

BE(COM)ING NIGERIAN: A GUIDE

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HOW TO BE A POLICE OFFICER

You didn't know it would be like this when you were applying. You just knew you wanted a job. Your relatives came together and contributed the money you put in an envelope to grease the wheels that would roll you through the various recruitment levels. Money that was probably going to be bigger than your first salary. But no amount of money is too big for the privilege of wearing that uniform.

You were excited about the new uniform. About the rank. The serial number. Your name on your breast. But no one told you. No one whispered it into your ear that you would be serving an ungrateful, hateful bunch of people who think you are the worst thing since discovering palm oil on your white shirt as you walk into school on a Monday morning.

You do not understand the hate. You cannot make sense of the lies they tell about you. But you will do your duty and serve your fatherland (or is it motherland you can never tell) in spite of all the naysayers and bad belle people. You will be a police officer.

The Checkpoint

God forbid that they put you on checkpoint duty. Someone has to do it. Someone has to flag down cars and shine a weak torch into people's faces. Someone has to salute the people in nice cars and remind them that their "boys are loyal". And

especially on the weekend, someone has to wish the law-abiding citizens “happy weekend”. Who else will give road users the privilege of showing their appreciation for the selfless work you do, with a bit of cash? You are not doing anything wrong. Think if there were no beggars in Nigeria. If they all went on strike. All those people who go to marabouts and juju priests would have nowhere to give up the offerings that form part of the rituals. You perform a serious duty. Take it seriously. Raise your voice when you ask: “Anything for the boys?” or “Oga how e go be na?” or “Madam de Madam!” Be proud of who you are. Be confident. Look people in the eye. Don’t squeeze the notes you receive. Fold them nicely, put it in your front pocket and slap it gently to make it sit comfortably. God sees your heart.

The Station

People may scrunch up their noses when they walk into a police station without asking, “Why does this place smell like an abandoned public secondary school male toilet on a Friday afternoon?” They will not ask why the walls have to look like a kitchen of a motor park bukka. They will judge you over a small thing like filth and stench. Your intention is not to make anyone comfortable in there. You want the suspects to reflect. To think of the crime they may or may not have done. To be so moved by all of the sights and smells to repentance. To come to a point where they hate crime. The people who judge you do not understand that as a police officer you are a literary person. The walls and floors are a metaphor for the hearts of the criminals: dirty. You want to hold up a mirror to them. You do it for their own good. You do not want a nice comfortable police station where people will commit crimes

just to spend the night as if it were a motel. God forbid that your station becomes a motel. (It does not matter if they are innocent. The fact that they got arrested means that at least, they followed bad gangs. And did someone important not say: show me your friends and I will tell you the kind of person you are?)

And you know, if you ask me, I would introduce a standard fee for paper when people need to write a statement. You do not fetch paper from the street. People should stop being stingy and support your station with the right kind of stationery.

The Pot Belly

You may start out thin and flat bellied. Do not see that as a thing of pride. You will look awkward with your police uniform tucked into a thin waist with your stomach looking like a chalk board. People won't respect you if you look hungry. Whether you are male or female, this applies to you. You need to slowly work your way to making your uniform look good and make the journey around your large belly. That way you look like authority and when you tuck in your uniform, you look menacing enough to stop crime. God forbid a flat, hungry belly. It will not be your portion.

The Patrol Vehicle

Like I said, you are a literary person. You are deep. Your patrol vehicle is another example of a symbol and a metaphor all in one. Don't mind the people who watch Hollywood movies and want to bring fiction into reality, wanting police patrol vehicles to look nice and neat, complete with bumpers and fenders, rear lights, windshields and a radio that works. Your patrol vehicle is a metaphor for the struggle of society.

The dents are a metaphor for the deep impressions you want to make on people. The broken indicator is a metaphor for all the broken things which indicate how problematic crime can be, broken things which you intend to fix. Your job is to fight crime, not have a nice car. Leave nice cars for politicians. Nobody has time for that. Do not bother with replacing lights. Hold together broken or cracked bumpers with nice thick copper wire. You are like that copper wire, holding the fabric of society together. And for this God will bless you.

The Barracks

As a humble person, you do not care about looking flashy. The barracks is where people can best see your humility. In the open sewers. In the litter. In the bushes and shrubs. In the half-naked children everywhere. The barracks have to show how down to earth you are. So down to earth you do not care about kempt surroundings. If you see someone obsessively cutting grass, cleaning the gutters, bearing children responsibly or sweeping the streets, it is a sign that they don't have work to do. And we all know that the idle mind is the devil's workshop. May God never let you become a workshop for the devil.

The Discipline

People don't understand you. To get well-shaped metal tools the blacksmith must beat it into shape. The blacksmith doesn't beat the red-hot iron because he hates it. Far from it. The blacksmith beats it out of love for the craft of making metal tools and items. Same with gold. It has to go through fire for purity. When you slap a suspect or chain them or beat them until you get a confession or slam batons onto the soles of their feet or strip them naked or whip them or let other cell

mates beat them or electrocute them through their penis (if PHCN allows), you do it out of love. Same way a mother will let a nurse insert a needle into the buttocks of her child. An injection hurts. But a mother knows it will help the child in the long run. You, more than most people know this. And it is not like you even go that far. You will never insert anything into another person's buttocks. You love the people you torture... I mean, discipline. You want them to change. You want them to confess and write that statement that will make the case end quickly. God, who sees your heart, knows this and will reward you greatly.

The Accidental Discharge

No, I don't mean when you accidentally ejaculate into a sex worker you have arrested behind a police van. Sometimes as a police officer, you will shoot people accidentally. Like when you have drunk too much alomo bitters during the night patrol. You need the alomo. The night is cold and full of errors. And guns are unpredictable. Don't let this affect the love you have for your job. Don't let a small thing like an accidental discharge or killing someone at a checkpoint stop you from giving your life to changing society.

Bail

See ba, people are ungrateful. If someone helps them carry load in the motor park or in the market, do they just walk away? Don't they give them something? In fact, these days the motor park touts negotiate their fee very aggressively before they even touch your load. No one sees anything wrong with that. In the old days people helped people. If they can pay a tout why should they not pay a law enforcement officer? Are

they saying that a tout deserves more than a person who risks their life to protect society? Yes, bail is free but you are only asking people to be reasonable. Just some appreciation, the way they would appreciate any other hard-working person they meet. May God send sensible lawyers who have home training and know how to show appreciation when you finally release their clients. I mean they could have been accidentally shot. Or died in a shootout with you. You know how those criminals like shootouts, sometimes even with handcuffs or ropes binding their hands they will dare to engage you in one. God forbid that you are forced into a shootout.

I have heard rumours like police officers working with armed robbers and sharing the proceeds, renting out guns, asking for money to help recover stolen property, raping sex workers without condoms after arresting them, helping politicians harass people who disrespect them, disappearing people. Rumours are the work of the devil and his children. (People should stop allowing the devil to use them). I do not take them very seriously. You shouldn't either because no one can prove that any of it is true.

God bless your hustle as you serve and protect everyone, including ungrateful, rumour-peddling Nigerians.