

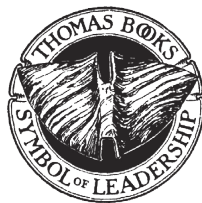
**A PREPARATION GUIDE FOR THE
ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD**

Third Edition

**A PREPARATION GUIDE
FOR THE
ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD**

By

TINA LEWIS ROWE



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*In every edition I honor the memory of the late Joanne Wright,
Denver Civil Service Commission promotional process coordinator.
One afternoon in 1986, Jo told me I should write a book on assessment
centers and dedicate it to her. I wish she was here! Thank you, Jo!*

*With all my love to my daughter, Shannon, her husband Casey,
my precociously precious grandson, Quinn Riley McCorison,
my former husband, Tom Rowe and his wife and my friend, Gail Doering Rowe.
I am indebted to my family in more ways than I can express.*

PREFACE

This third edition has the honesty, humor, and interesting perspectives that made previous editions so enjoyable to read and easy to understand. In addition, every chapter has been refreshed and renewed with tips, techniques, and insights that will help candidates use assessment center exercises to demonstrate their readiness for the rank and role they seek. Chapter Three, What Is Your Assessment Center Challenge, and Chapter Six, Three Characteristics of a High-Caliber Candidate, are completely new. They reflect decades of observation and analysis and will provide insights and guidance not found in any other training or text. The entire book is focused on improving the law enforcement profession by helping promotional candidates prepare to be effective in their preparation and testing, then effective on the job as they develop as coaches and leaders. This book is a must-have for assessment center preparation for any rank or role.

T.L.R.

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**A PREPARATION GUIDE FOR THE
ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD**

Chapter 1

READ THIS FIRST!

It is Amazingly Easy To Do Well in an Assessment Center

Do you find that bold statement hard to believe? I promise it is true. If you have been an effective officer, deputy, or employee until now; if you have had enough significant, related experiences to demonstrate understanding and readiness for the organizational role you seek; if you have attitudes and behaviors that are positive and outwardly focused instead of only about yourself and your world; and if you are generally knowledgeable in the areas of importance for the rank you seek, you can easily receive good to very good ratings in your assessment center.

Think about the likely activities: You may be asked to make a presentation about your career and how it has prepared you to be a sergeant. You may pretend to be a lieutenant, talking to a group of citizens about crime in their neighborhood, and you are expected to build trust and cooperation. You may be told there is a pursuit into your city and you are asked to explain what you would do as a sergeant and why. You may be told there was a small fire at a nursing care facility and smoke damage has required patients to be evacuated. Some of them are wandering in the nearby residential area.

Those are not unusually difficult tasks. If you have acceptable levels of knowledge and experiences and are aware of the big picture of how a supervisor, commander, and leader should respond while working with and through others, you could handle those acceptably.

What the assessors will be doing: While you are presenting or explaining your response plans, a panel rates you on the extent to which you:

- Demonstrate knowledge about your organization's rules, policies, and requirements for the rank.
- Take responsibility, show initiative, and provide leadership for those you supervise.

- Demonstrate you can analyze a problem and work with your team, the community, and a range of resources to solve it.
- Effectively communicate your knowledge, thoughts, experiences, and justifications for the actions you take.

Ratings: There are variations between assessment companies in how ratings are assigned, but for right now, think of being rated from 1–10 on the extent to which you demonstrate each rating category.

- 1–2: Almost no demonstrations and not consistently.
- 3–4: A few demonstrations of the rating category, but not strong
- 5–6: Several demonstrations of the rating category, but not strong or consistent.
- 7–8: Several effective demonstrations of the rating category. May not have been consistent.
- 9: Many strong demonstrations of the rating category, throughout the exercise.
- 10: So many strong demonstrations of the rating category that the candidate showed expertise in application of the competency.

A doable challenge: All of that *does* sound a bit intimidating and challenging, but I think you will agree that the exercise topics are reasonable. They are not so unique and difficult that there is no way you could be expected to know about them or describe how you would respond to them. Ratings are logical, only requiring you to say and do things that demonstrate your abilities, strongly and repeatedly.

In the history of your department, others who have certainly been no more brilliant than you have gone through an assessment center and rated high enough to be promoted; you can too. There is nothing about an assessment center that is out of reach for you if you study, prepare, and practice effectively. The extra benefit is that it is all preparation and training for your work *after* you are promoted.

Study, Prepare, and Practice

If you study this book, really study it and apply it, and commit to the time and effort it takes to immerse yourself in excellence, you will find it amazingly easy to work through any exercise and demonstrate significant knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and experiences that get you excellent to outstanding ratings.

On a scale of 1–10, an *unprepared* person may be able to receive a 2, 3, or 4 in most rating categories, based on their intelligence, intuitive thinking, and applicable job and rank training and experiences. A *prepared* person

can receive a 5, 6, or 7 in most rating categories. A *well-prepared* person can receive a 6, 7, or 8 in most rating categories.

You will go past those candidates and be *highly prepared* if you use this text as a guide to do hard-core preparation and if you apply the learning aids and your new skills in every assessment center activity. You can easily receive a 7, 8, 9, or 10 in every category, in every exercise.

