questions is to assess certain traits about you, so you can usually hear a question and figure out what they want to assess. These types of questions weed out the candidates who didn't go on ride-alongs or at least get prepped by an officer or a professor. Scenario-based questions are also used in correctional job interviews. You can prepare for scenario questions by practicing with the officer you do your ride-along with. Have the officer ask you questions and critique your responses.

In Chapter 3, you were provided with a brief lesson on the use of force. It is important to understand the use-of-force continuum and the Fourth Amendment connection to this topic. One side of the continuum consists of a scale of different levels of force an officer can use to accomplish the necessary enforcement. The other side of the continuum is different behaviors of the perpetrator that justify an officer's equal or slightly higher level of force. An example would be a suspect who has no weapons and sits on the ground, telling an officer that he is not going to jail. The officer has the authority to use verbal judo or certain pain compliance holds to encourage the suspect's cooperation, but pointing a gun would be unreasonable in this situation. The Fourth Amendment guarantees citizens that they will be treated reasonably. It also restricts the government from going beyond what is necessary. These are good key words for your answers: *continuum*, *reasonable*, and *necessary*.

Going back to Question 6, you can see that it is somewhat vague. The question leaves a lot to a person's interpretation. The question allows for a variety of possible answers. It uses words and phrases such as *people* (children, adults, gang members, known criminals), *emotional events* (car accidents, shootings, stabbings, sexual assaults), and *physically resist arrest* (guns, knives, broken bottles, fists). The best way to answer a question such as this is to cover as many possibilities as you can. It will show that you aren't closed minded and can see that there are many optional routes. It will also let you show off how much you know. You may not get another chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the use of force. One possible answer could be as follows:

The level of force is dictated by the situation. Officers should use verbal commands in combination with command presence. Whether you instruct a person to "Stop!" "Don't move!" "Be quiet!" "Listen to me!" "Let me see your ID!" or "You're under arrest!" voice commands in conjunction with your mere presence can prevent many situations from escalating. The right combination of words and command presence can deescalate tense situations and prevent the need for a physical altercation. When someone is noncompliant or resisting arrest, soft, empty-hand techniques might be necessary, involving the use of bare hands to guide, hold, and restrain; applying pressure points; and take-down techniques that have a minimal chance of injury. When a suspect is actively resisting, less physical measures

might be insufficient. Pepper spray or a Taser might be a better option, depending on department policy guidelines. Less lethal weapons can be used in accordance with policy when other alternatives are impractical and when lethal force is not justified. Hard, empty-hand techniques, such as kicks, punches, or other striking techniques, such as the use of a baton, could be justified if a suspect is actively attacking an officer. Of course, deadly force should be used only when a peace officer has probable cause to believe that a suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or others. The main thing is to understand department policy and procedure in terms of use-of-force guidelines and to maintain proficiency with training.

My personal philosophy will always be to only use the amount of force that is necessary and reasonable. I believe I have the ability to communicate with hostile or difficult citizens because of my 2 years of experience working as an intern for the U.S. Marshals Service and 1 year working in corrections as a detention officer. I assisted in over 50 verbal confrontations with hostile suspects or prisoners, which resulted in only one physical fight. I was exonerated for that fight and given a commendation for my self-restraint and overall behavior. My portfolio contains three letters of recommendation from my past supervisors, which all mention my ability to communicate well with combative subjects.

7. You are driving in your marked police car along a canal bank at midnight, and on the other side of the canal, in an open field, you see a man holding an axe standing over another man on the ground. The man with the axe has lifted it over his head, ready to swing down and hit the other man, who is not resisting in any way. What course of action would you take?

