CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEWING

GETTING STARTED

You have called the respondent to confirm that you are expected. You have checked your tape recorder. You have put your interview guide, fastened onto a clipboard, in your briefcase, first glancing at it to remind yourself of the interview's aims and content. You get in your car, a street map beside you. You find the respondent's home, park, ring the doorbell. The respondent comes to the door. You introduce yourself and are directed to a place to sit.

Your first concern should be to establish a good interviewing partnership. The way you act and what you say should communicate that you expect to work with the respondent to produce the interview. For example, as you bring out your tape recorder, you might ask, "Is using the tape recorder okay?" The point isn't the particular remark but, rather, the assumption of a collaborative relationship.

I bring two signed copies of a consent form to interviews. I give both to the respondent and say, "These are two copies of our consent form. Could you read one of them, and if it is all right would you sign it and give it to me and then hang on to the other?" Then I ask something like "Is there anything about the study you would like me to tell you before we begin?" Sometimes respondents want to know how they happened to be contacted. I then describe the sampling procedure. I almost always also say something about the general goal of the study, such as "We're trying

to learn about the experience of retirement and so are talking to people who know about it because they're doing it." I usually name the study's sponsor or give my academic affiliation to provide additional evidence that the study is legitimate.

When I can, I begin the interview where the respondent seems already to be. In a study of retirement, if a respondent mentioned, before I turned on the tape recorder, "I'm not actually retired; I've got a couple more weeks to go on the job," I might ask, after starting the tape recorder, "What's it like, being two weeks before the end of the job? Is that something you think about?" I might then go on to ask how the issue of retirement had arisen while the respondent was on the job, how other people had indicated that they were aware that the respondent was leaving, and how the respondent's job had changed since he scheduled a retirement date. If there is no evident place to start, I might begin by asking how the respondent happened to enter the situation about which I want to learn. "I would like to ask what your experience has been in retirement, maybe starting with how you happened to retire when you did."

In a pilot study of people who are HIV positive I generally started with how it happened that respondents got tested rather than how it happened that they became HIV positive, since their experience as people who were HIV positive actually began with the testing, not with the infection. Here is the start of my interview with one HIV-positive respondent:

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
INTERVIEWER: The idea of the study is to find out what happens to people as a result of their being tested and finding out that they are positive. What effects, if any, does that have on how they think, how they see the world, what they do. It's the kind of information that nobody has except the guy who's going through it. Nobody else has it.	*The setting is a small office in a testing station. The respondent has been told by his counselor that a study is being done and he has said he would participate. I want to establish a research partnership with the respondent.*
RESPONDENT: Right.	
I: I'm a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts, downtown.	

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
And what I'm doing is talking to people who are in your situation, because you know what is going on and nobody else does, but it is important for other people to understand as well as they can. And so I'm going to ask you to work with me to tell your story. And that's it. That's what I'm doing.	*Now I explain what my role will be as interviewer and propose to the respondent that his role will be to provide information about "what is going on" in his life, to tell his story.*
R: Tell you what happened, huh?	
I: Exactly.	
R: Sure. That's a good idea. And it's about time.	*The respondent indicates that, yes, this makes sense to him.*
I: Yeah. It's amazing, with all the AIDS research, this hasn't been done. Anyway, here is a consent form for you to read. It describes the study, and if it's okay with you, you sign one copy and let me have it, and keep the other.	*Here I try to get in tune with the respondent by extending his comment "And it's about time." I then ask the respondent to read and sign the consent form.*
R: Oh, yeah. I have no problem. So, will it be used in, like, kind of segments, something where it's like people will be able to listen to us? Or is it strictly for doctors and psychologists?	*This suggests to me that the respondent may feel threatened by the form. "I have no problem" may mean that the respondent first felt discomfort, then rejected it. This, plus the question about who will listen to the tapes, makes me think that reassurance might be called for.*
I: Nobody will be listening to the tapes except for people on the project.	*My guess is that confidentiality might be an issue.*
R: It doesn't matter to me.	*The respondent says confidentiality is not an issue.*
I: What we'll do is, we'll transcribe it. We'll be reading the transcripts of your interview and the	*Just to be on the safe side, and to forestall the respondent's later feeling uncomfortable about what*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
transcripts of interviews with other people we interview and we'll compare them and summarize them and say this is what goes on. We might quote people, but if we do we will drop out identifying information.	*he's bought into, I go into detail about how his tapes will be used.*
R: Well, I don't care. I mean, if you do quote me and you have to use my name, it may be more effective, by using my name and saying what it is. But that's neither here nor there.	*Again the respondent says he doesn't care. Looking back, I think he wanted his story told.*
I: It's just our practice that we don't do it.	*Maybe I should have gone on to the interview at this point instead of staying with this, but I felt more had to be said about the ground rules.*
R: Yeah. I just figured that one or the other, it doesn't bother me.	*Respondent is holding his ground.*
I: Okay.	*"I accept your position."*
R: Really, it doesn't. It has no effect for me, for some reason. Denial or something.	*This could be interpreted as saying, "I'm going to be vulnerable to exposure but I don't care, although maybe I should."*
I: Also, if it is possible, it would be good if we could talk again, maybe next week or two weeks from now.	*I direct the respondent's attention to the interview at hand and its continuation.*
R: Yeah, sure.	*"Okay. I'm ready for the interview now."*
I: I guess I'd like to start by asking how you happen to be here. Could you just walk me through how you happened to get tested?	*And so we start. The phrase, "Could you just walk me through . . ." suggests the level of detail I would like the respondent to provide.*

In this excerpt I made explicit the terms of the interviewing relationship. After introducing the study and myself, I said, "What I'm doing is talking to people who are in your situation, because you know what is going on and nobody else does. . . . So I'm going to ask you to work with me to tell your story." Often, I don't describe in such detail the interviewing relationship I hope to establish, because it seems to me already pretty much understood. In this case the respondent must have struck me as uncertain of what would be expected of him.

THE INTERVIEWING RELATIONSHIP

The interviewing relationship is a research partnership between the interviewer and the respondent. The terms of this research partnership are ordinarily implicit, but if I were drafting a contract between myself and a respondent, I would include the following clauses:

1. The interviewer and the respondent will work together to produce information useful to the research project.
2. The interviewer will define the areas for exploration and will monitor the quality of the material. The respondent will provide observations, external and internal, accepting the interviewer's guidance regarding topics and the kind of report that is needed.
3. The interviewer will not ask questions out of idle curiosity. On the other hand, the interviewer will be a privileged inquirer in the sense that the interviewer may ask for information the respondent would not make generally available, maybe would not tell anyone else at all.
4. The interviewer will respect the respondent's integrity. This means that the interviewer will not question the respondent's appraisals, choices, motives, right to observations, or personal worth.
5. The interviewer will ensure, both during the interview and afterward, that the respondent will not be damaged or disadvantaged because of the respondent's participation in the interview. In particular, the interviewer will treat the respondent's participation and communications as confidential information.

There are other ways, besides the research partnership, of defining the interviewing relationship. Sometimes interviewers present themselves as the means by which the respondent can tell his story: "Through me you

can make your story known." This might be the approach of someone doing life history studies or of a reporter in an interview with the famous or the notorious.

It is also possible for the interviewer to take the role of the respectful student, awaiting instruction. One woman, an excellent interviewer, said she tried to make the government officials she interviewed feel that she was ready to admire their knowledge and authority and was, indeed, already awed to be in the presence of someone so important. She believed that disguising how much she knew and how perceptive and skeptical she was disarmed her respondents.

Some interviewers are willing to act as the respondents' antagonists. If they suspect the respondent is holding back information, they are ready to confront the respondent: "You say you haven't ever used drugs. But you hung out with drug users. There must have been a time when you experimented." Interviews in police stations, of course, take on this quality, as do some employment interviews. Journalists sometimes read up on respondents, the better to confound the respondents' efforts to dissemble.

In my experience the research partnership definition of the interviewing relationship works best. It is the most easily sustainable, both for the interviewer and the respondent. And it is consistent with the reasons for having research interviews.

SOME INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

Being a good interviewer requires knowing what kind of information the study needs and being able to help the respondent provide it. Here are some guidelines.

WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO OBTAIN IN THE INTERVIEW?

In the great majority of research interviews you will want the respondent to provide concrete descriptions of something he or she has witnessed. This includes both scenes and events external to the respondent and the respondent's own thoughts and feelings. A task in almost every interview is to communicate to respondents that this is what is needed. Here is an interview excerpt that suggests the kind of information that is wanted and how it can be obtained. It is from an interview with a divorced father who was involved in a dispute with his former wife over his times of visitation. I conducted the interview as part of a study of the usefulness of a program for helping parents deal with visitation problems.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
RESPONDENT: It really appalls me that they [in the court] think that I'm some . . . some, I'm some symbol of money. That is the only reason that I even go to court and the court has any use for me is because I am a symbol of money. That is the only reason. They don't . . . they could care less if I saw my son. Okay? It's a different story if the mother wasn't seeing him. But they could care less if I didn't see him. They could care less if I didn't have a roof over my head. They could care less that I wouldn't be able to take my son because I don't have any money to feed him when I have him because I pay all the money out. They don't care about that.	*This response, a description of the courts as the respondent views them, is generalized. That it is so emotional may obscure the fact that it summarizes the respondent's experience rather than presents any specific experience. Note the respondent's use of "they" when he insists that "they" don't care about his relationship with his son, only about obtaining money from him for his wife. Later, when the respondent describes a specific incident, he will talk about specific people.*
INTERVIEWER: Could you walk me through the last time you went to court, just what happened?	*This is a way of asking for the concrete incident that led to the generalized emotional statement. The phrase "walk me through" is intended to communicate the level of concreteness wanted. "The last time" is intended to specify a particular incident.*
R: The last time I went to court was just before I went to see the counselor. Basically, I went down to go over custody and payments. Now think about it. I got to pay rent. I live in an apartment. I got to pay rent. I got to put food on the table, you know. I got to make payments on the car. I make three hundred dollars a week, gross. Take out my taxes, I make two hundred and forty-seven dollars.	*The respondent provides a time reference for his last time in court and a reason for having gone there but then returns to his outrage.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
They want seventy dollars. Who pays for my rent?	
I: Okay. When you came to court, were you waiting around before you . . .	*I bring the respondent back to the court appearance, to what is likely to have been its beginning—waiting around.*
R: Oh yeah, wait around for hours, hours.	
I: Where were you waiting?	*I ask for specifics to keep the respondent in the incident.*
R: You wait downstairs in a lobby, waiting to be called. And then you go through this shenanigans.	
I: What happens while you're waiting to be called?	*I'm asking for the concrete details of the incident. Notice that I ask about what happens in the present tense. This is an error, because it encourages a generalized response. (I say more about this later in this chapter.)*
R: You sit. You sit. You sit. You don't even get called. I had the lawyer go stand in line. You don't even see a judge. You see some person who shuffles a million people around a day. And then you sit down with a mediator. He's my mediator. He's not my mediator. He's telling me what I'm supposed to do like he's a judge. He's telling me, "This is what you have to do."	*The response is generalized, quite possibly because of the present-tense question.*
I: Was your wife with you when you were seeing the mediator?	*I now supply a specific detail to bring the respondent back to the incident.*
R: Oh yeah.	

