Don McNea Fire School
www.FirePrep.com

Below are leaderless group strategies that will increase your chances of being promoted. We strongly suggest you take the time to review these strategies before you take your examination. These strategies have been developed by experts in the field who have helped thousands of firefighters increase their score and gain their promotion!

At our website, www.FirePrep.com, under Fire Department Assessment Center Exam Preparation, we have in-depth Assessment Center Exam Prep and strategies to put you in the top percentile over your competition and get that coveted officer badge - good luck!

LEADERLESS GROUP EXERCISE TIPS

Group discussions in assessment centers generally consist of groups of six participants. This number can vary, depending on the number of participants involved in the assessment center and the exercise design. Generally, any number less than four makes it very difficult to assess an exercise as a "group" exercise. Likewise, any number of participants beyond nine makes it difficult for a group to function efficiently within the constraints of the assessment center. Group dynamics are very active in these exercises, and many factors affect and are impacted by the number of participants in a group discussion.

Focus on the dimensions of this exercise. Work towards being the one who keeps the group on track, who listens well to others, and can synthesize what the group has discussed. Focus on the larger perspective and keep the goals of the group constantly in mind. The group will wander from topic to topic. Someone should keep them focused and within the artificial parameters of the exercise. Be sensitive to the needs of others, and facilitate discussion and group involvement, rather than dominating the conversation. Wrap up, be accurate and concise. Did you meet the goals of the exercise that were spelled out for you? Did you hear from everyone? Did people "cut" each other off in the conversation? Were some people "wallflowers"? These are just some things to keep in mind. Next time you are in a department meeting, look to enhance your participation. Practice!

MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEADERLESS GROUPS

Candidates assume (mistakenly) that the assessors in a leaderless group discussion are looking for a group leader to emerge. As a result, candidates take on various roles in an attempt to exert some influence over the group. A common role is that of a group moderator. This role is neither positive nor negative by itself. It would be regarded as positive if the group lacked direction or strayed far from its original goal. On the other hand, if the group is doing well at, say, idea generation, then a moderator might inhibit valuable input from other group members. Assessors who observe this would rate this person much lower.

Some candidates will attempt to control a leaderless group discussion – and thereby assume that they are "leaders" – by acting in the role of a timekeeper or secretary. Just as with the moderator role, these other roles may or may not be regarded by the assessors as positive. It all depends on whether the group needs such roles to accomplish its task.

My advice to candidates who are placed in a leaderless group discussion is to forget about what you may have heard about "how to act" and evaluate the needs and goals of the group as it exists for that particular situation.

Another common problem encountered in group discussions occurs when the candidates are familiar with one another, as often happens in fire service promotional testing. The problem is that the participants bring to the group all their previous assumptions, opinions, role relationships, and attitudes about the other group members. If one participant, for example, has established himself as an "intellectual" or a "negotiator," other group members may quickly turn to him for problem solving or conflict mediation.

The solution here is the same as before. Unfortunately, it is more difficult to accomplish. As a participant, try to go beyond your previously established opinions and feelings about other group members. Regard them in the same light as the assessors, who should have no prior assumptions about the candidates' particular strengths or weaknesses.

Assessors who are observing a leaderless group discussion are more interested in who can get their points across and not in who takes control of the group. In terms of evaluating a candidate's ability to get a point across, assessors are looking for someone whose ideas are understandable (that is, communicated well) and accepted (that is, convincing).

To accomplish this, you, as a group participant, need to think through your ideas in a logical fashion so that, when presented to the other group members, your ideas come across as complete. When presenting your ideas to the group, do not abandon your logic for emotional appeals. Use examples and tie your ideas or comments to experiences with which all the participants can relate. And remember, while this, like all assessment center exercises, is designed to be competitive, an individual who can draw out the best in others, who can seek compromise, who can evaluate without criticism, will appear as a shining start in a leaderless group discussion.

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST FOR LEADERLESS GROUP DISCUSSION EXERCISE –
LEADERSHIP DIMENSION

Leadership: Effectiveness in getting others to accept ideas and suggestions, and in guiding others to accomplish a task or arrive at a solution to a problem; assertive at appropriate times; seeks responsibility of leadership role.

Positive Behavioral Descriptors:

- Makes suggestions on how to organize group activities and how to proceed to accomplish group objectives in a way that has impact; group generally follows.

- Mediates opposing individuals or groups by clarifying differences and/or using other techniques to highlight need for total group to reach a common solution.

- Makes suggestions on how to solve specific problems; influences the direction of the group as a result.

- Demonstrates skill and calm demeanor in dealing with group tensions; seeks to build group cohesion while directing group toward accomplishment of group goals.

