

Chapter 4

Planning Strategies

PART II

In the previous chapter we examined strategy in terms of purpose, agenda, and formulating questions. In this chapter our objective is to discuss those aspects that structure the content and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The three strategies that will be discussed include: (1) structuring the interview, (2) planning the physical setting, and (3) anticipating problems.

STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW

Every interview has a basic framework. Even if the structure is not planned, it develops during the interaction. The exact structure that you build will depend upon the situation and the type of interview. In surveys, for example, the structure is often rigid. Sales interviews often follow a basic pattern that has been found to be effective. In employment interviews the structure may be tailored to fit the job. In journalistic, counseling, or medical interviews, each new interview may be unique. Even though you would not structure all of these interviews alike, there are some basic guidelines that should be considered.

The Introduction²

No time is more crucial to the success of an interview than the first few minutes. This is the time to build whatever relationship is going to exist. Yet, frequently everything about the interview is carefully planned *except* the opening; what happens then is often left to chance, sometimes with mixed results. The opening can be planned generally, and it should be. The objective is to do whatever is necessary to motivate the interviewee to interact freely and accurately with you. The following guidelines are designed to accommodate this objective.

1. *Start with a realistic greeting.* This is the time when the basic interviewer-interviewee relationship is going to be established, and research has shown that people form their basic impressions of one another during the first few minutes of an interview.¹

There is a certain significance about the word "realistic." It suggests that interviewers attempt to create different kinds of atmospheres for different kinds of interviews. For example, it is often desirable to create rapport with the interviewee during the opening. Rapport involves building a degree of comfortableness together, of trust in one another, and of basic goodwill that will permit nondefensive interaction. Rapport is particularly necessary when you interact with strangers; therefore, it is most appropriate in surveys and in medical, journalistic, and selection interviews. Furthermore, rapport may be particularly useful when the interviewee is in unfamiliar surroundings. The applicant who goes to a new company to apply for a job or the subordinate who is called into the boss's office is likely to experience some nervousness because the person is out of his or her own turf. Therefore, the interviewer can do some of the following things to allay nervousness and create rapport.

The Introduction

enthusiastic welcome through nonverbal messages (like a smile and a warm handshake)

courteous offers of coffee or other refreshment

informal, banal exchanges (about the weather, traffic, or current event)

personal inquiry (such as "How are things going?")

humor

Actually, rapport builds or wanes throughout the course of the interview. Since the kind of information given is related to how comfortable the interviewee is with the interviewer, it may take a long period of time or even another interview for the interviewee to open up.

Not everyone appreciates attempts to build rapport, however. One

¹ L. G. Stein and N. Zunin, *Contact: The First Four Minutes* (Los Angeles, Nash Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 8-14.

person was given the following message in preparation for a survey interview that had been carefully arranged:

Don _____ indicated to me that he wanted to get right to the point in the interview and not "waste time" with rhetoric designed to establish a constructive atmosphere.

The interviewer did not try to build rapport. He acknowledged the interviewee's request and told him that it was important that a brief orientation be given. After three minutes, the body of the interview was being covered. As this message would suggest, it is not always appropriate to make an elaborate effort at building rapport. In fact, there are times when it becomes quite dysfunctional. A great many mistakes have been made in this regard by supervisors, for example, who have scheduled an interview with an employee. The purpose is often to counsel, discipline, or dismiss, and the employee knows that something is wrong. Therefore, talking about the weather would be seen as irrelevant and "beating around the bush" and could actually increase, rather than decrease, anxiety, since the employee is waiting for the inevitable "bomb" to drop.

In conclusion, an interviewer should know the importance of rapport and how to build it, and perhaps it should become a natural thing to do. However, the interviewer should also know how to get to the point quickly in a very business-like way when the rapport stage is unnecessary or dysfunctional.

2. *Try to motivate the interviewee in specific ways.* Ask for help or assistance. This is a very common opening and works well because most people have a need to be needed. It is hard to turn down a sincere request.

Mention any rewards that may come as a result of the interview. Researchers offer monetary rewards or a copy of the results. Personnel representatives offer a position, and bosses often hold out a raise or a promotion. Sales representatives offer a premium of some kind for participation. The strategy works for all of them.

~~Make the interviewee feel important.~~ You can refer to the importance of the person's position or the amount of influence that the person has. Another way of making the interviewee feel important is to emphasize the problem and the kind of impact the interviewee's answers can have. Simply stressing that his or her answers are unique is a way of making the person feel important.

Explain how the interviewee was selected. People are often very suspicious as to why they were chosen.

Refer to others who have participated or who have recommended that this particular interviewee be contacted. People tend to be more comfortable if they know that peers have also been involved. This is why a salesperson often drops names of others who have bought their products.

3. ~~Give the interviewee an orientation to the interview.~~ Generally, the interviewee should be given three pieces of information as part of the orientation. First, the interviewee should be told the purpose of the interview. This sets the course that the interview will follow, and generally people are more comfortable and cooperative when they know what to expect. Many people are suspicious or cautious in ambiguous situations. You can alleviate this problem by giving a clear orientation. This is helpful to the interviewer as well as to the interviewee. In training hundreds of interviewers, we have found that they need constant reminding of what the purpose actually is, and it is useful for them to be able to state it. Examine the following introduction.

Jane, I wanted to talk to you today about a problem that has been reported to me. Let me explain it and how it was described to me and maybe you can shed some light on the situation, so we can get this cleared up. Yesterday your manager reported that you were disturbing another worker and when he said something about it to you, you gave him a lot of back talk—that you were insolent in front of all the other workers. Now what do you have to say for yourself?

Many managers when they looked at this introduction have picked out different emphases. There is a desire "to talk . . . about a problem," and the interviewee's ability to "shed some light" seems to imply that her input is being sought. The interviewer said that he was trying to get Jane's side of the story. However, most of the managers who looked at this introduction suggested that the last statement seems to show that Jane already has been indicted and that this statement is likely to produce a very defensive response. The point is that this last statement seems to negate the earlier statement of wanting to hear Jane's side. Furthermore, it colors everything that the interviewer has said up until then. This example demonstrates how careful you need to be in determining the purpose for your own benefit and how carefully this purpose needs to be stated to the interviewee.

~~Second, the interviewee should be told what his or her role will be in the interview.~~ One of the most common ways this is done in a selection interview is to suggest, "I have a few questions that I'd like to ask you. Later in the interview I'll give you an opportunity to ask me some questions." Statements like these are helpful because they give a concrete definition to the relationship and alleviate any confusion of how the interviewee ought to operate. Another important item here is that they should know how much time the interview will take.

~~Third, the interviewee ought to be told how the information is going to be used.~~ Specifically, the interviewee needs to know whether or not the information given is to remain confidential, in what form it is going to be reported, and what is likely to happen as a result of it. An interviewee

needs this information in order to determine how much he or she wants to cooperate in giving you information. Sometimes, an interviewee may have a lot at stake. Perhaps, it is needless to suggest that whatever the interviewee is told in this regard should be honored.

Finally, the orientation should lead quite naturally into the main body of the interview.

The Body of the Interview

The body of the interview is where the main content is shared. It is the reason for the interview in the first place. To make it as beneficial as possible, three things affect the overall structure of the interview: (1) whether to use a directive or nondirective approach, (2) an outline of the topics to be covered, and (3) the sequence of the questions.

DIRECTIVE VERSUS NONDIRECTIVE APPROACH

The choice between a directive and nondirective approach reflects the basic interviewing style of the interviewer, and most types of interviews can be approached in either of these two ways. Each has a profound impact on the structure of the interview.

Basically, the directive style is rather straightforward and deductive in form. The interviewer knows exactly what he or she wants to cover and introduces the topics. The interviewer uses direct closed questions, and the interviewee may not have an opportunity to introduce other topics. This directive structure is most characteristic of standardized surveys, but it can apply to any type of interview.

The nondirective style, by contrast, is rather inductive in form. The interviewer may toss the lead to the interviewee and follow wherever he or she takes it. This is often used in counseling interviews and is one of Norman Maier's suggested forms for a job performance appraisal.² It is also the style that many supervisors try when problems come up. The rationale is that it decreases defensiveness when a client or a subordinate is the one to initiate the definition and discussion of a problem.

USE OF AN INTERVIEW GUIDE OR SCHEDULE

When the choice has already been made to be directive, an interview guide may be an important aid to the interviewer. Basically it is an outline listing all the topics and subtopics that the interviewer wants to cover in the interview. It comes in three forms: nonscheduled, highly scheduled, or moderately scheduled.

When the order or sequence of the topics is unimportant, the interview is frequently referred to as a *nonscheduled* interview. Attitude surveys and press conferences frequently are designed in this way, because

so much depends on what the interviewee actually says. Nonscheduled interviews give great flexibility or freedom in adapting to the particular respondent or the needs of the moment. They also permit the use of open questions and probing. Used by a skilled interviewer, the nonscheduled interview does not have any real disadvantages because it can be organized spontaneously. A problem does come up, however, when there are multiple interviewers and there is a need to pool or to replicate their findings. The very flexibility which they enjoyed then makes it difficult to tabulate their findings in exactly the same way. Answers do not always come out as a specific "yes," "no," or "maybe." Some researchers try to overcome this problem by taking verbatim comments that can be compared. These also add a bit of "spice" to any report.

Frequently, it is wise to plan not only the topics to be covered, but also the order in which they are to be covered. The most completely structured interview is called a *highly scheduled interview*. In its extreme form, the interview outline is standardized so that it contains all of the questions and probes to be asked in the interview. They are asked in the same wording and in the same order for every respondent, and the answers are immediately recorded. This type of interview is particularly useful in public opinion polls, attitude surveys in companies, telephone surveys, and academic research.

Since many of the questions in a highly scheduled interview tend to be closed, the obvious advantage is that the answers will be easily tabulated and replication will be easy. Furthermore, an interviewer does not have to be particularly skilled to get results. The procedures for building these kinds of outlines have been thoroughly worked out, and the outlines do exactly what they are designed to do. They are, however, entirely inappropriate for most interviews other than polling, research, or surveys because of the rigorous measurement desired. They cannot be used with much success, for example, with a group of job candidates.

Fortunately, there are degrees of structure between the nonscheduled and the highly scheduled interview. Those interviews in between these two extremes are called *moderately scheduled interviews*, and they come in many varieties. Basically, the interview outline contains a list of the topics to be covered in a suggested order with possible probes for each. In some cases, it might be advisable to maximize interviewee participation at the very beginning by starting off with the easiest (least threatening) or the most recent topics. The rationale for starting with the least threatening material is that trust is more likely to grow during the interview so that the interviewee will be open then to respond to sensitive topics. If you begin with a threatening question, the interviewee is likely to balk and the interview will suffer. Therefore, the structuring of the interview is a way to ensure that you get answers to the more innocuous questions first.