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I: So it's the three of you—you, your wife . . .	*Again, requiring the specific.*
R: Me, the lawyer—I might just as well have left the lawyer at home. I mean, I might as well have left him at home. I mean, I mean, the lawyer couldn't do anything.	*The respondent is now in the incident. It only remains to ask about it.*
I: So what happened?	*Which I now do.*
R: What happened is, you know, it's like this. I want three weeks. I want three weeks vacation with my son. Not all at once. Three weeks.	*I can't tell if the respondent asked for this or if it was only in his mind.*
I: So did you say that or . . .	*For clarification.*
R: I mean, what's this guy? What's wrong with three weeks? What's the problem with three weeks? One week, three times a year. Spring, winter, and summer. You know, what's the big deal? I don't see any problem with that. Oh, no. The mediator says, "Two weeks." I say, "No, I want three weeks." I mean, I don't know what the problem is. What's wrong with three weeks?	*Apparently, the respondent asked and was refused. And then the respondent argued.*
I: So what did he say then?	*I ask the respondent to continue reporting on the level of what actually happened.*
R: He says, "Well, I'm only giving you two weeks and come back in a year and a half and we'll negotiate again." What do you mean, come back? I'm not coming back to this court again. Negotiate? What are we negotiating? This is my son. It's not a negotiating thing.	*The respondent is now providing a description of the incident, both what was happening in the event and what was happening internally. This is the level of concreteness needed for the study. Note how it develops further useful detail.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I: Did your lawyer say anything?	
R: My lawyer. My lawyer's like . . . he says, "Well, why can't we have the three weeks?" But, you know, it is the mother. I'm like, "Well, I'm the father. Without me there wouldn't be a child." Well, I'm like, well . . . nothing. Nothing. And I say, "I love my son and I love seeing my son and I love spending as much time as I want with my son. And I don't like you telling me when I can spend time with him."	*This is an instructive account of the frustrations of the noncustodial father and the feelings of helpless rage that develop. Note the respondent's anger at being told when he can see his son by someone who doesn't know him or his son.*
I: What did he say when you said that?	*Again phrasing the question on the level of the concrete event.*
R: "Well, that's the way it is."	*The respondent says that he was essentially just turned away by the mediator, not attended to.*
I: What were you thinking . . .	*Asking for the internal experience.*
R: What am I thinking? I want to kill the guy. I want to kill her. You know, 'cause she's sitting there smiling and smirking. I mean, I tell you, I tell you, I'm a very rational person. But when I left that day, I tell you, and I watched the news, right? And I see these guys and I'm sitting there going, "There's something going on behind the scene. You're not seeing the whole picture."	*A statement of the level of rage the experience induced. Notice the shift into the present tense. Here it is not generalized; instead, it describes a past incident as though it were occurring now.*
I: What do you mean by "these guys"?	*The respondent is alluding to thoughts. I ask him to develop them further.*
R: These people that are on TV and they're killing their wives. I mean, nothing should ever be drawn that far. All right, beating your wife—I never did any beating. I never had any restraining order. Because I'm—you know. But I tell you, if I was that type of person, the way I felt when I got out of there, I tell you, I could have knocked her off. 'Cause I was pissed.	*This is a description of murderous rage. The responden't self-control is good enough so that he will not harm the mediator or his ex-wife. But this is the feeling that underlay the diatribe with which this excerpt began.*

This excerpt began with a generalized statement of the court experience of a noncustodial father. I wanted the respondent to move from this to as close to an observer's report as he could provide of his experiences, internal as well as external. Only that sort of concrete description of just what happened could constitute interpretable data regarding the experiences of noncustodial fathers in court.

Generalized descriptions can be good enough if they are about an issue of peripheral importance to the study. A respondent's statement that "I go to work about nine in the morning" would be acceptable if the study isn't especially concerned about the respondents' use of time. But if respondents' use of time is important to the study, the interviewer should attempt to obtain a concrete description of what happened the morning of the day preceding the interview.

We obtain descriptions of specific incidents by asking respondents to particularize. In the foregoing excerpt I asked, "Could you walk me through the last time you went to court, just what happened?" Other questions that might also have served to elicit a concrete description include: "Could you tell me about a time that displays that at its clearest?"; "Is there a specific incident you can think of that would make clear what you have in mind?"; and "Could you tell me what happened, starting from the beginning?"

It can sometimes seem to an interviewer to be an untrustworthy sampling of respondent behavior to ask only about the last time an incident occurred. To check this, it might be useful for the interviewer to ask if that occurrence was very different from previous occurrences and, if it was, to ask for the occurrence that preceded the most recent one as well. Often, however, the discussion of the most recent occurrence will produce so

much instructive particularity that it will be of secondary importance whether it is a typical event or not.

TENSE AND SPECIFICITY IN THE INTERVIEW

It is useful to bear in mind that reports of actual events are ordinarily made in the past tense: "I did . . . ," "He said . . . ," and so on. However, respondents may also make reports of actual events in the present tense to give their accounts a sense of immediacy and drama, as though the events were happening now. The respondent just quoted did that when he said, "My lawyer's like, he says, 'Well, why can't we have the three weeks?' "

A more frequent use of the present tense might be called "the generalized present." This is the tense respondents most frequently employ for a generalized description. It summarizes developments that occurred in the past and continue through the present. This is the tense used by the respondent in the excerpt just presented when he said, "You sit. You sit. You sit. You don't even get called." Notice that the respondent used the generalized present in response to a question by the interviewer that was itself in the generalized present: "What happens while you're waiting to be called?" This question assumed the generalized present and so pulled a response in the generalized present. A better question would have been, "What *happened* while you were waiting to be called?"

The generalized present is often requested in studies using a fixed-question–open-response format. Such a study might ask, for example, "What are the issues about which you and your wife tend to disagree?" As was exemplified in the excerpt, when a question is phrased in the generalized present, the response is likely to be in the generalized present.

There is a second generalizing tense, which I call "the generalized past." A respondent can signal this by use of the auxiliary "would," as in "I would sit there for hours." The respondent could also signal this tense by using "used to" or an equivalent: "I used to spend a whole day sitting there." Here too the respondent is summarizing, not describing a specific incident.[1]

Respondents often prefer to provide generalized accounts rather than concrete instances. One reason for this is that they can feel that they are being more responsible reporters if they remain general, since they are describing an entire class of events rather than a single idiosyncratic

event. The generalized material, they may think, is more inclusive and so constitutes better information. Actually, when respondents provide generalized accounts, their description expresses a kind of theory of what is most typical or most nearly essential in the class of the event. By doing this, respondents preempt the investigator's task of analysis; it is they who have decided what is important.[2]

In addition, a generalized account permits respondents to minimize elements about which they feel diffident. Respondents may feel that generalized accounts are appropriate for a report to someone like the interviewer, whom they don't know that well. Generalized accounts are more nearly public information, with none of the potentially embarrassing or revealing details of private life.

Interviewers, in qualitative interview studies, like their respondents, may imagine that the generalized present or generalized past will provide an overview that saves interview time and is less subject to the idiosyncrasies of the specific event. In addition, the interviewers may unconsciously prefer to phrase a question in the generalized present or past because it seems less prying, less intrusive, than a question that asks for a specific past event. The question, "What's it like when you and your wife quarrel?" can feel easier to ask than "Can you tell me about your most recent quarrel? Could you walk me through it?" Asking about a specific past event can make interviewers uncomfortable because it seems as though they are putting respondents on the spot.

But just because questions phrased in the generalized present or generalized past appear less intrusive, the interviewer should be wary of them. The point of qualitative interviewing is to obtain from respondents a field report on their external and internal experiences. This does require the respondent to provide a density of detail that would not be provided in ordinary conversation. If asking for detailed, concrete information in an interview constitutes an unacceptable invasion of privacy, the interviewing partnership is faulty.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

There are no magic questions. Any question is a good question if it directs the respondent to material needed by the study in a way that makes it easy for the respondent to provide the material. Sometimes the best question is one that in a very few words directs the respondent to give more detail or

fill in a gap: "What happened then?" Sometimes it is one that takes the time to tell the respondent just what is now needed: "Could you give me a concrete instance of that, a time that actually happened, with as much detail as you can?" Any question that helps the respondent produce the material you need is a good question.

On Phrasing the Question

Should every question be phrased in an open way, or might a question be a leading one in that it anticipates a response? Do you ask "What were your feelings then?" or "Were you unhappy about that?" Or might you even offer "You must have been unhappy"?

Most often, you will not want to affect the respondent's report by offering anticipations in your questions. If you have no reason to anticipate a particular response, you would ask, "What were your feelings when that was happening?" But sometimes you can help a respondent provide a full report by demonstrating your understanding, and one way to do this is to name the respondent's state. In this situation the right thing to say might be "You must have been unhappy about that." Or if you don't want to supply the characterization, "unhappy"—after all, if you do, the characterization of the feeling isn't the respondent's own—you might try "It sounds as though you had a pretty strong reaction." You don't have to be compulsively nondirective, but you should make sure that the words and images you may eventually quote in your report are the respondent's, not yours.

