The Rehabilitation Professional, 23(2), pp. 101–110

Forensic Vocational Interviews: An Exploration of Best Practices

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Forensics is a unique environment in which to conduct a vocational interview. Litigation presents challenges that affect the quality and type of the information obtained from the evaluee above and beyond what most vocational rehabilitation counselors encounter in a standard initial vocational evaluation interview. This paper will examine the components of a forensic vocational interview and provide the vocational rehabilitation professional with strategies to conduct a thorough, objective interview. We incorporate data from a survey of forensic vocational rehabilitation professionals to address best practices on how to prepare for the interview, establish a conducive environment, use disclosure forms, and manage challenging evaluees to ensure the quality and objectivity of the interview.

Keywords: forensic vocational interview, forensic rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation

The master's level curriculum to become a rehabilitation counselor includes training on counseling techniques. During training, students practice how to frame and ask questions, reflect emotion, and open and close a session, among other counseling skills. But what about conducting a onetime only interview with a client? And what if this interview is conducted in the context of a forensic setting where the evaluee1 often has limited to no understanding of why the interview is being conducted and there is no clientcounselor relationship? When, as a forensic vocational rehabilitation professional, you have only one opportunity to gather as much information as possible to develop opinions about an evaluee's past and future vocational potential, best practices must be utilized to make this sometimes challenging interview as productive as possible.

Having conducted many vocational evaluations in forensic and nonforensic settings, the authors have found that it takes time to develop the necessary skills and techniques to conduct an effective forensic vocational interview. When researching best practices for conducting forensic vocational interviews, we found the literature quite sparse. For example, Berven (1997) discussed the unreliability of the interview as an assessment tool due to the many potential sources of error in the information obtained (e.g. subjectivity of the counselor in interpreting statements and observations, relationship established, closed vs. open ended questions, etc.). The use of highly standardized interview procedures is discussed as a solution for making the information obtained in interviews more reliable. These suggestions are offered in the context of a rehabilitation counseling interview, not a forensic vocational interview, however.

Havranek's text (2007) is a comprehensive toolkit for the forensic vocational rehabilitation professional, yet the discussion about the vocational interview takes up less than half a page. He advised that the purpose of the vocational interview is to "verify and clarify biographical data, as well as to collect additional information" and offered a list of what types of information should be obtained through a detailed work history. Notably, he recognized the importance of sharing the purpose and process of the evaluation with the client, as by doing so, the "client is more likely to be committed to the process."

Wright's (1980) seminal text offers a more detailed description of the purpose of the interview and what information to elicit from a client (Chapters 24.2 and 24.3). In his chapter on Interpersonal Communication (Chapter 26), he offers 11 pages about how to prepare, how to establish rapport, how to arrange the room, take notes, and even what to do if a client cries during the interview. While this section offers helpful information about how to conduct an interview, especially for a new counselor, this is again focused on a counseling session, rather than a forensic vocational interview.

In conducting a literature review on interviewing, dozens of books and articles from counseling, journalism, police science, law, medicine, and employment/human resources surfaced, not all of which could be cited here. The fields of journalism and medi-

cine, in particular, offer entire books on how to conduct interviews within their discipline. One such book by celebrity interviewer Lawrence Grobel (2004) nicely summarizes the art of the interview:

> *What I learned is that to talk to people, especially people you are meeting for the first time, you need to be prepared and you need to have confidence. You need to know how to open a conversation. How to carry it forward. How to lead. How to ad lib. How to listen. How to be a chameleon and submerge your ego. How to make people comfortable. How to act and how to react to situations. How to be in control. How to keep things positive. How to stay on top of current events. How to ask the questions. How to close (p. 12).*

Grobel mentions another interviewer, David Isay of National Public Radio, summarizing the experience of interviewing with the following: "I'm so focused when I'm listening, it's exhausting. After I'm done it's like having run a marathon; I'm totally wasted." Although other fields recognize the importance of training for the complex task of interviewing, surprisingly, the literature in the vocational rehabilitation community about interviewing in a forensic setting is virtually nonexistent.

