

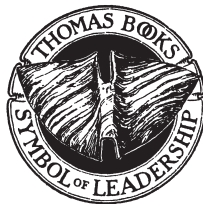
**A PREPARATION GUIDE FOR THE
ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD**

Second Edition

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

By

TINA LEWIS ROWE



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

This book is protected by copyright. No part of
it may be reproduced in any manner without written
permission from the publisher. All rights reserved.

© 2013 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 978-0-398-08751-7 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-398-08752-4 (ebook)

First Edition, 2006
Second Edition, 2013

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2013011884

*With THOMAS BOOKS careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing
and design. It is the Publisher's desire to present books that are satisfactory as to their
physical qualities and artistic possibilities and appropriate for their particular use.
THOMAS BOOKS will be true to those laws of quality that assure a good name
and good will.*

*Printed in the United States of America
SM-R-3*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rowe, Tina Lewis.

A preparation guide for the assessment center method / by Tina Lewis
Rowe. -- Second Edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-398-08751-7 (pbk.) -- ISBN 978-0-398-08752-4 (ebook)

1. Assessment centers (Personnel management procedure) I. Title.

HF5549.5.A78A68 2013
658.3'01--dc23

2013011884

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

*With many thanks to Larry Homenick,
Chief Deputy, United States Marshals Service (ret.)
who worked with me when I was the United States Marshal for Colorado
and continues to be my friend and colleague.
Larry is the best note-taker and assessor I have ever known
and is always an invaluable resource.*

*For this second edition, as with the first, I am grateful for the
support and assistance of Geoffrey Adams, Ph.D.,
my friend in high school at Arkansas City, Kansas,
now the pastor of Graceway Church, Kansas City, Missouri.*

