

PREPARING FOR A CAREER AS A PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER

Preparing for a job interview with a public safety agency rarely lasts longer than an hour, but its consequences can last for many years. In order for the interview panel to identify you as a well-qualified candidate, it is important for you to prepare in advance for the interview.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO IS PLAN AHEAD—

Before you ever apply at an agency, make sure it is an agency you want to work for. Research both the agency and the position you are applying for. Complete your resume and/or job application written to the specifications listed on the application. Follow the directions on or with your application. If you cannot follow directions, your application may be rejected.

Find a way to learn more about the agency you want to work for. This may include ride/sit alongs, participating in a Citizen's Academy, or being a volunteer. This will give you an idea of the diversity of job functions in the agency you are applying with.

As you prepare for your interview, locate local or Internet resources to help you. A career preparation class can be extremely helpful. Learn the mission statement (or goals) of the agency. Incorporate the mission statement as you prepare your opening and closing statement about yourself.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE --

Choose what you will wear to your interview. Make sure your attire is clean, neat and professional, right down to your toes. Make sure you are comfortable in your clothing. If you are uncomfortable, it will show.

Write an outline or cue cards to help you prepare for the interview. Include important information about yourself and why you are the best qualified candidate. Identify your five best skills that make you suited for a position with this agency. Examples might be the fact you are bilingual, your education, or community service. Emphasize how your skills suit this position as you develop your opening and closing statements.

ENTHUSIASM is very important - sometimes more important than skills. You may have the skills, but you must be able to verbalize them positively and let the panel know why they need you instead of another applicant.

Ask a friend to give you a "mock interview" with you wearing your interview clothing. Watch yourself in front of a mirror or better yet, review your performance with a video camera. As you practice, try to maintain a pleasant, relaxed smile. Be enthusiastic about the position, your accomplishments and what you know about the department.

Sit forward in your chair to reflect you are attentive and interested in the job. Avoid nervous habits such as touching your hair, placing your hands near your mouth or talking with your hands.

THE DAY BEFORE --

Check the details: gas/service the car or arrange for reliable transportation, polish your shoes, nails groomed. If you need carry papers, choose a simple folder or brief case. If you must carry a purse, make it small, neat and compact. Jewelry should be simple and conservative.

Now, you need to relax and fine tune your final performance. Review your notes, agency mission statement, agency information and your resume. Get plenty of rest

ARRIVING FOR THE INTERVIEW --

Arrive 15-30 minutes early. Remember your manners with everyone you encounter. Treat each person you meet as a silent interview. If you are rude, that information may get passed on to panel members or background investigators. As you wait, take slow deep breaths.

Remember, first impressions are of utmost importance. In our judgment of others, appearance counts for 55%, speech 38% and words 7%.

THE INTERVIEW --

Shake hands with all panel members. A proper hand shake should be firm with the web of each hand meeting. Lean forward slightly to imply your eagerness to meet. Make eye contact throughout the interview. It suggests confidence and honesty. If possible, address the panel members by their title and last name.

When you present yourself, be honest, credible and confident, but not arrogant.

If the oral interview questions are given to you to read, use them! Read the questions to yourself; make reference to the sheet to make sure you do not miss an element of the question. Clarify anything you do not understand; then answer each question by taking ownership of the position. The best method of answering the question is to respond by repeating part of the question, give an example to show you understand and relate your experience. For example: What did you do to prepare for this job? You might respond by saying, "What I did to prepare for this job was extensive. I attended a class that would prepare me for a public safety career. I attended the agency's Citizen's Academy. I completed three ride alongs on different shifts with officers. Doing this gave me a perspective on how to prepare, how the different departments within the agency work together and how calls are handled by officers."

Personality traits of a good dispatcher (you should emphasize)

- Ability to be a team player and get along well with others
- Ability to not take things personally (be thick-skinned)
- Ability to multi-task (do more than one thing simultaneously)
- Ability to think quickly and make a decision

What kind of questions should I ask?

The following is a list of questions that are valid questions and demonstrate a clear interest in the position.

1. What are the goals of the department?
2. What other agencies or departments do you interact with and in what ways?
3. What are the top priorities of this position?
4. What are the most important challenges facing someone in this position?
5. What qualities are you looking for in the ideal candidate?
6. Can you describe your management style?
7. When do you expect to make a decision?

Interview Questions That May Be Asked

- ✓ Describe a time when you faced a challenging situation: How did you handle it?
- ✓ Describe some of your most important career accomplishments.
- ✓ Describe your ability to evaluate situations and respond as new information arises.
- ✓ Describe your ability to perform several tasks at one.
- ✓ Describe your ideal job and/or boss.
- ✓ Describe your training, education, and experience as it relates to the position.
- ✓ Do you have any experience working nights, weekends and holidays?
- ✓ Explain your experience in customer service and your personal philosophy regarding customer service as it relates to the government sector.
- ✓ Give us an example of your multi-tasking abilities?
- ✓ How did you hear about this position?
- ✓ How do you feel you qualify for this position?
- ✓ How do you handle situations where the outcome is unstructured and unpredictable?
- ✓ How do you handle stress?
- ✓ How do you know when you are getting stressed?
- ✓ How do you motivate others?
- ✓ How would you grade your ability to anticipate needs before they arise?
- ✓ If we were to contact your references, what would they say are your strongest work-related qualities or skills? What would they say could be improved?
- ✓ In your most recent position, what types of decisions did you make without consulting your immediate supervisor?
- ✓ Is there anything else you wish to tell us about yourself and your background that would help us in deciding who should be the final candidates for this position?
- ✓ Please describe two or three short-term (within one year) and long-term goals which you have set for yourself. What are you doing to achieve them?