²Norman R. F. Maier, *The Appraisal Interview* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963).

We should point out that "it is difficult, if not impossible to develop a sequence of questions that will have the same emotional meaning for most respondents."³ Consequently, putting the least threatening questions last will give you the ability to adapt to individual respondents. On the other hand, there may be a certain inherent relationship that dictates the order, such as (1) the time sequence, (2) the spatial relationship, (3) cause and effect, (4) parts of the whole, (5) problem solutions. Finally, the topics might be arranged in order of the interviewer's priorities in an attempt to allow the most time for the things that are the most important.

Even moderately scheduled interviews require some planning, and they are particularly useful as a training tool for beginning interviewers. If you can still remain flexible by using the outline as a tool rather than becoming a slave to it, then the detailed preparation can be of immense value. It combines the advantages of preparation and freedom to adapt to individuals and to probe broad topics with spontaneity.

Most of the time discussions of schedules focus on interviews that are going to be used with multiple interviewees. However, the same principle of planning can be very useful in preparing for a one-time interview with an individual. Whether you are involved in a job performance, discipline, or counseling interview, the basic question is still what sequence the topics ought to be in. It can make a real difference in the interviewee's reactions.

SEQUENCE OF QUESTIONS

In the last section we were concerned primarily with the overall organization of topics for the entire interview. We will now focus on the relationship within those parts. In other words, we will focus on the basic structural development for each subtopic.

Funnel Sequence. The funnel sequence starts with the most general or broad questions at the top of the funnel, and each succeeding question narrows the focus and becomes more specific. All the questions may be open and the most open questions would come first. If closed questions are used, they would come at the bottom of the funnel. An example of the funnel sequence is given below.

Example A

What do you think are the most important problems facing the company? Of these, which do you feel is the most important? How does it affect you in your job?

This sequence was taken from an attitude survey that was planned to allow the interviewee a completely free rein in identifying problems. His

³Stephan Richardson et al., *Interviewing* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1965), p. 44.

reply is likely to relate his general frame of reference about the company and also the kinds of things he sees as being problematic. Had the interviewer started with questions on specific topics, such as economic conditions, management decisions, or job security, the interviewer might have inadvertently structured the interviewee's thinking so that topics of real concern would be passed over.

Example B

Would you please tell the court what happened? Exactly how much of this did you see? What was the injured party doing? How fast would you say the defendant was driving? In your opinion could the accident have been prevented?

This sequence was taken from a legal interview about an accident. The interviewer asks the interviewee to give the overall context. Knowing that what happened may include hearsay, assumptions, opinions, and facts, the interviewer asks the second question in order to discover which details were seen. Finally, there are very specific bits of information that would have to be clarified.

Example C

What is your reaction to this recording? How would you evaluate the music? The lyrics? Would you buy it?

In this telephone interview, an excerpt from a record was played for the interviewee. The interviewer was interested in two things: (1) the subjective evaluation by the interviewee and (2) the interviewee's behavioral responses so that she could predict an amount of sales. She felt that she should obtain general reactions before getting to the bottom line. The last question has a note of finality about it, suggesting that the interview has come to an end.

These examples not only demonstrate the nature of the funnel sequence but also suggest conditions when it might be most useful.

1. It lets the interviewer discover the interviewee's frame of reference.
2. It avoids leading the interviewee or shaping the interviewee's responses.
3. It satisfies a need for the interviewee to communicate opinions.
4. It maximizes the interviewer's options about what can be probed.
5. It can be used by supervisors in order to get their subordinates to bring up specific problems.

Inverted Funnel Sequence. The inverted funnel sequence is the exact reverse of the funnel sequence just described. It starts with specific questions, proceeds to more general questions, and concludes with the most general questions.

Example D

What interviewing procedures were used in your last job performance review? How did these differ from the procedures used in your previous reviews? How typical are your reviews in comparison with those given generally throughout the company?

In this example, a consultant had been assigned the task of evaluating the job performance reviews in a particular company. Although she asked many very specific questions, there was one segment in which she used these three questions. The reason they were put in an inverted funnel sequence was that the interviewer felt it was necessary in order to get people to think very concretely about a given appraisal before they really would be able to make comparisons. So the sequence was based on a constantly enlarging scope: think about one appraisal; compare it with your own appraisal; and, finally, make some judgments about all the appraisals.

Example E

You've read both proposals. Which of the two benefit plans do you favor? What are its strengths? Are there any things you'd like that are not included in either of the programs.

In Example E it is important to get a commitment from the interviewee initially in the interview. Then his or her thinking can be probed.

Example F

Where were you when you first heard the news? What were you doing at the time? How did it affect you? What are your plans now?

The questions in Example F could be transcribed from many journalistic interviews. The initial questions are closed investigations about a past event. They are there because (1) the reader or the audience needs a review of the circumstances as a frame of reference, or (2) it may be important to get the interviewee to remember the specifics in order for her or him to talk about general reactions and plans.

You may use the following characteristics of the inverted funnel sequence in determining whether or not to use it.

1. It forces the interviewee to think through specific attitudes or facts before articulating a general reaction or a conclusion. In this way, it follows an inductive thinking pattern.
2. It motivates the reluctant interviewee to communicate. Shyness or the reluctance to relive a bad experience makes a person reluctant to talk. However, answering some specific questions often opens a person to greater expression later.
3. It primes the interviewee's memory. When a person has forgotten an event, specific questions can help reconstruct the event and perhaps "jog the memory."

4. An initial commitment (yes or no) can be invaluable in interpreting the more general responses that come later.

~~Alternative Sequences.~~ Not all questions are related in terms of narrowing or enlarging the scope of the answer. It might be difficult, for example, to put the journalistic inquiries of who, what, when, where, and why in either the funnel or inverted funnel pattern. They are related, but it may not matter in what order they come. Similarly, there may be times when you may have five or six similar or equal questions (all open or all closed, for example) that need to be asked. The result may be a kind of tunnel sequence.

Example G

I'm going to read off several items and I'd like for you to tell me why each one is not important to your job satisfaction.

1. pay
2. your relationship with your supervisor
3. your family
4. the company's image
5. fringe benefits
6. your own productivity
7. your peers
8. recognition of your efforts

In this example matters other than the scope of the questions will be used to determine the sequence.

TRANSITIONS

Much of the structure of an interview can be planned, but it is virtually impossible to plan the exact nature of the transitions. ~~Even though they cannot be planned, the professional interviewer should develop skills to make the flow from one point to the next as smooth as possible.~~ Although they are often overlooked, transitions are an integral part of the structure of any interview. Because they are interconnecting links between points and topics and serve several important functions, they deserve attention of their own.

One of the chief functions of transitions is to give a constant orientation to both the interviewer and the interviewee about where the interview is going. You will notice how the ease of communication is momentarily halted when abrupt changes are made in an interview. This comes from a disorientation as the interviewee wonders how the past discussion is related to the old or tries to develop a new perspective. At any rate, it takes a while to get back on course. People need a sense of direction and a sense of progress in moving in that direction. The type of transitions that do this well are the summary and a brief explanation of where, and

perhaps why you are moving from one topic to another. For example, a simple statement by a recruiter that "we've covered those questions that I wanted to ask of you; now let me answer any questions that you have," explains that the interview is moving into a new stage. Another example is the statement, "We've covered the major questions in the survey; now I'd like to ask you some demographic questions that will be used simply to group all respondents into certain categories. No individuals will be identified." Hopefully, such a transition explains why the coming questions are necessary and this explanation may be absolutely necessary to get people to cooperate.

Another important function of transitions is to control the topic discussed, which is often linked to time control. In a counseling interview a subordinate may keep leading the discussion to his or her poor relationship with another employee. In this case, the interview may not move in the desired direction; furthermore, the interviewee may become more and more emotional. Finally, the supervisor will have to exert some control in order to move from the topic to a more productive one. The transitional statement may be: "Well, Alison, I'm really not particularly interested in this, uh, problem with Rachel any further. I know it's important to you, but I don't think that we can explore it very productively today. What I'm most interested in is determining how much of a problem scheduling is for you and what kinds of things we can do to reduce it."

CONCLUSIONS

Like transitions, conclusions are rarely planned in terms of specific content; however, it is useful to consider what they should accomplish.

First, the interview should be brought to a very definite close even though another interview may be wanted later. The interviewee should not have to wonder or to ask as some do, "Is that all?" or "Are we finished?" The interviewer can end it verbally with a statement such as "Well, I guess that about wraps it up for me," and nonverbally by making an appropriate gesture such as standing up, shaking hands, or opening the door. Second, the conclusion should leave both people with a sense of accomplishment. A final summary helps to do this. Third, the conclusion should forecast what is going to happen as a result of the interview. New meetings are scheduled, future correspondence is planned, a report on the survey is sent, or the time for publication of a study is scheduled. It is a good rule to keep all promises that are made. Finally, the conclusion should have a positive impact upon the relationship. It is always proper to express appreciation for the interviewee's time and cooperation and to refer to the importance of the interviewee's contribution. In situations when the interviewer and the interviewee have a continuing relationship, as with bosses and subordinates, it is useful to end in a way that is going to keep the relationship sound and productive. The interview should not be

viewed as a complete unit that has ended but as merely one interaction that may influence all other interactions that the two people involved might have.

PLANNING THE PHYSICAL SETTING

In recent years the general area of nonverbal communication has received a great deal of attention as researchers have tried to measure the impact on human communication of physical appearance, dress, arrangement of furniture, vocal cues, physical environment, and personal space.⁴ The overwhelming evidence supports the conclusion that the environment in which an interview is held contributes to the overall outcome of the interview. Consequently, it is naive to think that the physical setting cannot be used deliberately to accomplish the interviewer's objectives. We make this statement without any kind of value judgment as to how much and in what ways the environment should be manipulated. Consider the following.

A manager had a long rectangular desk in his office with one end pushed against the wall. A subordinate once suggested that if they were to pull the desk out from the wall, one more person could be accommodated around it. The boss replied, "In this office, there is only one head of the table." Upon hearing this story, people often groan in opposition to the manager's feeling. You may not agree with his objective, but the truth is that the manager knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish and he arranged his environment to send a nonverbal message, which most people had probably already sensed. Similarly, it is not infrequently that workers vie for larger offices, a certain position at a table, or a seat next to a certain person, because it *means something*. In 1978 Midge Constanza's office was changed from next to President Carter's office to a small office in the White House basement. Immediately, reporters drew all kinds of implications about what the president was "saying" by this move. Soon afterwards she resigned.

