

### **Richard W. Vomacka Student Speaker Competition**

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- School Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
- Topic: Going from Collegiate to Career EMS
- Presentation Synopsis  
(2 paragraph summary followed by Presentation Outline with each of your sub-topics and descriptions)

#### **THE TRANSITION FROM COLLEGIATE EMS TO CARREER**

Collegiate EMS was my introduction to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and all that EMS has to offer. Before becoming a probationary member of the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad (VTRS) in 1998, I barely knew even how to do CPR. My collegiate rescue squad taught me all about EMS and today I work as a paid Medic for the city of Radford, Virginia while still finding time to volunteer for the squad that made me. I would have never thought that by joining this student organization/collegiate rescue squad I would find a career path that would lead me to wake up everyday fulfilled, knowing that I can make a difference in the lives of others and love what I do. In the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad I was given many connections and had various networking opportunities with our Life Member and Alumni Association in order to prepare for a career in EMS once graduating college. I spoke to paramedics, physicians, nurses, flight medics, and firefighters about how I could continue after college with an EMS career. The transition from collegiate EMS to career EMS is a challenge, yet with the advice and support of my collegiate squad peers and life members, I came out on top. I still continue to volunteer as an active Life Member for VTRS, pulling a night crew, day duty, and have playing an active roll in preparing our members for their transition into career EMS and obtaining EMS jobs just as those before had helped me.

After having made this challenging transition from collegiate to career EMS I feel that I could be of help to all students that are a part of collegiate squads and are looking to continue EMS after they graduate. I have been involved in the interview process for both collegiate and career squads and have a lot to offer for those looking to succeed. My speech will include topics such as “from how to get the most out of your collegiate squad”, “how to prepare and pass an interview for becoming a Career Medic”, and “what to expect once you are hired.” There are many different squads throughout the nation yet common techniques and skills that can be used to pass your EMS interview and succeed in a career EMS path. The transition is a challenge yet with what I have learned and what I have been taught I feel I can help all those interested in continuing EMS in the future. It was about a year and a half-ago today that I made the transition and I look forward to the opportunity to help students wishing to continue with EMS. With the tips and advice mentioned throughout my speech, all students will be prepared to take that next step. (Please refer outline below. This outline is not completely filled because there are stories included as examples of some of the principles throughout the speech).

## THE TRANSITION FROM COLLEGIATE EMS TO CAREER

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Where my experience comes from.
- B. How I learned from peers and mentors.

### II. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR COLLEGIATE SQUAD YEARS

#### A. Starting early

#### B. Taking Advantage of Collegiate EMS Opportunities

1. Your youth
2. Peers interested in the same thing
3. Learning from your peers
4. Asking questions from those who have been there
5. Funding
6. Classes available
7. Experience
8. All the people that are there to help you
9. Training

#### C. Training, Training, and more Training

1. In collegiate EMS there is less call volume that in other areas. **Use this time to your advantage.** Use this time for training, so that when you all get that BIG call then you are prepared.
2. **Training builds team interactions and makes people more comfortable and confident in their skills.**
3. In collegiate squads there is such a huge turnover, that training is necessary yet also helps you really keep up with those skills that are rarely used yet always tested.
4. Plenty of students are always around, **create Drills** to simulate calls that you either do run all the time or don't. If you are not sure of drills to re-enact then look at references in the library or on the internet. Also there are student clubs and organizations that are willing to help with MCI – if that dorm ever collapses or then chem. building blows up.
  - a. [www.lessstress.com](http://www.lessstress.com)
5. Preparing and training for that Big call will one-day come in handy.
  - a. **Example → Tech Code – Cardiac Arrest – Seeing that kid later on-campus**

6. Collegiate squads have various resources including Internet Access. Here are some helpful EMS sites.
  - a. [www.vavrs.org](http://www.vavrs.org)
  - b. more to come
7. Enjoy the fact that you can take various **classes with your peers** and with people your age who are as enthusiastic as you are. Have fun taking these.
8. **Enjoy the attitude of the young and green.** Remember what it was like the first time you learned to take those vitals. Keep a refreshed new outlook on training as new probationary members do.