- ✓ Please describe what kinds of decisions you tend to make rapidly and which ones you take more time to decide? Give us some examples.
- ✓ Tell me about any confrontations you have had and how you handled them?
- ✓ Tell me about yourself.
- ✓ Tell us about a suggestion you have made at any of your jobs to improve a working condition or procedure which benefited the organization.
- ✓ Tell us what you know about this agency?
- ✓ This position includes shift work, weekends and holidays. Have you ever worked this kind of schedule before?
- ✓ What adjustments will you make to accommodate this kind of work environment?
- ✓ What are the personality traits of a good dispatcher?
- ✓ What are you doing in your present position?
- ✓ What are your career goals?
- ✓ What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- ✓ What characteristics should a person in this position possess? Give us examples of how you possess those qualities?
- ✓ What do you do to improve your self?
- ✓ What do you think the duties of this job are and why do you want a position with this agency?
- ✓ What have you done to prepare for today's interview?
- ✓ What influenced you to apply for the position?
- ✓ What is the most important qualification or accomplishment you have for this job?
- ✓ What motivates you?
- ✓ What skills do you think are most critical to the position?
- ✓ What type of people do you have difficulty working with?
- ✓ What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
- ✓ What were the best and worst aspects of your last job?
- ✓ What would a former boss/colleague say about you?
- ✓ Why are you interested in this position/this agency/our organization?
- ✓ Why are you job hunting/leaving your current job?
- ✓ Why do you want to work in this field?
- ✓ You are choosing a profession that requires you to make life and death decisions. What type of decisions or situations might that be and can you do it if the situation required it?

Killer questions that test how you react under stress:

- ✓ If you were president, which issues would you tackle first?
- ✓ Tell me a joke.
- ✓ Tell me something about yourself you've never told anyone.
- ✓ What were you hoping we wouldn't ask you?
- ✓ Which three famous people would you invite to a dinner party?
- ✓ Would you ever lie to get a job?

Situational

- ✓ An elderly lady calls and has no emergency or illegal complaint. It appears that she is lonely and depressed and just wants to talk. How would you handle this situation?

- ✓ How do you deal with someone who does not seem to like you but you still have to work with them?
- ✓ If you observe a fellow employee stealing, how would you handle it?
- ✓ It is two o'clock in the afternoon. You receive calls for a residential burglary in progress, a bank robbery that has just occurred, and a fire alarm from the paint factory all at the same time. Which would you dispatch first? And why?
- ✓ One of your co-workers is not doing his/her job properly and this is causing you additional work. You are not sure if your supervisor is aware of the situation. How would you handle this problem?
- ✓ The training period for this position is a one-on-one working arrangement with a trainer. If you felt you were having trouble with the training, what steps would you take to remedy the problem?
- ✓ What would you do if a fellow employee came to work with alcohol on their breath?
- ✓ You receive a call of a physical domestic violence situation involving an officer and his wife. How do you handle it?
- ✓ You start off your shift with five one-man units, including a field supervisor. During your shift, you are alerted that one of the officers has been in an auto accident and is injured. At the same time, a bar fight is called in and officers are requested. How would you respond?

The following is a typical scenario for a dispatcher. There is no right or wrong answer and a panel will understand you have not received training. They are more concerned about your thought process. You receive five calls for service (these calls may be written on a card and handed to the applicant).

1. Loiterers
2. Loud music
3. Bank robbery
4. Gang fight
5. Barking dog

Put them in order of importance. Now, what questions would you ask further of incident #3? Incident #4?"

Why Interviews Can Go Wrong

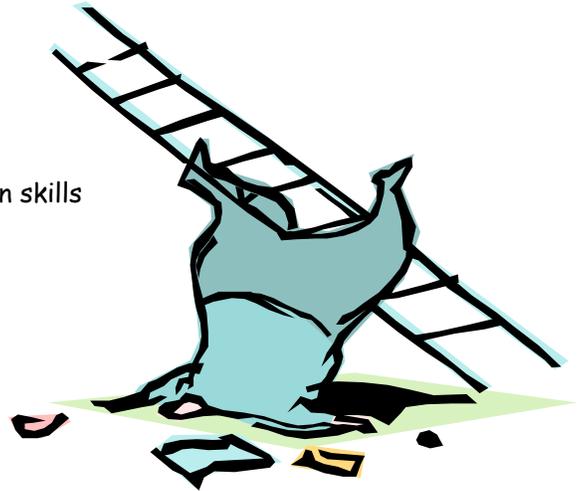
The more interviews you participate in, the more you will find that your success depends on saying the right things, being in the role and avoiding taboo topics. As many know however, there are sometimes other factors that can signal an unsuccessful interview.

Physical Flaws

- Less than professional appearance
- Lack of eye contact, weak handshake, lack of energy
- Trouble maintaining a conversation - poor communication skills

Protocol

- Lack of tact, maturity and courtesy
- Lack of interest, excitement and enthusiasm
- Neglecting to recognize and thank the interviewer



Objectives

- Lack of preparation for the interview, unclear purpose, unorganized delivery
- Inability to articulate the relevance of accomplishments
- Lack of information about the position and department
- Only interested in "what the agency can do for you"
- Overemphasis on compensation, hours and availability of time off

Prior Employment

- Critical of past employer
- Unexplained, numerous job changes or gaps in work history

Attitude Concerning the Job

- Evasiveness, making excuses for unfavorable factors in work history
- Lack of commitment to fill the position
- Lack of confidence/ Too shy about accomplishments

Many agencies state that one of the biggest reasons a candidate is not offered a job, is that they didn't really seem to want it. Don't let that happen to you. Be present, be ready, exude confidence!