The goal of our survey was to understand what professionals in the forensic vocational rehabilitation community knew about interviewing: how they learned this art and skill; how they prepared; and best practices for conducting the interview. We also were curious to explore what the literature from other disciplines has to offer forensic vocational rehabilitation professionals regarding interviewing, particularly in settings where professionals may only have one opportunity to meet with the evaluee (e.g. a forensic psychological or medical evaluation, challenging celebrity interview, police interview). In doing so, we uncovered strategies for improving the quality of information obtained in the interview, as well as directions for future research.

Data Collection Method: Peer Survey

To develop an understanding of what forensic vocational rehabilitation professionals know about forensic vocational interviews, the authors sent a survey to all members of the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP) Forensic section in the fall of 2013. Participation was voluntary. We asked 17 questions (through utilization of survey adminstrative software, specificallly Survey Monkey) addressing how professionals prepare for and conduct a forensic vocational interview. Of the approximately 800 members who received the survey, 108 members responded. Most (90%) of the respondents held a master's degree. Nine percent held a PhD and 1% reported having a bachelor's degree. Seventy percent of participants had more than 15 years of experience; 8% reported 1115 years of experience; 18% had 510 years; and 4% had less than 5 years.

We also asked how many forensic vocational evaluations they conducted each month. The majority (57%) conducted one or less per week, while 26% conducted 12 per week, and 15% completed more than 10 each month. Notably, we asked participants if they had coursework or specific training, other than on the job training, to conduct forensic vocational evaluation interviews. Fifty three percent said they did, while 47% said they did not. Comments suggested that most of the training was obtained through attendance at seminars and conferences. Only 2 had participated in a postgraduate certificate program relating to forensics.

In summary, we had a highly experienced group of respondents, yet about half reported they received no coursework or specific training about how to conduct a forensic vocational evaluation interview. In an attempt to determine how best to conduct interviews in a forensic setting, we will intertwine what we learned from the peer survey results with the information we gleaned from the literature.

Preparation for the Interview

Before beginning an interview, it is imperative to define the purpose. Nielsen (2007), who explores the interview as a method of qualitative data collection, discusses three frameworks from which to approach an interview in a research setting: a factfinding mission to obtain descriptions of the evaluee's reality; a constructive process, or "interview," in which the parties negotiate to uncover meaning; or actionoriented, in which the goal is to focus on insights which could potentially change the evaluee's situation. Regardless of which of these the vocational rehabilitation professional employs during the interview, it is worthwhile to spend time in advance of the interview to develop a personal framework within which to conduct the forensic vocational interview.

In addition to developing this framework, other preparation is essential to conducting the interview. In the survey, we asked peers which records they request for review prior to the vocational evaluation, understanding that not all records may be available. The majority requested medical records, employment records, earnings records, rehabilitation records, depositions/legal proceedings, and opposing expert reports. While we recognize that, on the one hand, it can be useful to have as much information as possible to review prior to meeting an evaluee, some researchers acknowledge value in the "art of unknowing" (Kelley & Fitzsimmons, 2000), or to be able to step back, be "authentically present" in the interview and say "I don't know you."

Preparing the Environment

Proxemics is the manner in which individuals structure personal space and their immediate spatial surroundings, and the impact of that environment on behavior. These differ based on culture. When conducting a forensic vocational interview, it is important to be cognizant of furniture arrangement. Haase and DiMattia (1970) indicate that the most preferred seating arrangement is that which depicts participants interacting over the corner of a desk. This allows for good eye contact but also an easy way to break it. According to Winters (n.d.), circular tables are best for collaboration.

Interview Process

Using research from the field of psychiatry, Shea (1998) discussed the value in conceptualizing different phases of the interview. Five phases were identified: the introduction, opening, body, closing, and termination. Though these phases are somewhat artificial, they help to understand the process of a forensic vocational interview.

Phase 1: The Introduction

This phase begins at the meeting of the evaluee and evaluator and ends when the evaluator feels ready to begin asking questions (Shea, 1998). There are multiple goals in this stage. The evaluator's goal should be to decrease the evaluee's anxiety by engaging the evaluee. Meanwhile, the evaluee is assessing what is happening, gaging the competency and openness of the interviewer, evaluating what the evaluator already knows about the evaluee, and how much control the evaluee may have during the interview.