**D. Other things to aim for that will help you obtain your goals**

1. **Take-on a Leadership** positions and make the position out to be bigger than expected.
2. **Follow your mentors** and those upperclassman that have been through what you are going through.
3. Strive to **become a Life member** of your organization.
4. Use your resources as part of a collegiate squad to do networking when looking for that dream job.
  - a. Tech LMA are OMD's, Captains, Lieutenants, Training coordinators, Instructors, Physicians, Med Students, Flight Medics, Firefighters. (i.e. Dwight Polk, Dan Berry, Russ Hummel)
  - b. LMA can be found where ever you look and can be a valuable resource. Just try posing a question to your LMA through a list serve or website.
  - c. Use your LMA to teach classes. (VTRS LMA training weekend)

**E. Remember where you came from.**

1. Take many **pictures**. These will be your roots and where you began.
2. Create a **logbook** for further reference on the type and amount of calls you have run.

### **III. HOW TO APPLY – THE TRANSITION BEGINS**

**A. Have Pride in Your Squad.**

1. Although you may consider yourself as inexperienced, all of your prior training has prepared you to be the best and to prove it to others.

## **B. Application Process**

### **1. Filling out your application**

- a. Know your deadlines
- b. Make sure it is turned in early. This shows eagerness and responsibility
- c. Make sure it's legible and neatly typed

### **2. Resume**

- a. Start working on your resume now
- b. Include a good mission statement
  - i. To be involved in Emergency Medicine and Patient interactions
  - ii. Other mission statements to come
- c. Include all your roles in your collegiate squad and leadership positions.

### **3. Recommendations/References**

- a. Even if these are not required include them
- b. EMS is a practical and skill based occupation, what you have done in the past matters – It matters how you treat your patients and if the staff respects you.
- c. Get them from your lieutenants and Captain
- d. Don't ask at the last minute

### **4. Driving Record**

- a. Most agencies ask for this
- b. Most agencies require no negative points
- c. Positive points are even better
- d. Take a driving course, b/c you will be driving a vehicle worth over \$500,000

## **IV. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

A. **How to Prepare Yourself** – Mental fear of the unknown is often what produces the physical symptoms of nervousness. In addition to preparing yourself physically you need to prepare yourself mentally.

The best way to prepare yourself mentally is to know what may be coming.

Fear of the unknown can only exist when there is an unknown.

1. What to expect. Classic/Behavioral/Situational
2. Know the certifications your employer requires prior to interview.
3. Make sure to have reciprocity and all certifications taken care of before interview. This shows prior planning and responsibility.

## B. Practicing for the Interview

### 1. Note-cards

a.

Word	
Definition/What it means to you	
Synonyms	
Personal Example	
Negative Example	

c. Sample words

- i. Integrity, Professionalism, Responsibility, Ethics, Confidentiality, Dedication, Success, Team, Goals

### 2. Mirror

- a. Practice with what you are to say with what you are planning to wear.
- b. You want to know what it will look like when you sit or stand or walk or bend
- c. Dress appropriately – Some interviews test skills and you need to be comfortable. (i.e. Lifeline)
- d. Always dress to impress.
- e. For Men:
  - iii. Conservative two piece business suit for men.
  - iv. Always long sleeve dress shirts even in summer weather.
  - v. No facial hair unless well trimmed mustache.
  - vi. Light cologne to none.
  - vii. No jewelry other than a watch or wedding ring/college ring.
- f. For Woman:
  - i. Always wear a suit with a jacket
  - ii. No stiletto heels.
  - iii. No purses, briefcase or folder appropriate.
  - iv. No more than one ring per hand.
  - v. Clear nail-polish, no acrylic nails. These are against OSHA regulations.