There may be a few points in an interview where you want to check on a surmise you have come to. One way to do this is to say, "It sounds like you are still pretty upset about that." But if the respondent agrees with this, you might do well to check whether the agreement comes because of politeness or because you have been right. I have sometimes asked "Is that exactly right?" just to make sure.

Helping Respondents Develop Information

Most important in an interview is obtaining concrete information in the area of inquiry. Once a respondent has alluded to an actual incident, perhaps in response to your asking, with respect to something of importance to the study, "Could you tell me the most recent time that happened?", you may have to help the respondent develop the incident

adequately. Here are forms of development you might want to obtain and some ways you might ask for them.

1. *Extending.* You might want to know what led to an incident. Questions that ask for this include "How did that start?" "What led to that?" Or you might want to know the consequences of an incident: "Could you go on with that? What happened next?"
2. *Filling in detail.* You might want more detail than the respondent has provided. A useful question often is "Could you walk me through it?" An interviewer who worked with me used to add "We need you to be as detailed as possible," and that seemed to work for her. Another approach to obtaining increased detail is to go to the beginning of the respondent's story for which you want detail and ask what followed, exemplifying in your question the density of detail you want: "So you were sitting there, talking with your guest, and this other fellow came over. What happened then?" You could even add "Can you walk me through it?"
3. *Identifying actors.* You might want to learn the social context of an incident, the other people who were there. You could ask "Was anyone else there when that was happening?" "Who else was there and what did they do?"
4. *Others the respondent consulted.* Especially in a study whose concerns include how respondents dealt with problems, you may want to ask whom the respondent talked with about an incident and what the respondent said: "Did you talk to anyone about what was going on?" This may also produce information about the respondent's view of the incident at the time.
5. *Inner events.* You will generally want to obtain information regarding some of the inner events that accompanied the outer events the respondent reports. Inner events include perceptions, what the respondent heard or saw; cognitions, what the respondent thought, believed, or decided; and emotions, how the respondent felt and what strivings and impulses the respondent experienced. They can also include the respondent's preconceptions, values, goals, hopes, and fears. You will usually want at least the cognitive and emotional events. Imagine a respondent reporting, "My boss called me in and told me he wanted me to fire one of the people working for me." After the respondent developed what happened, you could ask the respondent to de-

scribe his or her cognitive reactions by asking, "When that was happening, what thoughts did you have?" Then you might obtain emotional reactions by asking, "What were your feelings when he said that?" or "Can you remember how you reacted, emotionally?"

6. *Making indications explicit.* Respondents may indicate by a gesture, a grimace, or an expressive shrug feelings they haven't put into words. You won't have the gesture, grimace, or shrug in your transcript when you are analyzing your data, nor can you quote it as supporting material for your report. The problem is to communicate to the respondent that you sort of understand what he or she is indicating but that you want to be sure. To convey the message that the respondent's feelings are worth developing in words, you might try suggesting, perhaps by a nod, that you understand, and then ask for elaboration by the question, "You had some pretty definite feelings?" or "What were the feelings you had?"

Handling Difficult Questions

Some questions are hard to ask. People in survey research sometimes say that income is the most private of matters, more difficult to ask about than sexual behavior. Perhaps, but sexual behavior is difficult enough. However, often there is a relatively tactful way of entering a difficult area. To learn about men's extramarital experiences, in the study of how occupationally successful men organized their lives, we sometimes began by asking respondents about their experience of loneliness and then moved to questions about friendships with women other than their wives. Still, despite our efforts to be as tactful as possible, a few men responded by saying that they didn't want to get into that area. That told us something—although not very much.

In general, if there are difficult issues to be developed, it is important to establish a reliable research relationship before entering the area. It is also important for interviewers to know why the information is needed. Interviewers in any study should always understand its goals, so that they can know which of a respondent's leads to develop; but if they are to ask about sensitive issues, it is especially important that they know why they are asking. And they must thoroughly believe in the study's right to know. Otherwise they will communicate their absence of confidence in the questions.

Markers

I define a marker as a passing reference made by a respondent to an important event or feeling state. One respondent whom I interviewed in the study of retirement reported, "We went to our place on the Cape a couple of weeks after my mother died, and my husband spent all his time working on the house. He always has one more thing he has to do." The point of this response was to communicate how occupied the respondent's husband was, despite his retirement. The reference to the death of the respondent's mother—not previously mentioned by her—was a marker. The respondent was indicating that this was something significant for her, by which she dated events; that she understood that it might not be important for the study; and that if I wanted to pick it up, well, there it was.

After the respondent had finished developing the material about her husband's full schedule, I said, "You mentioned earlier that your mother had died. What happened?" The respondent then described how devoted she had been to her mother. That devotion explained why her inaccessibility to her husband had been an issue in his retirement. Now, with her mother dead, there were indications that things might be different. This was material important to the study.

Because markers occur in the course of talking about something else, you may have to remember them and then return to them when you can, saying, "A few minutes ago you mentioned . . ." But it is a good idea to pick up a marker as soon as you conveniently can if the material it hints at could in any way be relevant for your study. Letting the marker go will demonstrate to the respondent that the area is not of importance for you. It can also demonstrate that you are only interested in answers to your questions, not in the respondent's full experience.

Sometimes interviewers feel it is tactful not to pick up markers. This may, on occasion, be true, especially if the marker was dropped inadvertently. But most often respondents are in enough control of their report that if they don't want you to know about the area, they won't drop markers.

Respondents sometimes offer markers by indicating that much has happened that they aren't talking about. They might say, for example, "Well, there was a lot going on at that time." It is then reasonable to respond, "Could you tell me about that?" It is different when a respondent clearly states that an area is off-limits to the interview by saying something like, "There was a lot going on at that time, but I don't want

to talk about that." Now you can't possibly ask, "Could you tell me about that?" Still, if the topic appears relevant to the study and you have a good interviewing relationship, you might ask, "Can you tell me anything about what sort of thing that was?"

MANAGING THE INTERVIEW

Intrusions

The first rule of interviewing is that if the respondent has something to say, the respondent must be able to say it. If you find yourself talking over the respondent, interrupting, or holding the floor while the respondent tries to interrupt, something is going wrong in the interview. You might want to withdraw some of your attention from the respondent for a moment or two to figure out why you are competing for the floor. But whether you figure it out or not, you ought to stop doing it.

It is easy to intrude in an interview. You can interrupt the respondent. You can finish the respondent's sentences. You can offer your associations to what the respondent is saying. You can suggest explanations for observations about which the respondent is perplexed; for example, if the respondent shrugs and says, "I don't know why he said that," you could propose, "Well, maybe he was trying to defend himself." You can insist on completing your question even if the respondent has already started to answer. You can hop from issue to issue following your own train of thought rather than the respondent's. With any and all of these, don't do it.

Never, never fight for control of the interview. The interview is a collaboration. If it should happen that a respondent is developing an irrelevant topic at great length, you may have to interrupt to say that there's another topic you would like to get to. But that should be done in the spirit of the collaboration; it's your responsibility to set topics. You can usually manage the redirection without discouraging the respondent from talking freely. In the retirement study a respondent who was nearing retirement wanted to talk about the details of his business and how hectic things were. His discussion was interesting but not useful for the study, so at a pause I asked, "With all this going on, is it possible for you also to plan for retirement?" We then moved to discuss the respondent's planning for his retirement.

Talking About Yourself

The interview is about the respondent, not about the interviewer. In my view, at least until the interviewing has ended, the interviewer should do only as much self-reporting as is consistent with the interview situation. It is usually enough for the interviewer to give business card information—location and profession—along with the study's aims and sponsorship.

If a respondent asks about some aspect of the study, the question should be answered fully—although not so fully that the respondent's attention wanders. If a respondent asks a question of the interviewer such as whether the interviewer had a difficult time finding the respondent's home, the question should be answered in a way that will satisfy the respondent's concern, but briefly. If a respondent asks a specific personal question, such as whether the interviewer had an experience similar to the one the respondent is describing, the interviewer should answer honestly rather than seem mysterious. But again the response should be brief; it's the respondent's experience that's important.

Some interviewers believe that self-disclosure fosters disclosure by respondents. I don't have much experience with self-disclosure as a facilitative technique, but the experience I do have leads me to question it. My own experience is that self-disclosure complicates an interview situation by shifting the respondent's attention to the interviewer and altering the respondent's relationship with the interviewer.

Monitoring the Information the Respondent Is Providing

You must carry into the interview a general idea of what you want to learn about. The interview guide is one statement of this. Your ability to judge what else might contribute to the study's report should make it possible to recognize when material not anticipated in the guide could be useful for the study. Even as you are listening closely, you should be assessing whether the material might be useful for the study's report. The guiding question is "Does this material help illuminate experience in the area of the study?"

Suppose your study is on the psychological and emotional concomitants of being engaged in a lawsuit. Your concern is what it feels like to be either the person sued or the person doing the suing. In an exploratory interview you find yourself being told by a plaintiff about his experiences

as a father when his son got into a dispute over ownership of baseball cards. Is this relevant material? Should you ask for its development in the interview? Or should you be thinking about how to redirect the respondent? If I could imagine any use for the material, I would want the respondent to develop it. It might occur to me that the stance of being a father protecting his child, or teaching the child to deal with conflict, carries over into the respondent's present adversarial action. For me, that possibility would be enough to justify encouraging the respondent to develop the material.

It can be hard to know what is relevant, especially in early interviews, before the frame of the study is firmly established. My policy is: If in doubt, see what's there.

Adequacy of the Respondent's Account

Suppose what you are being told is in exactly the right area. How do you know whether you are being told enough, whether you are being given enough development and enough detail? One test is visualizability. Can you call up the scene and imagine who is there in the setting being described and how the participants relate to each other? If you were to stage the scene in a theater, would you know what people to put there? Would you know who is saying what? Would you be able to move the plot forward? Actually, you'll never get enough information to do all of this, but you ought to be able to identify the major figures present on the scene, know the important things that were said, and maybe understand how the scene came to be or what happened next. If an event is of critical importance for your study, you should try to get as much information about what happened as your respondent can supply, up to the point where the respondent becomes restive.

