The Oral Interview

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What are they looking at?

- Oral communications skills
  - Ability to articulate a thought or idea
  - Ability to present it in an understandable format
  - Ability to “connect” with the panel
- Thought processes
- Knowledge
  - Policies and procedures
  - Personnel issues
  - Fire service issues
  - Department issues

How are interviews scored?

- May be a compilation of scores in various dimensions:
  - Oral communications
  - Interpersonal
  - Administrative
  - Leadership
  - Technical
- Check boxes or Percentage ratings

Dimensions

- Oral Communications:
  - Articulate
  - Listens & understands
  - Organized
  - “Makes sense”
- Interpersonal:
  - Team oriented
  - Cooperative
  - Customer service
  - Relationship-based

Dimensions

- Administrative:
  - Common sense
  - Good judgment
  - Identifies problems
  - Provides solutions
  - Forecasts
  - Plans
  - “Political”
- Leadership:
  - Command presence
  - Decisive
  - Firm & fair
  - Motivates
  - “Walks the walk”
  - Ethical
  - Responsible

Dimensions

- Technical:
  - Policies
  - Procedures
  - Rules & regulations
  - Culture (City and Department)
  - Understands roles and responsibilities of subordinates

Determine the appropriate attire

- Dress uniform
- Service uniform
- Suit and tie
- Make sure:
  - It’s cleaned and pressed
  - Actually fits
  - Boots/shoes shined
  - Brass shined

Look your best

- Hair
  - Cut 1 week before
  - Neatly styled
    - Avoid spikes and colors!
  - Meets department standards
- Well-rested
- Nails trimmed

Arrive early

- Not too early
- Ask the name of your panel members
  - Commit their names to memory
  - Pay attention to rank and department

Understand the rules

- Read any material provided before-hand
- You may have a limited amount of time for the ENTIRE interview
- Be prepared to monitor your time
  - Wristwatch, wall clock, etc.
  - Will someone provide a “2-minute” warning?
- Are notes allowed?

You may be given the questions ahead of time

- Read each one thoroughly BEFORE developing an answer
  - Understand what they are asking
- Jot down notes in bullet format rather than writing paragraphs
  - Easier to reference under pressure

Be Prepared

- Should already have a format to answer basic questions:
  - Education
  - Work experience
  - Preparation
  - Oral resume
- Know policy, procedure, SOPs, etc.

When you enter the room

- Introduce yourself to the raters and shake their hand
  - Wipe your hands before you enter
  - Use their name
  - Make eye contact
- Wait to be seated
- Do not invade their space
  - If possible prepare the “arena” for combat

Get comfortable

(Not **too** comfortable)

Here come the questions

- LISTEN CAREFULLY!
- If you don’t understand the question – ask for it to be repeated
  - Do not ask for a repeat as a stall tactic
- Don’t respond until they have finished asking the question

Think before you speak

- Gather your thoughts
- Be thorough in your answer
- Explain your reasoning
- Make sure you answer the question first

MOST important:

- Answer like a Battalion Chief would answer

Eye contact

- Start with the person who asked the question
- Make eye contact with the next person
- Include all of the raters
- End with the person that asked the question

Look for feedback

- Facial cues
  - Smiles
  - Frowns
  - Nodding
  - Boredom
- Hand gestures
  - Playing with pencils or paper
  - Hands clasped

Answer the question they asked, not the one you want to answer

- To make sure you are on target, consider rephrasing the question in the answer:

“What is the biggest challenge facing our department?”

- The biggest challenge facing our department today is.....OR
- “If I understand you correctly, you are asking.....”

Expect

- Follow-up questions based on your answer:
  - May be designed into the interview
    - Just another question OR
    - A test of your commitment to your answer
  - May be to clarify a thought or idea
- The raters to:
  - Have their heads down sometimes
  - Be writing during your answers
    - Danger if they aren’t!

“Is there anything you would like to add?”

- Should have a prepared closing (and/or opening) statement
- They may be throwing you a lifeline
- Don’t repeat the entire interview
  - Cover areas that were missed
  - Highlight important areas
- Say thanks

Questions?