# The Weiser Security Services
# Guide for Interviewing Candidates
# for Security Officer Positions

## Screening Security Officer Candidates

Encountering a candidate for a security officer position who is intelligent, personable, and "ambitious", a recruiting manager may very well conclude that this is a good person and offer them a job. Understandable, perhaps, but hiring "good people" leads to many unnecessary hiring errors. The bottom line is that many good people are not suited for the position of security officer.

Before we can get our interviews and reference checking effectively focused, it is necessary to think more in terms of acceptable and unacceptable performance and less about "good" and "bad" people. Simultaneously with evaluating the performance potential of candidates, we must also keep in mind turnover risk. There are many individuals who would be capable of performing the duties of a security officer, for example, but who would not want to be a security officer. If you were to hire such a person, they might perform adequately or even very well for a period of time. All too soon, however, the individual will either terminate to pursue some other opportunity that better meets their needs or, worse yet, stay on with deteriorating performance. Though the individual in a broad sense may have been a "good" person, they did not match well with the requirements of the position.

In evaluating the match between a particular individual and a particular position, it is helpful to distinguish between what a person is capable of doing (i.e., "CAN DO") and what they want to do (i.e. "WILL DO"). "CAN DO" involves basic intelligence, special aptitudes (e.g., numerical aptitude) and special skills (e.g., verbal fluency). "WILL DO" on the other hand involves basic needs (e.g., security), interests (e.g., attention to details), and attitudes (e.g., tolerance for stress; cooperation). Many hiring errors result from paying too much attention to the "CAN DO" attributes and too little to the "WILL DO". This happens in part because formal credentials coming from education, training, and job experience give good clues about what a candidate is capable of doing.

Moreover, the interviewer has a relatively easy time judging certain aspects of capability from the nature of the questions the candidate asks; the way the candidate "thinks on his feet", the ease with which the candidate expresses himself, and so on. Much more difficult for most interviewers is to correctly judge the match between the applicant's needs and interests with the job requirements. The remainder of this interview guide is aimed at assisting interviewers at making better screening decisions on "WILL DO" attributes related to performance potential and turnover.

## Watching for Red Flags

Quite apart from the personality, attitudes and abilities projected during a job interview, there can be certain preliminary indications or warnings that the candidate is a poor hiring risk. We refer to these indicators as "red flags". For example, if the candidate has just moved to the area (regardless of reason), there is more turnover risk in hiring that person than in hiring someone who has lived locally for a number of years and has well-established roots. If a person owns a home and/or has family living locally, they have better established roots than if neither of these conditions are met. If a candidate has a history of frequent job changes, this indicates greater turnover risk than if the record suggests employment stability. A checklist of possible red flags is presented in Exhibit I.

It is important to remember that the total absence of red flags does not necessarily mean that a particular candidate is well suited for a position as a security officer. We will talk more about job matching in the next section of the guide. Whenever possible, only candidates with few or no red flags should be taken to the next step in the employment process.

### Quick-Check For General Employment Red Flags

| (-) | | (+) |
|-----|-----|-----|
| Under 40 | ____ ____ | 40 or more |
| New to area | ____ ____ | Has local roots |
| Not a high school graduate | ____ ____ | High school graduate or better |
| Does not own car/home, etc. | ____ ____ | Has assets |
| No other source of income | ____ ____ | Has supplementary income |
| No military experience | ____ ____ | Military experience |
| Provides incomplete information | ____ ____ | Completes all information |
| Doesn't follow directions | ____ ____ | Does follow directions |
| Sloppy dress/appearance | ____ ____ | Neat dress/appearance |
| Has difficulty completing application | ____ ____ | Completes application with ease |

# Matching Candidates to Post Requirements

Based on the validated research conducted at Weiser Security Services, Inc. (Weiser has the largest database in the world of psychometrics and biographical data of security officers in the workplace), there are two job performance dimensions to consider when screening security officer candidates and/or placing them in specific posts. One of these dimensions has to do with the significance of interpersonal tasks and the other dimension has to do with the complexity of duties to be performed. In combination, these two performance dimensions characterize four major "types" of post assignments, which are illustrated below:

### *Examples of Post Assignment Types*

|  | High | |
|---|---|---|
| **Importance of Interpersonal Tasks** (Average) | Lobby Information Desk | Airport Pre-Board Screening |
|  | Night Watchman | Closed Circuit Television Monitor |

