



Louis C. Senese

Interrogation Themes

Interrogation techniques to snag carjackers

Carjacking suspects fall into two primary groups: Those who physically harm the victim(s) and those who do not

Dec 13, 2021

Chicago police data recorded 224 carjackings in the first quarter of 2021 and a total of 1,415 for 2020, a 135% increase from the prior year. D

Many believe these increases can be attributed to the "defund" the police movement, leniency of punishment and the COVID-19 pandemic normalizing mask-wearing. At the same time, the increasing sophistication and prevalence of new anti-theft devices and alarm systems have resulted in criminals having to steal cars while they are running as opposed to breaking into parked vehicles.

Carjacking suspects fall into two primary groups: Those who physically harm the victim(s) and those who do not.

ELICITATION OF THE TRUTH FROM CARJACKERS WHO DO NOT HARM THE VICTIM:

- Compliment the suspect for not physically harming the victim.
- Compliment the suspect for not possessing a weapon and if possessing, not using.
- Compliment the suspect for using the car for a joy ride vs. using it in the commission of another crime.
- Compliment the suspect for leaving the vehicle in great/good/fair condition. If the car has significant damage, suggest the victim has insurance.

- Suggest it was an isolated instance for the offender (even though they've committed several) so you minimize the incident.
- Suggest the theft was situational vs. premeditated.
- Suggest carjacking is common in the suspect's depressed neighborhood because of the weak economy.
- Suggest the suspect's intent was to use the vehicle to help family or friends such as drive them to the hospital, job, visit friends, school, etc.
- Blame the suspect's drug or alcohol addiction causing them to act out of character.
- Blame the victim for having a unique/expensive vehicle or a model that is frequently targeted.
- Blame the victim for having valuables in clear sight in the car.
- Blame the victim for returning to or leaving a running vehicle.
- Blame inclement weather – rain, ice, snow, wind, heat – and that the suspect was simply looking for basic transportation.
- Blame another person for encouraging the suspect to commit a crime.
- Blame a gang initiation/obligation.
- Blame the victim for being distracted and creating an easy target.

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ELICITATION OF THE TRUTH FROM CARJACKERS WHO DO PHYSICALLY HARM THE VICTIM

Some of the previous elicitation themes may be appropriate.

- Blame the victim for verbally resisting.
- Blame the victim for physically resisting.
- Blame the victim for attacking the suspect and suggest the suspect acted more in self-defense.
- Blame an accomplice for provoking the incident.
- Blame affected judgment due to drugs or alcohol.
- Minimize the incident by contrasting taking a vehicle vs. not taking a person's life.
- Suggest motive was thrill and excitement.

- Suggest motive was uncontrolled anger.
- Suggest the victim sustained minor, not serious injuries.
- Suggest the victim did sustain serious injuries but survived and was not killed (If the victim was killed then homicide themes would be developed).
- If the victim is a female, contrast sustaining minor injuries vs. raping the victim.
- Suggest possible evidence: DNA, fingerprints, clothes fibers, videos.

INTERROGATION IN ACTION

Following the suspect's interview, review of case facts and evidence, it is believed that Jack carjacked Nathan's SUV. The elicitation of truth would proceed as follows:

"Jack, the results of our investigation clearly indicate that you did drive off with Nathan's SUV."

Use the word "drive" rather than "steal" to minimize the crime.

"Nathan stopped to look at his cell phone and you walked over to talk to him. You asked him if he was lost. He totally ignored you.

"You mentioned you had a couple of drinks that night and liquor can cause anyone to act out of character. He rolled down his window halfway and told you to 'shut the f--- up.' You saw a guy who has it all, an awesome SUV, well dressed and unfortunately a smart mouth. D

"You snapped because of the stress you're under because of no job, no car and no income. What did you do? You lost it because this guy was acting like a jerk, right? To get his attention, you flashed your 9mm. That got his attention. You said, 'Get the f---k out' and he did. He gave you his keys and you took (*not stole*) his SUV to teach him a lesson. You could have shot him, but you didn't.

"Jack, I don't condone what you did but I can understand. You're not a bad guy, you just did a bad thing. Considering all the circumstances, I get it. What's really important is you didn't hurt Nathan and you left his SUV in great condition. I can see someone else shooting this guy, but you didn't.

"Jack, beyond what I've mentioned the vehicle is or will be examined for DNA, clothes fibers and fingerprints. No two people have the same DNA. Your DNA can be in the car because of brushing your arm on the steering wheel, a cough, hair falling off (eyebrows, head, arms). Your clothes fibers could also be present. We are also compiling various videos. Let's get this resolved now so people know your side of the story.

"Here is what I need to know. Was this an isolated incident because of him acting like a jerk. You haven't done this before, right? What I'm thinking is that this was just the first time because of his behavior right?"


If the suspect acknowledges it was one time, not many, that is an initial admission of guilt. Follow-up questions would ask the suspect where the keys are (the suspect produces the keys), the exact location where the vehicle was left (that information was withheld and Jack identifies exact location), whether he was really going to shoot the victim, what he took from the car (information withheld and Jack admits taking his cell phone) and have him describe the victim. These questions would serve to validate the suspect's initial admission resulting in a legally acceptable corroborated confession.

About the author

Louis C. Senese is VP of John E. Reid and Associates and has been employed for over 40 years. He's conducted thousands of interrogations and volunteered assistance in cold cases. Listen to Lou interviewed on [Thinbluetraining.com](https://thinbluetraining.com), [podcast #4](#). He is the author of "[Anatomy of Interrogation Themes](#)" and has presented hundreds of specialized training programs to federal, state and local law enforcement, military, federal and NATO intelligence agencies. He has taught throughout the U.S., as well as in Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea and the U.A.E. Contact him at Lsenese@reid.com.

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