Multiple sources discussed the importance of having goals for the interview from the onset (Grobel, 2004; Wright, 1980; Shea, 1998, for example). It is not uncommon for the goals of the interviewer to clash with the goals of the evaluee. When "dueling agendas" exist, they often "demand a direct approach" (Coulehan & Block, 2006). By this, it is meant that the vocational rehabilitation professional must be as transparent as possible and educate the client about your role. Some suggestions for this are to provide an overview of the interview, including what will be discussed and the reasons for this, the length of the interview, and the anticipated outcome (Shea, 1998). Ask the evaluee what name he or she would like to go by. In addition, Brewer and Williams (2005) suggest letting the evaluee know that the interviewer is interested in learning as much about the evaluee as possible and to give the evaluee permission to use any words that he or she feels comfortable using.

Confidentiality is another important issue to address during the introduction. As discussed by Garrett (1972),

> When a person goes to a doctor or a lawyer, the confidential nature of the relationship is well established. The confidential nature of the interview relationship is often less well recognized. When it is established, beneficial results accrue at once. Frequently, after some reassurance as to the confidential nature of the interviews, the interviewee is able to go ahead and talk freely about what is troubling him, even giving information that, if generally known, might involve him with the courts or create further family discord (p. 77).

The Code of Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 2009) addresses informed consent in section F.1.b: "Individuals being evaluated are informed in writing *(emphasis added)* that the relationship is for the purpose of an evaluation and that a report of findings may be produced." The IARP Code of Ethics (2007) also addresses this issue:

> IARP members are obligated to secure the most appropriate services for clients within the standards of local, state, or federal law and within the scope of practice. Those services may include: i. Providing the client with a professional disclosure statement, verbally and/or in writing and documenting such activity.

Following these guidelines can help evaluees understand the purpose of the interview and recognize the benefits and limitations of participating.

In our peer survey, we asked participants about the use of written disclosure forms. Of the respondents who use disclosure forms, 57% do not send it in advance of the interview. Ninetynine percent conducted verbal disclosure at the beginning of the evaluation. We asked their opinions on whether the use of a written disclosure form assisted with or detracted from developing rapport with the evaluee when conducting a forensic vocational interview. Of those who use one, 32% felt it assisted with conducting the interview, while 20% felt it detracted, and 33% were not sure.

We asked if interviewers disclosed to the evaluee what materials they have reviewed prior to commencing the interview. Results were split, with about 49% saying they disclosed this information, and 51% saying they did not.

Phase 2: The Opening

This phase begins when the interviewer feels ready to begin asking questions. According to Shea (1998), one goal for the evaluee in this stage is to determine if a level of comfort has been reached such that sharing personal matters can begin. The evaluee is also beginning to assess what information to share, and how to

"tell my story right." Conversely, the interviewer should start to analyze how the evaluee views their situation and what the evaluee wants from the interview.

These goals may be at odds with each other. For example, the evaluee may have something pressing to share immediately but the evaluator may want to begin on a different topic. The evaluator should weigh the pros and cons of being flexible and allowing the evaluee a level of control over the interview in order to make the evaluee feel as comfortable as possible, which could go a long way toward developing rapport.

Also during the opening, the clinician should start to develop a feel for how this interview may progress. Beginning with openended questions or statements, such as, "Tell me about the symptoms you are experiencing today," will give the evaluee a glimpse of how the interview may go. Vocational rehabilitation professionals may want to take a suggestion from journalists (Grobel, 2004) who stress the importance of "the first question." How you choose to open the interview, and on what topic, sets the tone for the rest of the interview.

Shea (1998) discusses the different patterns of communication that arise during the opening phase and how the interviewer can address them (see Table 1).

In addition to these communication styles, the interviewer will be able to sense the emotional characteristics and personality of the evaluee at this stage. For evaluees that are emotional, it may help to offer condolence (Barone & Switzer, 1985). Ask questions gently, be compassionate and nonjudgmental. Barone and Switzer recommend not to exploit the evaluee's loss of emotional control. Taking a brief break can help get the interview back on track. If you notice the evaluee becoming hostile, remain calm and nondefensive. Having an appropriate and conducive interview setting, as addressed earlier, and investing time in the introduction can help to prevent hostile reactions.