- Makes suggestions for closing discussion on particular problems when agreement has been reached; suggestions and manner or presenting are effective and usually followed.

- Gives credit to others, builds upon their ideas, makes others feel they have had impact in devising solutions acceptable to the whole group.

- Encourages participation of others in arriving at group solutions; openness of manner suggests self-assurance and valuing of others.

- Appropriately assertive in dir4ecting group back to main goals when group members are focusing on minor points or agendas that detract from the achievement of group objectives; and/or in guiding the group to find better solutions when needed.

Negative Behavioral Descriptors:

- Suggestions are made at inappropriate times, e.g., after group has already determined course of action.

- Suggestions are not clearly explained or are "one-liners" that have no impact on the group.

- Sells only own point of view.

- Demonstrates a tendency to overlook points made by others, or fails to address tehse points in an effective manner, in formulating solutions to problems; hence, does not win as much support as would otherwise be the case, and may get resistance.

- Does not attempt to get others to consider his/her case; projects some understanding of the problem but does not demonstrate appropriate assertiveness in getting the group to consider his/her ideas.

- Demonstrates a tendency to let others actively finalize solutions and direct the group; role is more of a "follower."

- Demonstrates a tendency to take the "opposition" position and/or to oppose solutions favored by the group without taking the views of others into account in formulating new solutions acceptable to the group as a whole.

- Attempts to overpower others into accepting own view by projecting excessive dominance, in some cases being successful, but alienating some group members in the process.

- Participation is limited; either does not wish to attempt leading or guiding the group, or does not have the skills needed to intervene and participate in the discussion.

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST FOR LEADERLESS GROUP DISCUSSION EXERCISE –
ORAL COMMUNICATIONS DIMENSION

Oral Communications: The ability to express ideas clearly, concisely, and effectively in oral form; to listen to others attentively and with comprehension; to give appropriate non-verbal messages and to interpret such messages when given by others.

Positive Behavioral Descriptors:

- Presents thoughts and ideas in succinct and well-organized manner.

- Speaks in clear, well-constructed, grammatically correct sentences; articulates easily and fluently.

- Maintains eye contact when speaking.

- Uses appropriate hand and body gestures, and facial expressions, to emphasize important points.

- Listens attentively and with comprehension when others are speaking.

- Uses appropriate voice inflection to emphasize main points.

- Volume of voice is appropriate to the situation.

- Uses appropriate and easily understandable rate of speech.

Negative Behavioral Descriptors:

- Ideas and points are hard to follow because they are not presented in an organized manner.

- Rambles when trying to make a point.

- Struggles for phrasing and wording.

- Words are not clearly enunciated.

- Uses incorrect grammar.

- Overly repetitive.

- Does not make eye contact with others when speaking.

- Holds hand in front of mouth when speaking; or other habits which make understanding difficult.

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST FOR LEADERLESS GROUP DISCUSSION EXERCISE –
PROBLEM ANALYSIS/DECISION MAKING DIMENSION

<u>Problem Analysis/Decision Making</u>: Skill in identifying and analyzing problems and developing logical solutions; identifies logical causes of problems, develops alternative solutions, and makes decisions in a logical manner.

<u>Positive Behavioral Descriptors</u>:

- Seeks relevant information when needed; asks appropriate questions to get at the facts.

- Categorizes information, recalls relevant data, separates relevant from irrelevant information in exploring alternative solutions.

- Notes critical relationships between points made by others or among various parts of the problem in investigating potential solutions.

- Quickly and effectively analyzes situations or problems; focuses on the key elements of the problem without getting sidetracked by less important or trivial issues.

- Skillful in identifying possible causes of problems and logically weighs the available information in arriving at a decision.

- Develops possible alternative courses of action, carefully considering ramifications of each.

- Quickly and effectively evaluates new information and, if appropriate, modifies decisions.

- Positions on issues are well thought out, with logical reasons to support them.

- Judgments reflect an understanding of practical matters, including interpersonal issues that may affect the outcome of the decision.

- Foresees the consequences of various alternatives and selects the best alternative.

<u>Negative Behavioral Descriptors:</u>

- Does not spot relationships among key elements of the problem.

- Fails to adequately consider all of the available information.

- Fails to identify and consider possible alternative courses of action.

- Jumps to conclusions before properly defining the problem in its entirety.

- Fails to adequately consider the relationships between possible causes of the problem and the observed effects.

- Decisions do not fully address the key elements of the problem or situation.

- Makes decisions which deal with the surface issues rather than the causes of the problem(s).

- Judgments sometimes ignore practical or interpersonal concerns, resulting in negative outcomes.

- Decisions ignore important considerations, leading to the selection of poor alternative courses of action.