These are not isolated happenings, and we want to examine some strategic decisions that interviewers can make about the physical setting of an interview.

1. Where the interview takes place may have some profound implications. You may choose between a work environment and a more neutral setting like a restaurant, cafeteria, or lounge. You can expect the work situation to create a more formal, business-like atmosphere and the more neutral environment to decrease substantially the prevalence of work pressures. You can make this choice to accomplish your purposes. If you

⁴For an excellent review and synthesis of this literature, we recommend the following book: Mark Knapp, *Non-Verbal Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

want to enhance your own authority, you may have the interaction in your own office; in those instances when you want to reduce social distance with an employee, you might go to his or her office or invite him or her to a neutral, more relaxed setting. Many journalists would much prefer a more neutral setting because the interviewee is more likely to "open up" with a story.

2. The interior of an office or a room can be "landscaped" to achieve certain effects. One of the most interesting topics focuses on the desk. Common folklore suggests that if you want to create a formal situation that enhances your authority, you will sit behind a desk while the interviewee is seated across from you. If you want to set the interviewee at ease and build a more friendly climate, you can move from behind the desk and sit beside the interviewee. There is some evidence that this is more than just folklore. In an experiment by A. G. White in a doctor's office, "with the desk separating doctor and patient, only 10% of the patients were perceived 'at ease,' whereas removal of the desk brought the figure of 'at ease' patients up to 55%.⁵ The ultimate question here is how at ease do you want the interviewee to be. Some people respond by placing their desk so that it can never be between. There are some situations, such as in discipline interviews, where you may not want a desk at all. Perhaps the best situation is to arrange your office so that either alternative is available to you. Then you can make it formal or informal.

The concept of personal space may have an impact also on the way that office furniture is arranged. Edward T. Hall has studied this over a long period, and his observations suggest that the physical distance between people affect the way they interact; space speaks. Intimate distance ranges from touching to 20 inches. Casual-personal distance or neutral distance is from 1½ feet to 5 feet. Impersonal-business distance ranges from 4 to 12 feet. Public distance covers areas beyond 12 feet.⁶ These distances not only communicate something about the relationship but also affect the vocal shifts by which people communicate.

We do not really want to be prescriptive about how far chairs should be placed from one another, but we do want to emphasize that there exists a conversational distance. Locate your own conversational distance by experimenting with chairs and couches at certain distances. Beyond a certain distance, people tend to be inhibited and formal and want to move closer. However, if they are moved too close, they become uncomfortable and defensive. Obviously, the topics being discussed and the kind of interview being held will also have a strong influence on the appropriateness of the setting. Remember, however, that the setting does influence your interactions.

⁵Ibid., p. 33.

⁶Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1965), p. 163.

3. There is an influence that the room's "landscaping" can have on the interaction. This stems from the general decor of the room. Knapp describes an expensive living room as saying, "This room is for show purposes only; sit, walk, and touch carefully." Other rooms tend to suggest that you can "sit down and make yourself comfortable." It is difficult to generalize here, but it seems reasonable that the greater the difference is between a person's normal surroundings and what is encountered in the interview situation, the more uneasy the interviewee will be. Therefore, this may be a factor in deciding where to have the interview.

4. The presence of other people at the interview will influence the interviewee. A young man with an MBA said that his decision to find a new job came when his boss walked into a meeting in his office and "yelled" out some criticisms. He felt that the boss's criticism might have been accurate but that he had been grossly unfair in embarrassing him in front of his peers. A good rule to follow is to make certain that criticism is always given in private and praise is given in front of others.

5. Interruptions are generally taboo in important interviews. They not only interrupt the flow of information but also suggest that the interview itself may not be important. Therefore, for important interactions, a designated power should hold all calls or screen out other people. One of the most effective ways to avoid interruptions is to leave your regular office altogether.

6. Eye contact between you and the interviewee is generally desirable, and the room can be arranged to facilitate this. For example, avoid having the interviewee face directly into a window behind you; the glare may hurt the person's eyes or you may be inviting distractions. Recognize also that there are times when eye contact makes people uncomfortable. Many counselors dim the lights in order to make people more comfortable when they are discussing personal matters. One manager invites her subordinate to a walk around the block when she has to have some negative exchanges. She is uncomfortable in conflict and feels better when she does not have to look at the person during these periods.

ANTICIPATING PROBLEMS

Once again, we stress that anticipation is not designed to turn you into an amateur psychologist. Sometimes, problems do not occur. At other times, you may be confounded because things happen that you never anticipated. The fact is that the kind of potential problems encountered are far too numerous to be catalogued here. Perhaps we can illustrate the point with some examples. The supervisor who is going to give a negative appraisal to a subordinate can anticipate some defensiveness and perhaps hostility. How is the supervisor going to handle it? The investigative reporter who is going to interview a public figure about some sensitive

personal materials may anticipate some digressions and attempts to skirt the issues. How is the reporter going to handle this? The lawyer can expect a client to be one-sided in the interpretation of an event. What can be done to draw out as many facts as possible?

Since the kinds of problems encountered in an interview will vary among different kinds of interviews, we will deal with them in each discussion of a particular kind of interview. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here that you should think enough about the interviewing relationship with a specific person that you will be prepared for whatever problems you might encounter.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Interviewers should plan more than they generally do. If the planning takes the form of consideration of alternatives, it will be an excellent prelude to the actual interaction. The six strategies that have been presented in the previous two chapters include the following:

1. State the purpose.
2. Prepare the agenda.
3. Identify preliminary questions.
4. Structure the interview.
5. Plan the setting.
6. Anticipate problems.

These points will be amplified in each of the chapters that deal with specific types of interviews, since effective planning needs to take place before every interview. As you increase your expertise in the interviewing process, many of these things will become habitual. Nevertheless, if you ever find yourself having a problem, it would be a useful process to go back to the drawing board and begin to plan in detail.

When you look at the six steps above, it becomes evident that what you do in regard to each determines your basic approach to the interview. It is your interviewing style. Most of these can be linked to either a directive or nondirective approach. Therefore, you can begin to look at your own philosophy in these terms.

PROJECTS

1. Look at several offices or pictures of offices with an eye toward evaluating how the "landscaping" of the offices will affect communication.
2. Figure 4.1 has an outline of a room with a door. Draw in a desk, two chairs, and a table so that you can have the greatest impact upon communication in an interview. Try several different sketches to explore several possibilities.

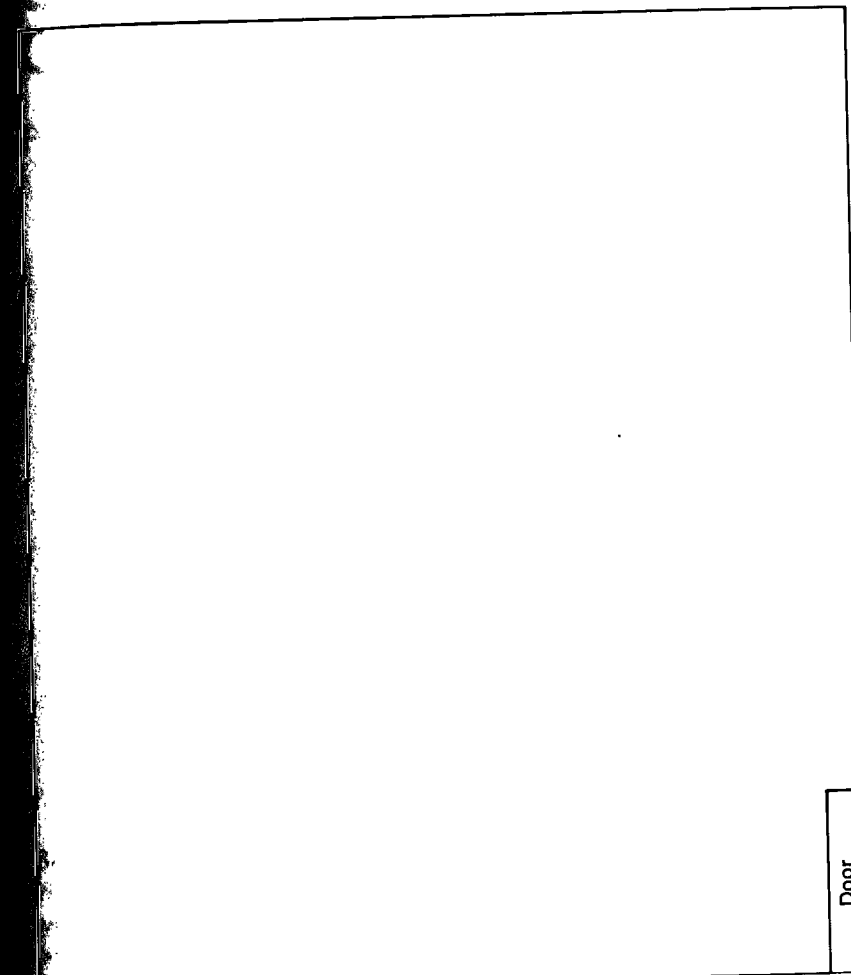


Figure 4.1 A room to be arranged.

3. Evaluate your own attempts at planning. For the next interview that you have, spend a half-hour filling out the interview preparation form (Figure 4.2). After the interview, analyze in what ways the elaborate planning was beneficial.
4. To what extent is planning akin to manipulation?
5. What kinds of planning can you do if you are the interviewee?
6. Discuss the relative merits of the directive approach in contrast with the nondirective approach in several different kinds of interviews.
7. To what extent do you prefer organizing your interviews?
8. Review all of the six areas covered in the last two chapters on planning an interview. Are there aspects of planning that have not been discussed?

A. State the purpose for the face-to-face interaction.

1. What is the exact result that I want from this interview?

(a) Information

(b) Attitude

(c) Behavior

B. How should I arrange this setting?

1. Time

2. Place

3. Other

C. What are the topics that I want to be certain to cover?

1. Is there a special order that they should be in?

D. What are some questions that I should ask?

E. Are there potential problems that I can anticipate in conducting this interview?

1. How can I best motivate this interviewee?

Figure 4.2 Interview preparation form

Chapter 5 Conducting the Interview

PART I

Regardless of how well you have planned your strategies, each new interviewee presents a challenge. Every person is different in some important ways, and even the same individual will behave differently as circumstances change. In other words, no one is completely predictable, and your plans are the best ones only until the interview actually begins. The plans will fortify you as you enter the interview. Nevertheless, you must be flexible enough to adapt to the other individual and to any anticipated or unanticipated problems that occur. This adaptation requires a special kind of analytic ability, that is, *the ability to analyze what is happening while you are participating in the interaction itself*. It is not always easy to be both an observer and a participant, but with practice this ability can be developed. When you learn to analyze in this way, it will become easy to assess the situation, calculate your alternatives to meet the situation, and then choose the one alternative that is going to move you toward your purpose. It is this kind of analysis and adaptation that is characteristic of your role, and there are five tactical areas that are particularly important.