Low ← Average → High

**Complexity of Duties**
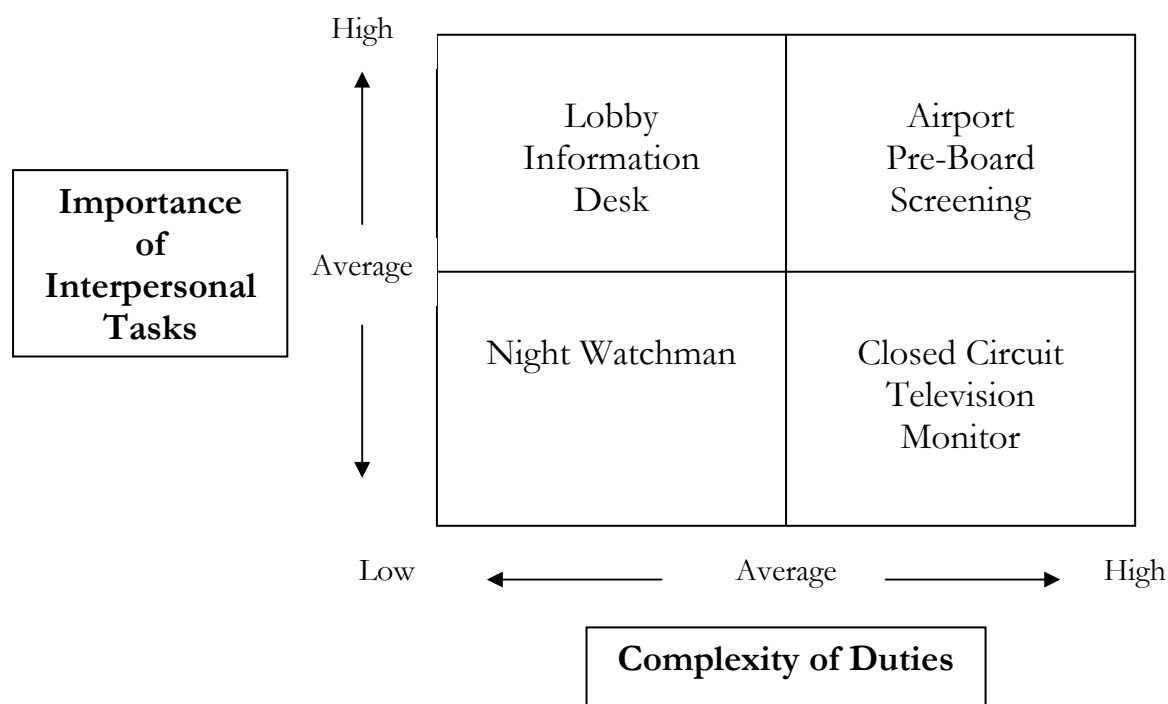
Using these four common types of post assignments as a starting point, it is possible to characterize or stereotype types of individuals that best match the post performance requirements. For convenience, we have labeled these types of guards as "Greeters", "Gratifiers", "Grinders", and "Graveyarders":

### *Security Officer Types*

<br>

|  | **High** | |
|---|---|---|
| **Importance of Interpersonal Tasks** — Average | "Greeter" | "Gratifier" |
| | "Graveyarder" | "Grinder" |

Low  ⟵  Average  ⟶  High

**Complexity of Duties**
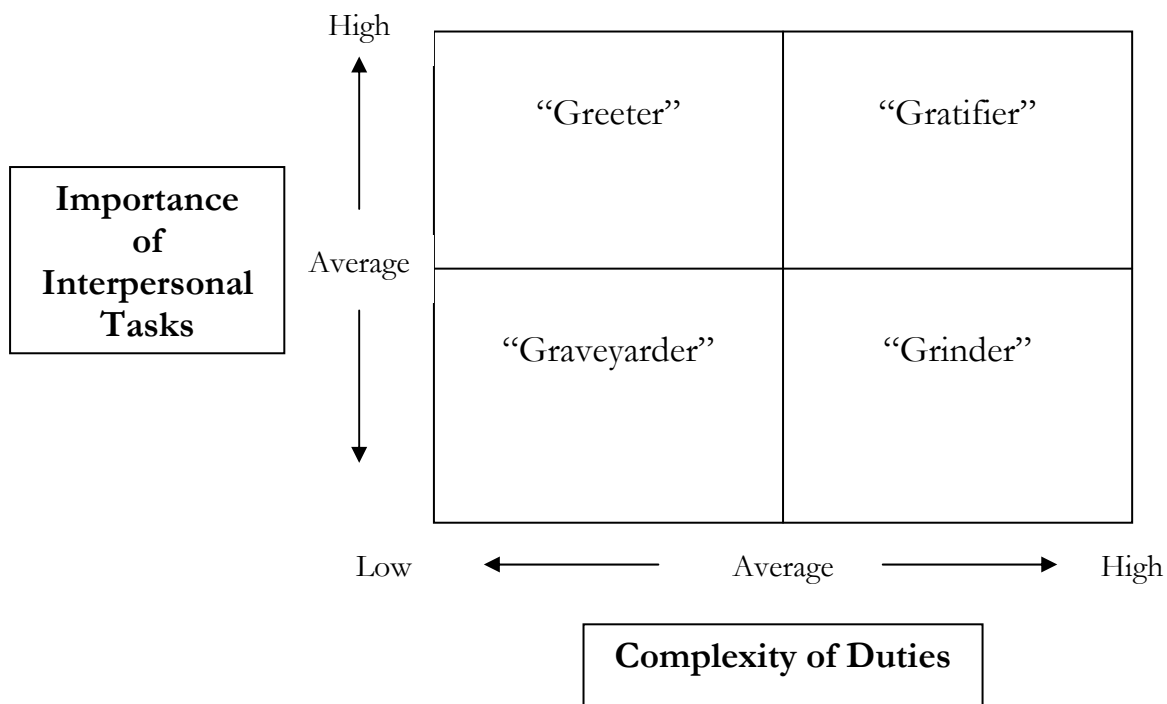
Based on the research conducted on the Weiser guard force, the following personal attributes have relevance in matching security officers to posts:

### *Examples of Motivational Attributes Associated with Making Effective Post Assignments*

|  | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Social Orientation** | **"Greeter"** *Sociability Emotional Control* | **"Gratifier"** *Combination of Greeter and Grinder* |
|  | **"Graveyarder"** *Detachment* | **"Grinder"** *Attention to Detail Personal Reliability Good Work Ethic* |