Managing Transitions

The best questions fit in so well with what respondents are saying that they seem almost to be continuations of the respondents' own associations. They encourage respondents to say more about what is already in their minds. Transitions to new topics require respondents to stop and think, to relocate themselves; they may be necessary, but they tend to be unsettling.

Suppose that after a respondent has told an anecdote about his children, the interviewer nods and then asks, "How about at work, what is a typical day like?" The respondent will require time to reorient himself. He must redirect his mind from his relationship with his kids to his work situation. For a few moments, the respondent is apt to flounder. The verbal expression of this might be, "Well, ah, well, ah, the way it goes, I guess . . ." The interviewer has flustered the respondent.

I used to tell interviewers who worked for me that they could fluster respondents three times in an interview. Anything more and the respondent would wait for the next question, answer it briefly, and then wait for the next question. This is how respondents act in survey interviews. It isn't at all what is wanted in qualitative interviews.

Actually, how many times a respondent can be flustered and yet remain ready to give a full report depends largely on the quality of the interviewing partnership. A fully cooperative respondent can be flustered more than the three times I would tell interviewers was their limit. But where there is initial resistance—for example, where a respondent isn't sure he or she wants to be interviewed—even a single flustering can lead to responses that are stiff and sparse.

It is good practice to try to follow the respondent's associations so long as they remain within the interview's frame. The interviewer will still have a great deal of influence on the direction the respondent's associations take. The interviewer will be constantly communicating—by nods of agreement and understanding as well as by questions and comments—what is of value to the study and what is not. Even if few directive questions are asked, the interview will be an interactive product. Usually, without introducing new topics more than three or four times in the interview, the interviewer will find that the issues that have to be covered have been dealt with.

There are, however, a few ways of phrasing transitions that can prepare respondents for redirection. When it is evident to the interviewer that a particular line of inquiry has been adequately developed, the interviewer might say, perhaps nodding affirmatively, "Okay. Now there is another issue I wanted to ask you about. It is . . ." The respondent may still be flustered but will have warning that a question requiring reorientation is about to be made.

How Well Is the Interviewing Partnership Going?

Be alert to indications by the respondent of discomfort, antagonism, or boredom. If there is any suggestion of any of these, your immediate aim should be to restore an effective partnership. A way of doing this is to listen sympathetically to whatever the respondent wants to offer so long as it is within the study's frame. Often the respondent will have talked easily and comfortably in an area dealt with earlier in the interview, such as challenges at work and how they were overcome. Returning to that area may improve matters.

Use your own feelings in the interview as a guide to what is going on. If you are being bored by the respondent, something is wrong in the interview. The respondent may be avoiding emotional material or may be defensively providing only superficial elements. Chances are, if the respondent's account were rich and alive, you wouldn't be bored.

Sometimes in an interview I have felt sleepy, almost to the point of being unable to keep my eyes open; the same, I think, has happened to other interviewers. This is boredom to an extreme. Almost never, I believe, is it an indication of fatigue or sleep deprivation. Rather, it suggests that the interview has become lifeless and that the interviewer has bought into an unspoken agreement with the respondent just to get the interview over and done with.

If you find boredom with the interview setting in, find a topic with life in it. If the respondent becomes engaged, you will too. There is little value in mechanically plodding on, obtaining still more material that challenges your ability to remain awake. Keep in mind that you are at least as interested in the topics of the interview as a reader of the ultimate report will be. If you are bored by the material, you can be sure its readers will also be bored. The contrary is also the case: if you are fully engaged by the material and drawn in by it so that you feel your understanding is being enlarged by it, then others will be also.

One approach to finding engaging material, should an interview become boring, is to ask yourself what may be concerning the respondent that the respondent isn't expressing. If you attend closely, you may pick up clues to emotions underlying the respondent's account. Respondents may show their emotions in the phrases they use or in the stories they tell or in their posture or voice tone. Should you get a clue about which you feel fairly confident, you might try to check it out—tactfully. A phrasing

I use to check out such clues is "It sounds like . . ." (as in "It sounds like you're saying that you don't feel you've been properly recognized"). Other introductory phrasings for getting beyond superficials are "Sometimes people who are in situations like the one you're describing have feelings like . . ." or "I wonder if you might have been thinking . . ."

But if you're not comfortable making potentially facilitative comments of this sort, don't do it. And if you should run into an interview that becomes draggy, do as well as you can with standard techniques and keep in mind that not every interview can be stellar.

EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEWING

EXAMPLES OF GOOD INTERVIEWING

Interview I. Working with a Respondent to Produce Useful Material

Here is an example of effective interviewing, from the study of occupationally successful men. It shows how a good interviewer and a cooperative respondent can work together to produce material useful for a study.

The respondent had completed a brief first interview the week before. One aim of this second interview was to learn about stressful incidents at work—how they happened and how they were managed. The interview took place in the respondent's office.

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INTERVIEWER: Can you think of what has been the thing that has been most troubling of all the things that you've had to do while you've been here?	*The interviewer asks the respondent to find an instance of stress produced by a work assignment.*
RESPONDENT: [*pause*] Well, I think the most difficult task I've had at [firm name] was when I was . . . I've been here five years and it was my first year, and my task, which was really . . . ah . . . im-	*The respondent describes his first year as having been difficult because he felt unequipped to deal with an important client. The account is a bit distanced, with details smudged, but that's all*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
plicit, because I had to learn what we did . . . I was hired as someone who will manage people who did know—and they did. A fairly large group. And the greatest source of revenue this company had at the time was this one client. And I don't know—I mean, I didn't have a vague idea [*chuckles*]—but it turned out that I understand . . . well . . . what . . . ah, what we did from a conceptual standpoint. But I had absolutely no technical knowledge at all, and in this medium not having technical knowledge impairs your ability to do creative work. So I was in a severe disadvantage. And I found that to be very difficult, a very difficult situation to go through.	*right. The time at work the respondent is talking about seems genuinely to have been difficult, and continuing this line of questioning seems likely to produce useful material.*
And in addition to that, I was . . . I was brought in because the whole client relationship with this one client was a mess. And, uh, it was run by a person who at the time was a vice president of marketing for the company and someone else who was very creative but resented the fact that I was brought in to try and get this thing organized and sort of be the people person and get morale back up and, you know, all this other stuff.	*Here's something that may be interesting; the respondent was brought in to remedy problems with the client.*
So I got very . . . I got no support from them at all. Quite the contrary. So the—plus I hated the client. It was, uh, the combination of all this I felt was pretty awful.	*Conflict with the incumbents and dislike for the client. If this isn't a setting for stress, what is?*
I: Was there any incident where it	*The interviewer asks for a critical incident. He asks for an incident that will display the elements that made the respondent feel awful.*

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surfaced or crystallized, and now you can remember that as a time when you really had the, uh, the height of feelings of whatever distress there was?	
R: Well, I . . . I can . . . [*pause*] I don't know, there were so many instances. I mean, I inherited this team. I found out . . . I had been here three days, and I found out that one of these guys that worked for me, an account supervisor, was just dishonest! You talk about dishonest subordinates, this guy was just dishonest. And he created . . . he was terribly destructive to the whole organization. He . . . I mean . . . again, in a technical environment, he lied about things that were . . . were not happening. And I thought, "This is awful!" And there'd be days when I'd know, without a doubt, that this guy cannot stay. So I fired him.	*The respondent is flustered. Maybe he's unwilling to experience the discomfort that would be associated with talking about a critical incident of trouble with colleagues. He shifts away from the tensions with the vice president and his creative colleague to describe something else, a problem with a subordinate.*
I: What was it like . . . uh, you know, going through that decision, that "I've got to get rid of him"?	*The interviewer accepts the story, although it is out of the area initially identified, and asks for the internal experience that accompanied the decision.*
R: [*pause*] Uhm . . . he . . . he was so blatant it was really not a . . . it wasn't a difficult decision, and it wasn't a, uh, an agonizing one in any sense. [*Spring in swivel chair squeaks.*] This guy was so blatant. And the thing that amazed me was that he'd been allowed to stay here. Why have you people not done	*Ah, here's the connection to the preceding material: the vice president (the fellow who had been in charge) and his sidekick (the creative colleague) should have fired the subordinate. This is further evidence for the respondent's side in the conflict with them.*

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anything about it? And I thought . . . I remember feeling a little resentful that—this is interesting, you know—you bring in a new guy and give him some pretty difficult tasks right off the bat! You know, you could've cleared house for me before I showed up. But you didn't. But that was consistent with the way these two people worked.	
I: Yeah.	*Encouraging further development.*
R: It was a certain amount of—it's interesting because one of them, the guy who was vice president of marketing, he and I are equals in this company now. He runs a division and I run a division. And actually we're quite good friends.	*The respondent is skipping to the end of the story. A lot must have happened between the respondent's first showing up (and firing a subordinate who needed firing) and this outcome.*
I: Back then things were not so good between you?	*The interviewer takes the respondent back to the beginning.*
R: [*laughs*] They weren't good at all!	
I: What did it feel like, realizing that you had opposition on a higher level?	*Picking up R's comment and asking for the feeling state that might underlie it.*
R: Well, I thought . . . this guy's personality . . . he's real slow talking . . . his values and mine were so different. And he was so clearly hostile—subtle in his own way—but to me clearly hostile. Uhm . . . that [*pause*] I never . . . well, I never . . . I guess . . . You know, I'm trying . . . trying to describe how I felt. I guess I never doubted my own self.	*Note the mixture of perception of the vice president and personal feeling state.*

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I mean, I didn't know what was going on—but why should I? I just got here! [*chuckles*] Uh, and I, you know . . . so his . . . the way he treated me was just annoying, but never made me feel—I never doubted myself.	
And, uh, I made friends quickly here, and the team of people who worked for me rallied around me real quick because I fired this guy who was such a destructive force. Early on, uh, I got this whole team into, uh, one of the conference rooms, and, uh—I don't know whether I really planned this, I just sort of did it—but I sat them down and I said, you know, "I'm so-and-so and this is . . ." I was kind of introducing myself to them. [*chuckles*] No one had introduced me. And I said, "I'm so-and-so and this is my background and this is what we're supposed to do and, frankly, I will not pretend that I know the techniques." I said, "I really don't. And, uh, because I don't, uhm, I'm going to ask you to really help. And, uh, if you help, I'll learn and there are things that I do know, and I'll be able to, uh, I'll be able to do something for you as a team."	*It would be possible for the interviewer to now say, "You said something a moment ago about the way the vice president treated you. Could you describe that? Maybe describe a particular incident?" However, the interviewer doesn't interrupt, and the respondent now goes into how he established alliances with his subordinates. Firing the incompetent subordinate seems to have helped him establish himself.* *This is an unasked-for critical incident. The respondent describes how he presented himself to his subordinates in an initial meeting. He asked for their affiliation and pledged himself to function as team leader, with loyalty returned for loyalty given. The story is useful for understanding supervisor–subordinate relationships. There seems no need to develop it further.*
And, uh, then I subsequently, you know, pretty soon got rid of this other guy, so they believed that. And they supported me. You know, so it wasn't . . . I wasn't in a total vacuum. I mean, at least not in my group. You see they trans-	

