

THE TEN MOST **DANGEROUS** MISTAKES IN YOUR POLICE SELECTION INTERVIEW

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Here is a super quick snap shot of some considerations on what NOT TO DO during your police selection interview!

Here are ten fundamental mistakes that you must avoid if you want to be amongst the few applicants who succeed at the interview stage.

These are:

1. Not paying attention to first impressions.
2. Explaining yourself or talking yourself out of a job.
3. Arguing with or disrespecting the interviewer.
4. Confusing values and virtues.
5. Stating weaknesses as positives.
6. Demonstrating poor loyalty.
7. Not having any questions to ask.
8. Leaving your mobile phone on.
9. Exaggerating.
10. Pretending to know an answer when you don't.

Lets talk about each of these very briefly so you can avoid falling into these traps that can completely ruin your chances of selection.

1. Not paying attention to first impressions.

The value of a first impression cannot be overstated for a job interview. The first impression you make is not just a stand alone element of the interview. It can potentially be the single most important contributing factor to the interviewer's assessment of you as **suitable or unsuitable**. The reason this can be such a dangerous mistake is that even the interviewer may be unaware of the subconscious significance.

This is basically to do with the concept of stereotyping. Put simply, we all make assumptions about others in the first few seconds of meeting them.



We do this unconsciously and it is a perfectly normal human behaviour.

The problems arise when we act on those assumptions without giving a person fair opportunity to show who they really are. This becomes a learned behaviour.

What is also automatic behaviour is that **we tend to look for the information that supports our initial judgement**. We simply don't like to be wrong!

So what does this have to do with your interview? Well if the interviewer makes a positive assessment of you in the first few seconds then they will potentially **look mostly for positive information during the interview to support their initial judgement**.

If, on the other hand, they make a negative assessment of you in the first few seconds, then they will potentially **look for negative information during the interview to support their initial judgement**.

I'm sure you can appreciate the difference these perspectives will have on the final result. Not to mention how pleasant or unpleasant the interview will be!

2. Explaining yourself or talking yourself out of a job.

Someone once told me, ***“When you explain yourself, you incriminate yourself.”***

The reason is that most times when you explain an action, you can easily be mis-interpreted as inappropriately justifying your actions. The key thing to understand here is that this can happen even if you're attempting to acknowledge responsibility for the event.

For example, if you are questioned on a speeding fine, you have many different options on how to respond:

If you choose to **explain** the event as a result of “being in a hurry for a family emergency”, then you are demonstrating poor judgement skills in your risk assessment of speeding for some other benefit.

If you choose to **explain** the event as an “accidental error” then you are demonstrating incompetence or inattention in your driving.



Neither of these options are a good outcome and only damage your impression during the interview.

If instead you acknowledge the incident and your role, then you are simply answering the question that you accept responsibility and have changed your behaviour since. So your response on this question might look like, *“Yes, I did have a speeding fine last year which was my responsibility. I’ve not had any since.”*

You may notice that this is a **very** short response. Which is pertinent to a few other mistakes including the error of **talking yourself out of a job**.

If in the above scenario you said, *“Yes I did have a speeding fine last year which was my responsibility. I have not had any since. **It’s actually made me a better driver as I now pay attention to my speed more.**”* This is a costly mistake. You are now implying a level of incompetence that you were not paying attention before. So the interviewer may well think or even ask, “What else do you fail to pay attention to?”

I’m sure you get the idea here. When you waffle on with an answer you risk exposing a weakness that may not have come up during the interview. You may remember the lesson in the eBook **‘Police Interview Questions’** that the interviewer is looking to answer three fundamental questions. Plus you are looking to convey your pre-determined set of highly valuable qualities that fit these questions. Additional and unnecessary information can damage your interview irreparably.

3. Arguing with or disrespecting the interviewer.

You may think that the person is being rude or just being a bit of a ‘dick’. Remember, they may be deliberately acting like this during certain questions as they try and elicit a stress response from you. They don’t necessarily have much time to conduct your interview. So if they are being curt, don’t mistake this for deliberate rudeness. Part of the interview is to observe how you respond to stress. Creating an argument is a good way to do this.

It also pays to remember that you’ll probably never see this person again. Yet they have a fair bit of power over whether or not you realise your dream to become a police officer. So don’t feel like you need to give them feedback on their character flaws. It is not going to help you!



So if you realise that this is all a test, then it is easier to remain objective and not let your personal feelings or emotions overcome you. If nothing else, just remember that the interviewer is observing for 'how' you communicate as well as 'what' you are communicating. This is an opportunity to show you can remain calm and level headed during an awkward or heated conversation.

4. Confusing values and virtues.

Virtues are simply ideals that are important. However, they don't necessarily reflect how you conduct your life on a daily basis. It may certainly be valuable to tell the interviewer that your virtues are aligned with the police service (including honesty, courage, teamwork, empathy, etc...) but this is a great opportunity to make yourself stand out from other applicants. Everyone else will be reeling off similar values but it doesn't mean much in terms of distinguishing yourself. If, on the other hand, you can give a real insight into how you spend your life, this will get the interviewer's attention.

Your true values will be very unique to you. You may value something like sport and recreation. Look at what you spend your time doing. This is what your values are. Someone once told me "you're actions speak so loud I can't hear anything you say."

This basically means that it doesn't matter what you 'say' is valuable to you. What matters is what you are doing. If you look around at other people you know, you will see inconsistencies everywhere in what they say are their values. Some people say they value health and yet they eat high sugar desserts on a daily basis and view exercise as a chore. It doesn't make sense!

Remember, your actions reflect your real values.

