

Preparing for the K9 oral interview

By Rodney Spicer

Every since you joined the police department, you have always wanted to become a K9 handler. For the last two years you have participated in the K9 training sessions on your off time and have also helped out, acting as a bad guy for public demonstrations. A new K9 handler position has just been posted, and although you have been putting in time at K9 training for the last two years, several well-respected officers are also applying for the position. Even though you have helped at K9 training in the last two years on your off time, this does not mean you are the next handler. There are NO GUARANTEES!! But with the proper preparation, you can get the edge over the other applicants. Below are some suggestions and some information that will help you stand out over the other applicants.

Be physically fit to perform the job of K9 handler. Some police departments require applicants to first pass a physical agility test such as running through an obstacle course, a ¼ mile run and back through the obstacle course a second time, in a pre-determined time. You must also be able to show that you can carry a K9 on your shoulder and possibly over obstacles or up a ladder.

Now that you are ready to go forward, talk to your family and neighbors let them know that you have an interest in becoming a K9 handler. Find out their opinions and thoughts. Have them talk to the families of other K9 handlers to get their perspective of what type of impact having a Police Service Dog in their home has had.

Now your homework begins. Talk to handlers from your department as well as other local agencies. Find out what is expected of you as a handler. How much training time is regularly scheduled and how much is expected on your own? What kind of calls do you generally respond to? Do you have to document all training and are there other K9 forms that you have to fill out?

Know your departmental policy in regards to the K9 Unit. Where does the K9 go when you are on vacation? What do you do with your narcotics/ explosives when going on vacation? What do you do if your K9 is not feeling good? Who are you going to notify if your K9 has an apprehension with contact? Know your standard operating procedure.

Know your case law. A good source is at www.k9fleck.org for legal updates and opinions. Know Graham Vs Connor, Kerr vs. the City of West Palm Beach, what six areas are plaintiff's attorneys are focusing on. Know your case law and how it applies to you.

Below are questions that have been used in past oral interviews. I have found these helpful to me to gauge how well a candidate has actually prepared him/her self.

CASE LAW

Question: What three-part test should be used to satisfy and justify a canine deployment?

- Answer:
1. The severity of the crime at issue.
 2. Whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the law enforcement officers or Others.
 3. And whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.

Question: What guideline should exist in all canine units?

Answer: A written policy.

Question: List the six areas that plaintiff's attorneys are focusing on in regards to K9 civil liability cases.

- Answer:
1. Training and supervision
 2. Police service dogs as deadly force.
 3. Canine deployment warnings.
 4. Repeated applications of force.
 5. Report writing.
 6. Accidental bites.

Question: What court case emphasizes the importance of training and supervision?

Answer: Kerr vs. the City of West Palm Beach, Fl.

LEADERSHIP ABILITY

1. What is your definition of a leader?
2. Give examples of when you have demonstrated your ability to lead?
3. How would you tell a supervisor that you cannot deploy the canine?
4. Do your peers view you as a leader, and why do you think so?

GOALS

1. What is the toughest goal that you have set for your self and did you attain it?
2. What goals have you set for your self while being an officer for the police department, and have you attained these goals?
3. Seeing all the work and commitment that goes into being a canine handler what goals would you set for your self.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. How do you rate your ability to communicate with others?
2. How do you view your peer's perception of your ability to communicate?

FAMILY AND NEIGHBORS

1. What does your spouse think about you applying for this position?
2. Is your spouse aware that this position is 24 hours a day 7 days a week?
3. Is your spouse scared of dogs?
4. Have you spoken with your neighbors about how they feel about living next to a dog that is trained to bite?
5. Do you have a good relationship with your neighbors?

PUNCTUALITY

1. How do you rate your self as far as being on time to appointments?
2. Do you regularly turn assignments in on time?

SCENARIOS

1. Another officer tells you that he thinks he saw a 211pc. suspect from the day before jump over the fence at Patterson and Vineyard. Due to the changes in terrain and high grass, the officer lost visual contact. What would you do and why?
2. There has been a traffic accident on Ventura Rd., just south of Wagon Wheel Rd. The driver of the car that caused the accident is heavily intoxicated and has minor injuries that require medical attention. The driver was hand cuffed and left sitting on the curb. When the officer returned the driver was no where in sight. A witness said that a man that was handcuffed entered the drainage canal and was going into one of the tunnels. You are called to the scene and are told what has happened. A sergeant tells you that no one escapes from this department and that you will send your dog into every tunnel in the city until you find this guy! What do you do?
3. You receive a call of a verbal 415pc. between a mother and her 17 year old son. When you arrive, the son is out side of the residence holding what appears to be a bat. His mother comes outside and says that she wants him to go away and live somewhere else. You order the son to drop the bat and come to you. He says, "if you want it come and get it". He then goes into a verbal rage directed at you and his mother. He then starts walking at you saying, "bring it on". You then call your dog to your side. The mother, in fear for her son getting bit, gets between you and the son. Now the son is furious at you and raises the bat in a threatening manner while his mother has her arms around him trying to push him back. What do you do?
4. You are giving a demo for the local obedience club. You send your canine on a call off, however he does not obey and continues to bite the agitator. You then call him to

come to your side, but he remains on the bite. What do you do and what do you say to all the dog enthusiast?

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDUE

1. When the handler is off on a scheduled vacation for an extended time, what should be done with his/her training aides (Narcotics/Explosives)?
2. Upon exiting the patrol car what should the handler do to ensure that his patrol car will remain stationary?
3. If officers have entered a search area or building prior to your arrival on a scene, explain what you would do before releasing your dog.
4. In a SWAT deployment which SWAT team member directs the canine team?
5. Give two examples of where a canine team would generally not be dispatched.

IN CLOSING

1. Why are you the best candidate for this position?

In sitting in on many oral boards there is nothing more impressive than a K9 handler candidate who comes in with confidence and has all the right answers.

Because you do well in the interview does not mean you will be a good handler. But by following the above will give you the edge over other candidates.

Best of luck,

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