## C. CLASSIC - Frequently Asked Interview Questions and Answer Ideas

1. [www.collegegrad.com](http://www.collegegrad.com)
  - a. What do you want to do with your life?
  - b. What is your work experience?
  - c. Why did you choose EMS and when did you decide this?
  - d. What goals do you have in your career and how do you plan to achieve these?
  - e. How do you evaluate success?
  - f. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
  - g. What motivates you?
  - h. Why should we hire you over someone else?
  - i. Describe some of your recent goals.
  - j. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
  - k. Do you handle conflict well?
  - l. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it?
  - m. What major problem have you had to deal with recently?
  - n. Do you handle pressure well?
  - o. What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?
  - p. What do you know about our company? Why are you interested in our company?
  - q. Do you have any location preferences?
  - r. How familiar are you with the community that we're located in?
2. Other questions I have used in interviews and why they were asked.
3. These are "Classic Interview Questions".
  - A. The standard answer for the question "**What is your greatest weakness**" is a veiled positive – "I work too much. I just work and work and work"- which ends up sending the completely wrong message. Either you are Lying or, worse yet, you are telling the truth, in which case you define working too much as a weakness and really don't want to work much at all. Think about it. Come up with a real one and then tell them what you have come up with to overcome this weakness. Give examples – detailed ones.
  - B. **Tell me about yourself.** – Talk about how your background to date has been centered around preparing you to be the very best \_\_\_\_\_ you can be. Talk about how you've always had your eye on medicine and your heart in EMS and how you have spent years working on your skills and educating yourself because you want to

be the best you can be. “I’ve always loved EMS and I have been involved with my collegiate squad since.....”

- C. **Why should I hire you?** – “Because I sincerely believe that I am the best person for the job. I realize that there are others that can perform in EMS yet I feel I also bring additional qualities that make me the very best person for the job—my attitude for excellence.” State some qualities that make you unique and make you an individual. (i.e. Charisma, honesty, respect, golden rule, loving my work)
- D. **What is your long-range objective? Where do you want to be 10-15 yrs from now?** – I know the direction I want to develop toward. I will work at becoming at being a leader and increasing my knowledge of EMS and patient care. And in so doing, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long run.
- E. **How has your education prepared you for this career?** – Check out my resume. Include college classes that you took that deal with EMS. “But it’s not just taking the classes to gain academic knowledge –I’ve taken each class, both inside and out of my major with this profession in mind. So when we’re studying in \_\_\_\_\_, I’ve viewed it from the perspective of a health care provider. In addition, I’ve always tried to keep a practical view of how the information would apply to my job.” (i.e. Courses in college, fire expo, ems symposium, certifications, instructor classes, mentor)
- F. **Are you a Team player?** – “Yes, very much so. In fact I have had opportunities in athletics, academics, and extra curricular activities to develop my skills as a team player.” Name opportunities you have had to be a team player, and mention how as a member of a team you encourage others to achieve their best through example. Mention how you have seen the value of teamwork and how it can achieve a greater goal than any individual member. (i.e. working with other agencies, VTRS, bvrs, ruems, MA’s)
- G. **Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How was it resolved?** – Be honest “yes, I’ve had conflict in the past. Never major ones yet there have certainly been situations in the past when there was a disagreement that needed to be resolved. I’ve found that when conflict occurs it’s because of failure to see both sides of the situation. I ask for the person to give me their perspective and then I ask the to allow me to explain mine. At that point I’d look for a compromise. If compromise cannot be met, I’ll

submit and try to understand them more because they are my superior and I do need to trust their judgement.” Name an example – John and I.

- H. **What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?** – Leadership – the ability to be the visionary for the people who are working under them. A manager should always be a positive role model for others to follow. The highest calling of a true leader is inspiring others to reach the highest of their abilities. Then give an example.
- I. **If you had to live your life over again, what would you change?** – Realize that things in the past cannot be changed, only the future can be changed. I would not change a thing. Do you like who you are. Never think there is anything you have to change. In answer to your question – there isn't a thing I would change in my past. I only look to my future to make changes in my life.– Partying too much in College – made me happy and who I am.