High — Average — Low

Low ← Average → High

**Work Orientation**
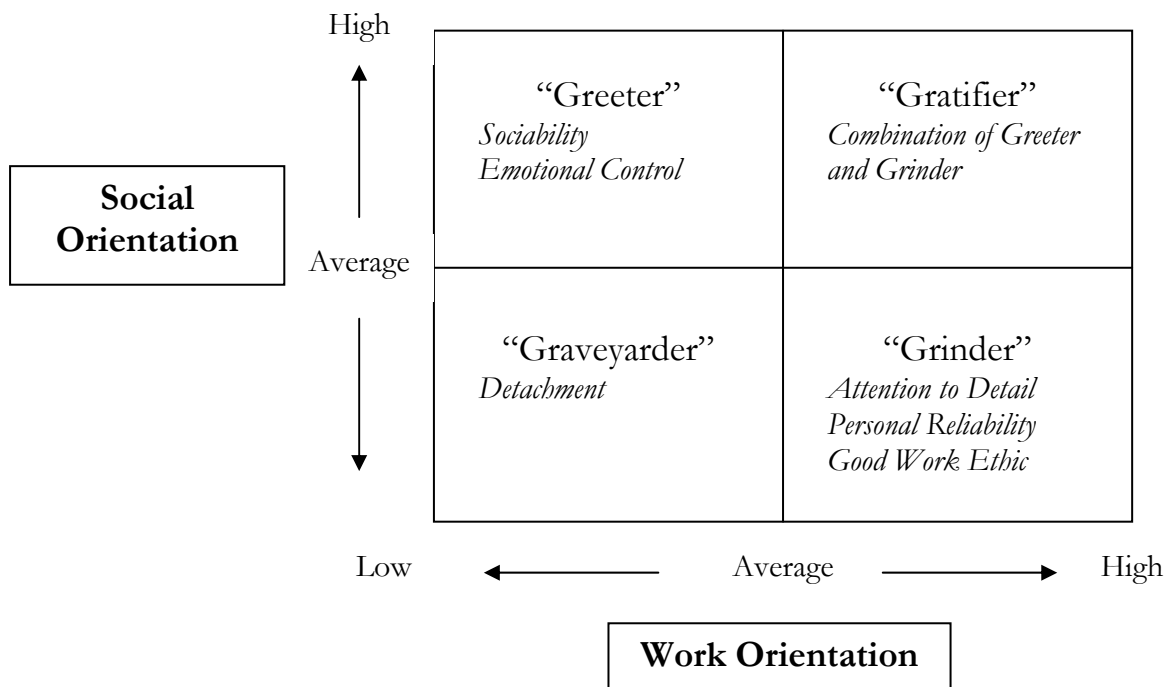
In narrative form, the "Greeter" type guards are social individuals who come across as pleasant and courteous. Although such individuals may be very likeable and genuinely personable, it is important that the interviewer not presume that beyond a pleasant style that there is necessarily a strong work ethic, nor necessarily the desire or self-confidence to handle responsibility on a consistent basis.

The "Grinder", on the other hand, is the opposite stereotype. Here is an individual that is attentive to details, follows directions, has a good work ethic and genuinely wants to do the "right thing". The limitation on a Grinder's effectiveness, however, is the lack of social flair or sensitivity. Consequently, though they do what they are told in a generally reliable way, they may do it in a narrow literal sense, perhaps insensitively and/or abrasively, and, in some cases, too zealously.

The "Gratifier" is essentially the combination of the positive attributes associated with the "Greeter" and "Grinder" types. These individuals are, in relative terms, more self-confident and better able to deal with the pressures coming from handling responsibilities. Characteristically, they will have a strong work ethic and high personal standards. They are also able to strike a reasonable balance between being personable and still meeting the administrative requirements of the post... behavior likely described as pleasant but firm.

The "Graveyarder" is an individual that does not need emotional involvement with people at work and actually may prefer to work in relative isolation. Some Graveyarders may simply be uncomfortable in a social role but many others are just rather socially detached. In either case, these individuals prefer to be left alone with their thoughts and may come across as having short attention spans or simply withdrawn and disinterested. Since the ideal Graveyarder is both socially detached and does not desire great satisfaction from the work they do per se, they are likely to come across as "I work to live", (i.e., for the paycheck) and not much else.

## Interviewing for Job Match Themes

In the Appendix to this interview guide, we provide a general introduction to employment interviewing with particular emphasis on reducing the errors commonly made. We provide specific examples of improperly and properly phrased questions. We also introduce the concept of developing by keeping the candidate talking through a probing technique we call "peeling an onion". Before proceeding with actual job matching interviews, we encourage the reader to carefully review this material.

Even when peeling the onion, a common error made in employment interviewing is to make too much out of too little. The answer to any particular question can be deliberately or inadvertently misleading due to the self-merchandising that necessarily is a part of seeking a job. The intent of your questions could be misinterpreted and the resulting answers, in effect, non-responsive. Moreover, you may simply misread the answer or otherwise misjudge it out of context. In short, successful interviewing depends in part on controlling the temptation to categorize answers as good or bad; to suspend evaluation temporarily so that revealing themes or patterns can emerge.

In the remainder of this interview guide, the attributes associated with each of the post assignment "types" are described in more detail and specific opening questions (onions) are provided which may provide response themes to assist in making better screening decisions and/or assignment decisions.