This question is a good opportunity for self analysis to make sure you are clear on your own values before you head into the police interview.

If you have congruence in your own values you will carry yourself with a very perceptible air of confidence. This will very much boost your chances of success in the interview.



5. Stating weaknesses as positives.

Whilst it is a useful strategy to identify the positive benefits, or lessons learned, from negative experiences, it is still important not to fall into the trap of stating all negative experiences or character traits as positives.

A better strategy is to acknowledge any weaknesses and clearly articulate how you mitigate this weakness. This means explaining what you are doing to develop this area.

For example, if you identify a weakness that you are a very young applicant, it is not good enough to say that your age gives you fresh perspective during problem solving. Whilst this is true, it is a bit of a cop out.

This comes back to remembering the three main questions that the interviewer wants to know about you. In this case, they are looking specifically at the 'skills / character' category of questions. They are analysing how you will handle your inexperience and if you have an understanding of potential options available to you.

So you would do well to state something along the lines that you *“acknowledge you have limited life experience and would look to consult with more experienced officers when practical”* and that you are *“willing to learn from others and that listening to more experienced officers can save a lot of unnecessary mistakes.”*

This is not necessarily a script that suits you, but it serves to demonstrate the point. Look for your weaknesses and then have a plan in your head as to how you can start to develop in this area and what resources are available to you to improve or mitigate this shortfall.

6. Demonstrating poor loyalty.

The police service expects a high standard of loyalty in its officers and support staff. The police interview can be a dangerous environment for exposing potential challenges you may have to maintaining this standard. Loyalty, in terms of an organisation, is generally a matter of respect. The respect of subordinates to their supervisors and vice versa. As a subordinate you expect that your interests are considered when supervisors make decisions that affect you. The flip side of this, specific to police service, is the loyalty expected not to undermine the chain of command. This means a measured respect to orders and policy.



At the most basic level, it relates to ‘bitching’ in the workplace. Talking about people who are not present is not loyal. This is a likely test during a police interview.

The problem that can arise in the police interview is that you may not realise how your past experiences and outlook on those experiences can indicate how you will perform in this function.

For example, if you talk badly about anyone at all during your interview, you are indicating a potential tendency for poor loyalty. This is because you are basically ‘talking behind someone’s back’. If they’re not in the interview then they can’t very well represent themselves.

This includes past employers. So be careful about how you explain previous employment and choose your words carefully if you need to answer a question of being fired or made redundant. Discretion and fairness should guide you in your response. This can be a very dangerous question!

7. Not having any questions to ask.

The interview is a two way communication setting. It is not an interrogation. If you don’t have any questions for the interviewer, then you demonstrate a lack of interest which translates into a lack of motivation. This may not be true of you, however, you need to look at the tangible identifiers available to the interviewer.

Remember, that you need to take up all the opportunities you can to help them find positive evidence of their three primary questions. Asking questions (usually towards the end of the interview) demonstrates you see the interview as an opportunity to confirm you are suitable for the role.

It is useful to keep a balance of asking questions but not appearing ignorant of things you could have asked beforehand.

Example questions to ask might include:

“What do you most enjoy about being a police officer?” Only ask this if the interviewer is actually a police officer.



“What is the next step in the process?” This demonstrates you are enthusiastic and want to continue in your preparations as required. You should definitely ask this at the end of the interview - unless they’ve already told you the next step!

“Is there anything you recommend I do from here?” This demonstrates optimism which is an attractive character trait. It may also provide you some feedback on your performance in the interview.

Example questions of **what NOT to ask** might include:

Don’t ask about anything that you may have heard in gossip. Engaging in this type of talk in the interview implies you may continue to gossip in the police service. This is not an attractive character trait.

Don’t ask about how long it takes to be promoted. If you appear anxious to skip the lower ranks of constable you may be indicating that you’re not interested in basic police work. Don’t ask about background checks. This implies you are concerned about your personal history or are trying to hide something.

8. Leaving your mobile phone on.

Other than the interruption if it rings, you do expose a potential negative trait if your mobile phone makes any noise at all during the interview.

Even if you rarely use your mobile phone, you need to consider how this looks to the interviewer. If they’ve only been talking to you for five minutes and your phone goes off, they might subconsciously think that you’re a ‘person who is on their phone a lot.’

Police work can require extended periods without use of your mobile phone. Don’t give the interviewer a false (hopefully not true) impression that you are ‘attached to your phone.’

Remember, some phones trigger daily alarms even if they’re switched off! So check your alarms are off as well.

9. Exaggerating.

You're certainly in the interview to show your best side. However, remember that one of the key questions the interviewer has is trying to work out if they would like working with you. Have you ever worked with someone who was constantly 'talking themselves up'? Or at the other end of the spectrum, someone who always makes a story sound worse than it really is? I'm sure neither experience was pleasant.

Police officers need to have a balanced perspective. The interview is a great opportunity to demonstrate that you can articulate the positives without going over the top. Plus if you exaggerate your own talents you risk sounding arrogant. Nobody likes an arrogant police officer - as you may well have experienced!

10. Pretending to know an answer when you don't.

Finally, if you don't understand a question, simply ask the interviewer to rephrase the question. Nobody likes a 'bullshitter'. So make sure you understand what you're answering.

If you really don't know an answer, it is better to say so instead of making it up. Acknowledging that you need to find out about something is better than guessing and proving that you're incompetent. This goes back to the dangerous mistake of talking yourself out of a job. Stick to what you know. Acknowledge what you don't.

Click on the eBook image to find out what to expect and how to answer questions in your police interview...

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