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# INVESTIGATORS TOOLBOX

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INVESTIGATORS  TOOLBOX

The Art of  
Non-Target  
Interviewing

Choosing The  
Right Tool To Get  
The Job Done

FROM  
LICENSED TO  
UNLICENSED

The Future of PI Conferences with the PPIAC

# The Art of Non-Target Interviewing



BY **ANTHONY LUIZZO AND JOHN GASPAR**

In two recent PI Magazine articles authored by the undersigned on interviewing and interrogations, we focused on how to interview and/or interrogate individuals who have some connection to specific incidents under scrutiny[1] [2]. This article will focus on interviewing individuals such as neighbors, bystanders, business owners who at first blush appear to have no apparent connection to the incident; but may knowingly or unknowingly advance the evolution of the investigative exercise. Performing this type of investigative exercises could be a simple walk in the park and leisurely chat with a neighbor; but it could also be a perilous encounter with a potential accomplice and/or a close relative or close friend of the target. The key to conducting these types of interviews begins and ends with doing your homework. To properly set the table, skilled interviewers need to draft a pre-interview checklist, locate interview targets, initiate contact-tracing, formulate interview blueprint, and perform non-intrusive background screening.

## **PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST**

It is said that prior planning prevents poor performance. The first step begins with preparing a needs assessment list to ascertain what will be needed to move forward. A sample checklist might include:

- Developing an interviewee profile folder. Profile folders often include interviewee photos, relationship to the target (friend, relative, other), marital status, employment information
- Checking whether outside law enforcement or private security assistance is needed if the interviewee resides in another jurisdiction?
- Ascertaining whether the interviewee is retired or employed?
- Deciphering whether the interviewee will be a hostile or non-hostile engagement

## **LOCATING INTERVIEW TARGETS**

It's important to note that much of the initial target information is normally unearthed during the initial target interview. As the interviewer questions the target, names, places, and locations are uncovered, which becomes the roadmap to follow in identifying future interviewees.

## **CONTACT TRACING**

This process begins with good gumshoe detective work. Contact tracing is, in many ways, analogous to what is normally done in tracing any and all persons who may have come into contact with a pandemic flu patient. Contact tracing helps to identify other individuals who should be included in the interviewer's contact list. Contact tracing works best when broad-based tracing methods are used. In essence, contact tracing is similar to a genetic family history search. A hypothetical real-life contact tracing episode can be likened to an infected COVID-19 patient coming into close contact with 10 others. The seasoned investigative sleuth's mission is to expeditiously locate all 10 contacts.

## **INTERVIEW BLUEPRINT**

Interviewing family, neighbors, work associates, casual acquaintances, and others requires a differing interview strategy. The key to ensuring success is to do your homework before sitting down with an interviewee. All of the above have one thing in common: they know the target in some way, shape or form. Knowing that,

it's imperative that the interviewer prepare an effective question design strategy that extracts information without impugning the target. A hypothetical example might be when the interviewer believes the target of the inquiry committed a crime, it's imperative that this sensitive information is not revealed during the interview. Seasoned interview sleuths instinctively know that questioning witnesses is fraught with peril and tread wisely in this explosive minefield.

## NON-INTRUSIVE BACKGROUND SCREENING

Background checks come in a wide variety of models and sizes depending on who is being checked and for what reason. With respect to interviewing neighbors and business owners, oftentimes, a non-intrusive screen is sufficient. This type of screen may include, informally speaking to neighborhood store owners, neighbors, employers, reaching out to local police beat officers, and conducting surveillance shadowing activities. From an investigative technological perspective, seasoned sleuths often employ web-based sources to get emails, phone numbers and physical addresses. As a matter of preference, many sleuths use video chat (DUO, FACETIME, GOOGLE, ZOOM) and/or audio calling methods. Other options include emails and US mail. Oftentimes, a video chat allows the interviewer to develop a rapport with the interviewee, whilst also offering a visual window to assess verbal and nonverbal mannerisms.

## QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

A seasoned sleuth knows how to do his or her homework before setting out to interview family members, business owners, bystanders and others. There is no single questioning strategy that snugly fits all types of interviews. As a practical matter, non-target interviewing is quite different than target interviewing in that the focus of the exercise is to gather as much peripheral information as possible from individuals who are not remotely associated with the case under consideration. With this in mind, we offer the following tips.

## QUESTIONING FAMILY MEMBERS

Interview questions might include:

- When was the last time you spoke to the target?
- Do you know why you are being questioned? – oftentimes family members have inside knowledge of the incident under scrutiny
- Do you feel comfortable being questioned?
- Is there any reason why we should not be talking?

## QUESTIONING BUSINESS OWNERS

Interview questions might include:

- Do you know this person – have a photo of the target if possible?
- Do you know why you are being questioned?
- Do you feel uncomfortable being questioned?
- Do you recall whether the target has ever come into your establishment?
- Do you recall whether you ever had a conversation with the target?
- Is there anything you would like to tell us about the target?
- When was the last time you spoke with the target?

## QUESTIONING BYSTANDERS

Interview questions might include:

- We are seeking information about this specific occurrence
- Do you know this person – show a photo if available?
- Do you recall seeing and/or speaking to the target?
- Is there anything you would like to tell us about the target?
- Do you feel uncomfortable being questioned?
- When was the last time you saw the target?

## QUESTIONING LAW ENFORCEMENT

Prior to questioning law enforcement personnel, it's important that the interviewer perform a cursory check of municipal and state legal statutes to ascertain permissibility. Assuming that it is permissible, interviewers must refrain from ever asking interviewees to violate ethical or legal obligations. A short-list of statutes that apply herein includes state and municipal sunshine laws, and the Freedom of Information Act (<https://www.foia.gov/>). Sundry public records that interviewers may need from law enforcement to buttress their case might include:

- Incident reports
- Investigative follow-ups
- C.A.D. reports
- Crime scene reports including photos and diagrams
- Body and auto cam footage
- Charging affidavits

## PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

In the court of protection wisdom, many security executives instinctively know that optimum programmatic oversight is often akin to a well-run assembly line. If the security chain breaks somewhere – it can quickly unravel everywhere. A proficient method of ensuring that a program is running effectively is to periodically inspect it. The tool often used by many administrators to get this job done is the After-Action Report (AAR). AAR assessments normally embody an oversight and monitoring schedule, a technological and proce-

dural step test plan, and a long-range compliance calendar. In competent hands, these reports help security managers keep a watchful eye over their institution's protection programming. Further information on AARs can be found in an article written by the undersigned [3].

## A FINAL WORD

The information herein is intended to furnish a roadmap for professional interviewers to follow when preparing their non-target interview game plan. Skilled sleuths instinctively know that interviewing family members, bystanders and others is often like taking a delicate walk through the tulips. The art of conducting these types of interviews lies in the interviewer's ability to set the proper stage for the interview, whilst the science embodies using the interviewer's intuitive skills to properly capture every morsel of fact. Looking back at police history: as the notorious TV police show "Dragnet" so eloquently recounted: *we are only seeking the facts and only the facts.* **PI**

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