



Louis C. Senese

Interrogation Themes

Interrogation tactics to snag porch pirates

An estimated 210 million packages were stolen from Americans' homes over the past 12 months in the U.S. — follow these steps to snag a porch pirate's confession

Yesterday at 2:43 PM

This article is not business as usual like my typical interviewing and interrogation articles – it's personal!

Sad to say, I was recently a victim of porch pirates. I had three packages on my home's porch overnight and two individuals, one the driver and the other in the back seat, jumped out at 3 a.m., ran to my door and, for some reason, only took two of the packages, leaving a wrapped fishing pole. They got a fishing reel and tarp. They were caught on video, but too well disguised to identify.

These bandits are not swashbucklers. They are pathetic cowards operating as opportunists pilfering residents' entryways of their packages.

MILLIONS OF PACKAGES STOLEN

According to a survey from [SafeWise](#) and Cove Home Security, an estimated 210 million packages were stolen from Americans' homes over the past 12 months in the U.S. As people purchase more items to be delivered to their homes, this number may only increase.

Most of these lowlifes justify their behavior by saying they are not bad people – they did not break into a property, hurt anyone and the victim will probably be reimbursed. Additionally, the items they are taking are probably not of a high-end value.

Interrogation themes will address how best to approach *two types* of offenders:

1. If the suspect is believed to have committed a specific porch theft but denies the offense, the goal is to elicit an admission *to a specific theft*.
2. If the suspect admits to a specific theft, the goal is to elicit admissions *to prior thefts*.

INTERROGATION THEMES TO ADDRESS A SPECIFIC THEFT

Blame the victim for:

1. Not scheduling packages to arrive when home.
2. Not having packages delivered to another location such as a workplace, neighbor, or smart locker.
3. Not leaving delivery instructions requesting package be placed in a less conspicuous spot.
4. Not having an obvious security system such as cameras or a door alarm.
5. Not having motion detector lights.
6. Not requiring a signature upon delivery.
7. Not having a porch security box.
8. Leaving packages out overnight or for a few days making theft tempting.
9. Having packages delivered on a regular basis making theft tempting.
10. Having a nice house so can obviously afford the loss.

Minimize the suspect's behavior by:

1. Not breaking into the property.
2. Not vandalizing the property.
3. Contrast one time vs. several (even though there were others the goal is to obtain the first admission).
4. Contrast taking property vs. taking a person's life.
5. Blame economic stress of suspect – not having a job, too many bills, supporting others.
6. Blame alcohol or drugs influencing behavior.
7. Blame others talking offender into committing offense.

8. Blame thrill and excitement.
9. Compliment suspect for not harming an individual.
10. Compliment the suspect for being a "good person" that just made a "bad decision."
11. Suggest it was a spur-of-the-moment act vs. premeditated.
12. Suggest it was just "too tempting."

INTERROGATION THEMES DESIGNED TO ELICIT ADMISSION TO PRIOR THEFTS

When suspect admits to initial theft:

1. Compliment suspect for initial admission but concern whether doing this a long time (months) or short time (weeks).
2. Compliment suspect for not using a weapon as opposed to another offender's behavior.
3. Compliment suspect for not taking sentimental or personal items.
4. Contrast hundreds of times vs. thousands of times.
5. Contrast a handful of times vs. hundreds of times.
6. Contrast timelines – doing this for weeks vs months.
7. Contrast every day vs. weekends.
8. Contrast one county vs. several counties or statewide.
9. Not telling the truth to other instances (thefts) may cause people to think it's thousands of times.
10. The intention was to stop once obtaining a decent job.

Once the suspect admits to the initial admission of a specific property or to several such thefts, then very specific details must be obtained from the offender. The more specific the better regarding the dates, times, cities, streets, or addresses of thefts, items stolen, what did suspect do with property, where the property was sold and what the suspect did with the money received.

EXAMPLE MONOLOGUE OF ELICITATION OF FOLLOWING ONE ADMISSION OF PORCH PIRACY

"Danny, I'm glad we got that straightened out about taking that property from the porch around 3 a.m. this past weekend from the house in White Pigeon, Michigan. You mentioned you took a box with a tarp and a fishing reel. Why didn't you take another long box?"

It would have been too difficult to carry it as the big box was just too big.

“What did you do with the two items?”

Sold them on eBay, the tarp for \$25 and \$10 for the fishing reel.

“What did you do with the money?”

Had it direct deposited into my account.

“Do you have a statement?”

Yep.

“Can I see it?”

Sure.

“Danny, I thank you for working with me. You see, I know you’re not a bad guy you just did a bad thing because of your financial stress. Look, you’re not driving a Mercedes, you’re driving a 2001 high mileage van. That tells me you are doing this to survive. But you and I also know this isn’t just the first time, right?”

“I have to compliment you for not breaking into the houses in the area or harming any of the residents. You are not the only person taking property and you won’t be the last. But there are over 120 reported thefts in the area. I know it’s more than one, but I’d like to think it’s not all 120 in the last 4 months. Could it be all 120?”

Oh, no way.

“OK, could it be 110?”

Absolutely not.

“OK then could it be just 100?”

Huh? I don’t think so.

“OK good. You give me a number where it could be as many as but you would be sure it couldn’t be more than that.”

Uh, it could be as many as 50 but no more than 60.

“You sure?”

Yes.

“OK then let’s start with the first one, what date was that on?”

Follow a chronological narrative of the thefts, locations and items. Obviously, obtain as many details as possible.

NEXT: [The value of asking a suspect to take a polygraph](#)

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, 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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