CONTENTS

| <i>Chapter</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. WHY YOU SHOULD READ ALL OF THIS BOOK | 3 |
| Study – Do Not Just Skim | 3 |
| Components of the Assessment Center Method | 4 |
| Starting and Staying Organized | 5 |
| A Key Concept: KSA | 5 |
| An Assessment Center Is Like Firearms Qualification | 6 |
| Meet Your Study Partner | 8 |
| A Background for the Book | 10 |
| You Can Have Confidence with the Process | 12 |
| Make the Book a Learning Tool | 13 |
| Personalize the Information | 13 |
| Establish Goals and Work to Achieve Them | 13 |
| Steps Toward Goal Achievement | 14 |
| Career Goals that Enhance Effectiveness | 14 |
| 2. UNDERSTANDING TO IMPROVE RESULTS | 18 |
| Terms That Will Tell You What to Expect | 18 |
| What the Terms Mean for Your Assessment Center | 20 |
| Assessment Center Guidelines | 21 |
| Assessment History and Your Future | 24 |
| Earliest History | 24 |
| German Assessments | 25 |
| British OSS Assessing | 26 |
| American OSS Assessments | 27 |
| History and Your Preparation | 29 |
| Assessment Centers in Business | 30 |
| Assessment Centers in Law Enforcement | 31 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Final Thoughts | 37 |
| 3. GET INSIDE YOUR ASSESSMENT CENTER | 38 |
| Steps to Assessment Center Development | 38 |
| Complaints and Litigation | 42 |
| Producing Your Assessment Center | 46 |
| Find Out All You Can About the Process | 46 |
| Final Thoughts | 48 |
| 4. EVERY DAY IS AN ASSESSMENT CENTER | 50 |
| Life's Lessons | 50 |
| Apply the Concepts in Your Personal Life | 51 |
| Your Personal Assessors | 51 |
| Develop a Personal Assessment Process | 52 |
| Determine Your Personal Assessor Priorities | 52 |
| Record Behaviors | 52 |
| Apply the Concepts to Your Career Development | 53 |
| Identify Requirements for the Assignment | 54 |
| Self-Evaluate | 54 |
| Apply the Concepts to Your Work Reputation | 55 |
| Determine Requirements for Your Work | 55 |
| Rate Yourself | 56 |
| Final Thoughts | 57 |
| 5. WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE SOMETIMES GET BAD SCORES? | 59 |
| Good and Bad Are Subjective Terms | 59 |
| An AC Experience | 63 |
| Misunderstandings About Ratings | 65 |
| Misunderstandings and Realities | 67 |
| An AC Experience | 72 |
| When You Do Not Do as Well as Expected | 73 |
| Final Thoughts | 74 |
| 6. HOW TO STUDY FOR YOUR ASSESSMENT CENTER | 75 |
| An AC Experience | 76 |
| Your Study Plan | 76 |
| Advisors and Mentors | 81 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| An AC Experience | 82 |
| Limit Your Request for Advisor Time | 82 |
| Remember the Social Graces | 83 |
| Keep Advice in Perspective | 83 |
| Inside Information | 84 |
| Questions to Ask and Discuss | 84 |
| Be Considerate About Questions | 85 |
| Studying with Friends | 86 |
| Sources for Study Partners | 86 |
| An AC Experience | 87 |
| Summary About Study: Do It | 88 |
| 7. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER | 90 |
| Your Assessment Day | 90 |
| Assessment Center Instructions | 91 |
| Staying Near the Assessment Site | 91 |
| Bring Items You Might Need | 92 |
| Finding a Private Place | 93 |
| An AC Experience | 94 |
| Lunch Breaks | 94 |
| An AC Experience | 94 |
| Attire and Other Essentials | 95 |
| Dress to Avoid Distractions | 95 |
| Your Overall Behavior | 98 |
| An AC Experience | 99 |
| Another AC Experience | 99 |
| Keep Your Mind Focused on the Process | 100 |
| Be What You Want to Be | 100 |
| Keep a Healthy Perspective Starting Now | 100 |
| Final Thoughts | 101 |
| 8. THE KEY TO A HIGH SCORE: KSA AREAS | 103 |
| How to Use a List of Dimensions/Competencies | 104 |
| Common KSA Areas | 104 |
| Can You Fake Competencies and KSAs? | 109 |
| Use the Words and Phrases on the Lists | 109 |
| KSAs Are Logical | 110 |
| How KSA Areas Are Used in Assessment Centers | 111 |
| You Will Be Observed for KSAs | 112 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Levels of Learning | 113 |
| The Knowledge Domain | 115 |
| An Example of Expanded KSAs | 116 |
| Applying the Concept of the Knowledge Domain | 118 |
| Testing Your Level of Knowledge | 118 |
| The Value of Understanding the Knowledge Domain | 119 |
| The Affective (Attitude) Domain | 119 |
| Levels of Learning in the Attitude Domain | 120 |
| Changing Your Attitudes | 122 |
| Applying the Affective Domain | 123 |
| Final Thoughts | 123 |
| 9. ASSESSORS, RATINGS AND YOU | 125 |
| Who Are the Assessors? | 126 |
| Assessor Training | 127 |
| Opinions Versus Behaviors | 132 |
| A Quiz About Behaviors | 134 |
| Is This a Behavior? | 134 |
| Issues About Assessing | 135 |
| Rating Methods | 136 |
| How Assessors Decide on a Rating | 136 |
| A Final Point on Assessor Evaluation and Rating | 140 |
| Rating Forms | 140 |
| Final Thoughts | 142 |
| 10. VIDEO IN YOUR ASSESSMENT CENTER | 143 |
| How Video May Be Used | 144 |
| Summary of the Way Video May Be Used | 147 |
| How Recordings Are Assessed | 148 |