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ferred their loyalty over to me right away. So that was good.	
It was easier to deal with Alden Brown.*	*When respondents name people, it can be assumed that their thoughts are moving closer to memories of actual incidents.*
I: Was he the vice president?	*The interviewer checks that his assumption that this is the vice president, not the creative colleague, is correct.*
R: Yeah.	
I: So you could rely on the people that you were working with?	*Asking for confirmation, but also communicating the message "Yes, I understand, I'm with you." But the phrase "working with" misses a point the respondent had made, namely, that the respondent was accepted as the leader of the team by his subordinates, as the boss, and not merely as a coworker.*
R: I could rely on the people who worked for me.	*The respondent corrects the interviewer's phrasing.*
I: Anybody else that you . . . sort of thought to yourself, "Well, I've got *that* person as a friend"?	*Since we're talking now about allies, we may as well develop that element. We ought to know if others were involved in addition to those identified so far, and it may be difficult to return to this scene later.*
R: Uh, no. No, not really. [*pause*] But just the people who worked for me. I didn't really know any others.	*This completes the picture of the respondent's interpersonal situation at work at the time. He was in command of the loyalty of his subordinates but otherwise on his own in confrontation with a hostile vice president and colleague.*

* This name, like all names of respondents and the people to whom they refer, is an invention.

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I: Can you remember back when you had an interaction, where you got bad vibes?	*The interviewer now asks again for a critical incident. Note that the respondent has now established that the vice president and his creative colleague were derelict in at least one respect—they didn't fire a dishonest subordinate—and that he had successfully won the loyalty of his subordinates. He may be ready now to talk about what happened between him and his antagonists.*
R: [*chuckles*] Well, I can remember one . . . uh, trying to come up with the most dramatic example. I . . . I was so mad. I was. This is awful. Uh, the client was [X Corporation]. Yeah. And we used to have to go down to have monthly meetings in [small town], which is in the middle of nowhere. And, uh, we went down there for a meeting. And it was always a very hostile environment. They didn't like us, we didn't like them. And here were two different groups, creative groups, working together, but we really used to compete with each other.	*Note the hesitancies. The respondent is not entirely comfortable reporting this incident.*
And the two guys that I worked with were Alden Brown and Dennis Ealing, who's since left. And, uh, Alden and Dennis—I'll believe this to this day—really kind of set me up.	*The interviewer assumes that the "two guys" are the vice president (Alden Brown) and the creative colleague (Dennis Ealing). The interviewer is confident enough of the identities to feel no need to check. But it's odd that the "two guys" should be referred to now as though they hadn't already been talked about*

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	extensively. It's as though the respondent, in describing this incident, has moved to another area of his mind.
They said, "Well, in this meeting . . ." You know, maybe thirty, forty people and I'd been here a short time and this is in [small town], so I felt displaced in the sense that there's no . . . I was with them and staying in some crummy hotel, you know. So it's really sort of—and I'm feeling very uncomfortable with the clients and the whole bit. And, uh, they kind of set me up by saying, you know, "In this meeting you should really propose this," knowing darn well that it was going to get shot down and be torn apart. And I, not having . . . not having the technical knowledge or . . . or experience really to be able to distinguish whether or not this was a good idea. So it was . . . I said it at the meeting, haltingly—because I didn't have confidence to really do it from conviction. And it got torn to shreds. And I remember sitting back down and saying, "That was amazing. Boy, this was awful."	*The respondent is recapturing how isolated, disoriented, and vulnerable he was.*
I: Did you realize what it was?	*The interviewer is asking the respondent what was going on in his mind. The interviewer could also have asked for information about thoughts and feelings in a more open way: "While this was happening, what was going on in your mind?" That probably*

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	would have been fine. But the phrasing used here is less distancing, more in touch.
R: Oh yeah. I kind of realized it halfway through what I was saying. You know, sometimes your perceptions are heightened when you have to speak publicly. [*chuckles*] And I remember thinking, "This is not going to work." Well, maybe I read it in the faces of the people. Whatever it was.	*The respondent is describing both self-monitoring and his monitoring of others. One of the issues included in this study's substantive frame was the way respondents deal with challenge. Self-monitoring seems to be part of that process.*
I: Could you sort of develop it from there? What happened? You're sort of talking, you look at the faces of these people in front of you. And they're starting to get uncomfortable?	*The interviewer has decided the previous response was good enough as a description of what had happened to produce the respondent's sense of failure. Now the interviewer asks for extension of the story: What happened then? Note how the interviewer tries to establish the level of concreteness he wants by bringing concreteness into the question: "You look at the faces . . . and they're starting to get uncomfortable?"*
R: Very. Everybody started squirming, and I guess I have another two minutes to go with this idea and it's failing. It's, uh, I suppose it's like the comedian with a bad joke! It's just—that is what it was like. A bad joke! And, uh, I . . . Yeah, I could read everybody's face and I just sort of kept on talking and I eventually did it mechanically and I'm sure I condensed it as much as I could so I could end.	

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I: Can you remember what it felt like internally while you were dealing with that?	*The respondent has come to the end of his description of the event. Now the interviewer asks for his internal state while it was happening.*
R: Oh, I felt like a fool. I felt mad. I felt—I really resented being set up. I mean, I thought, "What a cheap shot! What a son of a bitch." I mean, that's rotten.	
I: Then you knew it was set up?	*This sort of leading question can reassure the respondent that the interviewer is thinking and feeling along with him and can therefore encourage the respondent to continue. But an argument could also be made for asking a more open question such as "Did you have any thoughts now about your colleagues?"*
R: Oh yeah! And I said, "I would never have done that to you, you bastards." You know. But I also realized you've got to be pretty desperate to do this crap.	
I: Yeah.	
R: You know, . . . and, uh . . . so I sat down. And when I sat down, at first I just felt sort of, you know, just dread, just feeling, "What did I just do? This is awful! I feel like such a fool." And everybody's sort of, you know . . . and they very politely said, "Well, I'm sure your idea may have some merit." And this other company guy, he was sort of sarcastic and . . . and so	*This is the right level of concreteness and the right density of detail. The interviewer may well be nodding to signal understanding and assurance that this is important material.*

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condescending. And he said, "Well, I'm sure once you gain a little more experience in this field, you'll realize that that idea wouldn't quite apply to this particular situation. Although, you know, on its own merits it might . . . might've been all right." But it was a real put-down. A real put-down. Yeah. And I knew, you know . . . I instantly recognized, "Well, my credibility with *these* people . . . gee, why did you set me up? Why did you do this?"	
I: Yeah.	
R: It was rotten. "Why did you ever do this?"	
I: Yeah. Why had they done it?	*On the surface this question asks for information about the motivations the respondent attributed to the pair who had set him up. It also is a way of getting at the kind of threat the respondent felt himself exposed to.*
R: Ah, well, I thought there was a . . . From their standpoint it probably was more or less, uh, very shortsighted, but, uh, it ensured that as far as this one client was concerned, which was the company's most important client, I'd never have any credibility with them. And that's true! I haven't.	*The respondent thought that his colleagues had wanted to queer his reputation with the firm's most important client, and in fact they had succeeded in this. He might reasonably have feared that his job was in danger. This suggests a high level of threat.*
I: What happened after that? I mean, could you sort of . . . ?	*The interviewer asks the respondent to extend the story. The description of the stressor situation is adequate; so is the*

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	characterization of the level of threat. Now the interviewer wants to know what this level of threat did to the respondent and how he dealt with it. The open phrasing here ("What happened after that?") seems to me exactly right. Let the respondent tell the story, and get him to fill in the blank areas later, if necessary.
R: Well, for the rest of the meeting I just sat there, you know. I just . . . I don't know . . . tuned out. I mean, I paid no attention to that. I just sort of sat there and said, "Well, why did they do this?" And I realized, you don't do this unless you're scared of me. You wouldn't have to go to these extremes. It's really unfair.	*This is a description of trying to achieve mastery of self in a situation of what must have seemed catastrophic failure. Note how many leads there are, in this one brief passage, to an understanding of responses to threat. First there is the respondent's focus on the threat, then his attempt to work out the aims of his enemies, then his disparagement of his enemies together with an effort to reassure himself of his own potency, and finally his protest of the wrong done him.*
I: Now you've got—you were going to have dinner with them that evening and . . . ?	*The interviewer decides not to seek further elaboration of this scene and instead goes on to the next scene. Again, note the level of concreteness in the question.*
R: No, we had to fly back on this tiny little plane.	
I: What happened?	*The interviewer encourages the respondent to continue the story.*
R: I just sat by myself. I didn't talk to them. I didn't want to go to them and say, you know, "You set	

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me up." I wouldn't give them the pleasure of it. Just sat by myself. And, uh, when we got to the airport, I just walked . . . walked away.	
And, uh, we came to work the next day, and I decided, well, I'm not going to—because I was trying to be their friend! You know, I was trying to get the . . . get on the good side. I was trying to, uh, please them, trying to get along with them. Go and ask them questions. Show them that I was interested even though I wasn't completely knowledgeable. You know, that was the end of that.	*The respondent has not before described having attempted to ingratiate himself with the vice president and the creative colleague.*
I: What happened the evening you got home? After . . . after you got off the plane?	*The interviewer asks for further extension of the story. Instead of asking about a nonspecific time ("after you got back"), the interviewer refers to a concrete event ("after you got off the plane").*
R: [*pause*] I didn't share it with my wife.	*Mentioning that he didn't share the incident with his wife is a marker. Why else mention something that didn't happen? The interviewer must decide whether to pick it up. It could have been picked up with the question "How come?" Had the interviewer done this, the respondent very likely would have talked about problems in his marriage. Instead of detouring in that direction, the interviewer properly continues the story of the job trouble. Later in the interview the in-*

