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Interrogation Themes

Smash-and-grab crooks: How to grab confessions

This crime carries with it two goals for the investigator

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Shame on individuals blaming victims for not having enough security to defend against theft as [recently suggested by Chicago's mayor](#). My home town of Oak Brook, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, recently had a coordinated attack by 14 individuals ransacking the Louis Vuitton store and grabbing \$120,000 in high-end merchandise. This is becoming all too common. Additionally, identifying offenders is becoming more difficult due to COVID-19 mask mandates.

This crime carries with it two goals for the investigator:

- Initially obtaining an admission from an offender committing the crime;
- Obtaining knowledge from the acknowledged offender as to the name(s) of those who participated.

If evidence is sufficient to identify a smash-and-grab offender and he/she confesses, the goal would be to obtain *knowledge* of the accomplice(s). If, however, the goal is to obtain an *admission* from the individual committing the crime, the interrogation approach would differ. Following admission of committing the crime, the *knowledge* approach would then be utilized.

The following two approaches will be for the offender then followed by themes to elicit names of accomplices from the offender.

THEMES FOR OBTAINING OFFENDER ADMISSIONS FROM THE SMASH-AND-GRAB OFFENDER:

1. Blame "defunding the police" and less police presence for enticing the offender's actions.

2. Blame hard economic times due to COVID.
3. Blame the store for not having enough security (Chicago mayor's implication).
4. Blame organized crime for taking advantage of paying low-level, economically challenged criminals to steal.
5. Blame the decriminalization of low-level offenses with a threshold of \$950 for a misdemeanor.
6. Blame little consequences encouraging the behavior.
7. Suggest the ease of selling stolen merchandise such as e-commerce platforms, flea markets, pawnshops and street vendors facilitates crime.
8. Suggest no or little physical harm to the victim, if appropriate.
9. Suggest subject was talked into working with criminals but was reluctant to participate.
10. Minimize by contrast stealing from an individual who couldn't afford loss versus a store.

THEMES FOR OBTAINING KNOWLEDGE ADMISSION FROM THE SMASH-AND-GRAB OFFENDER:

Refer to [5 reasons witnesses won't ID offenders \(and how to beat them\)](#) as well as [Anatomy of Interrogation Themes](#) by John E. Reid and Assoc.

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1. Suggest that providing names will show their cooperation.
2. Suggest that you already have a good idea who was involved but need accomplices' names to be sure the subject is cooperating.
3. Suggest if the situation were reversed, the accomplice would identify you (the offender) validating their cooperation.
4. Suggest that Investigator can understand the natural inclination of "not getting involved" and the suspect's reluctance to identify the accomplice(s).
5. Suggest you understand the fear of violating the trust of "brotherhood or sisterhood" but the truth shows your cooperation.
6. Compliment the suspect for not planning the crime.
7. Tell the suspect that you do not need to know the complete name of the accomplice(s), simply jot down their initials, thereby allowing the suspect to maintain the position that they never *said* the accomplices' names.

8. Show the suspect a list of potential accomplices' names and while pointing a pen on each individual name, ask the suspect to cough or look away to whoever was involved thereby maintaining the position the suspect never *named* an accomplice.
9. Advise the suspect to write down the name(s) of those involved while the investigator leaves the room, thereby allowing the suspect to maintain the position that he/she did not say the name to the investigator.
10. As a last resort and if legally proper with prosecutor agreement/stipulation to maintain the promise of confidentiality, promise you will not identify their name.

In either situation of attempting to elicit the truth from the offender or in obtaining knowledge of accomplices, the investigator should prioritize the most appropriate themes.

Developing several themes will not appear to the subject that the investigator is insincere but rather as offering viable options. The investigator should observe the subject's behavior as to which theme appears more attractive to the offender. Once the suspect acknowledges accomplices, attempt to obtain as much detail as possible. Additionally, avoid taking notes when admissions or names are elicited as most subjects will be reluctant to incriminate themselves or others as they perceive that as a permanent record.

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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