Scenario-based questions pertaining to the use of force often deal with lethal force. Interviewers may want to know if you are willing to take a life. They also want to know if you recognize the reality of the situation. You would not want to try to swim across the canal to save the man. The axe is ready to come down. You would not drive around the canal to the other side; you would be too late. You would not drive your car toward the canal and attempt to jump over, because you don't have time and it might not work anyway. You do not want to try to shoot the axe out of the hands of the assailant. You might miss such a small target. The victim might be killed, and the stray bullet might hit someone else on the other side of the field. The sad truth is that a police officer may have to shoot someone during his or her career. You never shoot to kill; you shoot to stop. Your target is the center of mass. The biggest area of mass is the torso. The center of mass is in the area of the lungs and heart, which officers call the 10 ring because in firearms training, 10 points are awarded for hitting the small circular target

over the chest area. Although a shot to this area could be fatal, an officer's job is to stop the threat, not to kill the assailant. Hitting the area of the vital organs will stop an axe-wielding killer quicker than a leg shot. Officers don't shoot to wound, and they don't fire warning shots. The only shot allowed at a human is to stop a threat. A possible answer might come across like this:

I know that taking someone's life is one of the hardest things I might have to do as part of my job. Deadly force should only be used when necessary to protect myself or a third party against serious physical harm or death. In this scenario, I realize that every second counts. I will be yelling commands to the assailant from the moment I step out of my car and also pulling my weapon out as quickly as possible. I will point my weapon at the person wielding the axe and aim at the center of mass. If he does not discontinue immediately, I will fire on the suspect until he is no longer a threat. I realize that I could miss my target, or that he could be under the influence of a drug such as PCP and not be affected immediately by my first shot. I will shoot as many times as necessary to stop the threat. I will be cognizant the entire time of the background so that I can best position myself in a way that avoids hurting anyone who might be in the line of fire.

The interviewers may have follow-up prompts for a question such as this. You may be asked if you would hesitate. You will need to be careful not to ruin the great answer you already gave. The good thing is that interviewers are generally held to strict standards of fairness. So whatever they ask you, they have already asked it of everyone else before you. Make sure to confirm what you have already said, unless the scenario is changed in any way. Come back with the surety that you would shoot the suspect as quickly and as often as necessary to stop the threat.

8. You pull a driver over for speeding and find that it is your mother, who borrowed a friend's car. What is your course of action?

Do not write your mother a ticket! Knowing when to exercise discretion can be difficult with more serious infractions, but normal everyday traffic violations are much easier. It may seem more complicated if the scenario includes a fellow officer or maybe the mayor or a chief of police from another agency. If the traffic stop is for a routine traffic violation, don't cite any of these people. Make your answer come across as an easy decision. Here is a reasonable answer:

I know an officer has great discretionary powers. Every situation is different and should be judged on its own merits. Not every person who violates the law gets a ticket or goes to jail. There isn't enough room in the jails or time in the courtrooms to process every violator.

I realize that a common goal of the criminal justice system is to deter crime. I would handle a traffic violator differently who disobeyed the law blatantly than someone who may have accidentally breached a traffic law. I plan to use my discretionary power as fairly as possible and for the right reasons. Sometimes a person changes behavior just from the fear that was experienced in the traffic stop. I feel that if I would give a break to someone I don't even know, I would surely give a break to the person who raised me, fed me, and drove me to soccer practice.

In the situation in which the question involves a fellow officer, stay with the same way of thinking, but you can also add that you know that an officer will be treated more harshly in court than a regular citizen would be. Judges must be careful with the appearance of favoritism, as must officers. They have less discretion and would need to be harsher in sentencing than they would for a normal citizen. This is just an additional reason why you might give a warning to an officer who should already know better than to speed.

Be careful not to refer to an authority figure as a hypocrite for violating a traffic law. Everyone violates traffic laws, whether it is intentional or accidental. In reality, every time an officer writes a ticket for speeding, it could be considered hypocritical. Stay focused on the concept that you will write tickets if you feel it is for the better good of society as a whole. If you feel that a violator needs a ticket to help deter future behavior, you should write the ticket. If you feel that a warning would produce the desired result, just issue a pleasant warning and leave that violator with a positive feeling about the police.

Officers will sometimes write tickets out of anger at the way violators talk to them. Although this type of ticket seems unfair, officers are only human and might feel that violators need a "behavior adjustment." If you are asked a question that includes a belligerent violator who lacks respect for the law and for people, remember the purpose of the ticket. If you feel that the ticket will help society as a whole, you should write it. If you feel that the ticket would make things worse, you might go a different route and use the stop as a way to change the violator's opinion of police through kindness. You have that kind of power out on the street. These decisions are totally up to you. Just make sure you don't write a ticket out of anger. Just as in raising children, discipline for the good of the child, not to make yourself feel better.