### Listening for Work Orientation

Some people work simply out of economic necessity. Others work for social reasons or for "something to do". Oddly, many interviewers seem to forget that only some people really enjoy work and derive great personal satisfaction out of doing a job well. As a result, interviewers too often simply fail to evaluate whether they are talking to a worker or not. Yet, some security officer positions require a considerable amount of personal effort in the sense of diligence, attending to details, performing multiple tasks, acting with diplomacy, and so on, particularly in relation to the pay received. These more demanding security officer posts are not well suited for individuals that are lazy, that are uncomfortable handling responsibility or that lack high personal standards concerning work. In the vernacular, we are talking about

looking for hard workers but we are not talking about what is usually labeled as ambition. Ambition, meaning a desire to take on ever-increasing responsibilities, to be promoted, to acquire more status and a higher earnings level, is a separate though not totally unrelated phenomenon. Many fine hard working employees do not wish to take on additional responsibilities or have career objectives beyond doing a good job at whatever they are doing. Culturally, we tend to attach great value to ambition. Yet, in many positions such as security officer, a bias favoring "ambition" can lead to hiring decisions producing unnecessarily high turnover. Conversely, failing to properly assess whether a candidate possesses a reasonably strong work ethic can lead to performance problems in the more demanding posts. A summary of personal attributes useful in recognizing work orientation is presented below:

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**Personal Attributes Associated with Work Orientation:**

**Listen for:**

**\* Evidence of personal satisfaction stemming from doing the work "right"**

**\* Preference for rules, procedures, policies to guide work**

**\* Pride (with examples) in being a good or hard worker, of doing "what's expected"**

**\* Evidence of high personal work standards, measuring self against personal standards; sustained effort under pressure**

**\* Comfort with or preference for attending to details**

**\* Confidence with handling pressure from workload**

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Examples of opening questions (onions) that generally produce themes yielding clues about the presence or absence of Work Orientation include the following:

Q1  "Give me an example of where you did something particularly well (were able to use one of your strengths) in your position at XYZ Company."

Q2  "Give an example of something that you enjoyed/didn't enjoy doing on your last job."

Q3  "Describe for me the employee at XYZ Company who most impressed you."

Q4  "Describe a situation at XYZ Company where you felt you had too much to do."

Q5  "What did you do yesterday?"

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**Q1-5 Summary**

   Although these five questions on the face of it are quite different, any or all may provoke themes related to **Work Orientation**, or orientation instead to social or interpersonal needs, or to something totally unrelated. Listen for the emphasis or the lack thereof given to quality of work, personal standards, hard work, doing things right, persistence, etc.

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   Q6   "How do you know when you are doing a good job at XYZ Company?"

   Q7   "Describe for me the co-worker you most/least respect at XYZ Company."

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**Q6-7 Summary**

In the case of **Q6,** listen for whether the individual has, in effect, a personal scorecard or whether they simply are dependent on feedback from supervisors, customers, co-workers, etc. In general, people with strong **Work Orientation** will have personal standards that are quite explicit, job or task oriented and rather demanding. In the case **Q7** concerning co-workers, listen for the extent to which the standards are work related, or instead relate to interpersonal characteristics (e.g., gets along/doesn't try to get along; aloof/friendly, etc.) or to personal habits (e.g., smoker, talks all the time), personal grooming or other non-work related behaviors.

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   Q8   "Tell me what you most (least) enjoyed while working at XYZ Company."

   Q9   "Describe for me the particular task you most (least) enjoyed doing at XYZ Company."

   Q10  "Describe for me the most difficult project you have ever been involved with."

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**Q8-10 Summary**

Listen particularly for comfort with operating under rules or procedures; satisfaction about knowing what to do at all times; pride at becoming very proficient at executing things correctly, and so on. With individuals low in attention to detail, you may hear frustration with the lack of flexibility; lack of opportunity to initiate actions or to use discretion; or comments about people making a **"big deal"** out of little things.

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Q11 "Give me some examples of the kinds of paperwork you completed at XYZ Company."

Q12 "Describe for me a situation where you had to keep track of details."

Q13 "Describe for me the training you received on the job."

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**Q11-13 Summary**

**Each of these questions is likely to work very much as the preceding ones. Listen for tolerance or frustration in dealing with details, with following routines, with the need for accuracy, and so on. With Q13 concerning training in particular, listen not only for the structure provided by the training but the comfort or lack thereof expressed with the training about details rather than concepts.**

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Q14 "Tell me about a particular policy at XYZ Company that you think should be changed."

Q15 "Describe for me a situation at XYZ Company where you didn't know what you were supposed to do."

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**Q14-15 Summary**

**Questions concerning policies can work on several levels. On one level, candidates may reveal their attitude toward broad guidance versus narrower, more definitive guidelines. They may reveal their need to follow rules versus using their own judgment. At another level, reaction to specific policies may give clues to Work Orientation. These clues come from whether the policy is described in terms of how it affects the person as opposed to how it affects getting the work done.**

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Q16 "Tell me about something you did on your last job that your supervisor didn't like (didn't agree with.)"

Q17 "Tell me about the biggest 'goof-up' you were involved with at work last year."

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**Q16-17 Summary**

**In questions of this sort, you may encounter defensiveness among weaker candidates. Self-confident individuals will more readily relate substantive anecdotes. Listen for the extent to which the individual accepted some or all of the responsibility for the incident or, at a minimum, felt responsibility for helping to correct the problem. If the individual was directly involved, listen**

**for evidence that he or she learned from the incident and attempted to change their behavior in some productive way.**

Q18 "Describe the co-worker you most/least respected at XYZ Company."

And (later on)

Q19 "In what respect are you like (very different from) the person you have just described?"

