

'Be open-minded': A new detective constable gets top tips from a retired DCS

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During the coronavirus lockdown, DC Ahsan Anderson of Cambridgeshire Constabulary asked former Detective Chief Superintendent Dave Gee MBE some questions

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First arrest... A preacher in Derby city centre. I asked him to move on and said that it was 'my patch'. He replied that it was 'actually God's patch'. He was in the road and all the shoppers were stopping to listen. Fresh from training school, I arrested him for obstruction of the highway. He was convicted at magistrate's court and appealed, then was convicted on appeal at crown court.

Most proud of... Two things: establishing the guidance and standards for rape investigations, and my part in developing a blueprint for Sexual Assault Referral Centres, so that they provided a common minimum standard to rape victims.

I'd describe myself as... A trouble-shooter.

Biggest investigative breakthrough... There was a series of seven stranger rapes in Derby in the 1980s. As part of my general role of checking alibis for elimination purposes, I interviewed all of the suspect's previous girlfriends. One of his exes, who was his main alibi, had divided loyalties and decided to tell the truth. Once she had retracted her alibi, he pleaded guilty at crown court and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Tip for a new detective... Listen. Ask questions. Be open-minded. And listen!

Tip for Head of CID... Don't think you know it all. Take the ego out of investigations. Put those with current operational skills and credibility in a position where they can assist you in decision-making and carry out key roles like high-profile interviews. There's no doubt about it, the people who know best are the front line.

Worst thing ever said to me... Protect the reputation of the force above everything else.

Best interview tip... Listen properly to answers and be flexible about your agenda. If you are planning your next question before the interviewee has finished speaking, you are not hearing them fully. Preparation cannot be overstated.

Hardest memory of policing... Responding to the sudden death of a young child early one morning in 1983, when I had a child of the same age. As the on-call detective constable, I had to seize all of the clothing and bedding, and take a statement from the mother about all of the background information. I was then tasked with taking the child's body for a post mortem and returning him to the local mortuary, in my own car. While travelling across the Peak District, I got stuck in the snow and got help from a farmhouse before reaching the mortuary. I did all of it on my own – there were no specialists, just me.

After a bad day at work, I used to... Have a pint.

Detective Constable Ahsan Anderson

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Biggest cultural change during my career... The 'Gender Agenda', a 2002 positive-action initiative, was a catalyst for me to look more closely at women in policing. As a detective superintendent, I called a meeting of all of the female detectives and was, for the first time, the only man in the room. I felt really uncomfortable and couldn't get my words out. This was a total reversal of usual practice and made me think of all the ways in which women had been excluded.

Most worried about... The potential for officers becoming desensitised owing to overexposure to crime, particularly in specialist units, where officers deal with the same types of cases all of the time.

Greatest achievement... Establishing a charity for children in India who didn't have access to schooling. I fundraised to build seven rural schools and support students through to, and after, university. This changed my life, by waking me up to inequality and putting my get-up-and-go into action.

Best police force in the world is... The UK, because it is constantly seeking to improve. It has standards and oversight, and is the most scrutinised police agency in the world in terms of integrity and ethics.

Sum up your career in one sentence... I would do it all again in a heartbeat – I'd love my warrant card back!

Ahsan and Dave have kept in touch and continue to talk about policing.

- This article was peer reviewed by Detective Constable Simon Yearsley, Hampshire Constabulary and Detective Sergeant Michael Jimenez, Greater Manchester Police

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