

**THE POLICE
HOW-TO
GUIDES**

HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

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HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

*The campaign trail
can be a tough road
to travel if you
aren't prepared*



If jobs were like mental illnesses, the office of sheriff could be said to have multiple personality disorder. On one hand, you're a by-the-book law enforcement officer. On the other, you're a consummate, cunning politician. You're expected to crunch numbers like a slash-and-burn CEO, but turn on the celebrity charm when the TV cameras arrive.

In some communities, the sheriff's job is so hotly contested that just running for the elected office—with its oftentimes vicious campaigning, exhausting public appearances, and distasteful fund-raising pleas—is crazymaking unto itself.

So who in their right mind would run for sheriff? Plenty of people, as it turns out.

Unfortunately, rookie candidates have few places to go when considering a bid for office. Most lessons are learned the hard way, on the campaign trail, and can leave a candidate and his or her long-suffering family deeply disillusioned by the political process.

Despite these drawbacks, the job is a seductive one. It generally comes with a hefty salary, multi-million-dollar operating budget, and the job security of a four- to six-year term, with an option to seek re-election after that. For individuals ultimately seeking higher office, serving as sheriff is a proven strategy to build name recognition and a solid political base.

HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

To determine what qualifications are required in your community, contact your secretary of state or county clerk

Before throwing your hat into the ring and investing a lot of time and money into the process, be sure that you're prepared to run for the office, and prepared to serve, if elected. Before filing your nomination papers, ask yourself a few tough questions.

Are You Qualified for the Position?

Because sheriffs' offices are created by state constitutions, qualifications can vary widely. In Bibb County, Ga., for example, a qualified candidate must be at least 25 years of age, and have been a resident of Bibb County for at least a year. In Jefferson County, Colo., candidates must be able to pass a physical agility test. Livingston Parish, La., doesn't require its sheriff to have a professional policing background. But it does insist that candidates have at least 160 hours of law enforcement training at an accredited law enforcement school.

To determine what age, residency, educational, professional, and other special qualifications are required in your community, contact your secretary of state or county clerk. Your local elections office may also be of help.

While you're at it, don't forget to analyze your big-picture qualifications as well. Do you have the necessary administrative and law enforcement experience, training and education, political savvy and leadership skills to be a good sheriff?

"I would encourage anyone that would like to be elected to sheriff—or people who haven't thought about it, but might want to do it in the future—to become prepared," says Santa Clara (Calif.) County Sheriff Laurie Smith. "The time to run for sheriff is not within a few months of the election."

Will You Have to Quit Your Day Job?

Determine whether you will have to resign your current position. It might be required because of the Hatch Act, a law that restricts the political activities of federal, state, and local government employees. Or you may need to devote yourself to campaigning full time.

HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

If you can't weather attacks on your character, family, employment record, ethical and financial background, rethink your candidacy

"You've got to make a decision," says Saban, who earlier this year was appointed police chief of the Phoenix-area Buckeye Police Department.

Starting out as a relative unknown, Saban spent a year-and-a-half on the campaign trail drafting position papers, giving interviews, making public appearances on radio shows and public television stations, and speaking at political rallies, community-service club luncheons, churches, and other venues. In the end, he lost to the incumbent sheriff in the September 2004 Republican primary, garnering 46 percent of the vote.

"I got 10 years' experience in 18 months," Saban says. "The last eight months was full-time [campaigning]: 5 in the morning until 10 at night."

Can You Take the Heat?

Even in the dirty, dirty world of politics, sheriff's campaigns distinguish themselves as particularly sordid affairs. If you can't—or have no desire to—weather attacks on your character, family, employment record, ethical and financial background, or any other less-than-wise choices made in your personal life, rethink your candidacy.

"Sheriffs races are historically nasty races," says Smith, who is one of only 25 female sheriffs in the nation. "It seems a candidate doesn't just want to beat an opponent, but to indict them. Maybe it's that way because what we do is investigate for a living. It just seems to be more prominent in law enforcement races."

During one race, Smith scrambled to gather letters of support to rebut a California newspaper article (later retracted) that claimed she was being investigated by the District Attorney's Office for criminal violations.

In Milwaukee, someone sent an anonymous letter to then-candidate David A. Clarke, Jr.'s home, "informing" him that his wife was having an extramarital affair. In Maricopa County, candidate Saban was ambush-interviewed by a TV crew who ran with a rumor-mill-generated story claiming he had raped his adoptive mother 30 years earlier.

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*It's important to
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Do You Have the Political Backing?