9. As an officer, you must be able to communicate and obtain useful information from people. Assume you are an officer dispatched to contact a suspicious person. You locate the subject, who is elderly and apparently disoriented. How would you handle this situation?

Much of police work consists of difficult situations, but not all are criminal. You could be assigned to handle almost anything. Luckily, there are

other agencies out there to assist the police in cases that can be handled by other experts. Police are sometimes dispatched for “other agency assists” because the level of danger isn’t known initially. Police officers have guns, handcuffs, radios, training, and authority. Thus, any situation in which danger is a possibility will involve police. This is one possible answer:

Police often rely on the instincts and perceptions of citizens to detect activity that is out of the ordinary. Police have a duty and responsibility to follow up on reports of suspicious persons. Upon arriving on scene at such a call, it would be important to ask questions and determine what type of situation I am dealing with. In such a situation, an elderly, disoriented person could have Alzheimer’s disease or some other related dementia. It is important to identify and understand the signs of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias and how to communicate with people who have these conditions. This helps better serve both people with these conditions and the community as a whole. I would communicate to my supervisor what I was dealing with and determine what services the police department could offer, if needed.

It is sometimes crucial to say that you would contact your supervisor, but never use that as an easy out on your answers. The interviewers might not let you off that easily. It is common for an interviewer to follow your answer by saying that your supervisor is busy at a helicopter crash. If this happens, the interviewer wants to assess your knowledge of the particular situation. Give general answers; do not be too specific. It is best to let an interviewer know what you would do under a variety of scenarios. For example, you could call the man’s family, friends, or doctor. You could contact a crisis intervention team if your city has one. You could call an ambulance if the man needs to be assessed for dehydration or other common problems with disorientation. You always want to do something. It is okay to admit that you don’t know what to do, but follow that with your best guess. It is better to admit that you don’t know than to pretend you do and disqualify yourself with an inappropriate answer. If a weak answer knocks you out of the top list of candidates, you will have an advantage by knowing what types of questions to prepare for the next time you have a hiring interview.

10. An officer must accurately report information. Assume you are assisting another officer with an inventory of a prisoner’s property by completing the impound form. You see the other officer take a quarter from the prisoner’s property, put it in his pocket, and place a different quarter in the property bag. The other officer tells you that he is a coin collector and that that particular quarter is a solid silver quarter. What would you do?

What is the interviewer trying to find out about you with this question? Are you going to be a tattletale? Are you going to be unethical and just turn

your back on what your fellow officers do? You are always safe to lean toward what you would say to the chief if he or she were asking the question. Answer this type of question something like this:

This is an integrity issue. Police are expected by the public to be held to a higher standard than the general public. Police officers' ethics and integrity should be beyond reproach, because the public relies on police to respect civil rights. I would confront the officer and remind him that there are department policies in connection with handling prisoners' property. I would also advise the officer that this is an ethical issue. I would document exactly what happened in the police report. I would notify the officer that I am required to do so. I would make sure that the immediate supervisor is aware of the police report. It is important to document these things as a matter of record for performance review purposes and for future reference in case of repeated misconduct. Repeated problems or an accumulation of minor infractions of policy or procedure could become a problem. As such, this information must be available to supervisors.

Be careful of questions of this nature that might be assessing if you are too quick to jump to conclusions. Regardless of the scenario, you will normally be expected to take some form of action. Doing nothing is usually the wrong choice.

11. Department policy states that officers are not to accept gratuities, for example, free drinks or meals. You have just finished eating at a restaurant on your patrol beat, but the waitress is adamant in refusing to give you a bill. How would you deal with the situation and why?