Believe this: Being effective and receiving high ratings from assessors in all the rating categories is well within your capabilities. It might not be true for you right this minute, but you can make it true if you put the time and effort into it and open your mind to doing things in ways that might seem uncomfortable or unfamiliar to you at this point. You may also need to accept some harsh self-critique and critique from advisors and study partners, and you may have to work to improve, but you can do it. Ask anyone who has assessed, and they will agree with everything I just wrote. Assessors often say, “I wanted to scream, ‘This isn’t all that difficult’!” (Easy for them to say, right?)

Study This Book—Do Not Skim It

Every page of this preparation guide was written with you in mind, and every page contains information you can use. Nothing discourages me more than having someone tell me they read the last half of the book but not the first half or they only read the section on exercises, or they skipped PACTSFID and the ACTION ARROWS. *Arrghhh!* Do not do that to me—or to yourself!

Whether you are preparing for your first assessment center or what you hope will be your last one—or if you are studying as part of a professional development plan—read everything, from the first to last page, including this vital first chapter, as a way to ensure you do not overlook information that will assist you in reaching your goals. Contact me at trowetraining@comcast.net and let me know how you have used the book in your work and your promotional processes.

Assessment Center Components

The International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines provides a formal definition of an assessment center: ***An assessment center is a process employing multiple techniques and multiple assessors to produce judgments regarding the extent to which a participant displays selected competencies.*** The rest of this book will help you meet the challenges presented by that one sentence. The more you internalize the *why* of an assessment center, the more easily you will be able to develop the *how*.

The Five Components of Your Preparation Focus

1. The Rated Competencies
2. The Assessment Exercises
3. The Rating Method and Materials
4. The Tasks of Assessors
5. You and Your Responses to the Exercises

Every part of this book will give you information about those components so you can place yourself *within* the definition rather than feeling like a visitor in strange territory. I mean it when I say, “If you know *why* the process works and *how* it works, you will know what you need to *do* to prepare and work through the exercises effectively.”

Preparation Tips

Chapter Seven is all about Hard-Core Study, but I want you to gather your material and start using it before you get to that chapter.

Use hard-copy study aids in addition to reading from a screen. Scan and print pertinent sections from your department material, online information and anything else you will be studying.

Use a folder or preferably a three-ring binder and organize your material in a way that works for you. Make notes that personalize the learning and will cement it in your mind.

Many candidates have several three-ring binders filled with material, and when we are studying together, they can find anything they need because they use those study aids every day. That may not work for you. But I can tell you that candidates who have very little study material usually are not as committed to doing well, and that commitment is needed.

Material in Your Study Binder

1. A list of important topics and Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Attitudes, and Experiences (KSAAEs) for the rank and a section for each. Among the topics and KSAAEs should be policies and procedures that may be part of scenarios or interview questions, such as Pursuits, Sexual Harassment, Critical Incidents, Tactical Response, Counseling, Coaching, Leadership, Supervisory Control, Supervisory Approval Requirements, Interpersonal Relationships, Community Partnerships, Solving Problems, Time Management, Supervisory and Managerial Techniques, and Effective Communication with Individuals and Groups.

If you are in Corrections, the list may include Cell-Block Issues, Security, Contraband, Riots and Disturbances, Suicide Potentials, and other topics

relevant to your work as a sergeant or higher.

State Patrol candidates may include Chemical Spills, Major Accidents, Truck Violations, and Inter-Agency Cooperation.

Fire Department candidates will include Major Fires, Team Conflict, Equipment Maintenance, and similar topics.

A candidate who used this book to help him prepare for an assessment center for a high-ranking position in a bank system had sections related to Bank Fraud, Embezzlement, Auditing, Technology, Customer Service, and Conflict Between Employees. That last one never changes in any profession.

Get additional ideas for topics from those who have assessed in other departments and from your own study. Continually add study material to those topics sections. Most of it will come from department manuals and directives, but you may also have training material or information from the Internet or from texts or articles. It is disappointing that many candidates do not try to find information and ideas other than from department-provided material or their own limited knowledge. Expand your thinking! You can refer to the expanded information in all your exercises.

2. A section for PACTSFID and a section for the ACTION ARROWS.

These concepts will be explained starting in a few pages from now and continuing throughout the book. They are invaluable and you should study them just as you would any important material.

After reviewing dozens of problem-solving models and guides for responding to exercises produced by other trainers and by candidates, I think PACTSFID and the ACTION ARROWS are the most useful. The others can be helpful too, so I do not mean you should reject them. But they will not be applicable throughout your career as PACTSFID and the ACTION ARROWS will be.

3. A section for each type of potential exercise. If you are studying months in advance, as you should be, you will probably not know the exercises in which you will participate. You may be told about those in an orientation meeting a few weeks before your process, but I hope you do not wait until then to prepare. If you wait, you still can use everything in this book to help you do better than otherwise, but you will wish you had started sooner.

If the same testing company or test developer as last time is involved, you may have a general idea about exercises. Those may change and certainly the exact scenarios will not be the same, so do not assume you only need to prepare for what happened in the past.

The chapter on Exercises includes all the most-used types and is the best way to develop your list. Keep in mind this important fact: It is nice to know how to approach specific exercises, but it is crucial to have knowledge and