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# **Sport Parachuting**

## Interviewing For The Purpose Of Accident Investigation

**A guide to interviewing techniques used in the preliminary stages for the reporting of skydiving related accidents and incidents.**

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## **Introduction**

The sport of skydiving has evolved tremendously over the last 15 years due to the improvement of parachuting equipment, broader skill levels, combined with the many disciplines of the sport today. External factors such as social and legal environments have also had an impact upon the sport of parachuting. This results in an increase in litigation which also has the effect of increasing insurance costs. For this reason it is vitally important that all accident and incident reporting is prepared thoroughly.

An accident, incident, breach of regulations or unprofessional conduct during participation in a skydive, or skydive related circumstance may bring about the need for one or more persons to be interviewed. Interviewing is a useful and necessary part of an investigation to determine and record the facts so as to bring the matter to a conclusion. Furthermore, it is a process that can help in preventing the re-occurrence of an accident or incident.

The objective of this thesis is to supply information, ideas and interviewing techniques relevant to parachute investigators, namely at area safety officer level. This thesis aims to assist them with the skills necessary to conduct an effective interview by using a combination of communication methods, and an understanding of the emotional responses people may display during or after a parachuting accident or incident during their interview.

## **Skydiving Accident/Incident Investigation**

Following an accident or incident there are systematic steps that must be taken in the recording of the event. Those steps depend on the severity of the incident and may include things such as:

- Inspection of site
- Eye witness accounts / interview of witnesses
- Interview of person/persons involved in accident/incident
- Recording of necessary paperwork/statements/reports

This thesis will focus on the interview process and techniques which can be utilized during an investigation to extract information from witnesses and interviewees which would enable the investigator to gather facts in order to come to a conclusion on the matter.

This record may later prove crucial to investigation outcomes if the matter is presented before the courts or the need for litigation arises. In the event of an injury, preventable measures can be implemented to help eliminate or lower the probability of a re-occurrence of an incident if an accurate record of the event is obtained. Similarly in the event of a breach of regulation, an accurate record of the event can be used to discipline the offender and discourage further breaches of safety standards and regulations.

An accurate record of an accident or incident may comprise a number of items. These may include but are not limited to, verified documents, testimonials, video footage, physical exhibits or witnesses. Often eyewitness testimonies are the most important part of parachuting incident/accident investigations. Results of an investigation or inquiry are presented to relevant agencies and appointments which may include the Australian Parachuting Federation and disciplinary panels, and are also held on file for future reference.

A timely, thorough and well conducted interview can maximize the value of eyewitness accounts and prove vitally important to an investigation. Due to the importance of the incident record, correct interviewing techniques are essential to maximize the value of interviews leading to investigation outcomes.

## **What is an Interview?**

An interview is different from an informal chat, in that it is a controlled interaction between two or more people which uses verbal exchange as the main method of asking questions. The interview is created for specific purposes such as exploring reasons behind a person's actions or responses, to verify the reliability of answers with further questioning, and to obtain an unbiased independent version of events. An interview has direction and shape that is determined by the subject matter and nature of the incident and the effectiveness of the interviewer to obtain relevant information. The subject being interviewed may be a potential witness, offender/suspect, or interpretive witness. A skilled interviewer is able to control the interview by using many different approaches. Each technique has its advantages and the use of combined interviewing techniques can be effective in the hands of those with the appropriate skills.

## **Interviewing**

Interviews are conducted in a wide variety of situations for a number of reasons. The severity of the incident/accident determines the course an interviewer will need to follow. For example; a malfunction that does not result in an injury does not need the depth of a thorough investigation, whereas an incident resulting in a death would warrant a full comprehensive investigation.

Quite commonly the person being interviewed may have strong feelings of nervousness, or feel threatened by an investigative interview. Interview subjects are likely to be highly anxious and perhaps even stressed by the thought of an interview. These emotions can be magnified significantly if the interview surrounds a particularly serious accident or incident involving injury or death. Stress during an interview can transcend into anger, bluff, bravado or even feelings of shame. The interviewer needs to be conscious of the emotions an interviewee may be displaying and use his/her interviewing skills along with relevant experiences to handle these often difficult situations.

While interviewing can be stressful for both parties, the interviewee must be treated with dignity and respect at all times. It must be remembered that the interviewee will be more likely to surrender information if the interview is conducted in a diplomatic, non-hostile manner. For an effective, smooth and objective interview likely to achieve greater results, attention should be paid to the following issues:

- The Venue
- Preliminary Discussion (Ice Breaking)
- Recording the interview

- Timing of the interview after the event
- Accident Scenes
- Sequence of interviews
- Gender issues
- Culture issues

### **The Venue**

Investigators conducting interviews should take the time to ensure that a suitable area is available prior to the commencement of the interview. Ideally the area should be private and free from distractions which may include other jumpers, phone calls and noise. If the interview has to be done away from the drop zone, it is preferable for the venue to be at a place where both parties would be able to relax and not feel threatened. If it were conducted at either party's own residence then this could set up a barrier before the interview even starts. The interviewer should try to set suitable seating arrangements to allow the interviewee to feel as comfortable as possible. In short, ensuring that a venue is suitable for the interview may seem to be a minor detail, but it is a surprisingly common mistake made by those conducting interviews and a precaution that may make a productive difference to interview outcomes.