| Being Effective While Being Recorded | 148 |
| Role-Play Scenarios | 148 |
| Effectiveness in a Recording or with Assessors Present | 154 |
| 11. COMMAND-LEVEL AND EXECUTIVE ASSESSMENT CENTERS | 156 |
| How to Prepare | 156 |
| Command-Level Dimensions | 157 |
| Additional Dimensions for Command Ranks | 161 |
| Examples of Command-Level Items | 162 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| A Mix of Questions and Scenarios | 162 |
| Scenarios | 164 |
| Demonstrating Your Command-Level Readiness. | 165 |
| Chief of Police Testing Processes | 166 |
| Components of Your Process. | 166 |
| The Two Unspoken Questions. | 167 |
| Other Activities in Your Testing. | 170 |
| Fitting the Profile and Fulfilling the Dimensions | 170 |
| Some Issues to Research and Prepare About | 173 |
| Keep a Close-Up and Wide-Angle View. | 175 |
| Presenting Yourself | 175 |
| Putting It All Together. | 176 |
| 12. A MINI-REFERENCE FOR KSA TOPICS. | 178 |
| The All-Important Communication Skills | 178 |
| Verbal Communications | 179 |
| Guidelines for Verbal Communications | 180 |
| Written Communication. | 181 |
| Guidelines for Written Communication | 182 |
| Communication About Job Performance | 182 |
| Conflict Resolution and Mediation | 184 |
| Counseling and Coaching | 185 |
| Active Listening Skills | 186 |
| Knowledge of Resources | 189 |
| Delegation. | 190 |
| Discipline. | 191 |
| Interpersonal Sensitivity. | 194 |
| Job Knowledge | 194 |
| Motivation. | 196 |
| Organizational Roles | 198 |
| Personal Development. | 200 |
| Planning and Coordinating Work | 201 |
| The Six M's of Planning. | 201 |
| Problem-Solving and Decision-Making | 203 |
| Training. | 204 |
| Leadership | 205 |
| Management. | 206 |
| Presentation Skills. | 207 |
| Final Thoughts | 208 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 13. THOUGHT ORGANIZERS THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE | 209 |
| How PACTSFID and the Action Arrows Were Developed | 210 |
| PACTSFID | 213 |
| PA: Problem Analysis | 213 |
| C: Considerations | 214 |
| T: Training (Opportunities and Needs) | 215 |
| S: Solution (Options and Choice) | 216 |
| F: Follow-Up | 220 |
| I: Inform | 221 |
| D: Document | 221 |
| Final Thoughts | 222 |
| 14. EXERCISES: YOUR FRIENDS | 224 |
| Simulations and Fictional Information | 225 |
| Make It Real | 226 |
| Exercise: Oral Presentation | 226 |
| General Preparation Guidelines | 227 |
| Characteristics of Effective Presentations | 230 |
| Verbal Resume or Career Presentation | 230 |
| Functions of the Verbal Resume | 231 |
| What to Include in Your Verbal Resume | 232 |
| What Assessors Are Observing and Recording | 233 |
| Using PACTSFID and the Action Arrows | 234 |
| Time Limits for Your Presentation | 234 |
| Producing a Graphic | 235 |
| A Sample Structure for a Verbal Resume | 236 |
| Impromptu Presentations | 240 |
| Using PACTSFID and the Action Arrows | 240 |
| Impromptu Presentation Examples | 241 |
| Interview | 242 |
| Questions in Structured Interviews | 243 |
| Using PACTSFID and the Action Arrows | 244 |
| An Interview with Your Chief or Department Commanders | 246 |
| Written Exercise | 248 |
| Examples of Written Exercises | 249 |
| Role-Play Exercise | 250 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Roles and Scenarios | 253 |
| A Problem-Solving Interview Structure | 255 |
| The Role of the Role-Player | 259 |
| Role-Play Preparation Time | 259 |
| Working Your Way Through the Role-Play | 260 |
| Summary About Role-Plays | 265 |
| In-Basket Exercise | 265 |
| Read the Instructions and Follow Them. | 266 |
| Work Your Way Through the In-Basket | 267 |
| Prioritizing. | 268 |
| Summary About In-Basket Exercises | 269 |
| Justification of an In-Basket | 269 |
| Presenting Your Justification. | 271 |
| Critical Incident | 272 |
| Practicing Critical Incident Exercises | 274 |
| Other Exercises | 274 |
| Take-Home Problem-Solving Exercise | 275 |
| Exercises Using the Police Radio. | 276 |
| A Social Event. | 276 |
| Media Interview | 277 |
| Deployment Exercise | 277 |
| Leaderless Group | 278 |
| Telling and Selling Presentation. | 278 |
| Creative Activities. | 279 |
| No Advance Knowledge | 279 |
| A Hybrid Exercise | 279 |
| Final Thoughts | 280 |
| 15. A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT A ROLE-PLAY | 282 |
| The Scenario | 282 |
| A Sample Response | 283 |
| Taking Role-Play Apart to Look for Options | 284 |
| Coaching, PIP or Sanctions? | 285 |
| Working Through Role-Play | 286 |
| Point A (Start the Role-Play) – Point B (End) | 289 |
| The Bottom Line About Coaching | 295 |
| Your Role-Play Is Over. What Next? | 299 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 16. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS | 301 |
| Applying What You Have Learned..... | 301 |
| Make Every Day an Assessment Center..... | 304 |
| <i>Appendix</i> | 307 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 311 |
| <i>Index</i> | 313 |