With a few exceptions, police officers may not accept gratuities. Local and state police officers are first responders, and accepting a gratuity might make an officer feel obligated to favor the donor at a future time, when the officer should instead be unbiased. It might also make the donor feel that the officer owes him loyalty. You also want to avoid a scene at a restaurant. This is a possible answer, although a little over the top:

Police departments have rules for a reason. Although the payment of free coffee is perhaps a commonly received gratuity in many jurisdictions, business owners might expect extra services in return for giving gratuities. When law enforcement officers offer additional services to private businesses in exchange for a free cup of coffee, they detract from other citizens within their communities. Police service cannot be perceived as going to the highest bidder; decisions must be based on need. Many argue that the coffee is inexpensive and that owners are showing appreciation by offering a cup and enjoying the fact that officers spend time in their shops. Therefore, what is the harm? On the

other hand, what happens in a discretionary issue when an officer stops the owner or an employee for speeding? The officer may base the decision of whether to cite on the fact that he received free coffee. Should the free coffee factor in the officer's decision? Police officers often face the dilemma of accepting gratuities. Some officers view the acceptance of free coffee and free or discounted meals as an entitlement, while others view it as an unethical act. Law enforcement agencies should consider the perceptions of communities, as well as business owners, when accepting gratuities. Where there are departmental policies against accepting gratuities, they should not be accepted. I think the best practice is to be diplomatic with the restaurant server, thank him and explain that I cannot accept a gratuity, and leave payment with the cashier.

Could you just leave the money at the table, plus a tip, and not say anything? This is a solution, but be careful in your answer to this type of question. You want to focus on what the interviewers are trying to find out about you. You want them to know that you understand the real issue. It isn't only about whether you will accept the gift. If you just leave money at the table to cover the food and tip, it might all end up in the server's pocket, and the owner might think you accepted the gratuity. Plus, other citizens who may have witnessed the conversation would assume that you took the gratuity and just left a tip for the waitress. Even though you personally refused to go down that slippery slope, other damage could still be done to the police department as a whole.

12. Police officers work in ethnically diverse communities. Please describe how diversity affects the role of a police officer in the performance of his or her duties.

This may be an easy question for you. Make sure to use proper terms when appropriate. If you are a Caucasian man, you wouldn't want to start out by saying "I don't have any problems with minorities. I married one." Use terms such as *African American*, *Mexican American*, *Native American*, and so on. Using these terms will demonstrate that you have had some kind of training in the area of diversity. Make sure not to downplay this issue. It is a very important and controversial issue in the criminal justice system. Here is a possible answer:

Historically, many minority groups have been treated badly by the government—some by officials in the United States and others by governments in the countries from which they came. Harsh treatment can create distrust and fear of the government and authority figures in some minority communities. That distrust may make it difficult for minority groups to trust police or other authority figures in society. When approached by police, a minority member may express alarm or

doubt, or be coldly polite. It is important to keep backgrounds and experiences in mind as we reach out to different people. We may need to consider altering how we approach and interact with individuals from diverse communities. However, grouping people into categories such as these also can be misleading. We must be careful to avoid making broad assumptions about people based solely on appearances or ethnic or racial affiliation. Poor relations between community members and police can lead to feelings of distrust, anger, and fear. A situation involving the shooting of a minority citizen by a police officer, for example, could potentially cause heightened racial tensions. Citizens may think the police are prejudiced and have unfair policies. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences need to develop trust, understand one another's experiences, and work together on solutions.

You could also add comments about how important it is to have diversity within the ranks of criminal justice jobs to capitalize on dissimilar viewpoints and ultimately make better decisions for the community as a whole.

Dos and Don'ts

Some of the important dos and don'ts of interviewing have been covered, but here are a few more to help you succeed:

- Do get plenty of sleep the night before the interview.
- Don't chew gum during the interview.
- Do give a good firm handshake if the interviewer offers a hand.
- Don't have the smell of smoke on your clothes when you walk into the interview.
- Do listen to the last names of the interviewers and try to remember them. It would be impressive if you have the opportunity to insert a name or two later in the interview instead of saying "sir" or "ma'am." Remember to use "Mister" and "Ms." or "Councilwoman," "Judge," "Doctor," or "Professor" (along with the last name) if you know the proper title.
- Don't eat too much fiber or gassy foods (beans, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussel sprouts) within 24 hours of the interview. Your comfort is paramount to your performance.
- Do maintain a friendly and humble demeanor in your facial expressions.
- Don't slouch. Sitting up straight (yet comfortably) might take practice, but it is helpful to show confidence through body language.

