

COMMANDING VALUE

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# Apply Before You're Ready

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Chapter Two

Using Crisis Negotiation Tactics to Win Better Roles,  
Pay, and Career Control After the Badge

LIAM RONIN

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CHAPTER TWO

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# Apply Before You're Ready

One of the biggest mistakes transitioning law-enforcement officers make is waiting.

Waiting until retirement.

Waiting until they feel "ready."

Waiting until they believe they know how the private sector works.

**That delay costs confidence, leverage, and money.**

You do not learn the process by studying it. You learn it by being in it.



## Why You Must Enter the Arena Early

In law enforcement, you trained under pressure. You learned by doing. The private sector hiring process is no different.

Interviews are not just evaluations. They are training reps.

Most officers approach interviews like a final exam.

In reality, your first several interviews are practice. That is not failure. That is field training.



## THE 12–18 MONTH RULE

The question I get asked most often is: *"When should I start?"*

The answer: **12 to 18 months before your planned retirement or transition.**

Not 3 months. Not 6 months. 12 to 18 months.

Here's why that timeline works:

**Months 12–18 Out: Pure Training**

You are not serious about leaving yet. That is the point. You apply to roles you are curious about. You interview without pressure. You learn the language, the questions, the rhythm. No one expects you to accept. You are gathering intelligence. There is no downside.

**Months 9–12 Out: Building Confidence**

You have been through several interviews by now. Your answers are sharper. Your stories are clearer. You understand how corporate hiring managers evaluate candidates. Confidence replaces anxiety.

**Months 6–9 Out: Selective Engagement**

Now you apply only to roles you would seriously consider. You ask better questions. You recognize red flags. You understand compensation ranges. You are no longer guessing.

**Months 3–6 Out: Serious Offers**

This is when you want real offers on the table. You negotiate with confidence because you have been in this environment before. You know your value. You know the market. You are calm under pressure.

**Month of Transition: Multiple Options**

Ideally, you step into retirement with more than one offer in hand. That is leverage. That is choice. That is why you started 18 months ago.

*"The officers who wait until 3 months before retirement enter their first interview anxious, unprepared, and desperate. The officers who start 18 months out walk into negotiations calm, confident, and informed."*

**READER ACTION**

- Mark your calendar 12–18 months before your planned transition.
- Set a reminder: "Start applying." That reminder might feel early. That is the point.

**My Experience**

While I was still on the job, I started applying. Not because I was desperate. Because I was learning.

I went into interviews knowing I might not take the job. I might not get the job. I might say the wrong thing. I might freeze on a question. And all of that happened.

In one early interview, I answered a question like I was testifying in court — long, detailed, precise. I could see the hiring manager mentally moving on. That was the moment I learned: **the private sector values clarity over completeness.**

I was also offered roles before I was ready to leave and declined them. That was not failure — it was strategy. It gave me proof that I was marketable and removed the fear from future interviews.

Once you know someone wants you, you stop interviewing from a position of anxiety and start interviewing from a position of leverage.



### **Psychological Trap: "I Shouldn't Apply Yet"**

Officers often think:

- "I'm not retiring for another year."
- "I don't want to waste their time."
- "I should wait until I'm serious."

That belief is emotional, not strategic. You are not wasting anyone's time. You are learning a system you were never taught.

**Companies interview constantly. You get to interview rarely. Use the opportunity.**



### **The Reconnaissance Interview Framework**

Your early interviews are not just practice. They are intelligence gathering. Treat them like reconnaissance missions.

#### **Industry Language**

Every industry speaks differently. Finance talks about "risk mitigation." Tech talks about "agile methodology." Listen to the words they use. That is the language you need to speak in your next interview.

#### **Questions They Ask**

Corporate interview questions follow patterns — behavioral, situational, culture fit. Track them. By your fifth interview, you can predict what they will ask.

### What They Value

Pay attention to what gets their attention. What they react to tells you what they value. Adjust your emphasis accordingly in future interviews.

### Compensation Ranges

If they mention salary, write it down. Over time, you will build a database of what different roles and industries pay. That information is leverage when you negotiate.

### Red Flags

Disorganized interview processes often signal disorganized companies. You are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you.

#### READER ACTION

- Three things I learned about this industry
- Two questions I should have asked
- One thing I will do differently next time



### Rejection Is Training, Not Judgment

You will not get some jobs. That does not mean you are not valuable. It means:

- You are learning
- Your story needs refinement
- The fit wasn't right
- Someone else had a niche advantage

In crisis negotiation, not every outcome ends the way you want. You stay professional. You stay steady. You learn. Same here.

**By the time you are truly ready to leave, you should not be entering your first interview. You should already know the rhythm, the questions, the environment, your stories.**

That confidence shows. Employers feel it. And confidence directly affects negotiation leverage.



### How to Decline an Early Offer Professionally

You will receive offers before you are ready to accept. This is a good problem. It means you are marketable. It removes fear. It proves your value. But you need to decline without burning bridges.

**DECLINE EMAIL TEMPLATE**

*"Thank you for the offer. I am genuinely impressed by [specific thing about the company or role], and I appreciate the time your team invested in our conversations.*

*After careful consideration, I have decided that the timing is not right for me to make this transition at this time. If circumstances change or the timing aligns better in the future, I would welcome the opportunity to reconnect.*

*Thank you again for your consideration."*

**What this accomplishes:**

- ✓ You declined clearly and respectfully
- ✓ You left the door open for future contact
- ✓ You did not burn the relationship
- ✓ You protected your reputation

**Don't Settle. Command Value.**

The officers who leave with a plan — who've done this math — make this transition with confidence. The officers who wait without a plan make it with regret.

You spent years building skills that corporations will pay serious money for. A pension doesn't change that. A badge doesn't define the ceiling.

**You are not starting over. You are advancing.**

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix D: Interview Preparation and Debrief Guide — available in the full book.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix E: Professional Communication Templates — available in the full book.

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commandingvalue@gmail.com