**Q18-19 Summary**

**Although these onions may also give insight into Social Orientation in this case, specifically listen whether the co-worker is respected for hard work, quality of work, dependability, etc., or for non-work reasons such as a "good sense of humor", etc.**

### *Listening for Social Orientation*

There are individuals who are socially skillful and socially poised but who don't necessarily derive personal satisfaction from social interaction per se. Conversely, there are individuals who are rather shy, and who may even be hesitant to initiate social behavior with strangers or individuals perceived to be their superiors, who nonetheless value social interaction at work and may even derive great satisfaction from being helpful to others. Thus, one challenge for the interviewer is to be able to distinguish social skills and poise from whether or not the individual has a social nature. A summary of personal attributes useful in recognizing the presence or absence of Social Orientation is presented below:

**Personal Attributes Associated with Social Orientation**

**Listen for:**

**\* Valuing friends/friendships**

**\* "Outgoing" behavior**

**\* Enjoying in meeting/helping people/strangers**

**\*   Preference for keeping busy (rather than getting lost in thoughts, daydreaming, etc.)**

**\* Association/involvement (with neighbors, community, etc.)**

**\* Working for "something to do"**

**\* Emotional control/diplomacy in interpersonal conflicts**

Examples of opening questions (onions) that frequently produce themes yielding clues about the relative presence or absence of Social Orientation include the following:

Q20 "Describe for me a situation where you had a problem with a fellow employee at XYZ Company."

Q21 "Describe a situation where you found it difficult to help someone who needed help."

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**Q20-21 Summary**

**For all questions of this sort, listen for the extent to which the candidate extends themselves, attempts to understand the problem from the other party's point of view, shows patience in trying to resolve the situation, and expresses concern about how the other party felt during and after the episode. Individuals low in Social Orientation are more likely to want to get the situation resolved quickly and less concerned about how the other party feels afterward. Such individuals are more likely to be judgmental than understanding of the legitimacy of the other party's behavior.**

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Q22 "Tell me about a situation at XYZ Company where a customer got upset with you."

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**Q22 Summary**

**Although similar to Q20 & Q21, listen particularly for whether the candidate in effect says, "I was just trying to do my job," or "I was just following policy", etc., or whether the individual gives a more personal, less detached answer.**

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Q23 "Describe for me a situation where someone was very dependent on you at work."

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**Q23 Summary**

**Listen for the extent to which the dependency is described as a nuisance, a burden, time consuming, suffocating, or a problem to be rid of versus the extent to which the dependency is described in more favorable terms such as pleasure at being able to help, or being the one person he/she could count on, etc.**

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Q24 "Describe for me an experience you have had in the past year or two where you worked on something as part of a group." (Preferably at work but, if necessary, an example from school or sports may suffice.)

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**Q24 Summary**

**As you peel this onion, discover why this experience was chosen, what caused the team to be successful or unsuccessful, and what role the candidate played on the team. Listen for the extent to which the candidate chose or created a role that involved great interaction and involvement with team members or was relatively isolated or independent. Listen for the extent to which the team experience itself is described favorably or unfavorably, particularly when the outcome was not a complete success.**

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Q25 "What did you like best/least about your job at XZY Company?"

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**Q25 Summary**

**Listen for emphasis given to social satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) stemming from dealing with the public or co-workers, etc., versus satisfaction that stems directly from the task performed.**

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Q26 "What do you do in your spare time?"

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**Q26 Summary**

**This is a fishing expedition type of question but leisure choices and the importance attached to them may give you useful clues. Socially oriented individuals are more likely to be socially involved (at least with family members) than to be consistently socially detached with activities such as reading, gardening, watching television, sewing and so on.**

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Q27 "Describe for me the last time you felt your supervisor didn't deal with you correctly."

Q28 "Describe for me the last time you had to deal with someone who was out-of-line."

Q29 "Tell me about the last time you got really angry at work."

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**Q27-29 Summary**

**In questions of this sort, listen both for emotional control (or lack thereof) and whether or not the candidate dealt constructively or defensively with the situation. Emotional control and dealing with problems in a way showing acceptance of personal responsibility often go hand in hand.**

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# A Final Comment About Interview Guides

Most people cannot think and listen attentively at the same time. Successful interviewing is much more in the listening than in the asking. Thus, it is imperative that before each interview you know what you are looking for (e.g., Work Orientation) and what questions you are going to ask. The questions illustrated in this guide certainly are not exhaustive. You may very well come up with additional ones. The essential point is that they are written down or typed up in advance. Use your guide every time. Over time you may find certain questions work better for you than others. Simply refine your guide as you accumulate experience. Use the same questions over and over. Not only will you become a better listener (because you are doing less thinking) but also you will become more expert at recognizing the themes that emerge through a series of peels and across onions.

Keep in mind that the basic list of questions in your interview guide is quite short but reused as circumstances permit. For example, if a particular candidate has held three prior jobs, you peel the same onion three times:

Onion: "What did you enjoy most about your job at Company A?"

Peel: " "

Peel: " "

Peel: " "

Etc.

Repeat the onion.

Onion: "What did you enjoy most about your job at Company B?"

Peel: " "

Peel: " "

Peel: " "

Etc.

Repeat the onion.

Onion: "What did you enjoy most about your job at Company C?"

Peel: " "

Peel: " "

Peel:   " "

Etc.

Secondly, keep in mind that the onion is worded so that it is directed to the specific experience of the applicant. The examples we have provided suggest that the applicant has been working at XYZ Company. But if the applicant is just graduating from school or returning to the workplace after raising a family or has just been discharged from the military, the basic nature of the onion is the same:

"What aspect of your coursework in your senior year was most satisfying?"

"What did you find most satisfying about your job as a housewife?"

"What did you find most satisfying about your tour of duty in Vietnam?"