#### D. BEHAVIORAL - The Behavioral Interview

1. **Definition:** Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior. (i.e your past performance is the best predictor of future performance)
2. **Where it came from:** In the late 1970's Industrial psychologists studied the effectiveness of traditional interviews and concluded that they aren't very effective in predicting a candidate's ability to do a job. The questions are often hypothetical or theoretical. Job candidates often end up giving hypothetical answers that sound great but aren't a true representation of what they would do in real situations
3. **Differences between the behavioral and traditional interview**
  - A. Instead of asking how you would behave in particular situations, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.
  - B. Expect the interviewer to question and probe (like peeling layers from an onion)
  - C. They will ask you for details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.
  - D. It will be a more structured interview by concentrating on areas that are important to the interviewer.
  - E. They will probably be taking a bunch of notes during the interview.

- F. There will be follow up questions such as “Can you give me an example?, What did you do?, what did you say?, what were you thinking?, how did you feel?, what was your role? And what was the result?”
- 4. How to prepare and be able to answer behavioral questions.
  - A. Once you have become practiced in interviewing skills, you will find that you can use almost any question as a launching pad for a particular topic or compelling story.
  - B. **STAR** – One strategy for preparing for the behavioral interview.
    - 1. **Situation** or **Task**
      - a. Describe a situation that you were in or a task that you needed to accomplish.
      - b. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past.
      - c. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.
      - d. The situation can be from a previous job, volunteer experience, or any relevant event
    - 2. **Action** you took
      - a. Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you.
      - b. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe your role and what you did – not solely the efforts of the team.
      - c. Don’t tell what you might do – tell what you did.
    - 3. **Results** you achieved
      - a. What happened?
      - b. How did the event end?
      - c. What did you learn?
      - d. Never end on a negative note?
- 4. **Other ways to prepare**
  - A. Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
  - B. Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
  - C. Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.

- D. Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- E. Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- F. Remember that mistakes are what help us learn. Whatever you do, don't tell the interviewer that you really can't think of any mistakes that you made. Don't make up an answer either because interviewers trained in behavioral interviewing techniques will probe deeply into your answer. You will have a hard time keeping your story straight if you start making things up. Inconsistent answers will cause you to be assessed negatively.
- G. Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

#### **E. SITUATIONAL – The situational/role play interview**

- A. What to expect
- B. Tips to live by
  1. Try to take it seriously
  2. Take a second to think if you need it
  3. Pick one and stick with it
  4. Don't forget – you are trying to get this job
  5. Stay calm and collected
  6. Do not let them raise your voice or whine
  7. Never think – it's over
  8. Pick one and stick with it
  9. Never think it's over

## **F. Pre-Interview**

1. Get a goodnight's rest.
2. Remember to be yourself.
3. Go over your note-cards.
4. Bring copies of all your info.
  - a. Application
  - b. Resume
  - c. Driving Record
5. They are always watching you
  - a. Drive safely to the interview – If you wreck on the way – they will not let you drive an ambulance
  - b. Clean your car- believe it or not – they look at it
  - c. Be kind to everyone you meet on the way- in EMS they want to see how you deal with strangers on a quick basis.
  - d. Don't be in a rush.
  - e. Turn all phones and pagers off – you're a squirrel but leave your stuff off or in the call if having it on you is too much of a temptation.

## **G. The Interview**

1. The Entrance
  - a. Greet everyone with a warm smile and firm handshake while standing upright.
  - b. Be prepared to introduce yourself as though your interviewers know nothing about you.
2. Your Body Language – How to use it to your advantage
  - a. Sit appropriately. A straight back implies confidence.
  - b. Don't forget to smile.
  - c. Don't be fake, please be yourself.
  - d. Try talking with your hands. This further accentuates your points and shows your communication skills.
  - e. Make direct eye contact with everyone at the interview. You want all the interviewers to get to know you. This means true eye contact not just looking between someone's eyes.
  - f. Make sure to lean forward when you talk because this engages your audience.
  - g. Do not rustle papers or play with jewelry or clothing because this will only distract your interviewers.
  - h. Do not stare out into space.

