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Interrogation Themes

## Catalytic converter theft: Converting denials to admissions

20 steps to effectively securing a confession

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[Catalytic converter theft](#) is skyrocketing. They are easy to steal from a car, truck, or bus in a few minutes and equally as easy to sell at remarkably high prices due to the value of a converter's metallic contents.

As of June 2022, the Money Metals Exchange valued the three metallic components inside a catalytic converter per ounce at:

- Rhodium: \$14,900.
- Palladium: \$2,080.
- Platinum: \$1,055.

Per "Waste Advantage Magazine," a typical catalytic converter contains 1-2 grams of rhodium, 2-7 grams of palladium and 3-7 grams of platinum. There are about 28 grams in 1 ounce.

Replacing a catalytic converter is expensive, usually costing \$2,000 or more. Typical recyclers will pay \$100 to \$250 per converter from conventional cars and substantially more for hybrid converters as they contain more precious metals.

It has been nearly impossible to cut the number of converter thefts. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) notes catalytic converters stolen annually have increased from 1,296 in 2018 to 14,436 in 2020.

Some states have passed laws requiring scrap metal dealers to ask for vehicle titles or other documentation before they buy used converters. However, it is very lucrative for unscrupulous metal dealers to continue purchasing stolen converters.

## **HOW INVESTIGATORS CAN CONVERT A THIEF'S DENIALS**

Converting a thief's denials into admissions is accomplished through interrogation themes that are at the core of the Reid Technique.

Most suspects rationalize and justify their illegal behavior, which is why the combination of shifting blame for the theft upon the victim's own conduct together with presenting the thief with morally (not legally) acceptable excuses that minimize their behavior is so successful.

Once admission is obtained, then the interrogator should elicit details of the crime that only the actual perpetrator would know. This insulates the interrogator from being accused of inducing a false confession.

Interrogation themes that **blame the victim** include:

1. The victim not having the catalytic converter etched with a VIN or other identification.
2. The victim not painting the catalytic converter a bright color.
3. The victim not securing the catalytic converter with an anti-theft cover.
4. The victim not having an appropriate alarm.
5. The victim parking in an unsecured/unlighted area.
6. The victim possessing a vehicle requiring little effort to remove the converter.
7. The victim owning a vehicle with a higher valued converter (greater quantity of precious metals).
8. The victim having valuables in the car attracting the suspect's attention.
9. The victim leaving the vehicle parked in the same spot for a long time (there are increased thefts from airport parking lots).
10. The victim owning an expensive car – taking from the rich not the poor.

Interrogation themes that **minimize** the suspect's theft include:

1. Contrast only taking the converter, not the car.
2. No one was physically harmed.

3. Suggest converter is covered by insurance.
4. If the subject is caught with many converters, suggest it could have been more.
5. Contrast a few individual thefts vs. hundreds.
6. Contrast theft timeline for only a few weeks vs. few months or few months vs. entire year or two.
7. Blame the economy and suspect's financial situation such as being out of a job, work hours cut, can't meet bills, unable to afford gas, etc.
8. Blame others for showing suspects how easy catalytic converters are to take and sell.
9. Blame recyclers for making it easy to sell and give good money.
10. Blame the insurance companies for lack of regulations requiring anti-theft devices.

### Catalytic converter thefts: 14 suspects charged by Beaverton police



#### **CASE EXAMPLE**

Phil was pulled over for a speeding violation. In addition, his license plates did not match the vehicle. During the search of the vehicle, eight catalytic converters were discovered in the trunk along with a battery-operated saw. Phil denied knowing the converters or the saw were in this vehicle, which he said he shared with a friend.

During Phil's interview, he was asked the bait question: "Phil, would there be any reason your DNA or fingerprints would be found on any of the converters or saw?" His response was, "I don't think so. Oh wait, I did look in the trunk for a flashlight when it was dark and uh, didn't see anything but maybe I could have bumped them without realizing they were there." That qualified response, along with several other deceptive responses during the Reid Behavioral Analysis Interview, provided the basis for an interrogation incorporating some of the above-mentioned themes.

"Phil, you know and we know that you took those converters found in the trunk of the car you were driving. I know you're not a bad guy. You just did a bad thing taking them. Look, if you were a bad guy you would have taken the vehicles, not just the converters, right? Also, no one was harmed! Plus, the victims will have replacement covered by insurance, not costing them replacement costs.

"You mentioned to me that you are between jobs with no income and a family to support. A dad has a responsibility to provide for his family. This economy is the worst I've ever seen. Five to six dollars a gallon for gas is ridiculous. Phil, to take catalytic converters is easy and a quick way to make a few bucks. I know you're just trying to get by in life until you find a decent job.

"Also, the vehicles were probably not parked in a heavily trafficked area making it more tempting to take them. Plus, there were no alarms on the car or identifying numbers on the converters or cages protecting them. If there were, you wouldn't have taken them. The insurance companies agree cars have VIN numbers to prevent theft, right? They should do the same for the converters. If they did, you and I wouldn't be here, right?"

"Like, I said earlier, you're not a bad guy. I simply think this was a situation where you were trying to make a few bucks to provide for your family. You haven't been doing this for years, have you? I'm thinking these eight were the only ones you took because you were trying to figure out where to sell them, right?"

Once the suspect acknowledges the theft, the interrogator must immediately attempt to obtain the dates of thefts, types of vehicles, location of vehicles, and the time of the day or night the thefts occurred by developing a timeline of incidents beginning with the most recent. Obtaining these specific details will corroborate his initial admission.



## 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](mailto:Lsenese@reid.com).

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