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

Chapter 1

WHY YOU SHOULD READ ALL OF THIS BOOK

Second Edition Challenges

You would think, if someone teaches about assessment center preparation, develops assessment centers, and regularly writes about the subject, that producing a second edition to an established text would be easy. I would have thought it as well. However, just as people are wrong who tell you it will be quick and easy for you to prepare for an assessment center, I was wrong to think updating would be quick and easy.

However, the work has been worth it for you and me both, because this second edition keeps the significant material from the first but adds a tremendous amount of helpful material and insights from candidates and assessors.

Please contact me through my website, www.tinalewisrowe.com, to let me know about information that you think would be helpful to add to the third edition.

STUDY – DO NOT JUST SKIM

To gain the full benefits of this book you must study it, not skim through it. All of it was written with you in mind and every page contains information you can use.

There is more to this book than you may have anticipated – and more than you might have thought you wanted. My goal in this second edition continues to be to provide information you may not find elsewhere and that can make a dramatic difference in your assessment center performance. I also want you to be able to apply it personally and professionally, long after you

are promoted to the next rank and the next.

In the first edition, I hesitated about including suggestions for applying assessment center concepts to relationships. However, many readers told me that it was not only useful for their relationships, it gave them a way to let their loved ones and friends understand the process, so I retained all of it and added a bit more.

One candidate's wife wrote and said it started a dialogue they had needed to have for years. That did not surprise me, because many candidates, of all tenures, tell me the entire book has given them different perspectives on their life and work. I hope it will do that for you as well.

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 all of this book, including this first chapter with introductory material, as a way to ensure you do not overlook information that will assist you in reaching your goals.

COMPONENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD

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.¹

If you have read anything on the subject of assessment centers, you have read or heard that definition. The rest of this book will help you meet the challenges presented by that one sentence. Look at the seven key components of that sentence:

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.

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.

1. International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines. (Endorsed by the 28th Congress on Assessment Center Methods, San Francisco, CA., May 4, 2000), *Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operation*, 10.

STARTING AND STAYING ORGANIZED

Four Requirements for Effectiveness

1. A foundation of professional knowledge, skills and experiences.
2. An understanding of how that foundation can be tested in a formal process.
3. Awareness of how your behaviors (what you say and do) can demonstrate the levels of your knowledge, skills and experiences.
4. Effective communication skills to convey what you have to offer.

This book can help you do the final three things, but you must provide the first and it cannot be crammed. However, you may have a more solid foundation than you realize and all of this material can help you maximize it. In the meantime – keep working on your foundation. Chapter Six is about how to study for an assessment center, and all of it is about gaining and strengthening your professional core.

PREPARATION TIP: It is an understandable temptation to want to immediately start practicing sample exercises if you think you know which exercises will be used. However, if you are preparing well in advance, you probably will know little or nothing about the process. Even if you think you do, hold off on practice until you can say with certainty that you can practice at the same high levels you want to demonstrate in the real deal.

The whole focus of this book is to encourage you to put the exercises in perspective, so you will make gaining knowledge and skills for any exercise your number one priority.

A KEY CONCEPT: KSA

You will repeatedly see the term KSAs in this book and in every aspect of your testing. I will briefly define it here, so you can understand the term when it is used in the rest of this chapter. You will have a chance to learn how to make your KSAs work for you in Chapter Eight. Studying that chapter and fully applying the material could make the difference between a low and mid-range score or a high score.

KSA, in a general sense, refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and traits required for competency and effectiveness in a task or job.² (I often write it as KSAAEs to convey the thought that Experiences are part of the

2. Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. (Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1986), 9.

package.) It is a long-standing educational concept that refers to what you know and can accomplish with your knowledge and skills and the traits and demeanors that affect how others perceive you. A key issue about KSAs, to which you will see me refer a few times, is that there are KSAs and there are KSAs, and there are often big differences between them.

Your preparation focus should be on developing and demonstrating the highest levels of KSAs.

That is not to say practicing specific exercises is unimportant. It is a way to become more comfortable speaking and writing about the knowledge, skills, and experiences you possess, in the format in which you are likely to be assessed. However, if you have not developed high levels of knowledge and skills, you will not be as effective as you would like, no matter how much you practice role-playing, presenting a verbal resume, or working through sample in-basket items. In fact, the more you practice incorrectly or in a mediocre way, just walking through an exercise for practice, the more likely the methods you use will be what you will do in your assessment center.

Bottom line: In the month or so before a test, you can do many practice exercises, but until then, work on demonstrating high levels of competencies (KSAs) in *any* exercise.

AN ASSESSMENT CENTER IS LIKE FIREARMS QUALIFICATION

I often use firearms qualification as an analogy for an assessment center: If you only take three bullets with you, you cannot get a high score – even if you get those three bullets in the middle of the ten-ring. This book will help you gather all the ammo you can carry and have the skill to use it, so your assessment center target is blasted by hits in the ten-ring.

You Are The Weapon

The weapon is you. You alone deliver your KSAs verbally and in writing. The weapon is the combination of your thought processes, words, gestures, expressions, decisions, judgment, style, and effectiveness. On the firearms range, you must pull the trigger to deliver the ammunition to the target throughout the course of fire. In your assessment center, you must think, speak, and write effectively to demonstrate your KSAs throughout each exercise.