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	terviewer could return to the marker by saying: "Earlier you said that when you returned from that client visit, you didn't tell your wife about it. Do you remember thinking about telling your wife?"
I: Can you remember how you felt?	*The interviewer asks the respondent to describe his internal state on return. Here, as is often the case, it is valuable to learn not only what happened, but what the respondent thought and felt about what happened.*
R: Mad. Angry. I was angry. Yeah. I was feeling—I was also glad to be out of [client company's town], it was such an awful place. Hated it! [*chuckles*] I mean, the whole environment. Something like that to happen in that kind of environment. It was just sort of . . . so distasteful. But, I don't know, I was just angry. Like I couldn't wait to get to work the next day. I probably didn't sleep very well.	
I: Why couldn't you wait to get to work?	*Maybe it would have been good here to ask the respondent about what kept him awake: "What was going through your mind?" The interviewer may have moved too quickly to the return to work.*
R: Because I wanted to do something about it, you know. [*pause*] And I . . . I can't remember specifically what I did. I can just remember how I felt. And I felt like, I'm	*The respondent says he wanted to do something about the incident, but can't remember what he did. He goes on to describe what seems to have been an ef-*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
certainly more honest than you are. My intentions are better. And uh, [the firm] was right to hire me because you couldn't run an organization where other people would report to you. So they won't. From now on they'll just report to me. And, you know . . .	*fort to reassure himself that despite his disastrous presentation to the client, the company had been right to bring him in and should continue to value him.*
I: Did you have some sense of damage done?	*The interviewer wants to know to what extent the respondent felt his standing in the organization had been damaged. But the respondent hadn't yet said anything about believing damage had been done to his standing. The interviewer should first have learned how the respondent thought the incident would affect his standing at work by asking something like "Did what happened in your presentation affect your situation at work?"*
R: To me personally?	*The respondent is floundering a bit. He is not sure what the interviewer has in mind. Damage to the firm? Damage to him personally? What sort of damage?*
I: To your . . .	*The interviewer, recognizing that the question was too vague, starts to specify that he wanted to ask about damage to the respondent's situation at work.*
R: To my reputation?	*But the respondent is continuing with his review of what might have been damaged. So the interviewer gives the respondent the floor.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I: To your reputation in the firm.	*Now the interviewer says that yes, he wants to know whether the respondent had been aware of damage to his reputation in the firm.*
R: As far as I was concerned, that was such a clear setup that any . . . anybody should've recognized it. I'm sure everybody did. Emmett Franklin, the man I now work for—and he is one of the founders—yeah, I think Emmett . . . I never talked to Emmett about it, but I think he understood.	*Despite the interviewer's problem in directing the respondent, the interviewing partnership is sound, and the respondent continues to work with the interviewer to produce useful information.* *The respondent's reference here to Emmett Franklin was a marker, although the interviewer did not recognize it. Later in the interview, the interviewer asked the respondent how he had managed to maintain himself in the company despite the failure of his presentation to the company's most important client. At that point the respondent said he had gone to Emmett Franklin and told him that he needed him as a mentor or he would never last. Franklin, who apparently thought well of the respondent, did agree to act as the respondent's mentor and helped him obtain accounts of his own. But here the respondent discouraged questioning about Emmett Franklin by saying he had never talked with him about the incident and by neglecting to mention that he nevertheless had gone to him for help.*
I: Looking back now, uh, how long . . . could you say how	*The interviewer is asking about the aftermath of the incident.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
long that incident stayed with you emotionally?	
R: Oh, as far as Alden Brown's concerned, it will always stay with me. I mean, he and I do get along very well now. We're good friends, but I'd never work with him!	
I: How about the other man?	
R: Dennis Ealing? He went to work with the client company. [*chuckle*] He's its director of marketing. He was an odd duck. Very brilliant guy. Absolutely brilliant. And I don't like him.	

Interview II. Negotiating What the Respondent Will Report On

Particularly early in a first interview, the interviewer may have to search for the areas in which the respondent can provide useful material. The interview guide will tell the interviewer the areas in which the study needs information, but the respondent may have little to offer in some of the areas, a great deal in others. Or the respondent may feel uncomfortable about reporting material in some areas, and their exploration might be postponed until the interviewing partnership is better established. The following excerpt displays the process of searching, in the beginning of a first interview, for the areas to discuss.

The respondent was an IV drug user who had learned a few months before the interview that he was HIV positive. The interview was one of several conducted in a pilot study of reactions among present and former IV drug users to the results of testing for HIV. The interview took place in the HIV clinic of a hospital in which the respondent was an outpatient. The respondent had mentioned, in a brief discussion with the interviewer that preceded the interview, that the medical staff at the hospital were not giving him information he wanted. The interviewer began by asking about this.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
INTERVIEWER: You were just saying you wanted information. Can you say what kind of information you wanted?	*The interviewer begins where the respondent is.*
RESPONDENT: Well, essentially knowing what to expect. To me that seems to be the greatest problem right now about this whole thing, being HIV positive, about having this. To know what comes next. You know, everybody talks about AIDS. Okay, AIDS is going to kill you. There's no cure for it. But how? And when? I mean, can I expect to get up every morning? Am I suddenly going to be struck down one morning, I can't get up anymore? Am I going to lose my sight? Am I going to lose my mobility? What's going to happen? How is it going to happen? Is it going to be painful, is it not going to be painful, what? Even having the experience of seeing other people having died from it, it still doesn't tell me a lot about what to expect.	*This is vivid, but it's hard to know where to go with it. The response suggests both dread of what may happen and discomfort because so much is uncertain. It might be worth learning, perhaps, whether worry about what might happen is always in the respondent's mind. But the reference to "seeing other people having died from it" sounds like a marker.*
I: You've seen other people die from AIDS?	*The interviewer picks up the marker.*
R: Yeah. I've had a lot of friends who've died from it, and I know that most of them became very debilitated at the last stages and went to the hospital. They began to lose a lot of weight, and they became very ill. And so I'm wondering, "Is this the kind of thing that's in store for me? Am I going	*But the respondent doesn't now describe a particular incident. This is generalized: "a lot of friends." The respondent might intentionally be avoiding being specific because he doesn't want to talk about a particular person or might rather have something else on his mind. The interviewer*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
to end up in a hospital somewhere, [having] to be cared for, or whatever?" There are a lot of aspects to this thing, in my case particularly. I'm thirty-nine years old. I don't have any kids.	*might possibly ask for specifics by saying, "Of the friends who've died, could you tell me about the one who died most recently?" But that question would not connect with the respondent's worry about himself. In any event, by the time the respondent stops talking, the respondent has moved to not having kids. This is both another marker and apparently another aspect of the respondent's worry about his own situation.*
I: You don't have any kids?	*The interviewer picks up the marker and asks the respondent to develop the thought of not having kids in any way that feels right to him.*
R: No. I don't have any children. And at present I'm not really going steady with anybody, not living with a woman or anything like that. It's difficult to maintain the single lifestyle now. I mean, I'm out having a drink or something and I run into a woman, start talking to her. I feel somewhat obligated to make sure that nothing goes on but conversation. It kind of puts a real strain on me.	*The respondent extends not having kids to not going with a woman—with whom, presumably, he could have kids. Then he moves to his feeling that when he meets a woman he cannot allow a relationship with her to develop. The respondent seems to be alluding to actual events.*
I: Are you thinking of a special time, a particular time?	*Again the interviewer picks up what seems to be a marker.*
R: This is any time right now. I can't afford to have a relation with a woman right now.	*The respondent refuses the interviewer's implied suggestion that the respondent is summarizing*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
	actual events. He says that there are no such events; he isn't establishing relations with women now.
I: When was the last time this happened?	*Nevertheless—mistakenly—the interviewer tries again for a particular event. The vividness of the image of "nothing goes on but conversation" may have made the interviewer believe that the respondent did have a particular incident in mind, despite his disclaimer.*
R: Shit. I mean, at least three, four months now since I had a relation with any woman. I mean, I'm in a stage where I'm just looking. That's all I *can* do, is look. Because, what am I going to do? They say, well, okay, use condoms. But even condoms are not a hundred percent safe. There's too many possibilities of an accident happening. And so what I've done is more or less I've just gone to where I don't have any sexual relations with women. Now that . . . phew . . . is a real change, a real upsetting thing. You know, there's still a relationship based on friendship and conversation. But, I don't know, it's just not enough for me.	*The profanity here may express exasperation at having to say again that there isn't any woman, or it may be a way of introducing further detail of a repugnant situation. What follows is a vivid description of the respondent's sense of having to turn away any chance for a sexual relationship.*
I: It means you're alone.	*Partly to strengthen the interviewing partnership, partly to attend to the feeling tone of the respondent's report, the interviewer establishes that yes, he does understand that the respondent is talking about how his HIV status has forced him to isolate himself.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
R: Yeah. Yeah. A great deal, a great deal. And it's adjusting to it, accepting the fact that I will never have kids. That entire aspect of my life is through. I'm thirty-nine. And how am I dealing with that?	*The response "Yeah. Yeah. A great deal, a great deal" acknowledges that the interviewer has understood his feelings. Now the respondent goes on to elaborate what it means to be alone. He indicates that not having kids is an expression of being alone.*
I: What do you think about that?	*The interviewer asks for further thoughts about dealing with not having kids. The question is a bit awkward, but gets the idea across.*
R: It's fucked up. It's real messed up. It's *real* messed up. . . . It seems like it's difficult, very difficult to deal with.	*The respondent seems to be saying that the situation is so appalling that it cannot be grasped. Here the profanity seems to express movement from a more public self to a self closer to emotion. The respondent uses intensifying words to convey the depth of his despair.*
I: How's that?	*The interviewer is asking the respondent to continue the theme of "it's difficult."*
R: I have a lot of friends, a lot of acquaintances, a lot of people I'm meeting who don't know me that well, and I know they're wondering, like, "What's it with him? Why is he not with anybody?" Which brings up a whole thing about people wanting to know what's up with you. . . . It puts a strain on family relationships. All my brothers and sisters, they've got wives, girlfriends or boyfriends, or whatever. And just the whole concept of . . . anytime you see me,	*The respondent fears that he is suspect because he is alone. He must deal not only with being alone, but also with the suspicion that his being alone creates in others.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I'm always by myself. There's never a woman involved. I've got nieces and nephews that are getting to the age where I know that they're beginning to look and say, "Well, gee, Uncle Al never has a girlfriend. He's never around any woman. He never brings anybody around like that." Dealing with that whole aspect of it, knowing that people are wondering and that some people are not saying anything out of respect. They're not being nosy, they're not asking it outright.	
I: When's the last time something like that happened? Like you were with somebody and this thing came up?	*The interviewer is here trying for a concrete incident that would display the respondent's "knowing that people are wondering." But the interviewer's phrasing asks for such an incident in too open a fashion.*
R: Well, probably have to be before the tests. And then it wasn't an issue. It never did come up because it wasn't an issue. Since the test I have not been involved sexually with anybody. Okay? And that's simply because I just have chosen not to. It's just on my mind so heavy. To think about that. It would be easy to do that. I could get away with it real easy. I mean, I could fool somebody right quick. But what would that involve? That involves taking a chance on infecting somebody else. Cutting somebody else's life short. Why would I	*The respondent misinterprets the interviewer's question as asking about his being HIV positive in connection with a possible sexual relationship. He says he hasn't been with anyone since before the tests, and then he didn't know he was HIV positive. But now "It's just on my mind so heavy."*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
do that? Or why even want to do that? I don't have the heart to do anything like that. Just don't have the heart to do that. I really don't feel like I could do that to somebody, that I could pass this on to somebody else.	
I: It sounds like it's made you feel sort of a pariah, like.	*Here the interviewer could have picked up the ethical issue or the self-restraint the respondent is describing, but that would probably have led the respondent to repeat what he's already said about not wanting to put someone else at risk. Instead the interviewer makes explicit what may be the theme underlying much of what the respondent has been saying: no kids; being seen as suspect by friends and family; having no access to sexual relationships. The interviewer is, in effect, checking a hypothesis, while at the same time suggesting an issue for development. And the interviewer is also again establishing that he understands what the respondent is saying. Note that the interviewer offers his guess at the underlying theme in a tentative, "sounds like . . ." statement that the respondent can reject.*
R: Yeah. Yeah.	*The guess seems to have been right.*
I: Is that it?	*The interviewer is giving the respondent a further opportunity to*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
	reject the guess if it doesn't strike him as exactly right.
R: Yeah, it definitely made me feel like a pariah. The old-style lepers, I guess. Way on the outside now. Always looking, but you never touch. Never let anybody get that close. It's tough, man. It's very tough to be that lonely. To not have the affection, the closeness. Just not be there anymore. To always be backing out of things, always on your guard to never let a situation get that developed. Or somebody may want to be with you—you can't let that happen. Can't let it happen to you. You just can't let them get that close. At the same time, doing it in such a way as not to just come right out and say, "Hey, I got AIDS." Like to get the message across that you just don't want that kind of relationship.	*The respondent corroborates that he is talking about feeling like a pariah. He now explicitly links this feeling to his earlier statement about not being able to touch, but only to look. Note that now, instead of skittering from issue to issue, the respondent speaks coherently and with vivid emotion. He is now talking about matters of great importance to him.* *The respondent and the interviewer have together located what the respondent can best contribute to the study at this point in the respondent's interview: a statement of how isolating it is to be HIV positive and how lonely it is to be so afflicted.*