Phase 3: The Body

This phase is the heart of the interview. Shea (1998) recognized that this is "one of the most, if not the most, difficult set of skills for most clinicians to acquire." A vocational rehabilitation professional needs to know what topics to explore, how to explore them, and how to transition between them. While it is important to utilize the counseling skills taught in vocational rehabilitation counseling programs during this phase (e.g., nonverbal listening skills, utilizing open versus closed questions, reflecting feeling and content, etc.), the

Table 1
Communication Styles in an Interview

Interview Type	Characteristics	How to Address
Shut down interview	Short responses. Long pauses. Poor body language or eye contact by the evaluee. Getting information is a struggle.	Spend more time building rapport. Reiterate your desire to obtain a fair and accurate story. Start with nonthreatening questions or specific questions before moving on to broader ones.
Wandering interview	Evaluee is loquacious, tangential, and meandering. Interviewer may become afraid to ask question for fear of lengthy answers.	Ask for specific responses. Don't be afraid to interrupt. Use closed questions. Redirect. Avoid nonverbal language that reinforces the person to keep talking. Mention that you notice this person is wandering and ask them what they think is going on.
Rehearsed interview	Evaluees who know the system and think they know what you need to hear. Evaluees volunteer diagnoses, symptoms, or terminology that they know you're going to ask them about.	Probe for clarification. Ask for specific examples.

Note. From Shea (1998).

uniqueness of the forensic vocational interview requires more than this.

One consideration at this stage is whether or not to use a structured versus freeflowing interview format. In our survey, we asked if vocational rehabilitation professionals use an interview form when conducting a forensic vocational interview. Seventy six percent of respondents use an interview form. Fourteen percent of those who use an interview form use a different form for rehabilitation clients. Of the participants who offered comments about this question, most said their forensic form is more detailed than the form they use for rehabilitation clients. Regarding the professionals who do not use a form, some offered comments stating they have an outline of topics they plan to address, but do not use a specific form.

We also surveyed participants about the order in which they cover topics in the forensic vocational interview (see Table 2).

From this data, we found that most vocational rehabilitation professionals, 80%, start by discussing either the description of the injury or the social history. Interestingly, about 10% of those surveyed never cover the description of the injury. Most cover the vocational history and earnings information toward the middle, followed by return to work efforts. Seventy two percent end with vocational testing, although 4% indicated they never perform vocational testing.

Some participants offered additional topics, or specific issues/questions they make sure to cover. For example, several indicated they ask about "genetics," meaning the occupations, education, and/or health of the evaluee's parents and grandparents. Many others stated they discuss the evaluee's goals for the future. Others shared that they allow the evaluee an opportunity to mention anything that has not yet been covered. Other participants highlighted the importance of making specific observations about the employee's appearance and presentation.

Shea (1998) discussed the importance of using transitions during this phase of the interview. These are pivot points, used by either the evaluee or interviewer, to move between topics. They are useful in that they not only keep the interview flowing but, when used by the evaluee, can shed light on what topics the evaluee feels most comfortable discussing and what level of control they want to assert into the interview. These are some examples of transitions (Shea, 1998):

- Spontaneous: unfolds without any effort by the interviewer.
- Natural: includes a cue statement and the transitional question. Listen for something from the evaluee on which to pivot the conversation.
- Referred: the interviewer enters a new region by referring back to an earlier statement made by the evaluee.
- The phantom: comes from nowhere. Can be used to focus an evaluee, such as in a wandering interview. Can be used to catch a person off guard.
- The implied gate: questions that seem to be generally related to the region already under discussion.

Given that most evaluees have never undergone a forensic vocational interview, the vocational rehabilitation professional should expect evaluees to present with some anxiety. Many seem anxious to make sure the evaluation goes smoothly and the interviewer gets the information he/she needs. As such, it is not uncommon for an evaluee to ask questions or make comments about the interview process itself, such as, "How am I doing?" or "Is that what you are asking?" These types of comments are consistent with the phenomenon of immediacy discussed in the counseling literature (Clemence et al, 2012). Addressing them genuinely can facilitate expression of positive feelings for the evaluator and can lead to more indepth exploration of personal topics.