- Do bring your portfolio to the interview. It might not be required, but having it will be impressive. There may also be opportunities to pass a recommendation letter around or a certificate of relevance.
- Don't let your cell phone make any noise during the interview. However, if you do forget to shut it off, just apologize and move on. You could even make a joke about it at that moment, such as "Wow, that's a good way to impress my interviewers." Well-timed and tasteful humor is always welcome, even in the most professional settings. You are especially okay if you are laughing at yourself.
- Do use good vocabulary and avoid slang and jargon or pause words such as "uh."
- Don't speak negatively about past employers or coworkers unless it is absolutely necessary to explain a bad report.
- Do tell the truth.
- Don't bring in personal issues and family problems to the interview if it can be avoided. However, you should always be honest if asked.
- Do focus on what you can bring to the agency, not on why the job is important to you.
- Don't rush to answer a question. It is okay to repeat a question to make sure you understood it. That will buy you more time for your response. A slight pause is fine after each question, so that you can visualize the path you want to take with your answer. Seasoned criminals use the pause technique during interviews; why shouldn't you?
- Do come across as appreciative and respectful without sounding desperate.

A Personal Note to Minorities, Women, Gays, and Lesbians

I have had the pleasure of working for and alongside minorities, women, gays, and lesbians during a 27-year law enforcement career. The police department was better because of them. We became like family through the years, but these remarkable individuals all had their share of depressing experiences dissimilar to my own, as a straight white man. There will always be some prejudice and bias in the workplace. Cultural and religious issues will be present as well. Caucasians, men, and heterosexuals who don't see it may never see it. Remember the serenity prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Hopefully you will have the courage to aggressively seek the job you want and not be dispirited by the unfortunate past or the imperfect present. There are a good, a better, and a best in many areas of our lives. Be the best you can be at the best job you can earn, and persist in making the world better.

Summary

You should expect an interview for any job you apply for. In a perfect world, the best candidate would get the job. In our world, the best interviewer often gets the job. Some important hints for success are to be about 10 minutes early, have the proper appearance, use body language tricks to help show yourself off, and make a good first impression in your introduction, which includes a smile.

There are two types of questions in the interview. The first part of the interview involves questions that you might expect, such as what you have done to prepare yourself for the job, why you chose this career, and what you know about the agency or firm. The second part involves situational questions to assess your thinking process. You can prepare for these types of questions by learning about use of force (in police and corrections interviews); knowing the firm's or agency's policies; and having examples in your mind of situations you have been in, such as handling difficult people, crisis situations, and teamwork experiences.

Historically, women and minorities have experienced inequality in the workforce. Women continue to enter jobs that have traditionally been carried out by men. Although there has been significant progress in welcoming women to police and correctional jobs, there is still more ground to cover. Although not many, there do remain a handful of men in police agencies and correctional facilities who are skeptical about women's abilities to perform all facets of the job.

Women need to be mentally prepared for interviews by men. The vast majority of men have no issues, but there is always a chance that a male interviewer could be a skeptic. Men change their views of women in law enforcement as they witness outstanding female employees do the job well. The interview is not the right time to make a statement about women's rights. Women should portray in interviews that they are team players and can work with anyone. Once women are hired, they can prove to any skeptics that they belong there through their performance.

There will always be some prejudice and bias in the workplace. Cultural and religious issues will be present as well. Caucasians, men, and heterosexuals who don't see it may never see it. Hopefully you will have the courage to aggressively seek the job you want and not be dispirited by the unfortunate past or the imperfect present. There are a good, a better, and a best in many areas of our lives. Be the best you can be at the best job you can earn, and persist in making the world better.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there any suggestions about your appearance for an interview that you strongly agree or disagree with? Explain.
2. Do you agree with the level of importance placed on smiling? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree that it is better to let the interviewer offer a hand for a handshake instead of being the first to do so? Why or why not?
4. When answering questions, the author suggests that you make eye contact with all the interviewers, not just the person who asked the question. What is the reasoning behind this strategy? Do you agree or disagree with this reasoning? Why or why not?
5. What are some things you can do to prepare for the hiring interview questions?
6. Do you agree with the author's assertion that there will always be some prejudice and bias in the workplace? Why or why not?

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