1. establishing and maintaining a productive climate
2. listening analytically
3. probing thoughtfully
4. motivating the interviewee continually
5. controlling the interview

ESTABLISHING A PRODUCTIVE CLIMATE

Interpersonal climate represents the general atmosphere, mood, or tone in which the interaction takes place. It is a rather broad term that describes how the interviewer and the interviewee feel about their relationship. So far no researchers have been able to measure all of its basic components, but it will be instructive to examine a number of ways that climate has been conceptualized. Keep in mind that it is being described basically from the viewpoint of the interviewer in order to examine some things that an interviewer might do to achieve the kind of climate that suits his or her purposes. While most interviewers approach climate as something to be set in the introduction, it is also useful to remember that climate may shift subtly and quickly and that a conscious effort must be expended to maintain a good climate throughout the interview.

Comfort -Versus- Stress

Perhaps the most common way of thinking about climate in an interview is in terms of comfort or stress. Comfort represents the degree to which an interviewee can be made to feel at ease. Stress is often anxiety imposed internally by the interviewees themselves. They may come to the interview with a large amount of internal anxiety in anticipation of things such as "What if the interviewer asks something I don't know?" "What's going to happen?" "I really need to make a good impression." "Can I do it?" or "I wish that I had not agreed to this." There is tension created also when the interviewee is in unfamiliar surroundings such as the interviewer's office or a new building. Some of the most frequently used ways of building a comfortable climate include the following:

- Spend a few minutes in small talk about the weather or about some current event.
- Offer coffee, water, or a drink.
- Sit beside the interviewee in a comfortable chair.
- Use a warm, friendly tone of voice.
- Give a full orientation.

As these points would suggest, perhaps the overriding principle for building a comfortable climate is to show a genuine consideration for the other person's needs.

There is a productive reason for establishing a comfortable climate. People tend to be less guarded and more talkative and communicative under relaxed circumstances. Since several kinds of interviews are covered in this book, however, we must disagree with those who say that the interviewer must *always* make the interviewee comfortable. You should if it suits your purposes. One condition in which this is nearly always useful is when you are interviewing strangers for research, selection, or journalistic interviews. In a superior-subordinate relationship, it may be useful in most instances to set a comfortable climate, but in others it could be dysfunctional. For example, it is perhaps quite unrealistic to expect anyone to experience comfort in a disciplinary interview; to start off with small talk would only increase the interviewee's anxiety. In selection interviews there are interviewers who sometimes like to put interviewees under stress to test their reactions, and they find this useful.

Formality -Versus- Informality

Formality is characterized by (1) a business-like atmosphere, with the content and processes carefully monitored, (2) formal address, such as Mr., Ms., or Senator instead of first names, and (3) the interviewer dominating the structure of the interview. Informality is characterized by the exact opposites of these.

Since form of address plays a major role in setting a climate, it warrants special examination here. As the interviewer, you will set the tone to a great extent. It is particularly important for you not to be hesitant in introducing yourself in a way that suggests what you expect. To introduce yourself as Ellen Ross when you would prefer to be called Ms. Ross or Dr. Ross only gives the interviewee a misleading cue.

People sometimes make a mistake when they assume that informal climate and comfort go together. This is not necessarily the case. Interviewees can be comfortable in either formal or informal situations, provided that it meets their expectations. Subordinates, for example, expect a certain distance with their bosses, and some elected officials expect a certain distance from journalists; distance is simply built into the situation. Consequently, the degree of formality may vary considerably among productive interviews. One basic consideration is what kind of climate the interviewee expects.

Another important consideration is the degree of formality that suits you, the interviewer. Over a period of time you will develop some preferences about how you relate to others and what works best for you. In fact, you may prefer to relate informally with some interviewees and to be formal with others. Decide on the climate that permits you to achieve your objectives and build it.

Open Versus Closed Climate

The distinctive features of an open climate are a great willingness to trust, an avoidance of evaluation, and an apparent willingness to accept whatever information the interviewee wants to give. Essentially, the interviewee experiences a certain freedom of expression. This climate is particularly useful for any information getting interview. In the special circumstances surrounding superior-subordinate interviews, it is important to distinguish between openness in (1) message sending, such as a candid disclosure of feelings or information by the interviewer and (2) message receiving, or encouraging and permitting the frank expression of views divergent from your own. Furthermore, openness needs to be defined in terms of task related openness or nontask related openness. You may, for example, be willing to hear anything about nontask related topics, but you may also be more closed or limited as to what you will accept about task related topics. Others prefer to exclude the nontask related topics but will accept any task related information. In other words, openness exists as a matter of degree and everyone sets limits. A supervisor may accept "Would you clarify that last instruction?" but may rule out "I don't want to do it." as a legitimate response.

Openness is really an attitude. If you say that you want to have an open relationship, your behaviors must not contradict what you say. There are many people who will tell you that they want your honest opinion and then cut you off before you have sufficient opportunity to express it. The ultimate expression of openness is for a healthy two-way communication to take place, with both you and the interviewee conversing freely."

A closed climate is the antithesis of an open one. Communication basically goes in one direction, with the interviewer being highly directive. There is little desire on the part of the interviewee to create rapport or a cohesive relationship, and participation is highly controlled. Normally, we do not advocate developing a closed climate because it breeds defensiveness and stifles revealing expressions. Nevertheless, there may be times in a work situation when you choose deliberately to impose limits. In one instance a supervisor grew tired of hearing the same idea expressed again and again by a subordinate. To overcome this, he closed the interview climate by regulating the topics about which the subordinate could talk. In the same sense, a journalist will "close" the atmosphere a bit when she sees that the interviewee is taking her in a direction that she does not want to go.

Defensive Versus Supportive Climate

Jack Gibb delineates the characteristics of the two types of interpersonal communication climates as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO DIFFERENT CLIMATES

DEFENSIVE	SUPPORTIVE
<i>Evaluation.</i> To pass judgment on another; to blame or praise; to make moral assessments of another; to question another's standards, values, and motives. <i>Control.</i> To try to do something to another; to attempt to change an attitude or the behavior of another; to try to restrict another's field of activity; "implicit in all attempts to alter another person is the assumption of the change agent that the person to be altered is inadequate." <i>Strategy.</i> To manipulate others; to use tricks to "involve" another; to make another think he or she is making his or her own decision; to make another feel that the speaker has a genuine interest in her or him; to engage in a stratagem involving ambiguous and multiple motivations. <i>Neutrality.</i> To express lack of concern for the welfare of another ("the clinical, detached, person-is-an-object attitude"). <i>Superiority.</i> To communicate the attitude that one is "superior in position, power, wealth, intellectual ability, physical characteristics, or other ways" to another; to tend to arouse feelings of inadequacy in another; to impress another that the speaker "is not willing to enter into a shared problem-solving relationship, that he probably does not desire feedback, that he does not require help and/or that he will be likely to try to reduce the power, the status, or the worth of the receiver."	<i>Description.</i> To be nonjudgmental; to ask questions that are perceived as genuine requests for information; to present "feelings, events, perceptions, or processes that do not ask or imply that the receiver change behavior or attitude." <i>Problem orientation.</i> The antithesis of persuasion; to communicate "a desire to collaborate in defining a mutual problem and seeking its solution" (thus tending to create the same problem orientation in the other); to imply that the other person has no preconceived solution, attitude, or method to impose upon the other; to allow "the receiver to set his own goals, make his own decisions, and evaluate his own progress—or to share with the sender in doing so." <i>Spontaneity.</i> To express guilelessness, natural simplicity; to be free of deception; to have a "clean id"; to have unhidden, uncomplicated motives; to be straightforward and honest. <i>Empathy.</i> To express respect for the worth of another; to identify with another's problems, share his or her feelings, and accept his or her emotional values. <i>Equality.</i> To be willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect; to attach little importance to differences in talent, ability, worth, appearance, status, and power.

Table 5.1 (continued)

DEFENSIVE	SUPPORTIVE
<i>Certainty.</i> To appear dogmatic; "to seem to know the answers, to require no additional data"; to regard the self as teacher rather than as co-worker; to manifest inferiority by <i>needing to be right</i> ; to want to win an argument rather than to solve a problem; to see one's ideas as truths to be defended.	<i>Provisionalism.</i> To be willing to experiment with one's own behavior, attitudes, and ideas; to investigate issues rather than to take sides on them; to problem-solve rather than to debate; to communicate that another may have some control over the shared quest or investigation of ideas. ("If a person is genuinely searching for information and data, he does not resent help or company along the way.")

SOURCE: Jack R. Gibb, "Defensive Communication," *Journal of Communication*, (September 1961): 142-148. Reproduced by permission of the International Communication Association.

The descriptions in Table 5.1 demonstrate that it is easy for people to do things unconsciously that contribute to another person's defensiveness. Our purpose by describing them is to emphasize that you can consciously build a good climate if you work at it.

Finally, it is important to recognize that assessment of the interviewing climate is a very subjective process. The descriptions or labels are really perceptions that people have. Furthermore, just because you try to be informal, supportive, or open does not mean that the interviewee will necessarily perceive it as such. Therefore, you will need to stay keenly aware of how the interviewee is responding to you, and then perhaps this will suggest to you how he or she is thinking at that moment in response to the climate of the interview.

LISTENING ANALYTICALLY

Your questioning technique is one of the most important skills that you can develop. Our focus, however, must now be enlarged to examine another important skill: listening to the interviewee's answers and analyzing them. The reason for asking a good question is to get a response, and your success as an interviewer depends on how valuable that response is to you. You must learn to make an immediate evaluation of a response; in fact, your analysis must begin while the interviewee is answering you. This combination of listening, analyzing, and asking probing questions differentiates the best interviewers from the more mediocre ones. Before you can be good at probing, however, you must become a good listener.

The sad fact is that many people do not listen very well. There is a temptation to be so concerned with your questions or what you are going

to say that the amount of analytic listening you do is minimal. Novice interviewers frequently fall into the trap of treating any verbal response as a complete answer to a question and then move on to their next planned question. This failure to listen has been identified as one of the greatest barriers to communication in all kinds of situations, but it is particularly important that it not be allowed to become a barrier in an interview.

The Value of Listening

A first step in improving your listening ability is to become convinced of its values to the interview interaction. Basically, ~~the values of listening can be grouped into two general areas:~~ its impact upon the content of the interview and its impact upon the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

In terms of content your ultimate success in achieving your objectives in any information collecting interview will depend upon how well you are able to receive information. Listening not only helps you determine what should follow each of the interviewee's responses but also is necessary to avoid making errors in recording and interpreting the data.

