

Tips for Managing Interviews

Use this tool to help manage interviews.

Take Nothing at Face Value.

Notice what words and phrases people use. Ask, "What do you mean?" when they make an assertion or use a "short hand" phrase. Often, people's words, phrases and entire thoughts mean something quite different from what you might think.

Listen for Where People Get Stuck.

Watch for when they seem to want more facts or if a perception blocks them from talking more about a concern. This insight can help you learn where people need more information or need to hear more perspectives on a topic.

Ask People to Square Their Contradictions.

Throughout a conversation, you will hear people contradict themselves. Set up the contradiction, saying first: "I've heard you express two different ideas A and B." Then ask, "I know this can be a tough issue but what do you make of these two different ideas?" Or, "How do you square those?" The goal is not to "catch" someone as a hypocrite but to illuminate what they are struggling with so as to learn more.

Piece Together What People Are Saying and Test It.

Usually people don't make one all-inclusive statement about what they think or how they feel about a concern. Nuggets of insight emerge over time and you will need to piece those nuggets together. Test this by saying: "This is what I'm hearing, do I have it right?" Or, "Is this what you are saying?"

Watch out for preconceived views.

Everyone has what might be call "biases" or preconceived views. Each of us grows up with our own set of experiences, values and notions: all serve as filters when thinking about a story, asking questions, framing the story and writing it. Beware of possible preconceived views when doing interviews. Otherwise, it may be hard to hear and learn what people have to say.