The interviewer made a couple of mistakes in the course of this excerpt. He failed to recognize that the respondent had disclaimed any potentially romantic relationship and went ahead to ask for an instance; and he phrased an appropriate question in so open a fashion that the respondent entirely misinterpreted it. Nevertheless, the interviewer paid close and unfaltering attention not just to what the respondent was saying, but also to what might underlie what he was saying. Fairly quickly the interviewer found an important underlying issue that had been expressed in much of what the respondent had said and that had to be recognized if the respondent's situation was to be understood. The interviewer's recognition of this underlying issue was not only valuable for the study in its own right, but also strengthened the interviewing partnership.

EXAMPLES OF POOR INTERVIEWING

A bad interview can often be identified just from the look of a page of transcript: the ratio of words said by the respondent to words said by the interviewer will be nearly one to one. However, a preponderance of respondent material doesn't guarantee a good interview. An interviewer can produce a bad interview not only by talking as much as the respondent but also by permitting the respondent to develop at length material of no value to the study.

Bad interviews are more frequently of the sparse-response type than the runaway respondent type. Leading to the sparse responses, often, is what seems to be questioning by the interviewer that is unrelated to the respondent's train of thought; instead, the interviewer's questions are directed solely by the interview guide, or they express the interviewer's own train of thought.

Interview III. An Interviewer with an Unshakeable Assumption

In this first example of bad interviewing, the interviewer seems to be trying to control what she is being told. She has a preconceived notion of what the respondent ought to tell her, a notion she doesn't permit the respondent to influence.

The general topic was relationships at work, and the interviewer was searching for instances of stressful relationships. The respondent had been talking about other members of his work group.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
INTERVIEWER: In relationships with any of these people or anyone else you would interact with regularly at work, would there be anything about the relationships that . . . were there any times when the relationships themselves were bad or were a source of distress for you personally or . . .	*The question doesn't adequately direct the respondent to a specific relationship—a boss or subordinate or peer. And the final phrasing, "times when the relationships themselves were bad or were a source of distress," has a vagueness that makes response difficult. In its favor, the question does get the respondent into the area of relationships at work. In*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
	addition, it asks for concrete instances.
RESPONDENT: Well, I find that, for the most part, the kinds of . . . I never had any bad relationships myself with anybody in the group.	*The respondent starts on something, then changes course to reject the notion that he had had bad relationships.*
I: But within the framework of the people you were speaking with . . .	*The interviewer doesn't recognize that the respondent has rejected the idea of having had bad relationships with anyone in his group. Now the interviewer begins to argue ("But . . ."). My guess is that the phrase "bad relationships" suggests being unable to get on with others and the respondent wants to deny being that sort of person.*
R: Within the framework of the people with whom I worked, I did not have any relationships which grated on me, no.	*The interviewer should now recognize that the respondent wants to close out this line of questioning. The respondent is saying, firmly, that there is nothing to report.*
I: Or which caused . . .	*The interviewer keeps going on the issue of bad relationships. The interviewer seems to have been determined to complete the earlier question, even though its premise has already been rejected by the respondent.*
R: Some of them had relationships which were grating . . . which grated on each other, which I was pretty much aware of and probably could deal with more effectively than anybody else, because I never wound up with a situation in which in order to resolve this I had to make an enemy out of any one of them.	*The respondent offers a compromise: he acknowledges that other people had trouble with each other, a situation he was able to help with. The interviewer should accept this and let the respondent develop the material, perhaps by asking, "Could you tell me about one of those times?"*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I: Uh-huh. That was just your own style.	*The interviewer doesn't recognize that there is a story being alluded to here. Instead, she takes the respondent's comment as a statement about managerial style.*
R: Yeah, that's more a matter of leading them rather than telling them what to do. If you can convince them and convince the whole group by consensus that this is what we ought to be doing, then they all go out, back to the trenches, and do it.	*And now we have a bit of management philosophy of little obvious use to the study. It is quite distant from the topic of relationships at work. The interviewer has fostered this by her reflection in the previous comment.*
I: Basically, you never got into a stress or distressful situation, then, with any of your people that you're related to or felt closer to?	*Now the interviewer returns to the bad relationship line the respondent has flatly rejected. This approaches badgering. In actuality, the respondent may have been in stressful or distressing situations with one or more of his people—most managers at some point are—but this isn't the way to get a description of those occasions.*
R: No. The other thing I would say is that I typically manage the group by calling the whole group in and asking them to explain what they are doing. Just going through . . . each guy says what's going on in his area, and then, sort of by consensus, it all helps steer the consensus as to what we do next, fellas. But that way, pretty much, people as a group understand as a group what they were trying to accomplish, and you could shift responsibilities around to match the skills, and so on.	*The respondent is now speaking in the generalized present. At this point it would make sense to accept where the respondent is and ask him to become concrete: "Could you tell me about the last meeting? Walk me through it?"*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
I: What about your "boss"? I mean, do you have some kind of relationship?	*The interviewer's question suggests an absence of interest in what the respondent just said. My guess is that the interviewer is continuing to search for stressful or distressing experiences and has hit on the idea of asking about specific relationships. But to introduce this now abruptly shifts the interview away from where the respondent is.*
R: My present boss?	*The respondent is flustered—as well he might be. He tries now to reorient himself. He asks a question partly to gain time until he can get a grip on the new interview topic.*
I: Well . . .	*And, in stumbling fashion, the interview goes on.*
R: . . . or my past boss?	
I: Your . . . maybe we can talk about both.	
R: Well, my past bosses were two people for whom I had a great deal of respect.	
I: Yes, you did mention . . . perhaps we can go into that a little bit.	

In this interview excerpt the interviewer was determined to get an interesting story of troubles with a coworker and refused to accept the respondent's unwillingness or inability to come up with one. The interviewer also refused to accept the respondent's indications of material he could develop comfortably. I find it remarkable that the respondent continued to be cooperative, despite the interviewer's competing with him for the floor, disregarding his comments, and abruptly shifting topics.