Even as a young man, David Clarke knew he wanted to be the chief executive officer of a law enforcement agency.

By the time he became sheriff of Milwaukee County, he already had 24 years of experience as a patrol officer, detective, and commanding officer with the Milwaukee Police Department. When opportunities arose to take management training and leadership instruction at a variety of institutions, including the prestigious FBI National Academy in Quantico, Va., he did not let them pass by.

When it came time to stretch his political wings, Clarke already had formed crucial contacts in the local business community. He forged these professional relationships during his tenure as Commander of the Milwaukee PD First District, the city's downtown and entertainment center. Slowly but surely, Clarke worked his way—year by year, conference by conference, promotion by promotion—into the sheriff's seat. Unfortunately, the actions didn't support his next bid at elected office, a hotly contested race for mayor of Milwaukee, in 2002.

As evidenced by Clarke's experience, it's important to focus in on your own base of power. Where is it? In the small-business community? The churchgoing crowd? The senior citizen vote? Unionized labor groups? Ethnic communities? Then ask yourself how you can tap into all those potential votes.

Can You Raise Enough Funds?

It may be distasteful to ask people for money, as political veterans like Clarke and Smith will freely admit, but in the political world, fund raising is a necessary evil. There's a reason so many wealthy people run for elected office: It costs a lot.

That said, you don't have to be rich to run for sheriff. You just need to be able to raise funds from supporters along the way. And that's not always an easy task.

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For those who can strike a balance between upholding the law, the voters' interests, and the bottom line, the job can be the ride of a lifetime

A few weeks out from the 2004 election, Maricopa County's Saban seemed poised to knock off the incumbent, but highly controversial, Sheriff Arpaio. Saban had won endorsements from a slew of police unions and state and federal law enforcement agencies, including the Arizona Police Association (representing 14 police agencies and 6,500 law enforcement officers.) He had managed to raise \$90,000 to finance his campaign.

But it wasn't nearly enough. Arpaio raised nearly three times as much. And won the election.

"That's the uncomfortable part of this position, raising money," admits Milwaukee's Clarke. "There's a segment of the population that gives to political campaigns for access to the office. When I became sheriff, I made integrity a huge issue, so I think people got the message early on."

The other message to take away from this: If you can't realistically match your opponent's fund-raising efforts—not necessarily exceed, but at least match them—think twice about making a run for elected office.

Is Public Office For You?

Just as a good beat cop may not excel as an office-bound commander, a good public servant doesn't necessarily make an effective elected official. After all, as someone once observed, "Politicians make the promises and public servants make progress."

Another way of defining it: Police officers and sheriff's deputies serve people; the sheriff serves The People. For some, the latter may never prove as satisfying as the former. For those who can strike a balance between upholding the law, the voters' interests, and the bottom line, the job can be the ride of a lifetime.

"That's one of the greatest things about being sheriff," observes Santa Clara County's Smith. "Being able to run the agency the way the public wants you to run it. Being the chief law enforcement officer in the county doesn't give me more authority, just more responsibility."

HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

“Have a good adviser; listen to him or her, and do what you're told”

Words of Advice

Laurie Smith, Sheriff, Santa Clara County, Calif.

- Started as: Deputy sheriff/matron, Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office, 1973
 - First elected sheriff: 1998
 - Next election: 2006
1. Get involved in the community. It's the right thing to do.
 2. Have a good resume.
 3. Don't take campaign-related anger or frustration home to your family. They can't make it better, and there's no reason to make them hurt, too.
 4. Understand that you must raise substantial amounts of money. And know where you're going to get it from.
 5. Cops generally don't know elections. Have a good adviser; listen to him or her, and do what you're told.

Dan Saban, Candidate, Maricopa County, Ariz. (Chief, Buckeye Police Department)

- Started as: Reserve Deputy Sheriff, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, 1975
 - Ran for sheriff: 2004
 - Next election: 2008
1. Determine why you're running. Do you want the power or do you want to create a topnotch sheriff's office? Is it ego or is it real?
 2. Include your family in decision making (including whether to even run in the first place.)
 3. Be active in your party and local district at least a year before you run for office. Precinct committeemen are the worker bees of the entire political process.
 4. Ask yourself: Do you have the time to do this full-time, or can you do it on the side?
 5. Determine whether you can match your opponent financially.

HOW TO RUN FOR SHERIFF

“Understand what the dynamics of the office are and have a strategic plan for where you're going to take it”

David A. Clarke Jr., Sheriff, Milwaukee County, Wis.