Finally, just as you must not do much thinking about what to ask next, you must not do much reflecting on what you have just heard. Take notes in key words and/or short phrases. Wait until the interview is completed and save for yourself at least five minutes to review your notes and form summary judgments.

# <u>Appendix</u>

## <u>Introduction to Interviewing</u>

Because we have all interviewed and been interviewed many times, it is easy to trivialize the difficulty of this practice with which we are so familiar. For one thing, there is not much of a scorecard for evaluating the interview other than the fact it was completed. Though an interviewer may be a little nervous the first few times, experience with this particular art form quickly leads to a certain smugness about one's skill. When we were learning how to drive an automobile, we may have been a bit nervous, but comfort with our competence quickly increased. Surveys of drivers inevitably show that the vast majority of drivers rate themselves to be good or excellent drivers despite the fact that opinions collected with these surveys about the "other guy" are not so charitable.

Those of us who give careful scrutiny to the employment interview aren't particularly charitable either. Scientifically collected information suggests the typical employment interview has a predictive efficiency marginally better than flipping a coin. Though the evidence indicates that the venerable employment interview is typically little more than a time-consuming ritual, it need not be so.

As a starting point, it helps to understand why such a commonplace task is anything but easy to effectively execute. For one thing, the candidate is a human being and human beings are very complex creatures. Moreover, the candidate typically is a virtual stranger to the interviewer. To further complicate an already difficult scenario, the candidate is motivated to present himself in the most favorable way he can. If that were not enough, we often schedule ourselves in sixty-minute (or less) interview segments. Thus, in a relatively few minutes, we attempt to make accurate judgments about critical attributes of a complex stranger who is not motivated to fully cooperate in our quest to uncover the truth about how this person is likely to perform over the next several years.

Viewed for what it is, the employment interview represents a challenge of nearly heroic proportions. With proper execution, the typical employment interview would still frequently fail simply because of the inherent complexity of predicting success or failure in particular situations. But the interview is generally not well executed in the first place. Though we could create a long list of typical interviewer failings, there is great value in dealing successfully with just the following three:

1. Most interviewers talk too much. We estimate that the interviewer talks nearly seventy percent of the time in a typical interview. Though this seldom surprises anyone when we mention it, it falls in the category of applying to the "other guy". A hidden camera videotape of a live interview can be disquieting however. The amount of time consumed with pleasantries ("Did you have any trouble finding our office...?"), with unnecessary restatements ("I see from your resume that you spent

over five years with...”), with fumbling around phrasing your next question, with lengthy positioning, with summarizing, and so on, adds up. Then, of course, the interviewer tells the candidate something about the company, the career opportunity, the position, the hours and, presto, the hour is up. Score: Interviewer - 42 minutes, Candidate - 18 minutes.

2. Most interviewers think too much. Many interviewers feel a great deal of pressure to “keep the interview going”. And the wheels spin mightily coming up with the next question, and the next question, and the next one. With this experience, however, the interviewer may come up with a repertoire of clever questions and clever tactics. But the wheels still turn, perhaps not so much with the questions now but with the answers and the conclusions to be reached. See number three below.

3. Most interviewers make too much out of too little. This phenomenon can start almost as soon as the candidate walks in the room: good looking, nice smile - that's good; shifty eyes - that's bad; sharp dresser - that's good; five minutes late for the interview - that's bad. Quickly, the interview falls into a familiar rhythm... question followed by answer followed by judgment. For starters, isolated facts have virtually no predictive value. Even to the extent an isolated fact might have some predictive value, you must remember that: a) much of what a candidate tells you is calculated and may be distorted, incomplete, out of context, and, b) you may misinterpret the event anyway due to the unique filters imposed by your own personality, needs, and interests, and the pressure to fill open posts.

Earlier in this interview guide, we have presented some questions that are specifically chosen because they are likely to provoke responses that will provide insight concerning the presence or absence of personal attributes important to success as a security officer. But the reason we have gone to some length in this introduction to discuss problems commonly encountered with employment interviews is because many individuals mistakenly believe that the success of an interview somehow rises or falls on the cleverness of the questions. A host of other considerations are of equal or greater significance.

## Interviewing Objectives

Perhaps foremost, interviewers must remind themselves that the purpose of the interview is not to be impressed but rather to learn about the candidate's true qualities. Given the inherent complexities of human beings, the fact candidates are necessarily merchandising themselves, and the time constraints of the interviewing process, the number one objective must be:

Keep the candidate talking.

1. Avoid asking questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no".

Poor:    Did you enjoy working as a security officer at XYZ Company?

Better:   Tell me about your experience at XYZ Company.

It's not unforgivable, of course, to occasionally ask a question that can be answered "yes" or "no". But most interviewers ask too many yes-no questions that may need one or more follow-up questions. This contributes to the interviewer talking rather than the candidate. Besides, the more open-ended versions of a question will sometimes provide totally unexpected insight bonuses.

2. As part of the discipline of honing your interviewing techniques, try to avoid questions that are roughly equivalent to asking a yes-no question.

Poor:    What did you think of the training you received at XYZ Company.

Better:   Describe for me the training program at XYZ Company.

It is commonplace to ask yes-no questions in everyday conversation and habitual in nature. Yet, as an interviewing tactic, it is simply a bad habit. Although most professionals know they should ask open-ended questions most of the time, in the heat of battle, we often revert back to our bad habits. When trying to break a habit, going cold turkey works best for most people.

3. If a question is worth asking, the answer is worth understanding. But you must presume the answer is incomplete, insincere, self-serving or otherwise calculated to impress. You must routinely get the candidate to elaborate. Understanding lies somewhere beneath the surface. Remember that flipping a coin to hire people is more cost-effective than superficial interviewing.