Interview IV. Refusing Respondent Leads

Here is another excerpt from an interview in which the interviewer did not listen well. In this excerpt the respondent tried to contribute usefully to the study, but the interviewer failed to elicit from the respondent the meanings of a critical incident. The interview topic was the way that recognition and informal evaluation affected the respondent.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
INTERVIEWER: I was wondering if, you know, what sort of an audience you have for your work? Is there some sort of group that you're doing it to impress as . . . or who you might look for out there somewhere else . . . or maybe your colleagues or . . . you know . . .	*It's all right to ask questions awkwardly as long as your concern is communicated and you don't inadvertently introduce an element that requires special attention. Here the interviewer does inadvertently supply a possible motivation for competent performance ("doing it to impress"), a motivation many respondents would want to disclaim.*
RESPONDENT: Well, obviously, uh, first I wanted to satisfy my boss, in the sense that he's—you know, I serve at his pleasure, so to speak. My annual evaluation is in his hands, so I certainly have to impress him properly and give him the level of confidence in me, you know. That's only for my benefit. About my peers within . . .	*The respondent reacts to the "doing it to impress" part of the question. He doesn't flatly reject the idea that he works to impress, but he does correct the implication that he might work only to impress. Of course he works to satisfy his boss, and in that sense to impress him, but that's his job. The respondent is starting to consider whether he works to impress his peers when the interviewer interrupts him.*
I: Which would be . . .	*The interviewer wants to know exactly who is meant. This is not necessary, and because it interrupts the respondent, is questionable.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
R: . . . within the company . . .	
I: Within the company.	
R: . . . and, uh, the peers outside the company?	*The interviewer's insistence that the respondent identify his peers before saying whether he works to impress them appears to have flustered the respondent.*
I: Yeah. Like who would be your peers?	*The interviewer establishes control over the interview by requiring that the respondent provide this unessential information before going on with his story.*
R: Well, former associates . . .	*The respondent would have a right to be annoyed around here. He doesn't seem to be. He might be getting a bit cautious in his response, though; a bit concerned with whether the interviewer will understand.*
I: Oh, former associates . . .	
R: Or competitive associates. You know, people from other companies.	
I: Uh-huh. You all know each other in . . .	
R: It's . . . we may probably know *of* each other, probably more than we know each other, because we are—although it's a fairly large community in the sense of numbers, it's very small in the sense of knowledge of companies and people and, uh . . .	
I: How is that information transmitted to each other? How do they . . .	*Has the interviewer forgotten that the issue was whether the respondent worked with this audience in mind? Or is the interviewer assuming that the respondent has agreed that he wants to impress competitive associates? Actually, he hasn't agreed to this at all.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
R: Usually very casually. Where we, uh, chance meetings or chance conversations. Let me say also in terms of people, of people I want to please, I want to please the people who I'm doing the project for . . .	*The respondent, God bless him, is still trying to answer the question about working to impress other people. Now he remembers his clients, whom he does want to please.*
I: The clients?	*The interviewer seems to have lost the thread of the interview and is puzzled by the respondent bringing up his clients.*
R: The clients. In the sense that it tells me that I've done a good job for them, and it tells me that my company has done a good job. And when there's an opportunity in the future, we certainly want to be considered—or even more than considered, even handed the project. Well, these are . . . I like to leave a good trail.	
I: Yeah . . .	
R: Both, again, for my own accomplishment and also for the good of the company. But we were having lunch today in a west suburb. I was there this morning. We had lunch—the client, my boss, and myself. And out from another table comes somebody I knew from a company I worked for three years ago, who I haven't seen in	*The respondent is virtually interviewing himself. He holds to a theme and looks for concrete instances. Without any help from the interviewer he here presents an incident that illustrates how people outside the company learn how you are doing.*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
almost—what?—three years. And through the whole chitchat . . . I introduced him and introduced the people to him and, you know, these chance meetings, chance encounters, this is how things get spread around.	
I: So what did you talk about?	*Okay, I guess. But more useful might be what went through the respondent's mind when the fellow he once worked with came up to his table to meet him, his client, and his boss.*
R: Well, just what his company was doing and what I'm doing and who these people are who were having lunch together.	*This is superficial, as well as general. A former colleague comes over to say hello and maybe check out how the respondent is doing. This would very likely elicit appraisals of relative success. It would be natural now to ask what had been the respondent's thoughts as the former colleague came up.*
I: Was it kind of the idea of impressing them with your association with the client, or was it really friendly?	*This question is at least a stab at obtaining the respondent's thoughts and feelings during the incident, but it overstructures by asking if the respondent was aiming to impress—and is a bit demeaning by making that supposition.*
R: No. Just sort of a friendly informational-type thing. Like that.	*This pretty much repeats the previous statement about what was talked about. The respondent is indicating that there's nothing more of note here.*
I: And it kind of gets spread around?	*The interviewer drops the inquiry into the meaning of the encounter for the respondent. Instead of pursuing this, the interviewer asks a leading question about what will now happen to the information about the respondent gained by his former coworker. Sometimes leading questions are useful because they demonstrate that the interviewer is in touch or because they suggest a useful direction for development. Here the leading question only narrows the possible response.*
R: Yeah. Now he'll go back and say, you know, that he saw me yesterday and who I was with.	

One of the several problems in this excerpt is the extent to which the interviewer provided wordings for the respondent. When an interviewer introduces a phrase in a question (here the phrase is "and it kind of gets spread around"), then the phrase is the interviewer's and not the respondent's, even though the respondent may accept that phrase ("Yeah, it gets spread around").

The same observation holds for this interviewer's insistence, despite the respondent's objections, on pursuing the theme of working to impress. Does this respondent really work to impress others? I would say no, not in the sense the interviewer intends. He wants recognition for his competence, but that's different from being competent in order to gain recognition. However, the interviewer kept returning to this theme, and at a couple of points elicited very qualified agreement. But it would be wrong to accept this qualified agreement as validating the interviewer's assumption.

Interview V. Losing the Research Partnership

Despite the serious interviewing flaws in the two previous excerpts, the interviewer in each was able to maintain an interviewing partnership. When things really go badly, the research partnership is likely to be questioned by the respondent. The following example of bad interviewing is from an interview conducted by a student in a class on interviewing.

The student interviewer was concerned with identity formation among delinquents, an interesting issue for which qualitative interviewing would seem to be the appropriate data-gathering approach. The student hoped to demonstrate that criminal behavior stemmed from the development of a criminal identity and that one process leading to the development of a criminal identity was taking as a role model a figure from organized crime. The excerpt is from the student's interview with a 17-year-old who had recently been convicted of theft. The 17-year-old has just said that organized crime figures had long been heroes of his.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
INTERVIEWER: Did looking up to them change your behavior? Would you have gotten into crime without them?	*The student makes a couple of errors here: a minor one (asking two different questions at once) and a more important one (asking the respondent for conclusions rather than observations).* *The problem is that the student wants a quick confirmation of his hypothesis. He would like the respondent to say, "Yes, looking up to them made me a thief." The student interviewer would have done better to elicit his respondent's thoughts and memories and to let* them *confirm or disconfirm his hypothesis.*
RESPONDENT: Yes, I tried to be an enforcer for them. I started thieving and eventually I got into trouble.	*This statement in itself doesn't contribute much, but what a wonderful collection of markers it is: "tried to be an enforcer" (note the "tried"); "started thieving"; and "got into trouble." Given the research aim, I would pick up on "tried to be an enforcer" and ask "Could you tell me about trying to be an enforcer?" with the expectation of then asking "Could you go*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
	back to where the idea came from?" and "How did things develop from there?" I'd also make a mental note of the other markers and be ready to return to them when there was opportunity.
I: Why were they your role models?	*The student is determined to confirm his hypothesis; he neglects the markers.*
R: Because they were into organized crime. They had a lot of power.	*The word "power" strikes me as another marker. I would guess that it is an expression of something of cognitive and emotional importance to the respondent. It might be valuable to follow it up.*
I: How do you mean?	*It's going to be tough to get to the reason power is attractive, but maybe the respondent can describe the imagery associated with power. In general, it's difficult to get respondents to explore cognitive and emotional complexes. Asked for elaboration, respondents are apt to state the complex in new words rather than provide its imagistic and emotional bases. Although the question "How do you mean?" can be a good one if a respondent is already in a scene (if this respondent had said, "The guy I was working for showed me he liked me"), here it's too unfocused. The respondent can't know whether the interviewer is asking for a definition ("What do you mean by power?") or for an elaboration of the idea of power. A better question might*

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT	COMMENTS
	have been "How did they show their power?"
R: They had the power to choose whether a person could live or die. They had the power to snap their fingers and people would do what they say.	*The respondent does provide some development of his idea of the crime bosses' power. He conceives of the crime bosses as having not only a Godlike power of life and death but also a royal power of command. It would be important to move to concrete material now. One possibility would be to ask the respondent when he first became aware of the crime bosses' power or first saw it displayed. The respondent's stories would then show what images were indexed by his words. But also the interviewer should note that the response is a bit testy. Attention to the interviewing partnership might be in order.*
I: Like how? What do you have in mind?	*This question, at this point, makes me think the interviewer was out of sync with the respondent. The respondent has just tried to answer "How do you mean?" by specifying the display of power he had in mind. Now the interviewer is again asking a kind of "How do you mean?" question.*
R: Come on, man. You know as much as I do. They don't like somebody, they get one of their people in, they say go hit him in the head. Pretty soon he's not around anymore. That's all there is to it. They had that kind of power.	*This is a rejection of "What do you have in mind?" Manifestly, the respondent rejects the interviewer's pose of naïveté. But there is also in the respondent's asperity an objection to a sense of artificiality in the interview, to*

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	the absence of genuine partnership.
	The level of the respondent's asperity seems mild to me. Nevertheless, the respondent is questioning the assumptions of the interviewing partnership: "Come on, man. You know as much as I do." The respondent goes on to provide an answer, but he has put the interviewer on notice that he is aware that the interviewer is playing a role and that he is made uncomfortable by it. And he refuses, at least for the moment, to provide anything more than a sketchy, if vivid, indication of what he has in mind.

There's nothing irreparable here as yet. But note how the student interviewer's failure to pick up markers, insistence on a particular line of thought, and, finally, unfocused response to the respondent's reference to crime-boss power led the respondent to challenge the research partnership. The partnership may have been fragile to begin with—and certainly the student was courageous to undertake a tape-recorded interview with a 17-year-old who had recently been convicted of theft—but closer attention to the respondent's thought and imagery and more concern for maintaining the interviewing partnership would almost surely have produced a better interview.

What is essential in interviewing is to maintain a working research partnership. You can get away with phrasing questions awkwardly and with a variety of other errors that will make you wince when you listen to the tape later. What you can't get away with is failure to work with the respondent as a partner in the production of useful material.