Opposition / Feigned Incredulity: *Indicate disbelief or opposition in order to prompt a person to offer information in defense of their position.* "There's no way you could design and produce this that fast!" "That's good in theory, but…"

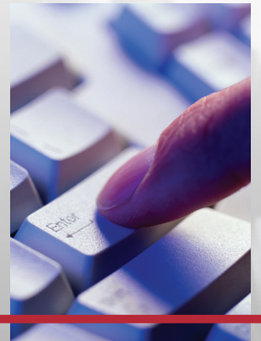
Provocative Statement: *Entice the person to direct a question toward you, in order to set up the rest of the conversation.* "I could kick myself for not taking that job offer." *Response*: "Why didn't you?" Since the other person is asking the question, it makes your part in the subsequent conversation more innocuous.

Questionnaires and Surveys: *State a benign purpose for the survey. Surround a few questions you want answered with other logical questions. Or use a survey merely to get people to agree to talk with you.*

Quote Reported Facts: *Reference real or false information so the person believes that bit of information is in the public domain.* "Will you comment on reports that your company is laying off employees?" "Did you read how analysts predict…"

Ruse Interviews: *Someone pretending to be a headhunter calls and asks about your experience, qualifications, and recent projects.*

Target the Outsider: *Ask about an organization that the person does not belong to.* Often friends, family, vendors, subsidiaries, or competitors know information but may not be sensitized about what not to share.



COLLECTING INFORMATION

Volunteering Information / Quid Pro Quo: *Give information in hopes that the person will reciprocate.* "Our company's infrared sensors are only accurate 80% of the time at that distance. Are yours any better?"

Word Repetition: *Repeat core words or concepts to encourage a person to expand on what he/she already said.* "3,000 meter range, huh? Interesting."

DEFLECTING ELICITATION ATTEMPTS

Know what information should not be shared, and be suspicious of people who seek such information. Do not tell people any information they are not authorized to know, to include personal information about you, your family, or your colleagues.

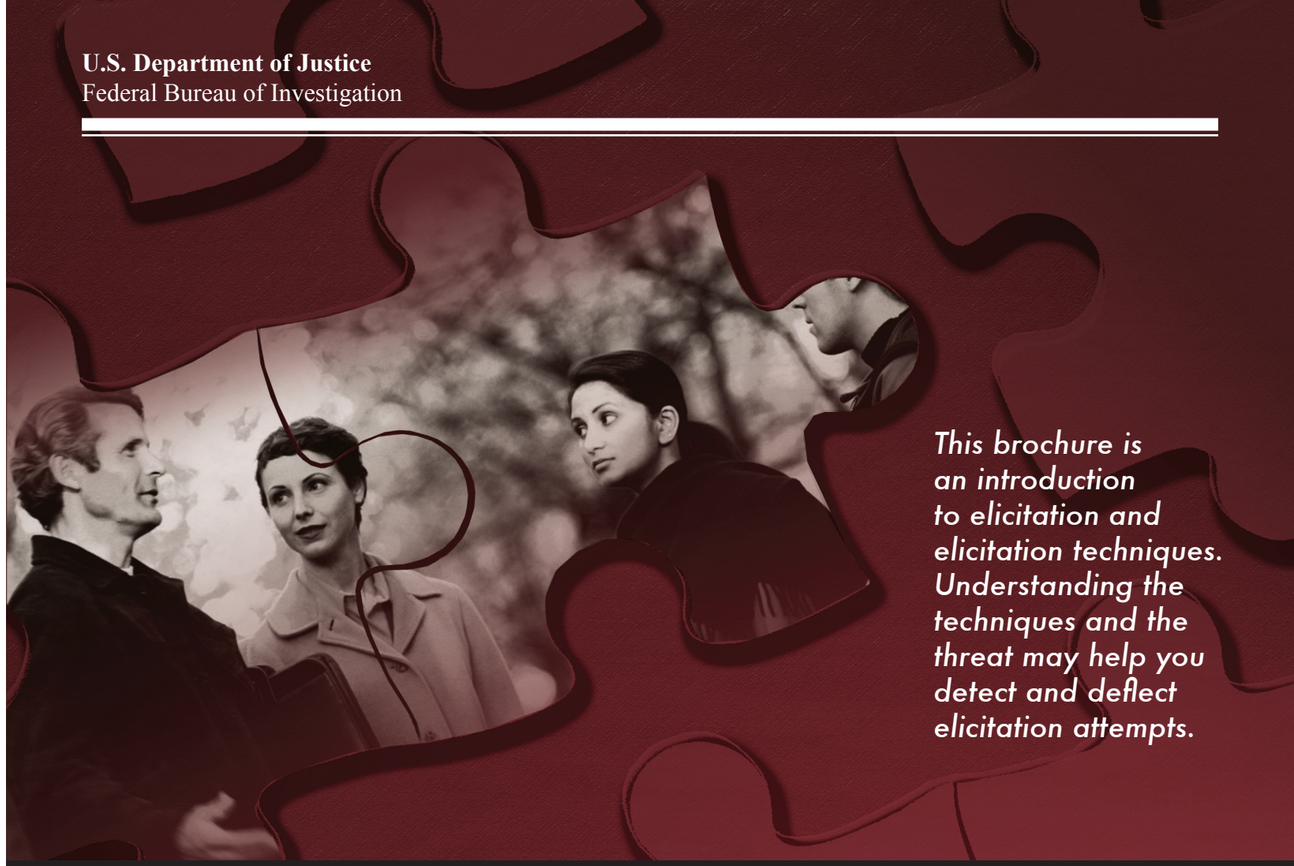
You can politely discourage conversation topics and deflect possible elicitations by:

- Referring them to public sources (websites, press releases)
- Ignoring any question or statement you think is improper and changing the topic
- Deflecting a question with one of your own
- Responding with "Why do you ask?"
- Giving a nondescript answer
- Stating that you do not know
- Stating that you would have to clear such discussions with your security office
- Stating that you cannot discuss the matter

If you believe someone has tried to elicit information from you, especially about your work, report it to your security officer.

For additional information or training, contact the FBI.
www.fbi.gov

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation



This brochure is an introduction to elicitation and elicitation techniques. Understanding the techniques and the threat may help you detect and deflect elicitation attempts.

ELICITATION

Elicitation is a technique used to discreetly gather information. It is a conversation with a specific purpose: collect information that is not readily available and do so without raising suspicion that specific facts are being sought. It is usually non-threatening, easy to disguise, deniable, and effective. The conversation can be in person, over the phone, or in writing.

Conducted by a skilled collector, elicitation will appear to be normal social or professional conversation. A person may never realize she was the target of elicitation or that she provided meaningful information.

Many competitive business intelligence collectors and foreign intelligence officers are trained in elicitation tactics. Their job is to obtain non-public information. A business competitor may want information in order to out-compete your company, or a foreign intelligence officer may want insider information or details on US defense technologies.

ELICITATION DEFINED

The strategic use of conversation to extract information from people without giving them the feeling they are being interrogated.

Elicitation attempts can be simple, and sometimes are obvious. If they are obvious, it is easier to detect and deflect. On the other hand, elicitation may be imaginative, persistent, involve extensive planning, and may employ a co-conspirator. Elicitors may use a cover story to account for the conversation topic and why they ask certain questions.

Elicitors may collect information about you or your colleagues that could facilitate future targeting attempts.

Elicitation can occur anywhere— at social gatherings, at conferences, over the phone, on the street, on the Internet, or in someone's home.

ELICITATION IS NOT RARE

It is not uncommon for people to discover information about a person without letting on the purpose. For example, have you ever planned a surprise party for someone and needed to know their schedule, wish list, food likes and dislikes or other information without that person finding out you were collecting the information or for what purpose? The problem comes when a skilled elicitor is able to obtain valuable information from you, which you did not intend to share, because you did not recognize and divert the elicitation.