Resistance on the part of the evaluee is also not uncommon. The stakes can be high in a forensic vocational interview. Evaluees may be hesitant to discuss a particular topic. They may also be uncomfortable discussing their life story with a stranger. They may start to feel unexpected emotions. Here are some strategies to deal with resistance:

- If the evaluee is becoming angry, ask why. If it seems to be anger directed at you, address it (Coulehan & Block, 2006).
- When the evaluee seems anxious, act unhurried and calm. Acknowledge that it is understandable to feel anxious, given the newness of this situation. Be specific about what you expect from the evaluee (Coulehan & Block, 2006).
- Use selfdisclosure: if you feel frustrated by resistance, say so. Start a dialogue about this to get to the heart of what may be going on with the evaluee (Shea, 1998).
- Transition to a new topic. To do this, it is important to sidetrack to a topic that will probably be important to the evaluee (Shea, 1998).
- Prevent resistance by clarifying up front who you are and the purpose for the meeting (e.g., proper disclosure in phase 1 and 2; Shea, 1998).

In addition to resistance on the part of the evaluee, dealing with conflicting information can be a barrier to the flow and quality of the interview. However, in a forensic setting, ignoring discrepancies between information in the records and the information provided by the evaluee can greatly affect vocational opinions. As part of our survey, we asked participants if they address inconsistencies in the record versus the evaluee's selfreport during the evaluation. Of the re-

Table 2
Order of Interview Topics Covered in a Forensic Vocational Interview

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Medical treatment (past and/or current)	6.32%	30.53%	11.58%	7.37%	6.32%	12.63%	5.26%	9.47%	5.26%	3.16%	0.00%	2.11%
Subjective complaints/limitations	4.21%	7.37%	22.11%	11.58%	5.26%	6.32%	10.53%	12.63%	6.32%	9.47%	2.11%	0.00%
Educational background	6.32%	14.74%	16.84%	14.74%	6.32%	11.58%	20.00%	5.26%	3.16%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Employment history	2.11%	7.37%	8.42%	14.74%	8.42%	8.42%	10.53%	20.00%	12.63%	6.32%	0.00%	0.00%
Social history	38.95%	2.11%	3.16%	7.37%	17.89%	6.32%	5.26%	4.21%	6.32%	4.21%	1.05%	0.00%
Economic status (current)	0.00%	7.37%	3.16%	5.26%	12.63%	12.63%	6.32%	8.42%	14.74%	18.95%	5.26%	2.11%
RTW effort	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.11%	1.05%	3.16%	6.32%	6.32%	14.74%	26.32%	35.79%	3.16%
Vocational testing	0.00%	0.00%	1.05%	1.05%	2.11%	1.05%	2.11%	1.05%	2.11%	2.11%	12.63%	70.53%
Description of injury	37.89%	12.63%	5.26%	4.21%	7.37%	3.16%	12.63%	2.11%	2.11%	1.05%	0.00%	1.05%
Activities of daily living /typical day	1.05%	6.32%	14.74%	23.16%	11.58%	5.26%	9.47%	6.32%	7.37%	6.32%	4.21%	1.05%
Earnings history	0.00%	1.05%	6.32%	5.26%	12.63%	8.42%	7.37%	17.89%	20.00%	11.58%	5.26%	1.05%
Transportation resources (i.e., driver's license status)	2.11%	9.47%	6.32%	2.11%	7.37%	20.00%	3.16%	5.26%	4.21%	7.37%	27.37%	4.21%

spondents, 34% said they do address such inconsistencies during the evaluation, 2% do not, and 64% stated it depends on the nature of the inconsistency. One participant commented that doing so depends on whether the inconsistency is material to the conclusion of the report. Another mentioned that a call might be placed to the evaluee afterward (if possible) to clarify an inconsistency missed during the interview. The literature discussed the importance of waiting to address conflicting information until later in the interview after rapport has been established (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 1998; Grobel, 2004). One source (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey) addressed the value of confronting clients on both strengths and limitations. In a forensic vocational interview, this might mean to discuss with the evaluee discrepancies that might be both helpful and harmful to the referral source, so as to obtain the most objective picture. It is also important to be tentative and avoid accusations, judgments, or solutions to problems when discussing discrepancies.

