



(U) Can You Cut the Mustard as a SCO? -- What It Takes

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(U//FOUO) As "Papa SCO" I've frequently been asked to explain what qualities or traits make a SCO (Senior Collection Officer in [NSOC](#)) effective on the desk. It's a big question, and the answer applies not only to the SCO Desk but also to any senior desk in NSOC. What follows is my opinion on what makes a good SCO. I've tried to keep it down to basics. Not all SCOs possess the traits in equal quantities, but I believe all of the good ones possess some of each trait.

1. (U//FOUO) Arguably the most important trait is the hard-to-define, **operational focus**. This trait is most prevalent in shift workers. An operational focus allows you to handle multiple crises or tasks without freaking out. You have to know which tasks need immediate attention and which ones can simmer for a while. It's akin to a juggler with a glass ball, an orange, and three rubber balls in the air; sometimes you have to let something bounce a few times while you concentrate on one or two items. If they are SIGINT balls you have to know how many times each ball can bounce before you put them in the air again. From experience, the orange has to be let down gently and the glass ball does not bounce well at all!
2. (U//FOUO) The second - and this relates to the first trait - is the **ability to multitask**. You could be handling vastly different tasks simultaneously and you will need to keep the oranges with the oranges and the apples with the apples without mixing them up! There is no call for "mixed fruit salad" in NSOC.
3. (U//FOUO) The third trait is **coolness under fire**. Making more noise and stomping around in circles does not equate to getting more done! Usually there are enough people running around screaming, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling!" and an NSOC senior desk officer doesn't need to be one of them! Even if you don't know what to do, no one else needs to know that yet! **FAKE IT!**** Trust your experience and your contacts in the collection community to pull you through. They will. You don't need to act casual, just act coolly, with confidence, and do your best. You'll surprise yourself.
4. (U//FOUO) As a surprise fourth, you do **have to know something about SIGINT collection and collection management!** An understanding of requirements (NSRP and SURREY) and the tasking process is necessary. A general knowledge of targeting (phone number and text selection), collection and forwarding principles, and the different collection disciplines is required. You have to understand the Collection-Processing-Forwarding cycle.
5. (U//FOUO) The fifth quality is **knowledge of the Enterprise and extended Enterprise**, to include second parties. You have to know who does what to whom, and how often! Some of the basic knowledge can be picked up during the first two weeks of desk training through organizational tours and briefings. More briefings can be added later during straight days.
6. (U//FOUO) The sixth quality is **an in-depth knowledge of at least one collection discipline** (Overhead, FORNSAT, SCS, etc.). Obviously more is better, but not required. You will learn what you need while on the desk. A background in tactical SIGINT or supporting tactical units would be a big plus.
7. (U//FOUO) The last trait, but by no means the least important, is the **ability to take the job seriously, but not yourself!** You will make mistakes, and you will correct them. There will be gaffes and faux pas. There will be embarrassing moments. You may as well

laugh at yourself when appropriate! Have fun on the SCO desk! It will probably be the best collection job you'll ever have. You can even wear your kilt to work -- I did! It bears repeating: Don't take yourself too seriously, save that for the job.

(U//FOUO) The above traits are only my opinion -- today! If you ask a dozen ex-SCOs you'll get at least a dozen lists, but this is a start. I don't mean to downplay the knowledge of collection; it is important, but I think the proper temperament is also very important for an NSOC Desk officer.

** (U) Note: Faking it does not mean fabricating an answer or making up facts! What it does mean is that you remain confident and do not panic, while you use your experience, search skills and contacts to find out what you need to know and then resolve the issue. I'm not advocating trying to fool anyone. If you don't know something and can't find out anything about it, you must admit it. However, there is no sense creating drama until you have exhausted all search options. The SOO needs a positive, confident SCO presence, so say, "Yes Sir/Ma'am, I'll take care of it"; in other words, fake it!

Papa SCO (aka The SIGINT Curmudgeon)

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