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## From the Mailbag: Admission Difficulties

Dear Dave and Shane,

*I was interrogating an internal subject recently for a known merchandise theft and hit a snag when trying to get additional admissions from her. I only had the one incident on video, but "knew" the subject had committed other thefts over the past few months, including cash and merchandise, but could not get the admission. At one point the subject admitted that she had "stolen other merchandise, but couldn't remember what it was." I just could not get her to open up about anything other than the video-taped incident, which happened the same day of the interview. We ended up moving forward with what we had, but my question is, "What could I have done to get over this hump and obtain the additional confessions?"*

Thank you,

JD, Loss Prevention Manager

**Y**our question addresses a common problem among loss prevention managers across the country. After conducting a thorough investigation, the manager is able to get admissions from the employee only relating to what was known by investigators prior to the interview.

You are quite correct in the assumption the employee was likely involved in more theft activity than your investigation established. It is exceedingly rare for an employee to be caught the very first time she engages in dishonest behavior. When a person is caught the very first time they steal, it is likely she has been involved in a pattern of theft activity at other jobs and has returned to this pattern at your company.

There are a number of issues we need to consider when explaining the reasons why you are having difficulties expanding admissions with dishonest employees. While your note does not detail how the interview with the employee was conducted, we will attempt to make some assumptions that may have contributed to your difficulty.

### Interviewer's Attitude

Were you as the interviewer too needy in your desire to obtain the confession?

There has to be the impression the interviewer does not need the admission and can walk away from the encounter. The admission is really for the benefit of the subject, allowing her a chance to express her remorse and explain her actions. If the interviewer expresses too much interest in the subject's

admission, suspicion is aroused and the individual's resistance rises as her trust waivers, resulting in a reduced admission.

People generally confess because they believe they have been caught, either as a result of what the interviewer says or the proximity of the interview to a recent theft. The timing of your interview in relation to the most recently committed theft likely indicated to the employee you were aware of the incident occurring earlier in the day. Since the associate believed she had been caught in that instance, she acknowledged it first, limiting further admissions.

However, if you used a direct accusation focused on the last theft, you again indirectly indicated what you knew, diminishing further admissions. The direct accusation also sets the interviewer as an opponent, limiting trust, rapport, and admissions. Furthermore, if the interviewer's general attitude was rude or condescending, this could also contribute to a lack of cooperation from the individual.

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These may contribute to several additional problems.

First, if the interviewer focuses on this last instance, it will likely increase the individual's resistance to giving additional admissions because she believes those are still undiscovered.

Second, the interviewer has now lost the ability to absolutely determine if the associate is still lying because he has given up what is known in the investigation. Now, if the employee says, "That is the only time I have stolen," the interviewer has no effective way of knowing in absolute terms if the individual is still lying.

In one research study it was determined investigators were able to determine deception at an accuracy rate of 85 percent in situations where they were able to withhold evidence from the suspect to compare against the story or admissions they were obtaining. One of the most common problems we see in both the public and private sectors is the investigator's presentation of evidence early in the interview. Even though the evidence may be powerful, the subject is still physically and psychologically strong, allowing her to withstand what is known. However,

evidence used later in the interview has a greater impact in obtaining a first admission or encouraging a dishonest associate to give fuller admissions.

Third, while attempting to develop the admission, if the interviewer claims evidence or knowledge the subject knows or suspects is wrong, she will reduce her admissions believing she is being lied to by the interviewer.

Another common problem that causes smaller admissions is the type of assumptive question used by the interviewer. If the interviewer asked an assumptive question eliciting the last time the employee stole from the organization, he has effectively given up the investigation's only real piece of evidence. Instead, the interviewer should have asked, "When was the very first time you took money or merchandise from the company." The "first time" assumptive question protects the evidence available and conceals what is known about the subject's activities while creating an opportunity to expand the admission.

Sometimes an employee who is interviewed the same day she has stolen will offer an immediate admission to that incident. The timing of the interview along with the proximity of the theft allows the employee to make a leap of logic that her last dishonest act has been discovered, and she tosses this bone in hopes the interviewer will accept it and go away.

If an associate makes an admission to what is known early in the interview, the interviewer should avoid detailed questioning about the topic. The interviewer should acknowledge the admission, but immediately focus on earlier thefts as his primary area of inquiry. A good response is something like, "Yes, of course. But we really need to start at the beginning not at the end."

## Role of Rationalization

A powerful contributing factor to small admissions is not rationalizing with the subject. The interviewer's failure to rationalize the associate's dishonest behavior does not allow her to save face in light of the investigation. Sometimes loss prevention managers will simply attempt to obtain the first admission using evidence in hopes of shortening the process. This does often result in an initial admission to what is known, but prolongs the development process or significantly limits additional admissions. Forgetting to use rationalization in an interview asks the subject to admit to stealing and being a bad person, neither of which does anything to support the individual's self-image.

The rationalization process allows the individual to save face, minimizing the seriousness of what she has done, while focusing her attention on the resolution of the problem rather than the consequences of her actions. Rationalizing by the interviewer also continues the rapport process and generally removes the interviewer from the role as an opponent, creating a cooperative environment to develop the admission.

## I Don't Remember

Problems developing admissions often originate early in the interview with the symptoms only appearing much later. We suggest looking at how the interviewer approaches the interview

and what is said since it is the interviewer who is the common denominator in all the encounters.

The "I don't remember" statement made by a subject is difficult, but not impossible to deal with. We will deal with this topic in our next column. ■

## WORKPLACE DISHONESTY

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inventory shrinkage and was reported to have been adopted by about five percent (5.7%) of the retail chain respondents in this year's survey. The use of RFID tags has slowly, but substantially, increased from its first inclusion on the 2002 NRSS when reported usage was just under two percent (1.7%) and appears to be up from last year's reported usage of 5.0%. In terms of actual numbers, six respondents reported using RFID technology in 2008 compared to seven retailers who indicated utilizing RFID tags in our 2007 NRSS. ■

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This column consists of selected highlights from the recently published 2008 National Retail Security Survey. If you wish to read the full report, send an email to Dr. Hollinger at [rhollin@ufl.edu](mailto:rhollin@ufl.edu). He will reply with the University of Florida website URL and password to open and print the survey final report. You are also invited to visit Dr. Hollinger's blog that is posted at [www.LPportal.com/blogs](http://www.LPportal.com/blogs) to engage in a discussion regarding various loss prevention questions.* 📧



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