Poor:

Q:    Why are you interested in becoming a security officer for Weiser?

A:    Because Weiser has an excellent reputation ...blah, blah, blah... and ...blah, blah, blah.

Q:     Where did you hear that about Weiser?

Better:

Q:     Why are you interested in becoming a security officer for Weiser?

A:     Because ...blah, blah, blah.

Q:     Why is that important to you?

In short, you must learn to peel the onion, not to slice it. We will elaborate on this later in the guide.

4.     Gratuitous prefaces to questions generally aren't all that horrible but they don't accomplish anything either except to contribute to the phenomenon of the interviewer talking too much. As part of your interviewing discipline, edit out the unnecessary.

Unnecessary:All companies have their strengths and weaknesses. What did you like best about working for XYZ Company?

Better:     What did you like best about working for XYZ Company?

Of almost equal importance to keeping the candidate talking is to keep him or her talking without inadvertently giving away the nature of your interest or concern. Think of the interview as a game. The game strategy of the candidate is to tell the interviewer what he wants to hear. The interviewer, however, can defeat that strategy by:

*  Giving the candidate every opportunity to hang himself.

5.     Avoid telegraphing the issue or concern behind your questions.

Poor:     How long do you think you would be willing to work as a security officer if a promotion didn't come along?

Better:     Tell me how the job we have just described fits in with your goals.

Avoid positioning questions. It is generally totally unnecessary, contributes to the interviewer talking too much and frequently provides clues to the candidate on how to best answer.

Poor:     You have changed jobs twice in less than four years. Why is that?

Better:     Why did you leave Company A to go to work for Company B? (After fully understanding the reasons, you can get to the reasons for going from Company B to Company C later.)

6.      Don't ask leading questions.

Poor:      How good are you at paperwork? (Of course the candidate is going to tell you they can handle paperwork!)

Equally Poor:How do you feel about a job where you have to keep track of a lot of details? (Candidates that can't keep track of their shoes, even when laced on, will tell you that details don't bother them.)

Better:     Tell me about the paperwork you handled on your last position.

Listen for evidence of being attentive to detail. Listen for attitudes toward accuracy, completeness, etc. The raw material you get will generate plenty of opportunity to follow up to your satisfaction.

Finally, we feel obliged to beat the drum one more time about how fundamentally difficult it is to conduct a successful interview. The candidate is a complex human being who is generally not motivated to fully assist the interviewer in the discovery process. The interviewer is generally not a psychologist; and the interviewer has a limited time with the candidate. Though most interviews seem to be aimed at understanding the "whole person", the superficiality of the interviewing in the face of the inherent complexity of the task more or less guarantees predictive efficiency dubiously better than chance. Nor is understanding the whole person necessary even it were possible. Many, perhaps most, attributes are irrelevant to understanding performance in particular positions. But a short list of critical attributes can do much to explain job success or failure, particularly failure. Thus, for both the limitations on what any interviewer can accomplish plus the relatively narrow way in which performance success and failure is likely to be determined anyway, there really is little substitute for committing to doing a few things well. In other words:

Keep the interview focused.

7.      Avoid hypotheticals. What people say they will do and what they actually do are two different things. Direct all of your questions to their experience. What they have actually done in the past gives you the best clues about what they will do in the future.

Poor:      What do you see yourself doing in five to ten years?

Better:     Tell me about your last job interview.

Questions that don't force the context can produce abstract answers and are of as dubious value as pure hypotheticals.

Poor:   What do you consider as your greatest weakness?

Better:  Give me an example of how a weakness of yours caused you some difficulty at XYZ Company.

8.   Avoid distractions. Stay focused.

Candidates have things they want to talk about. Sometimes in all innocence, and sometimes very deliberately, they will try to shift the interview in the direction they want to go.

Q:   What did you like least about working for XYZ Company?

A:   Well, my frustration was not so much with the company as it was my growing awareness that I needed to change directions and get into something that ...blah, blah, blah.

Poor:

Follow-up:What do you mean by changing directions?

Better:   But what did you like least about working for XYZ Company?

Another common ploy of candidates is to answer a question with a question.

Q:   What do you find most appealing about the position we have discussed?

A:   A number of things. But I wonder if first you could tell me more about where this position might lead career wise?

Poor Response:Sure. This is an entry level position which...

Better Response:We'll come back to that later. Now what do you find most appealing...

## Interview Tactics

As we have stated previously, most interviewers attach undue significance to the questions they ask. Yet conducting a successful interview is much more a matter of having a focused notion of what is critical to the position in question and then carefully listening to what the applicant is revealing. The art form that turns the interview from a questioning session to a listening technique (and which overcomes most of the execution errors noted in the previous section), we refer to as "Peeling the Onion. The truth lies somewhere beneath the surface. Moreover, the truth is seldom revealed in simple bites but rather in the themes that emerge across multiple answers. The most effective way to get to the truth and to recognize it for what it is, is to carefully peel the onion one layer at a tie:

Choose your onion: "Why are you applying for a position of security officer with Weiser?"

A:   "Blah, blah, blah."

Peel off one layer: "Why is that important to you?"

A:   "Blah, blah, blah."

Peel off another layer: "Would you elaborate on that, please?"

A:   "Blah, blah, blah."

Peel off another layer: "Why do you say that?

A:   "Blah, blah, blah."

Peel off another layer:"What other aspects of this position do you find intriguing?"

A:   "Blah, blah, blah.", etc.