STRATEGIC

WHY ELICITATION WORKS

A trained elicitor understands certain human or cultural predispositions and uses techniques to exploit those. Natural tendencies an elicitor may try to exploit include:

- A desire to be polite and helpful, even to strangers or new acquaintances
- A desire to appear well informed, especially about our profession
- A desire to feel appreciated and believe we are contributing to something important
- A tendency to expand on a topic when given praise or encouragement; to show off
- A tendency to gossip
- A tendency to correct others
- A tendency to underestimate the value of the information being sought or given, especially if we are unfamiliar with how else that information could be used
- A tendency to believe others are honest; a disinclination to be suspicious of others
- A tendency to answer truthfully when asked an "honest" question
- A desire to convert someone to our opinion

For example, you meet someone at a public function and the natural getting-to-know-you questions eventually turn to your work. You never mention the name of your organization. The new person asks questions about job satisfaction at your company, perhaps while complaining about his job. You may think, "He has no idea where I work or what I really do. He's just making idle chat. There's no harm in answering." However, he may know exactly what you do but he relies on his anonymity, your desire to be honest and appear knowledgeable, and your disinclination to be suspicious to get the information he wants. He may be hunting for a disgruntled employee who he can entice to give him insider information.

CONVERSATION

TECHNIQUES

There are many elicitation techniques, and multiple techniques may be used in an elicitation attempt. The following are descriptions of some of those techniques.

Assumed Knowledge: *Pretend to have knowledge or associations in common with a person.* "According to the computer network guys I used to work with…"

Bracketing: *Provide a high and low estimate in order to entice a more specific number.* "I assume rates will have to go up soon. I'd guess between five and 15 dollars." *Response:* "Probably around seven dollars."

Can you top this? *Tell an extreme story in hopes the person will want to top it.* "I heard Company M is developing an amazing new product that is capable of …"

Confidential Bait: *Pretend to divulge confidential information in hopes of receiving confidential information in return.* "Just between you and me…" "Off the record…"

Criticism: *Criticize an individual or organization in which the person has an interest in hopes the person will disclose information during a defense.* "How did your company get that contract? Everybody knows Company B has better engineers for that type of work."

Deliberate False Statements / Denial of the Obvious: *Say something wrong in the hopes that the person will correct your statement with true information.* "Everybody knows that process won't work—it's just a DARPA dream project that will never get off the ground."

TARGETING

Feigned Ignorance: *Pretend to be ignorant of a topic in order to exploit the person's tendency to educate.* "I'm new to this field and could use all the help I can get." "How does this thing work?"

Flattery: *Use praise to coax a person into providing information.* "I bet you were the key person in designing this new product."

Good Listener: *Exploit the instinct to complain or brag, by listening patiently and validating the person's feelings (whether positive or negative).* If a person feels they have someone to confide in, he/she may share more information.

The Leading Question: *Ask a question to which the answer is "yes" or "no," but which contains at least one presumption.* "Did you work with integrated systems testing before you left that company?" (As opposed to: "What were your responsibilities at your prior job?")

Macro to Micro: *Start a conversation on the macro level, and then gradually guide the person toward the topic of actual interest.* Start talking about the economy, then government spending, then potential defense budget cuts, then "what will happen to your X program if there are budget cuts?" A good elicitor will then reverse the process taking the conversation back to macro topics.

Mutual Interest: *Suggest you are similar to a person based on shared interests, hobbies, or experiences, as a way to obtain information or build a rapport before soliciting information.* "Your brother served in the Iraq war? So did mine. Which unit was your brother with?"

Oblique Reference: *Discuss one topic that may provide insight into a different topic.* A question about the catering of a work party may actually be an attempt to understand the type of access outside vendors have to the facility.

KNOWLEDGE