

THE INTERVIEW- by Cheri Stephens

Joe Navarro defines the interview as ‘effective communication with a purpose’. Therefore, you must first know what your purpose is. Is it intelligence, historical information, obtaining a lead, developing a personality profile, etc? In the interview you are trying to gather information from someone who may not be a suspect, such as a witness or victim. Interrogations are conducted with, generally, an unwilling suspect. However, the interviewee may also be less than willing to cooperate. So, understanding who and why you are talking is paramount in conducting a successful interview. Effective interviewing requires “dominion over self, dominion over interviewee, and dominion over the theater of the interview”. Let’s look at these.

Navarro says, “Preparation will not guarantee success, but failure to be prepared will guarantee failure.” Practice the interview; plan the interview. You can even role play the interview prior to the actual one. Identify what you want to ask. Avoid taking notes—try to remember the information. Using legal pads is often counterproductive so use index cards if you must write down information. Video taping the interview is also somewhat intimidating, but may be agency policy. In that case, often the interviewee seems to forget the tape after a short time. Keep the interviewee in the frame throughout the interview for best results.

Know your suspect. You will be more successful if he/she likes you. In some cases, for instance, gender bias can work for or against you. Some men resent women interviewers, some do not (and vice versa). Some people respond positively to an older, experienced interviewer, others may do better with younger, less experienced (perhaps less threatening) officers. Experienced interviewers know when to turn the session over to someone else who may be more effective. The interviewee may have personality disorders, such as, schizophrenia, paranoia, narcissism or psychopathy. Understanding these disorders can help in planning the interview. For example, paranoids often do not like to be interviewed in closed room, so talking outdoors may be an effective tactic

Select both the time of day and the location for best results. There is a ‘4 by 4 rule’, which says that after 4 hours and after 4 PM are when there are the most confessions offered. Statistically, however, 80% of suspects confess at some point, even after all the televisions shows teaching us about Miranda warnings! So you can often select the time of day to interview your subject, Morning hours find most people more alert and detail capable, while late afternoon or evening hours will find the subject tired and perhaps less able to resist the questioning. Select a site for the interview. Police stations can be intimidating for anyone, so workplaces, homes, or other more neutral sites may be preferred. A non-intimidating site, such as a book store or coffee shop, may be a very good choice for many interviews. In any case try to limit the people present to only one or two and not a representative from every agency connected to the case. Finally the positioning of the participants should also be considered. Males react better when sitting angled to one another, whereas females respond more positively to face-to face conversations. In every case cars are never a good place, because there is limited eye-contact possible.

Finally the interviewer should establish both dominance and rapport within the interview setting. Control can be created by such actions as making the interviewee wait a few minutes, selecting the seating for the interviewee, reaming standing until all are seated, offering refreshments or breaks, and controlling the questioning pace. Empathy can be developed within the interview by other actions. Smiling, eyebrow raising, head nodding, mirroring gestures and language, using formal titles and names, and maintaining comfortable eye contact all work to make the interviewee more comfortable.

Ultimately, interviewing is a skill that can be both developed and improved with practice. Not all interviews will be successful and some may need to be repeated, if possible. All should be reviewed afterwards. Remember that nonverbal clues will be as important, if not more, than the words.