As interviewers gain experience, they develop their own style. While there is no one right way to do this, different disciplines have different interpretations about interview styles. For example, journalists (Grobel, 2004) discuss the value of becoming a "chameleon," meaning blending into the style of the evaluee rather than having a consistent style of conducting an interview. During psychiatric or medical evaluations, Shea (1998) also talks about how it can be disengaging for the evaluee if the interviewer maintains "professional blandness," or a neutral demeanor, throughout the interview. This sentiment is echoed in counseling literature (Heller, Davis, & Myers, 1966), as more active interviewers lead to more verbalization by the evaluee. Depending on the evaluee, the interviewer may want to increase their level of animation in the interview. Finally, it is important not to ignore the role that humor can play in the interview (Benjamin, 1981) as a means of building rapport and decreasing anxiety.

This paper would be remiss if we ignored the importance of being a culturally sensitive interviewer. However, addressing all of the components to being culturally sensitive is outside the scope of this paper. Some general tips (Cormier & Nurius, 2003) are to:

- approach all evaluees, regardless of cultural background, with respect, warmth, acceptance, interest, empathy, and due regard for individuality and confidentiality
- be aware of your own cultural background and biases
- be aware of the cultural background of the evaluee
- acknowledge and address cultural factors affecting the interview
- ask the evaluee what you should know about cultures with which you may not be familiar
- be aware of community resources for people of various cultural backgrounds

It is also important to recognize that some cultures find direct questions intrusive. Storytelling as a way to gather information in a medical setting has gotten attention recently. The interviewer may want to ask for a summary of the evaluee's life story as a better way to gather info (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 1998) if this is the case.

Phase 4: Closing the Interview

In this phase, the interviewer's role is to summarize what happened, finalize the business of the interview, and bring it to a close (Shea, 1998). This is a good time to ask if the evaluee has any final comments or questions. The interviewer may also want to ask if there is anything the evaluee would like to clarify before ending the interview, or any other documents or records the evaluee would like to share or discuss. This is also a time to talk about followup or next steps (Shea, 1998). In a forensic vocational interview, this might mean that the vocational rehabilitation professional discusses when the report will be available, how the evaluee can get a copy, etc.

Phase 5: Termination of the Interview

This final phase is the actual closing words and gestures of both parties (Shea, 1998). It often just involves a handshake and smile, or showing the evaluee to the door.

Discussion and Professional Implications

The last two questions in our peer survey were openended, allowing participants to free write about what they think makes for an effective interviewer and what makes for an effective interview. From the 80 responses received, the following are select opinions regarding what makes for an effective interviewer:

- "Honesty, patience, an air of desire to know the person not just sterile, eval, process tailored to the individual, ability to listen, rephrase, reframe, observe, probe and be nonthreatening."
- "Listening to the quiet allowing for the silence."
- "Open disclosure of purpose, responsibilities, how opinions will be made . . . . "
- "Capacity to project competence, comfort with odd situations...ability to quickly find some things in common and to project understanding of evaluee's

situation. More patience, especially when evaluee is upset, tangential, or slow."

- "The ability to build rapport or comfort level with the individual assessed regardless of the referral source. Allowing breaks or position changes as needed, explaining why information is needed if asked, observing the individual's behavior to identify fatigue, anxiety, pain or other issues that will interfere with functioning. Most importantly is the ability to maintain a consistent methodology to provide a true, impartial assessment of the individual's vocational potential."
- "Know the case."
- "Being humorous and being human...having passion for your work and genuinely enjoying hearing people's stories...sometimes I'm the first person who's ever said to them, 'tell me the story from start to finish.' . . ."
- "Treating the individual with respect. One of the nicest compliments I ever received was that I treat the client with respect regardless if I am hired by the defense or the plaintiff. I believe that due to this, I often have more detail in my interviews than opposing experts."
- "Someone who is creative and can think out of the box as well as have the ability to respond quickly."
- "Being sincere in wanting to get the facts straight."