### **Recording the Interview**

During the interview it will be necessary to take notes to record interview outcomes. This can be done by either taking the main points of the conversation and writing them down as they are spoken, or by utilizing a voice recorder. If a voice recorder is to be used then the relevant legislation that applies to that jurisdiction must be considered. Different states in Australia have differing rules in regard to using recording devices and if such conditions are not complied with, all evidence adduced from the interview may well be excluded in subsequent court proceedings. Permission is to be obtained from the person(s) being interviewed and care must be exercised if using a voice recorder to record the time, date and people present at the start of the tape. The interviewee must be aware that if they don't want to say a thing they don't have to and that they may have someone present if they wish. It is wise to record at the start of the interview and include their rights in the recording to exclude any accusations later that were not informed of their rights. Many people are very wary of tape recorders and this may effect the development of a good relationship with the interviewee during the course of the interview.

The keeping of records is very important as formal, possibly even legal proceeding may take place in future months or years as a result of an accident or incidence. The investigator may later be called to recall a particular event that may have occurred many

years ago. For most people this is difficult to do from memory alone, hence the important need for an accurate record of an incident or accident.

### **Preliminary Discussions (Ice Breaking)**

Preliminary discussions or the opening phase of an interview is important as it sets the stage for what will follow in later parts of the interview process. It is also the time an interviewer will explain how the interview process is going to be conducted, what is intended to be discussed, and hope to achieve. Also in this point of time is when basic background information can be obtained and a good rapport developed between interviewer and interviewee. Rapport<sup>1</sup> is the term given for close connection and sympathy between people or people and things.

One of the most demanding aspects of interviewing is developing the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. This relationship begins on the very first occasion on which the two people interact, and can change in many ways before the interview is over. Building a good rapport and learning different techniques of interviewing is beneficial to the interviewer as it assists them in becoming more aware of differences among their witnesses/ interviewee.

If the interviewer is successful in making the interviewee comfortable, they are more likely to be cooperative resulting in an open interview that enables the interviewer to establish what actually happened according to the interviewee's best ability. Talking about neutral topics of mutual interest reduces tension permitting the interviewer to comfortably move into the interview. During lead in the interviewer will be able to determine the anxiety level of the person if any, and work towards easing this.

As first impressions are important, the experienced interviewer must try hard to avoid making quick judgements about others. Cues given by voice, appearance and various non verbal behaviours are interpreted and influenced by the interviewer's attitude to the interviewee. Even if the interviewee's past has been tarnished by prior accidents or breaches of Australian Parachute regulations it is important not to form negative opinions on that person.

### **The Formal Interview**

This is the part of the interview which is more formal and demanding. The person is objectively questioned in relation to the incident/accident. Specific objectives that the interviewer has set for the meeting must be constantly kept in mind. This ensures that the interviewee talks about relevant subjects. The formal component of the interview should be precluded by an explanation to the interviewee, giving them the opportunity to ask any questions he or she may feel necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Macquarie Dictionary 1989



During the course of the formal interview the interviewer must show consideration towards the interviewee's feelings and emotions and be wary of stress levels that can build up. The interviewer must ensure the interview is free from personal feelings, opinions or judgement.

The interviewer should attempt to preserve the rapport created, as cooperation is the key to a successful interview. If the questions are irrelevant, ambiguous or even misleading, then the relationship created will decline and so too the interview as the interviewee loses interest.

### **Timing of the interview**

Consideration of post traumatic stress and emotional shock following the witnessing or involvement in a parachuting fatality must be carefully weighed against the need to quickly and accurately gather information to further the investigation. If this isn't considered then this information could be inaccurate as the witness may be suffering from emotional trauma.

### **Accident Scene**

Visits to the accident scene are potentially emotional disasters for some witnesses. However, it is a vital part of the accident incident investigation. It is up to the judgement of the parachute investigator to determine when it is appropriate for a witness to return to the scene. Consideration could be given to the witness being taken to the scene in a virtual sense without actually physically going there. Edited photographs or videos, aerial maps or sketches are good substitutes to assist in clarification issues.

### **Sequence of interviews**

The order of witnesses can also be an issue. Subject to availability of witnesses and other factors such as shock, physical injury or witness welfare, the general rule is that important eye witnesses should be interviewed first with offenders or suspects being left to last.

Another consideration for the interviewer may be the necessity to segregate witnesses, which may ensure cross contamination of memory does not occur, against the need for people to benefit from the mutual emotional support available only from sharing grief with their friends or colleagues.

### **Gender issues**

The gender of the interviewee should be considered so that allegation of gender bias or intimidation against the witness is precluded. This can be overcome by the presence of an independent person, ie; having a female in the room when interviewing a female witness.