- Started as: Patrol officer, Milwaukee Police Department, 1978
 - Appointed sheriff: March 2002
 - Elected sheriff: November 2002
 - Next election: 2006
1. Be truly committed to public service. You're not an appointed bureaucrat; you're here because the people put you here.
 2. Make friends before you need them.
 3. Continue your personal development. You can always get better at what you do.
 4. Never forget you're a representative of the people.
 5. Develop a thick skin.
 6. Be aware of the Hatch Act, and make sure you can legally run for the office.

Fred Wilson, Director of Training, National Sheriffs' Association in Alexandria, Va.

1. Know your community.
2. Get your family on board. They'll be your biggest supporters in good times and bad times.
3. Familiarize yourself with the position. Understand what the dynamics of the office are and have a strategic plan for where you're going to take it.
4. Approach the office with ethics, integrity, and leadership.
5. Be able to raise money and handle it wisely.

Who's the Sheriff?

When most people think of sheriffs, images of Wild West gunslingers meting out stern frontier justice spring to mind. In reality, the office of American sheriff traces its roots back to colonial times and the early Anglo-Saxon common law system.

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"The sheriff is directly responsible to the people ... and the public has the duty, and ability, to reaffirm their faith in the sheriff"

This history lesson comes courtesy of Fred Wilson, director of training for the Alexandria, Va.-based National Sheriffs' Association, which represents 3,085 sheriffs across the nation. Because sheriffs are directly elected by the citizens, he notes, they enjoy a connection to the community that other, appointed law enforcement officials don't have.

"The sheriff comes from the people, and serves the people," Wilson says. "The sheriff is directly responsible to the people ... and the public has the duty, and ability, to reaffirm their faith in the sheriff."

But a sheriff's specific duties differ from state to state. All U.S. states except Alaska and Connecticut have sheriffs. Each state constitution mandates the sheriff's position and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the officeholder. In general, sheriffs are elected officials, charged with a specific set of duties. They oversee law enforcement activities in the jurisdiction, operate the jail, and provide security at county courthouses. In some states, the office is also charged with transporting mentally ill persons to appropriate care facilities, enforcing laws concerning diseased livestock, or other obscure duties.

In many places, the county sheriff's office has taken a back seat to fast-growing municipal law enforcement agencies. In other communities, the sheriff is one of the most powerful, popular politicians in local government, hobnobbing with the likes of governors and U.S. congressional representatives.

In Wisconsin, Milwaukee County Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr. chose to take his office in the latter direction. His outspoken manner coupled with his visible presence in conducting arrests and other high-profile activities within city limits dismayed administrators in some municipal police agencies. But Clarke says his method was generally embraced by officers at the street level and, most importantly, by the voters.

"I felt there was a lot that a sheriff could do to make a difference," says Clarke, who has held the office since March 2002. "[Members of the general public] just want to be kept safe. They don't care who's doing it."

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Identify three key ideas important to you and voters in your election district that will become the three pillars of your campaign platform

Campaign Tips

Be knowledgeable on a variety of issues, but identify three key ideas important to you and voters in your election district. These issues will become the three pillars of your campaign platform—the nuts-and-bolts message that tells voters who you are and what you stand for.

Former California Gov. Jerry Brown used this technique to develop memorable themes for his own administration: "Protect the Earth. Serve the people. Explore the universe." Even if you didn't agree with his positions, you at least knew what his priorities were. And that's something.

Examples of campaign issues used in actual sheriffs' elections include "Time for change. Rely on experience," "Eliminate cronyism. You deserve better access," "Prevent crime. Reduce crime," "Support gun control. Preserve the right to bear arms."

- Early on, hire a professional to help you plan your campaign.
- Set up a campaign Website. It should include a photo of the candidate, a biography, and a list of accomplishments and awards. It should outline your campaign pledges. Include a valid e-mail address or phone number where members of the media and general public can reach you. You can also use the site to post press releases (for newsworthy issues like winning important endorsements) or to list upcoming campaign events, if appropriate.
- Familiarize yourself with the Hatch Act. The law prohibits federal employees (and state, county, and local employees whose jobs are connected to programs financed with federal funds) from being candidates in partisan elections. Understand campaign finance laws and other legal reporting requirements.
- Be prepared to back up any criticisms of your opponent's record—or highlights of your own successes—with proper documentation. The media will demand it. As will your opponent.
- Ask people for their vote.
- Don't be afraid to stand up for what you believe in. Be yourself. And be consistent.