- i. Nod as to show that you are following along when your interviewers are talking to you.
  - j. Avoid annoying habits. No clicky pens, no biting nails, no gum.
  - k. Be confident and relaxed.... Overconfidence implies cockiness and a fake attitude.
  - l. Remember that there is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.
3. Don't be afraid to ask...
    - a. For time to think about an answer to a question.
    - b. For your interviewer to repeat a question.
    - c. What the job entails for you.
  4. Speak from experience – (behavioral).
  5. Know your Protocols and skills.
    - a. Don't be surprised if your interviewers throw drills at you or megacodes.
    - b. Always keep up with your skills so that it shows.
    - c. Questions may be asked like “what would you do if your pt wouldn't let you \_\_\_\_\_?”
    - d. I have a few friends that lost their jobs due to this.
  6. Mind your P's and Q's
  7. Never NEVER Lie (John and haitian)
  8. Mention your enthusiasm and interest in continuing with EMS and learning new EMS systems.

## **H. Post Interview**

1. Always ask questions after your interview. You want to know what you are getting into and show maturity.
2. Say thank you and shake hands again.
3. Write a letter of thanks to your interviewers for their time and ask if they need any other info in addition for your record.

## **V. HOW TO STAY HIGHERED – THE REALITY OF AN EMS JOB VS THE COLLEGIATE SQUAD**

### **A. Differences to expect in Collegiate VS Career EMS**

1. Not so much of a family. (2 people working)
2. You'll be working with people of different ages and treating a more varied amount of ages, races, and economical backgrounds. (This is good b/c you'll be exposed to greater diversity)
3. People will not be coming in and out all day.
4. More responsibility on your part – as volunteers you fill out paperwork b/c you want to be a good person, in paid – you do it or your fired.
  - a. Can't sit around all day b/c you are being paid.
  - b. Must keep track of your certs and CE's.
  - c. You are required to know and be proficient at your skills.
  - d. If you don't know it you are fired.
  - e. Response times and scene times are recorded and monitored, as are your skills.
5. Gaining respect from the hospital staff and your co-workers (in a collegiate squad you prove yourself by moving up and being able to run calls in a paid job you are expected to be able to run calls.).
6. Your attitude always matter – you are no longer just a volunteer with a bad day you are just a bad employee.
7. Working as the paid personnel with other Collegiate rescue squads.  
Be an advocate.

### **B. Learning to run calls the way your co-workers do then...**

1. Many of the people you are working with will do things differently.  
Try to learn their style.
2. Working as a team more than in the past.
3. Working with firefighters and non-emt's.
4. Handling a code by yourself and being in charge of all aspects of a call.

### **C. What it means to have a captain that is now your boss/employer**

1. Make a good working relationship with your boss.
2. Say good morning.
3. The sweetest sound to any person is his or her own name.
4. Be upfront and honest.
5. Whatever you do – do not give in to the trash talk.

6. Remember, although you may get along super well he is still your boss.

**D. How to integrate values and training from your collegiate squad.**

1. Watch out w/ “at tech we” or in “Radford-we”. AKA the infamous “back-home”
2. Just make suggestions before you start bashing the ways things are done at work
3. Remember you are working with people who have treated pt for almost longer than you have been alive.

**E. Keeping your stamina and drive with a new drastically increased call volume**

1. Try to remember how lucky you are to work in EMS
2. Realize that you do make a difference
3. Don’t overwork yourself (work to live, not live to work)
4. Rest and get some sleep
5. Don’t lose hope in people who will abuse your kindness.
6. Don’t allow patients to hurt you.
7. Critical incident stress management – CISM (VTRS story)
8. Employee Assistance Programs – EPA (my story)
9. Priorities will change. (Less drinking and partying, more resting)
10. Visit your old squad.

**VI. CLOSING REMARKS**

**A. How to give back to your collegiate squad once you’ve left**

1. Teach classes and offer resources.
2. Keep in touch with the life members. And what they are doing.
3. Go back to the banquets. See the new squad, relive the old. Meet new LMA

**B. When to move on.**

1. Things will change.
2. Younger and newer people will be put into power.
3. The squad will continue whether you stay or leave.
4. People will change.
5. Squad priorities will change.
6. When it’s no longer fun, it’s time to say goodbye.
7. Remember you have a job in EMS and you should focus on that.

**C. Remember to have Pride from where you came from.**