In terms of the relationship, the impact of analytic listening is perhaps even more profound. (1) ~~Listening allows you to determine exactly the other person's frame of reference.~~ (2) ~~Listening often reduces emotional tension. It becomes a particularly useful tool for curtailing the pendulum effect that often occurs when one person feels that he or she must counterbalance the other person's anger or aggression. Taking time to listen breaks this pattern.~~ (3) ~~Listening conveys a sense of importance to the interviewee. Most people tend to respond favorably to those who will listen to them. This point was illustrated pointedly by a participant in a focus group who said, "Sure, I'll cooperate. No one ever asked my opinion before."~~ (4) ~~Listening is persuasive: People have to refine their thinking while trying to articulate their ideas. By listening carefully and asking an occasional question, you can help them in this refinement process. Frequently, they have to change their initial opinions as they work through their own ideas.~~ (5) ~~Listening is also a form of effectively relating to others. Hopefully, your listening will convince the other person to reciprocate by listening to you.~~

Barriers to Listening

A second step in overcoming poor listening habits is to become aware of some of the most common obstacles to listening so that you can rid yourself of any that you may have.

~~The tendency to evaluate is a kind of intolerance,~~ described by Carl Rogers and F. Roethlisberger as the most detrimental obstacle to listen-

ing. It is "our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve (or disapprove) the statement of the other person of the other group."¹ In such a situation a person makes no attempt to find out what the other person really means or why the person accepts a particular point of view. If the evaluation is negative, then the choice is either to tune the interviewer out or to cut the interviewee off. In either case, the flow of information is ended and the relationship may be impaired.

Somewhat akin to the tendency to evaluate is the characteristic of some interviewers to be impulsive. They jump in and interrupt before an idea is sufficiently developed, or they ask questions to change the subject before the interviewee is ready. Experienced interviewers know the value of waiting; they get a maximum of information.

Never responding (verbally or physically) is another bad habit. It leaves the interviewee in limbo, not knowing whether he or she has been understood. The interviewee feels that you do not care. This practice can also be very intimidating. For example, a manager recently asked what he could do to keep job candidates from being so afraid of him. A videotape of one of his interviews revealed that he tended not to react to people. Consequently, he came across as a very cold individual, and people were unsure of how to interact with him. Effective listening involves giving some feedback to the interviewee in an apparent natural reaction.

There are also several nonverbal habits that irritate interviewees. If you catch yourself in such actions, try to overcome them, because they are distracting to the other person.

- avoiding eye contact; most people expect eye contact
- looking at your watch or out the window
- playing with a pencil or other object
- doodling
- obviously concentrating on your next question rather than on the answer to your current one
- writing too many notes

Finally, one of the worst listening habits is *allowing interruptions* either in person or by the telephone. Interruptions introduce distractions that make it very difficult to sustain a train of thought. In short, they make listening very difficult.

The Nature of Listening

Anyone can improve as a listener if the person is willing to work at it. In most cases, a person's potential exceeds practice. Therefore, there is a

¹Carl Rogers and F. Roethlisberger, "Barriers and Gateways to Communication," *Harvard Business Review* (1952): 46.

need to discriminate between the *ability* to listen, which most people have and the *willingness* to listen, which more people need. If you need to improve your listening, there are several points about the nature of listening that may help you begin.

First, listening is not the same as hearing. It is easy to become adept at carrying on a conversation without remembering what has been said. This is listening at a very superficial level.

Second, listening occurs at different levels. You can focus on the explicit content of an interview by listening to those messages that are actually verbalized. This is very important. Sometimes, however, you can tell much by what is *not* said if you are listening for it. You also need to pay attention to those things that are implied but are never stated outright.

Third, as an interviewer, you have the power to decide what you want to listen to. These are the areas that you decide to probe. In other words, your probing is a means of directing your listening. If you are going to be a good prober, you must listen analytically.

Fourth, Carl Weaver has suggested that listening involves a number of subskills. These are listed below.²

- to get main ideas
- to hear the facts
- to make valid inferences
- to get the central theme
- to retain pertinent content
- to identify the main and supporting ideas
- to perceive differences between similarly worded statements
- to identify correct English usage
- to use contextual clues to determine "word meanings"
- to comprehend oral instructions
- to hear details
- to hear difficult material
- to adjust to the speaker
- to listen under bad conditions
- to resist the influence of emotion laden words and arguments
- to take notes
- to structuralize a speech
- to prevent the facts from interfering with hearing the main idea
- to improve concentration by use of special techniques
- to hear the speaker's words
- to develop curiosity
- to follow directions

²Carl Weaver, *Human Listening* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 10.

- to judge relevancy
- to recognize topic sentences and to associate each topic sentence with some previous bit of knowledge
- to recognize what the speaker wants the listener to do
- to understand how words can create a mood
- to understand connotative meanings
- to predict what will happen next
- to understand denotative meanings
- to identify speaker attitudes
- to get meaning from imagery
- to notice sequences of ideas and details
- to check for the accuracy of new information
- to avoid the effects of projection
- to evaluate and apply material presented
- to introspect and analyze one's own listening disabilities
- to judge validity and adequacy of main ideas
- to discriminate between fact and fancy
- to judge whether the speaker has accomplished his or her purpose
- to recognize self-contradictions by the speaker
- to be aware of persuasive devices used by the speaker

Developing Listening Skills

There are no simple formulas for making listening easy. We have laid the groundwork, however, by pointing to the value of close, precise listening. Now we call attention to several positive steps that can assist you in becoming a better listener. These suggestions are based on work by Felix Lopez.³

1. *Prepare.* Be fully informed so that you can appreciate the special nuances and implications of the answers you get.
2. *Involve yourself in the interaction.* Lack of interest dilutes attention. To listen well you must be convinced that the interaction is important. If you search, you can find something of interest about almost any one or any topic. If the content is of no real consequence to you, be motivated to listen by reminding yourself that your relationship with the interviewer is important and that you must listen if you are to sustain the relationship.
3. *Concentrate.* Being attentive requires expending a lot of energy and self-discipline. You can weed out some distractions by preventing interruptions, but the mental disruptions and wanderings are still tempting. Inexperienced interviewers are often so worried about their structure

³Felix Lopez, *Personnel Interviewing* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), pp. 58-63.

of their next question that they find themselves concentrating on what they are doing rather than on the interviewee's behavior. It is also tempting to anticipate what the interviewee is going to say with such certainty that you may tune out momentarily. In doing so, you risk being caught when your comments do not fit what the interviewee has been saying. Concentration is difficult, but it can be mastered. Focus on what the interviewee is saying, how it is being said, the gestures that accompany it, and what relevance it has for things that have already been said. Practice this often and periodically give yourself a mental examination to determine how well you are doing.

4. *Link information together.* There should be a natural or logical connection between the questions, answers, and new questions. Making mental links between what is going on with what has gone on before is one of the best ways of maintaining your concentration. As you do this, there will be a natural free-flowing interaction that will transform the interview into a conversation with a purpose.

5. *Integrate messages so that you listen for total meaning.* Listening in depth requires an integration of all the messages that you see and hear into patterns or trends. This will enable you to view information from a general perspective instead of examining only the bits and pieces. Integrating involves organizing or arranging all the parts so that you get the total picture. When the organization is attempted, any gaps in the information become readily apparent, and you can probe for these.

Ralph Nichols has been one of the most popular proponents of effective listening, and people have found his advice very instrumental in developing their listening skills. The following eight guidelines have been adapted from his writing.⁴

Find areas of interest . . . The key to the whole matter of interest in a topic is use. Whenever we wish to listen efficiently, we ought to say to ourselves: "What's he saying that I can use? What worthwhile ideas has he? Is he reporting any workable procedures? Anything that I can cash in, or with which I can make myself happier?"

Hold your fire . . . We must learn not to get too excited about a speaker's point until we are certain we thoroughly understand it. The secret is contained in the principle that we must always withhold evaluation until our comprehension is complete.

Listen for ideas . . . Good listeners focus on central ideas. . . .

Be flexible . . . Note-taking may help or may become a distraction. Few of us have memories good enough to remember even the salient points we hear. If we can obtain brief, meaningful records

⁴Ralph G. Nichols, "Do We Know How to Listen?," *The Speech Teacher*, 10 (March 1961): 120-124.

of them for later review, we definitely improve our ability to learn and to remember.

Resist distractions . . . A good listener instinctively fights distractions.

Exercise your mind . . . Poor listeners are inexperienced in hearing difficult, expository material. Good listeners apparently develop an appetite for hearing a variety of presentations difficult enough to challenge their mental capacities.

Keep your mind open . . . Try to identify and to rationalize the words or phrases most upsetting emotionally. Often the emotional impact of such words can be decreased through a free and open discussion of them with friends or associates.

Capitalize on thought speed . . . Most persons talk at a speed of about 125 words per minute. There is good evidence that if thought were measured in words per minute, most of us could think easily at about four times that rate. It is difficult—almost painful—to try to slow down our thinking speed. Thus we normally have about 400 words of thinking time to spare during every minute a person talks to us. . . . Not capitalizing on thought speed is our greatest single handicap.

In conclusion, effective listening is not a passive activity. It requires work, dedication, concentration, and self-discipline. The rewards are worth it, however. As you develop your abilities to listen and to analyze, conducting an interview will become much easier.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Only two of the five tactics set out at the beginning of this chapter have been discussed. The others will be included in the next chapter. Nevertheless, these two will represent a great challenge for you. Climate is the foundation for everything else. As you examined the different types of climate described, you were aware that they describe the kind of relationships that can be developed between two people. You also became aware that the kind of climate, or relationship, may indeed determine the kind of messages and content that can be shared between two people. Therefore, it is a factor that is preliminary to everything else.

Listening, on the other hand, is a skill that is very important to communication. If you are to begin to analyze what is going on in an interview, you must listen, not only with your ear but also with your eye. Before you can determine which of your alternatives is best, you must listen. It is ironic that less time is probably spent training people how to listen than is spent on any other communication skill. Nevertheless, we hope that this discussion has stimulated your desire to begin to train

yourself to be a better listener, because listening is necessary if you are to develop the three tactics that are discussed in the following chapter.

PROJECTS

1. Examine each of the types of climate and try to determine when each particular type would be appropriate. Even though some of the descriptions have negative connotations, they may be appropriate under certain circumstances.

2. How realistic is Jack Gibb's dichotomy in Table 5.1? Are there times when his descriptions need some qualifications?

3. "Openness" is a popular concept today. What do people mean when they say that you ought to be "open"? How is this related to the idea that protecting the self-image is a basic motivation?