This form of interviewing is as thorough as traditional interviewing is superficial. Yet, peeling the onion is not intended as a stress interview. You should not become a prosecuting attorney cross-examining the defendant. Quite the opposite, when done effectively, peeling the onion appears almost conversational in nature. The candidate talks about himself (which most people enjoy doing) and the interviewer by body language, facial expression, tone of voice, and so on conveys great interest in what the person has done, why they've done it, how they felt about it, what they like, don't like, and so on.

An essential point to bear in mind is that the interview is not the place to do your thinking. Many interviewers are so busy thinking of their next clever question during the interview and/or evaluating some scrap of information revealed five minutes earlier that they fail to carefully attend to what the candidate is doing and saying. One

of the tremendous advantages of "peeling the onion" is that you do most of your thinking before the interview and after the interview. Before the interview you determine which few personal attributes you are going to go after in the upcoming interview. We call that "choosing your onions" from your personal inventory of questions. Examples of questions you might want to use are presented in the final section of this guide.

If you are planning a typical one-hour interview, this means you are going to peel only five to eight (onions) in an interview. During the interview, with the interviewer's focus determined and the onions pre-chosen, you can put your brain more or less on automatic pilot as you peel the onion and listen to the answers. "Peeling the onion" takes no more brainwork than saying "Please elaborate on that" over and over. There must be, of course, several hundred different ways to say, "Please elaborate on that." For starters, we have given you thirty suggestions in Table One.

The point is, it takes very little thought to keep the candidate talking so that you can direct your energy to listening and note taking. Unless you have allowed yourself to get in front of a complete Bozo, suspend the temptation to make judgments about the candidate until after the interview is completed. Once the interview is complete, and as soon as possible thereafter, critically review the results of the interview and summarize your impressions or conclusions.

## **Thirty or So Ways to Say,**
## **"Would you elaborate on that, please?"**

"Would you elaborate on that, please?"

"What other steps did you take?'

"Tell me more about that."

"What else?"

"Why do you say that?"

"What happened?"

"Why do you think that?"

"What else did you try?"

"Why is that?"

"What else was attempted?"

"How do you interpret that?"

"How did that happen?"

"Why is that important to you?"

"Why did things go that way?"

"Why was that disappointing to you?"

"How did you react?"

"Why was that the case?"

"How did that affect the situation?"

"Give me some more details on that."

"How did that come about?"

"Help me understand that better."

"Please go on."

"Run that past me again, would you?"

"Could you be more specific?"

"Could you clarify that?"

"What other steps did you take?"

"Please explain that to me."

"How do you know that?"

"Enlarge on that, would you?"

"Would you give me an example?"

"Expand on that."

"Give me another example, please."

"How come?"

## Pubic Contact Orientation Form

**Candidate's Name:** _____

**Interview Date:** _____

You heard evidence of...

| | Negative (-1) | Neutral (0) | Positive (+1) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Impatience | ____ | ____ | ____ | Patience when dealing with others |
| Reserved/standoffish behavior | ____ | ____ | ____ | Efforts to get to know others |
| Preference to work alone closely | ____ | ____ | ____ | Preference in working with others |
| Disinterest in helping others | ____ | ____ | ____ | Interest in helping others |
| Leisure time spent alone | ____ | ____ | ____ | Leisure time spent with others |
| Hot temper/ aggressiveness | ____ | ____ | ____ | Diplomacy/tact in interpersonal conflicts |
| Indifference about how others behave/feel | ____ | ____ | ____ | Concern about how others behave/feel, etc. |
| Lack of importance attached to being recognized or appreciated | ____ | ____ | ____ | Importance attached to being recognized or appreciated |
| Being a loner | ____ | ____ | ____ | Involvement with friends, family, neighbors |
| Avoidance of social situations | ____ | ____ | ____ | Seeks out social situations |
| Wanting to be left alone | ____ | ____ | ____ | Wanting to be needed |
| Discomfort around strangers | ____ | ____ | ____ | Enjoys meeting new people |
| Inflexibility when working with others | ____ | ____ | ____ | Flexibility when working with others |
| **TOTAL** | ____ | ____ | ____ | |

## Work Responsibility Form

**Candidate's Name:** _____

**Interview Date:** _____

You heard evidence of...

| | Negative (-1) | Neutral (0) | Positive (+1) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laziness | ____ | ____ | ____ | Hard worker |
| Loose or low personal/ work standards | ____ | ____ | ____ | High personal/work standards |
| Little emphasis on doing work correctly/completely | ____ | ____ | ____ | Great emphasis on doing work correctly/completely |
| Giving up in the face of work obstacles | ____ | ____ | ____ | Persistence in the face or work obstacles |
| Places little value on attendance, dependability, punctuality | ____ | ____ | ____ | Places high value on attendance, dependability, punctuality |
| Low expectations concerning co-workers | ____ | ____ | ____ | High expectations concerning co-workers |
| Dislike of attending to details | ____ | ____ | ____ | Liking to attend to details |
| Dislike of a need for accuracy | ____ | ____ | ____ | Liking of need for accuracy |
| Dislike of having a lot to do | ____ | ____ | ____ | Preference for having a lot to do |
| Dislike for clear rules, set procedures to follow | ____ | ____ | ____ | Preference for clear rules, set procedures to follow |
| Working because one has to work | ____ | ____ | ____ | Working because one wants to work |
| Lack of willingness to accept some responsibility for past problems | ____ | ____ | ____ | Willingness to accept some responsibility for past problems |
| Disregard for rules, policies, or procedures | ____ | ____ | ____ | Respect for following rules, policies, procedures |
| **TOTAL** | ____ | ____ | ____ | |