There was some overlap of themes between this question and the question of what makes for an effective interview. The following are select answers from the 79 responses on what makes for an effective interview:

- Knowledge of the evaluee prior to the VE interview so that probing questions can be asked, sensitivity to areas of discrepant information, knowing what information you don't have so that questions can be asked about needed information; preparing the evaluee for the interview by providing information about the purpose of the VE interview prior to the actual interview, e.g., sending the evaluee an outline of the interview format and telling them what information they need to bring to the interview."
- "Building good rapport, staying objective in asking questions, clinical judgment."
- "Quiet setting, good lighting, comfortable seating for client, breaks as needed to change positions."
- "Having as close to a normal conversation style with the (plaintiff) as possible, without the interference of others such as attorneys, court reporters, videographers, etc."
- "Complete understanding of your role as an evaluator, not to be confused with a counselor or advocate. Neutrality. Impartiality."
- ". . . Details, details, details. Together comparing earning history such as SSA record vs. recall of work history. Use DOT or O*NET during interview to nail down their exact job duties."
- "Structure and consistency."
- "Preparation of questions prior to the interview."
- "I prefer to do (evaluations) in person versus over the phone. I want to see the body language, shake their hand (establishes rapport and gives me some clue as to physicality . . .)"
- "Openness in communicating the purpose and limits of the evaluation. That you want to have an understanding of their situation in order to be objective in rendering an opinion."

As the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan said, "The interviewer should be alert to, so that he can correctly recall, all that he has said and done in the formal inception of each interview, so that he can learn to do better." It is important that we evaluate how we conduct our forensic interviews in order to continually improve. Yet, as forensic experts, we are most often alone in the room with the evaluee and have no other professionals present with whom we can analyze our performance, so to speak. Brewer and Williams (2005), for example, discuss the importance of ongoing interview training for police officers. These professionals have regular training, which includes roleplay, feedback from interview trainers, videotaped interviews, and review of written protocols. While the authors are not suggesting any or all of these methods should be applied in a forensic setting, or are even feasible given the nature of our work, we may want to consider other ways to improve our interviewing techniques, as this will ultimately affect the information obtained. Workshops on best practices at seminars could be a start. These could include roleplaying and "case studies" of "good" or "bad" interviews. We would encourage having a new hire or trainee sit in on evaluations to offer observations and feedback, regardless of their level of training or experience.

Regarding limitations, it is important to note that the survey distributed was not standardized or evaluated for validity before dissemination. This was created merely to obtain a brief overview of the viewpoints of forensic vocational rehabilitation professionals in the field, as such little information on this topic was found in the literature. Further, this survey was only distributed to IARP forensic section members. It is unknown if the results would differ if completed by vocational rehabilitation professionals who are not IARP members. Future research might examine how having others present during the interview (a family

member, interpreter, etc.) affects the quality of the interview, or how the gender might affect the interview, among other topics.

In closing, forensics is a unique environment in which to conduct a vocational interview. It does not fit neatly into any realm, such as counseling, medicine, police science, journalism, or other professions that commonly conduct interviews. The vocational rehabilitation literature lacks information about best practices for conducting a forensic vocational interview. Other disciplines mentioned have substantial literature about how to conduct interviews. We hope this effort to explore this topic in depth, and the preparation of a checklist of best practices (see Appendix A), is useful to both seasoned and new professionals to help them consciously reflect on the interviewing process and conduct more effective forensic vocational interviews.

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Endnote

[1] Rehabilitation counselors do not have clients in a forensic setting. The subjects of the objective and unbiased evaluations are evaluees (Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 2009).

Author Notes

This paper is based on a presentation given at the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals conference in Charleston, South Carolina, in November of 2013.

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Appendix A
Checklist of Best Practices for Conducting the Forensic Vocational Interview

Stage of Interview Process	Best Practice	Complete (Check if yes)
Before the Interview	Define the interview purpose	
	Establish a method for the evaluation	
	Request/review records (medical, employment, earnings, rehabilitation, legal/depositions, opposing expert reports, etc.)	
	Prepare questions	
	Prepare the physical environment	
Phase 1: Introduction	Address the purpose/goals	
	Establish rapport	
	Written/oral disclosure	
Phase 2: Opening	Assess the communication style of the evaluee	
	Sense of direction in which the interview may be heading and make adjustments	
Phase 3: Body	Consider structured v. free-flowing interview (forensic v. non-forensic interview form; no form)	
	Consider topics to address and their order	
	Prepare strategies for dealing with resistance	
	Practice cultural sensitivity	
Phase 4: Closing	Summarize what happened	
	Discuss next steps	
	Ask for final comments/questions	
Phase 5: Termination	Closing words/gestures	