4. Make a list of as many irritating listening (or nonlistening) habits that you can. What makes people engage in these?

5. Whose responsibility is listening? Should a listener listen regardless of what is going on, or should the speaker be required to make it "interesting"?

6. If you have been able to improve your own listening habits, identify some of the procedures. Make a specific plan whereby you will continue this improvement.

7. How do you feel when people do not listen to you?

8. In order to work on listening, get into groups of three individuals. Designate one person as the listener, another as the speaker, and a third as the observer. Enforce the rule that the speaker must present something for five minutes with only interruptions of questions of clarification allowed. The observer should enforce the rule. At the end of five minutes, talk about the difficulties presented to the listener.

Chapter 6

Conducting the Interview

PART II

In this chapter we will discuss the final three strategies for conducting an interview: (1) probing thoughtfully, (2) continually motivating the interviewee, and (3) controlling the interview. Before you begin reading this chapter, it might be well for you to review the two tactics we explored in Chapter 5 so that the relationship between the two chapters will be evident.

PROBING THOUGHTFULLY

The rationale for probing is that for the majority of topics secondary questions must supplement primary questions. Probing is an important skill because most answers, particularly to open questions, are inadequate or deficient in some way. They simply do not cover exactly what the interviewer wants to know in exactly the right amount of detail. This observation is not meant to be a negative assessment of an interviewee, because there can be several good reasons for an incomplete response: You and the interviewee may be operating at different levels, with different expectations, with a different understanding of words, or with different kinds of things at stake.

The ability to probe well is perhaps the one skill that discriminates between the best interviewers and those who are merely adequate. To probe thoughtfully, of course, depends upon your ability to listen analytically. In order to develop this important skill, the following section covers the nature of inadequate responses, the reasons why they are given, the different types of probing, and some guidelines for probing.

Inadequate Responses

The first requirement of an interviewer in handling successfully the problems of inadequate response is that he [or she] be able to recognize response inadequacy in its various forms.¹ Basically, a response may be inadequate in any of the following ways.

1. *There may be no response.* Some interviewees choose not to answer a question, and they remain silent; others may even articulate their refusal to answer. For example, a recent telephone interviewer asked several questions of an interviewee and received good responses until she asked the question, "How much do you earn?" The interviewee immediately responded, "I don't think that I care to answer any more of these questions. After all, I don't really know who you are." The interview was then ended politely but firmly.

2. *The response may be incomplete.* What an interviewee tells you may be useful, but you may also need additional information about the topic. If you ask someone to tell you about her work experience, for example, she may identify her work in a department store, in a restaurant, and on an internship in a hospital at different periods of her life. This just whets your appetite for more information, and you will need more extensive information about each of these areas for it to be of value. In other words, the initial response provided only general information that needed to be probed more thoroughly.

3. *An answer may be irrelevant to the question.* It may be a digression or may even completely change the subject. This problem becomes particularly acute when the interviewee is very articulate. The interviewer always faces the question of whether to interrupt the interviewee or to get the conversation back on track.

4. *Inaccurate information sometimes is given.* It could be that the information given contradicts known fact or that the interviewee is making unwarranted assumptions. Should you correct the interviewee or not? This depends upon your purposes. It might be revealing, however, to discover the interviewee's reasons for the inaccurate information.

5. *Some responses are so poorly organized that they are difficult to follow.* Inarticulate interviewees commonly leave out information, so that

¹Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell, *Dynamics of Interviewing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963), p. 218.

there are gaps in your interpretations, or they may explain things in ways that make it very difficult for you to see the connecting links. When you probe, you may find that the interviewee feels that he or she is being forced to be repetitive. Nevertheless, it is still necessary for you to get the correct information.

6. *The answer may contain words, the meaning of which are uncertain to you.*

Reasons for Giving Inadequate Responses

Recognizing the forms of the inadequate responses listed may be helpful to you in determining what kind of probing you should use. As part of the analysis process, however, you may also need to assess why the interviewee gave a deficient answer in the first place. The following reasons are common ones.

- does not understand the purpose of the question or how you might use the information
- does not understand the kind of answer desired
- is uncertain about how much of an answer to give
- does not understand the language in the question
- is unwilling to give information that is personal, threatening, or endangering to self
- may not know the answer
- may not remember
- finds it difficult to articulate feelings
- thinks you will not accept or understand the answer
- does not care about you or the interview
- fears the results of giving an answer
- has competing thoughts, so concentration lags

These reasons can be grouped into three general areas: (1) those involving unwillingness on the part of the interviewee to answer, (2) those involving confusion about what you want, and (3) those involving an inability to answer due to a lack of knowledge or a faulty memory. These categories offer some direction in determining what kind of probing you should use.

Types of Probing

Probing can be classified generally as either direct or nondirective. Direct probing focuses on exactly what you want to know, whereas *nondirective probing* focuses on merely keeping the interviewee talking without any coaching as to what areas to include. First, we will explore the types of direct probing.

ELABORATION

Your most consistent need will be for additional information. Therefore, you should ask the interviewee to extend, to amplify, or to build up the response. Some examples of probing for elaboration are

- Tell me more about that.
- What else can you tell me about_____?
- Was anything else happening at this time?
- How did you feel about that?
- Was there more to the incident than that?

CLARIFICATION

When you do not understand the words an interviewee uses or how certain events are related, you will need to obtain some explanations. Note the following example:

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about the new organization?

INTERVIEWEE: Ummmh, it's OK, I guess.

In this case, the question is open and does not put any limits on the interviewee's answers. Not knowing what the options are, interviewees typically use words like "OK" or "interesting." Such answers are too indefinite to be very meaningful. Is the response positive, or is it negative? In order for you to interpret this response adequately, you would need some clarifying information.

Similarly, a response may give several bits of information that are vague or ambiguous. The following exchange took place in a screening interview.

RECRUITER: What was your major at the university?

CANDIDATE: I majored in personnel administration because I'm basically people oriented and like to work with people.

In this case, the recruiter was given two areas that needed probing, and he had to make a choice as to which should be probed first. He then immediately asked the question, "What did personnel administration involve at your university? What did you study?" Then later he probed, "Earlier, you described yourself as being people oriented. Would you tell me what that means to you?"

REPETITION

Interviewees often evade questions. When this happens, one option you have is to repeat the question exactly or to ask a reasonable facsimile.

JOURNALIST: What do you think should be done to curb inflation?

POLITICIAN: That's a difficult question, but there are a lot of suggestions that ought to be considered. We've got to stop it; that's for certain, or we're going to have real problems.

In this example, the politician clearly does not answer the question; she merely talks around it, suggesting that it is indeed an important topic. Skillful probing is necessary to make this politician commit herself on a specific proposal. One possibility is to ask the same question again to show that you know that she has not answered it.

CONFRONTATION

Many interviewers shy away from confrontation, but this desire to avoid an unpleasant situation creates a bias in the interview. Confrontations may be useful in calling attention to an apparent inconsistency or a contradiction among items of information in the answers. If the interviewee is actually contradicting himself or herself, he or she ought to be made aware that you recognize this. Unfortunately, some interviewees do lie. There is a more important reason, however, for confrontation. Often what appears to be a contradiction can be explained rationally if you explore it. Things sometimes get left out inadvertently, and it is easy to give wrong dates or to have a slip of the tongue. In such cases, it is more equitable to give the interviewee an opportunity to clarify the situation than for you to leave the interview convinced that the interviewee was lying or was incompetent. Finally, it is important to confront an interviewee because he or she may feel embarrassed to volunteer important information. If the interviewee seems reluctant to commit himself or herself, you may have to test the interviewee's sentiments explicitly.

Not all confrontations need to be emotionally wrecking interactions. In the following example from a counseling interview, the subordinate would not introduce or admit a problem existed until the manager confronted him in the following way.

INTERVIEWER: It seems to me that what you have been saying, Perry, implies that any solution to this problem of coordination has to come from other departments? Is this the way you feel?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, (silence for ten seconds) maybe it sounds that way. I don't know. You know, when people pressure you . . . well, it's not easy to decide what to do . . . what's best or fair for everybody. Maybe there are one or two things that we could be doing . . . You know, I'm certainly willing to do my share, to meet others half-way. But they need to understand our problems, too.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I really didn't mean to overstate your case. But it did seem to me that all of the things you said earlier indicated that Tom and George were going to have to do the adjusting, and I just wanted to check it out to see if I am reading you correctly.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, you know, when you put it that way, I guess it sounds kinda harsh . . . and maybe selfish. I don't want it to sound that way. Still, I must admit that it would be easier . . . and a lot

cheaper and simpler . . . if they would make some changes. I realize everybody has to work together. I just don't want to be the one who gets pressured all the time.

In the final sentence the subordinate admits to some feelings that he has been unable or unwilling to express until now. Perhaps it is unlikely that he would have ever done so if his boss had not confronted him quite directly with the implications of his own statements.

In addition to direct probing, there are also several kinds of *nondirective probing*. There are many instances when you will want just to keep your interviewee talking. You may not have any specific questions, but you may want to encourage the interviewee to continue giving you information. In such cases, nondirective probing is very useful. There are four types of nondirective probing that you can use skillfully and unobtrusively. In many cases, the interviewee is not aware of them.

SILENCE

Novice interviewers often have a low tolerance for silence; they often feel that unless someone is talking, nothing is happening. This certainly is not the case. Still, one of the hardest lessons to learn is to use silence deliberately and productively. In fact, the lack of any pauses may be an indication that you are nervous or insecure.

Silence has several functions. It allows interviewees time for reflection and thinking. Not every answer will fall into place quickly, and generally people need some time just to think. Silence may also communicate a mood. Research "indicates that there is a positive correlation between the amount of silence used by the interviewer and the respondent's general level of spontaneity."² A pause slows the pace a bit and keeps you from interrupting your interviewee's chain of thought.

In what sense can silence function as probing? It merely communicates that more is expected. If it is accompanied by a nonverbal expression of interest, such as a nod of the head, it also indicates a willingness to listen. Since the interviewee is likely to have less tolerance for silence than you, he or she probably will experience some pressure to fill the gap and will keep on talking.

Obviously, long periods of silence can also be dysfunctional. There are people who like to play games to see how long they can outlast the other person. Therefore, in exploring the use of silence as probing, it must be understood that we are talking about occasional brief periods of silence lasting perhaps 10 to 20 seconds. If, after waiting this long, the interviewee has not begun to talk, you may need to use other means of securing information.

²Raymond Gorden, *Interviewing* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 188.

NEUTRAL PHRASES

Verbal spurts such as "I see," "Hmmm," "Un huh," "Yes?" "OK," and "You don't say" tend to encourage interviewees to keep talking. These phrases are actually uttered while the interviewee is talking, but they do not really interrupt the interviewee. In fact, if you pay attention to the way people converse almost anywhere, you will hear them using phrases such as these to show that they are listening and to encourage the conversation to continue.

REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS

Sometimes you can repeat back to the interviewee a statement that the interviewee already has made to indicate that further clarification or elaboration is needed. For this reason, they are often called mirror statements.

DOCTOR: How are you today?

PATIENT: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't feel too well.

DOCTOR: You don't feel well?

The doctor has used the patient's exact words but has turned them into a question. This is an excellent means of getting interviewees to tell you more without structuring their answers. The same technique is used in the following examples.

PROFESSOR: Mary, you didn't do as well on this test as before. What happened?

MARY: I just didn't have the time I needed to study.

PROFESSOR: You didn't have time?

POLLSTER: How do you feel about the president's tax proposals?

CLIENT: I'm against any tax increases; they're way too high already.

POLLSTER: You think taxes are too high?

CLIENT: I sure do. There's a general tax revolt developing in this country. The more you make, the more they take. You never get ahead. It's got to stop somewhere. I sure hope this proposal gets killed quickly.

INTERNAL SUMMARIES

Periodic reviews of the most important points you have covered in an interviewee serve a triple function. First, they act as a probe by allowing the interviewee to check the adequacy of your interpretation of what has taken place. In fact, it is often wise to preface your summaries with a remark that suggests that you are probing. For example, a manager was trying to secure suggestions from her subordinate. After a while she said, "Okay, Jim, let me see if I understand your recommendation." She then

went on to summarize what she thought Jim had been saying. Such a tactic is very helpful, because it is not infrequent that the interviewee will need to correct an interpretation with a comment like "That's not quite what I meant." Your summaries can be an open invitation to more discussion or a search for more accurate understanding. Second, accurate summaries demonstrates that you have been listening. This has a motivational impact upon your relationship with the interviewee. Third, summaries are an excellent means of building transitions from one topic to another. They give people a sense of direction and a sense of progress.

Guidelines for Probing

Skill in probing comes by developing a sensitivity to the communication process and an ability to analyze almost instantaneously what additional information you need. It can never be reduced to mere technique. The following guidelines, however, focus on some of the most important considerations for probing effectively.

EXERCISING CONTROL OF THE TOPIC

Organize so that you will stay on track. Probing is the way that you can direct the interviewee toward giving you the kind of information that you want. As we pointed out earlier, it is also your way of indicating what you are willing to listen to, that is, of weeding out the relevant from the irrelevant information. For this reason you must have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Examine the following examples to determine what area could be probed.

SUBORDINATE: If I have to start this new project without adequate supplies, I'm really going to raise hell!

You have several options here. If you want to keep the discussion on an informational and somewhat rational level, you might ask, "What supplies are you short of?" If, on the other hand, you analyze the situation and feel that there may be more to the reaction than is evident, you might want to focus on the subordinate's feelings by asking, "You're angry, aren't you?" Neither of these probes are inherently better than the other, and you probably can identify some other alternatives. What you do depends upon what you are trying to accomplish.

The following situation presents similar options.

INTERVIEWER: As far as you are concerned, how do you feel the new system is working out?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, there's a lot of grumbling going on because a lot of people don't like it. They say it's just too impractical and takes too much time. It was probably dreamed up by people who never did this kind of work.

What is the most appropriate response to the comments in this conversation? What alternatives can you list? We presented this example to hundreds of supervisors, and their responses tended to fall into two groups. One large group said that they would repeat the question, "How do *you* feel?" or ask, "Is that the way you feel?" According to this group, the original question specifically asked for a description of the interviewee's feelings or attitudes and not someone else's feelings. Therefore, they viewed the response as inadequate. The other group viewed the interviewee's response as very relevant. Therefore, they said that they would ask, "What is impractical or unrealistic about the system?" or "What are the problems with them?" This group felt that the interviewee obviously did not want to commit himself or herself to a personal answer for a particular reason; therefore, the interviewee answered indirectly. To this group it was more important to find out what the problems are than to press for the interviewee's feelings. Furthermore, they inferred that the indirect response was so strong that it probably reflected the interviewee's own feelings anyway. Remember that neither of these two groups is wrong or right; they merely differ in what they were willing to listen to.

KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

Not everything has to be probed in depth. Do not drag out an interview needlessly. Even in-depth interviews have a point of diminishing returns. Consequently, assess your priorities and quit when you have everything you need.

SENSITIVITY TO THE INTERVIEWEE'S NEEDS

Remember that the interviewee has purposes and needs that he or she wants to fulfill. In a survey, for example, some people have a need to articulate their feelings; therefore, you should perhaps listen more than you want to in order to keep a pleasant atmosphere and be able to get other information that you want. In a manager-subordinate relationship, a subordinate often needs to protect his or her self-image. Therefore, the person may choose to answer indirectly rather than directly. Furthermore, in all types of interviews there may be a need for the interviewer to justify why certain questions are being asked; the respondent may need to know the interviewer's purpose before giving an answer.

EVALUATING YOUR OPTIONS

The following example illustrates the necessity for training yourself to evaluate your options. Suppose you are a personnel manager who is giving an exit interview to an employee who is leaving the company. You ask, "John, we're sorry that we are losing you, and we wonder if you could tell us why you decided to leave." John answers, "I've got this job at Nolan,

and it's just time to move on." Since the interviewee's response does not give you reasons for his departure, your next question could be any one of the following:

1. "What made you decide to do that?" This is an open question that essentially repeats the original question. It could be useful, because John may have misunderstood what was being asked of him.
2. "Of course, we're particularly interested in why you were willing to leave your job here and move to Nolan. Can you tell me something about that?" This is very similar to the probing question above. Its primary difference is that it contains a preliminary comment that is an attempt to show interest and perhaps motivate John to respond with some specifics.
3. "Are you getting more money there?" This is a closed question that amounts to a "fishing expedition." Coming so early in the interview, it is a mark of an unrefined interviewer who uses a specific question when a general one would be better. Unfortunately, many interviewers try to use specific, probing questions too early.
4. "Didn't you like it here?" This is a poor closed question, because it sounds as if the interviewer is defensive or is begging for a compliment. People often leave organizations that they like because the opportunities are better elsewhere. This is not a very desirable probe.
5. "What do you mean by 'it's just time to move on?'" The interviewer here has picked up a hint of why the interviewee wants to move and asks for some clarification. This could be an excellent means of getting specific information.

USING CUES FROM THE INTERVIEWEE

Watch for covert as well as overt cues from the interviewee. Sometimes, the fact that the interviewee has left something out may call attention to it; therefore, you would want to probe. The choice of certain words also may indicate that there is more behind the verbalization than is being expressed.

DISTINGUISHING FACT, OPINION, HEARSAY, AND FEELINGS

You need to know exactly what type of information you are getting. Consider the police officer who is interviewing a witness to an accident. She might begin with "What happened?" However, experience teaches that people often fill in a lot of gaps in their stories by making up or inferring things. Consequently, she may probe the answer with "Exactly how much of this did you see?" It is important to remember that all information getting interviews need a clearly connected factual base that can be

weeded out from opinions or feelings. Inexperienced interviewers, however, tend to excel more in obtaining opinions than in obtaining facts or feelings.³

MOTIVATING THE INTERVIEWEE

Behavior is influenced by the kind of reward and the intensity of threats anticipated. The concept of motivation includes the process of furnishing incentives or inducements to move the interviewee in accordance with your objectives. Previously we have talked about motivation in terms of fulfilling a need that the interviewee has. This was explored in Chapter 2. In this section we will focus on the need for you to motivate the interviewee to participate fully and cooperatively in the interview process. Six motivators are examined, and then six recurring problems are described.

Motivators

ORIENTATION

People often hesitate or are reluctant to commit themselves in ambiguous situations; they participate more fully when they know what is expected of them and have some direction. Therefore, it is appropriate for you to give some orienting cues throughout the interview. For example, you may explain the rationale for a question, you may discuss how the information is going to be used, or you may provide a summary so that the interviewee will be aware of how you are moving from one point to the next. The important point is that orientation is a powerful motivator, if the interviewee is willing to go in the direction you are trying to take her or him.

RECOGNITION

Most people respond favorably to someone who makes them feel important in some way. This technique is used by pollsters when they tell people that their opinions are important: supervisors use it in appraisal interviews when they tell employees that they need to improve because they play an important role in the organization. Recognition satisfies the ego or self-actualizing needs.

CATHARSIS

Nearly all people have times when they must get things "off their chests" before they can deal rationally with an issue. They seem to feel relieved of

³William Banaka, *Training in Depth Interviewing* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 100.

some burden and are more attentive after they have rid themselves of the anger or the anxiety that they have been harboring inside. You probably have heard someone say, "There, I've said it, and I feel better already." You may not always feel that catharsis is appropriate, and you may not want to take the time for an interviewee to go through this process. It is your option as an interviewer to tolerate it or to shut it off. It can be a motivator, however, because the person may have emptied himself or herself of certain emotional barriers that were preventing effective participation in the interview and may now be ready to become a cooperative partner.

CONGENIAL RELATIONSHIP

Establishing a rewarding relationship with another human being is an enjoyable experience. Therefore, many interviewers will cooperate because they like the interviewee, find him or her stimulating, or trust him or her. Whatever you can do to build this kind of relationship will be a powerful motivator in the interview. For example, an interviewee may be persuaded to cooperate and answer questions completely more by who you are than by the topic or the idea being discussed. Such a relationship may take time to build. One of us once interviewed someone for 45 minutes in an attitude survey and was ready to end the interview and leave. Suddenly, the interviewee asked him to sit down again and began to give honest answers that he was unwilling to give earlier. Apparently, it had taken this long for the interviewee to be certain that the interviewer could really be trusted.

CHALLENGE AND GROWTH

People often look for positive challenges or ways to extend themselves. Therefore, you should look for ways to stimulate the interviewee.

EXTERNAL REWARDS OR THREATS

All of the motivators just described are intrinsic to the interview in the sense that they bring inherent satisfaction to the interviewee through participation. There are motivators, however, that are extrinsic to the interview. In research surveys, for example, the respondents are frequently paid \$4-\$10 per interview, and the only reason some of the interviewees volunteer is for the money. A politician's reward may be the publicity he or she receives. A manager may promise a subordinate a promotion or may threaten the subordinate with disciplinary action in order to get the person to cooperate. These extrinsic motivators are very effective when intrinsic ones are not enough. They constitute an effective tool, but intrinsic motivators need to be present, too, for the most effective communication experience.

