

Interview of deputy probation officer

Sociology, Communication



I interviewed Joe Neal, Deputy Probation Officer III, Mendocino County Adult Probation. I learned a lot about the Probation Officer's job and Joe during my time interviewing him. Joe started his law enforcement career at a young age. He did not go into much detail about his career start, but did tell me that he eventually ended up being a Juvenile Court Judge. He retired then went to work at the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department. Due to the stress and shift work there he decided he would have more impact on people if he were in probation.

He applied and went through the process and was hired. His goal was to help people turn their lives around and live drug and alcohol free productive lives. Although probation is also a high stress job, Joe said he would choose this profession again if he were younger. I asked him about his daily routine and job responsibilities. Case load seemed to be the majority of his day. Reading reports, petitions and distributing cases to the 65 probation officers in his office. I am told that a pre-sentencing report can take from 8 to 12 hours to complete.

There are on average of 25 to over 100 that come in on a daily basis. On average there are from 70 to 100 cases per officer in our county at the adult probation office and 15 to 40 at juvenile probation. When I asked Joe about transfers or advancement, he smiled, almost laughed and simply said " No way. " He explained to me that in the economic crunch and with a lack of providers in our county, things are at a stand still. When the economy is not so bad, a transfer can usually take place on a case by case basis and are recommended by a supervisor.

We got onto the subject on personal rewards of the job. Much like me, Joe takes great pride in helping people start their lives over on a positive drug and alcohol free path. Seeing people accomplish this he says “ Is very rewarding. ” I asked him about the hiring process and what it takes to be a probation officer. He asked me if I was sure this is what I wanted to do for a career. He handed me a rather thick packet of papers that describe how the hiring process takes place. In reading through it, I was very impressed at the amount of information the packet contained.

The very extensive background checks, the lie detector process and personal life habits. Things like whether you have stolen a pen from work, paying your bills on time and a full credit history. The documents they need to verify your information and pages and pages of information on your previous addresses, jobs and family members, including step. It is started by applying and then applications are sorted by qualifications. There is a written exam with the State. Once the exam is passes, there is an Oral Board interview.

A copy of your driving record printout, copy of current driver’s license, sealed copies of college transcripts, copy of your college diploma, social security card, birth certificate, release forms for verification of information provided, and a handwritten autobiographical history. Once that information is verified fingerprinting takes place. When you pass all of the background the next step is to be scheduled for a physical and a psychological exam. An offer of employment is contingent with passing the physical and psychological exam.

I got the impression from this packet that if you are not a person who takes the time to keep your life in order, you can’t possibly help others learn how

to either. I also noticed during the interview how short most of Joe's answers were. I asked him why he didn't elaborate on different questions, he told me that he learned a long time ago to get to the point quickly and you get the best answer from your questions. If they don't have too much information to compute, you usually get an answer beyond " just because". I noticed Joe's office was very tidy and well organized.

I didn't ask how much time he spends filing or organizing, but with the case loads, I imagine he has to make the time after each task to be prepared for the next duty of the day. As I was walking out, I thanked him for his time and for all of the valuable information he gave me. He then informed me that he is now retiring and his time will be spent " Eating Bon-Bon's" I left Joe's office, headed home and thought about what he had told me. There is a lot of information to store for my future and to meet mygoals. In the end, I have decided that, yes, this is in fact what I want to do.