Problems in Motivation

The problems that you can expect to encounter are far too numerous to be treated comprehensively here. Some of these will be covered in later chapters as they occur in specific kinds of interviews. However, there are a few inhibitors that cut across all kinds of interviews, and these can be treated profitably here.

TIMIDITY

Shy people find it difficult to respond easily in an interview. Their answers tend to be brief and underdeveloped. Many are so ill at ease that they want to get out of the situation as quickly as possible. If you are interacting with someone who behaves timidly, the first thing you should do is try to ascertain why the person is behaving this way. Is it a personality trait? Might it be caused by the fact that your surroundings or status are greater than the interviewee is accustomed to? There may not be much you can do if the former is the case except to be pleasant and reassuring. In the latter case, however, it would be useful to change surroundings, to create a more relaxed atmosphere, and to assure the person of his or her own worth. In either case, it might be useful to start out with easy topics or questions whose answers do not require much elaboration. The objective is to get the interviewee to start talking about anything. Hopefully, the interviewee will gradually lose part of his or her timidity. Caution must be exercised so that you do not appear to be too aggressive in trying to get the interviewee's participation. The situation can best be handled if you invite, not demand, the interviewee to participate.

EGO THREAT

The self-image is one of the most important psychological constructs for any person. When it is threatened the individual has a natural inclination to defend it. It is predictable, therefore, that most respondents will withhold information that threatens their ego or that they will misunderstand threatening information that they receive. The need for security may cause them to repress or evade so that the free flow of honest, valid information is inhibited. Such a reaction to ego threat may take many forms: some say they have forgotten; others deny; some defend themselves; and some write off the whole episode with a "no comment."

Ego threats arise in an interview for different reasons. Sometimes they are conscious ploys on the part of the interviewer. A journalist may challenge, apply pressure, and even bait a potential interviewee in order to get a story. A manager may use them to convince an employee to accept a certain idea or behavior. Some people delight in using this technique; others rule it out ethically as an element of trickery or force.

The truth is, however, that it can work for people in a very persuasive way.

On the other hand, there are many times when ego threats become barriers to communication, and this would be a matter of concern. An assurance of anonymity may help overcome it in research as well as in discipline interviews. Thorough explanations sometimes are successful in getting people to examine themselves less defensively and more logically. Separating a criticism of a behavior from an evaluation of the total person is often successful. In this case, you would try to reduce the ego threat by letting the person feel good about himself or herself generally while looking at one characteristic in which the person may need to improve. Finally, you may be surprised sometimes when an interviewee reacts in a threatened way if you had no intention of creating such a reaction. If this occurs, a simple explanation of your intention may be instrumental in getting the person to perceive your comment or question differently.

ETIQUETTE

Raymond Gorden describes an etiquette barrier as being a reluctance on the part of an interviewee to answer a question because it contains "information perceived by the respondent as inappropriate to give to the type of person doing the interview."⁴ It occurs when a candid answer would be considered in poor taste. There are things, for example, that subordinates do not say to their bosses, church members do not say to their ministers, or foreigners do not say to members of the host country. To do so would violate a norm and shock the interviewer. Therefore, there is a qualitative filter operating that makes the respondent withhold certain facts or modify the way he or she talks about a subject.

You can often anticipate an etiquette barrier whenever you and the interviewee have a vastly different positional, social, or cultural background. You can imagine what barriers might exist if a white, middle-class, college educated social worker tried to deal with a black, disadvantaged, uneducated family. Answers would probably be doctored so that they would appear socially acceptable to the interviewer. If you anticipate that there might be an etiquette barrier operating, there are several alternatives by which you can try to overcome it.

Select interviewers similar to the interviewees.

Use a questionnaire instead of an interview.

Use multiple-choice questions with options that show that you would not be surprised by the choice of any response.

Make a statement prior to the question to show that you would not be shocked. For example, you might say, "I know that sometimes

⁴Gorden, *Interviewing*, p. 76.

people _____. Have you had a problem with _____?"
 Never register shock, even if you are shocked. Keep your reactions under control.
 If you want information, be very unevaluative of the answers that you get. Do not agree or disagree or make moral judgments.

DEFENSIVENESS

The barrier of defensiveness has been covered more completely in the discussion of climate in Chapter 5. Still, it is such a common barrier that it is worth mentioning again.

People generally become defensive under any of the following conditions.

1. Serious evaluation or criticism, particularly when it is thought to be unjustified, makes people rush to defend themselves. This is one reason for not trying to correct all problems with an interviewee at once. In some cases, a person might deal effectively with one complaint, but the introduction of several may overload the person's circuits and cause him or her to try to defend himself or herself against all of them.
2. Manipulative strategies are not conducive to effective communication. For example, a manager described how she and her superior had both read the same material about nonverbal communication; therefore, in their meetings they each tried to stare the other down. For the manager, it became a form of defense against what she thought was manipulation on the part of her superior. Their meetings were rarely productive when this happened.
3. An attitude of superiority—not considered to be legitimate—often brings out a response of trying to put the other person "in his or her place."
4. Dogmatic statements or attitudes breed defensive reactions because the interviewer will try to make the interviewee "see the light."
5. Any statement perceived as untrue is an invitation to defend against falsehood.
6. An attack on an interviewee or a lack of concern for him or her as a person may necessitate defense in order to preserve honor or dignity. Actually, you may feel the need to attack an interviewee on occasion or to defend yourself. In either case, if you react too aggressively you may risk starting a vicious cycle in which both of you may become increasingly defensive, so that communication in its fullest sense becomes impossible. This is a very unproductive situation. If you are attacked, avoid a defensive reaction; perhaps

your own stability will motivate the other person to participate in the interview less aggressively.

PRIOR RELATIONSHIP

A prior negative relationship is a very common barrier to communication. A manager and a subordinate or a husband and wife may have a long history of not getting along together; a public figure may have a basic distrust of members of certain television networks; a homemaker may have had bad experiences with door-to-door sales representatives. All of these situations have one thing in common: the interviewee will not be enthusiastic about the interview, and the interviewee's consequent behavior may inhibit communication.

In a work situation you will need to be aware that you may not always be the best person to conduct a particular interview with a given individual. If information sharing is important, the interviewee may be more motivated to give the information to someone else than to you. Similarly, a particular journalist may have raised the ire of a certain public figure; therefore, a different journalist may be more successful in getting a full story from this public figure. The point is that you need to be aware of how your previous relationship with someone might affect your interview.

Of course, it is not always possible or desirable to send someone else. In such cases, give much thought to how you can secure the cooperation of the interviewee. Generally, you will need to provide the interviewee with an expectation of intrinsic or extrinsic reward, and the reward may need to be commensurate with the pain of interacting in an unpleasant relationship.

FORGETFULNESS

Forgetting is another frequent barrier to communication. Whereas the barriers previously mentioned deal with people's willingness to interact in an interview, the failure to remember is a matter of ability. Everybody forgets at times, and you cannot really anticipate when this is going to happen. There is no way of planning for it. There are some things that you can do, however, to help an interviewee remember when it happens.

First, recognize that people forget for one of many reasons. Events that were not particularly meaningful are not recalled very vividly. Traumatic experiences, on the other hand, may be too painful to recall. A lapse of considerable time causes a person to forget a number of details and to focus attention on just a few. Furthermore, the pressure of an interview itself may frustrate the interviewee's memory. Sometimes, people have even been known to forget for strategic reasons, like protecting themselves. If you develop some insight into why people cannot remember, you are in a good position to help them.

Second, be aware that remembering often takes time and effort.

Memory is not something that people switch off and on easily. Furthermore, the fact that a person is trying hard to remember can be frustrating, and this may make it even more difficult to remember. Sometimes, you may feel that you can help an interviewee remember by urging the person on with phrases like, "Come on; you can remember. I know you can do it." This kind of urging, however, probably will make the person more anxious. Your best tactic is to give the respondent time; decrease the pressure. Be patient and allow some silence.

Third, switch topics; talk about something else for awhile. This is one of the best means of reducing the pressure and focusing attention away from the memory barrier. After you have talked about other matters, you may wish to come back to the forgotten material later. Surprisingly, people often have no difficulty recalling things at this point.

Fourth, if you are trying to reconstruct an event, you can facilitate memory by asking very direct questions. For example, if you were interviewing someone about a sequence of events, you might want to probe whether X came before or after Y. As you try to get all the facts in their proper sequence, double-check your findings. Be particularly careful to watch for possible inconsistencies. You are trying to help the other person, so you must also be very cautious about superimposing your own structure or thoughts on the interviewee.

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

In nearly all interviewing situations the locus of control rests with the interviewer. It is part of your role, and only an occasional interviewee will challenge it. There are degrees in the amount of control that you may choose to exercise, but one of the worst criticisms that can be leveled at you as an interviewer is that you have lost control of an interview.

Actually, most of the things that have been discussed in Chapter 5 and this chapter are related to ways that you can control the interview: by setting a climate, by probing, and by motivating the interviewee to respond.

The greatest source of control, however, is for you to control yourself. Following the guidelines in this book should help you to become a well-disciplined interviewer who keeps yourself under control and who is analytic enough to exercise options in a way that will accomplish your purposes.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

All the planning in the world is useless if you cannot implement your plans. In Chapter 5 and in this chapter five tactics have been described that will enable you to accomplish your purposes.

1. Set the climate.
2. Listen analytically.
3. Probe thoughtfully.
4. Motivate the interviewee.
5. Control the interview.

It is hoped that the relationship among these five factors are evident. Listening is a part of setting a particular climate. It is also a prerequisite to being able to probe thoughtfully. The desire to probe, however, is not enough; it takes a great deal of skill. Furthermore, there are many alternative ways of probing, and you must be able to determine which one is suited for obtaining your information from a particular interviewee. The more you understand why responses are inadequate, the better you will be able to make decisions among your alternative ways of probing.

The material about motivating respondents in this chapter is directly related to the discussion on motivation in Chapter 2. It would be well for you to review that material. As you attempt to motivate the interviewee, keep in mind that this individual must be offered a valuable reason to cooperate with you, since communication in the interview is a joint process. Therefore, your basic aim is to provide an intrinsic or extrinsic reward to the interviewee for participating in the interview. Finally, all of the guidelines discussed have been designed to give you some measure of control over the proceedings.

This chapter concludes the presentation of materials about basic interviewing processes. Now you are ready to begin to examine specific types of interviews in terms of these processes.

PROJECTS

1. Why do you think many interviewers do not probe as well as they ought to? List as many reasons as you can. A good place to begin is with your own probing techniques.
2. What are the relative advantages of direct probing in contrast to indirect probing?
3. Critique any transcript of an interview in terms of the probing techniques used.
4. How can you know what will motivate another person to participate in an interview?
5. Make a list of the most frequent problems that make it difficult for an interviewer to control an interview.