### **Culture issues**

In multicultural Australia today it is almost impossible to not have some contact with persons of differing backgrounds. Cultural differences can affect the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, for example an eye witness may have difficulty in understanding the questions asked. If communication hosts a problem including language issues, the use of an interpreter may be required. It is important to also consider any religious or political differences. Early recognition, awareness and understanding of cultural differences mark the beginning of a better understood interview.

### **Common Reactions by Interviewee's**

A member who has breached the Australian Parachute Federation operational regulations, has been involved in an accident/incident or is defending someone else may exhibit inherent self-preservation instincts. This causes people to respond to the interview process in somewhat peculiar ways. Some interviewee's may engage in deliberate deception or avoidance behaviour that can be used to cover up or hide the truth. Some may weep or show signs of remorse, while others may express anger in an attempt to divert the focus away from themselves.

Below are some of the ways in which interviewees may react to different interview questions.<sup>2</sup>

- Difficulty in expressing themselves.
- Emotional stress.
- Inconsistencies.
- Non cooperation.
- Evasion.
- Bias

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<sup>2</sup> Keats 2000

### **Difficulty in expressing themselves**

Some may find it difficult to express themselves clearly; a prompting question can be used to assist them. If the person is from a non-English speaking background, their verbal skills may be lacking and once again may find it difficult to express themselves. A simple answer may take a long time. There are some people who are not accustomed to using verbal means in which to express themselves, they instead may resort to actions. These actions can still be recorded by the investigator, especially if taping; the investigator should respond "For the record, you are now indicating the right side of the body where the cutaway pad was located". The language style may be more of a colloquial language and slang. Often this is associated with many pauses and fumbles.

### **Emotional stress**

Especially in a serious accident, high anxiety levels and nervousness may lead the interviewee to lose concentration during particular questions. This will have a marked effect on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Emotional stress can present itself as tears, anger or silence. This will have a negative effect on the interview as do exaggerated euphoria and abnormally high levels of self-evaluation.

### **Inconsistencies**

A question asked later in the interview which may be similar to a question previously answered, may contradict an earlier response. This may show that the interviewee either did not remember what was said previously or perhaps is not speaking the truth. Did the interviewee get caught out with their answer? Sometimes intervening questions will help the respondent to think more clearly or even feel more comfortable with the interview situation.

### **Non cooperation**

A guilty person or persons who are withholding information may be non-cooperative during the interview. The deliberate withholding of information may be an attempt to hide the truth, cover for someone else, or to protect themselves. This may also happen if the interviewee is under high emotional stress following an incident/accident

### **Evasion**

The interviewee often talks around the question by not answering it directly. An example of this is by the interviewee saying, "I don't remember", or "I don't know". This could be the truth and the competent interviewer should be able to recognise this. Often hesitating before responding is an indication that the interviewee is evading the question or thinking of an alternative answer. The interviewer should look for non-verbal signs such as facial expressions, fidgeting, and arm movements. This is discussed in 'Body Language' on pages 14 & 15. Another way of evading the response is to bluster, in an

attempt to turn the focus towards the interviewer, away from the interviewee. This is not an uncommon defence of a hostile interviewee.

### **Bias**

Many types of reactions by respondents produce some kinds of bias in their answer. Bias is commonly used to portray the speaker in a favourable light to the interviewee. It can occur in the interpretation of the question as well as in the answer. Judgmental attitudes that are condemnatory also produce biases. Such attitudes become quickly apparent to respondents, who then react defensively. They may clam up, give incomplete and inadequate responses or they may distort their answers to present a more favourable impression.

## **Questioning Skills**

Constructing the questions, knowing what questions to ask, and how to ask them takes learning and practice. An interviewer must develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships and set all questions in a way that enables them to obtain useful answers. This allows them to produce the most effective interviewing technique.

There are many types of questioning techniques an interviewer may use, some of these may include;

- Open ended questions
- Closed questioning
- Biased questioning

### **Open ended questions**

These types of questions are sometimes referred to as general questioning, leading the respondent to give more information, freedom of explanation and opinion. They allow for a variety of responses and enable the candidate to take whichever direction they like to demonstrate their knowledge. It does not suggest answers or offer alternatives.

An example of an open-ended question is:

“What happened with your jump on Saturday morning?”

Interviewee: “I lost height awareness and as a result I opened at 1000 feet.”

### **Closed questioning**

A more precise questioning method is closed questioning. These questions are constructed to be answered by a simple brief response. These sorts of questions tend to retain focus so as the direction of the interview stays on track. These questions are normally used to confirm an already said statement.

An example of a closed question is;

“So you went low yesterday?”

Interviewee: “Yes”.

### **Bias Questioning**

A biased question is one in which will lead the interviewee away from what he wants to say or direct them on a certain path. A leading question can also be called a biased question, as it does not keep all alternative answers open. It tends to lead the interviewee in a certain direction.

An example of a biased question is;

Interviewer; “You saw that John previously hooked his canopy in late on numerous occasions, this is true isn’t it?”

## **Probing**

Probing has many functions in interpreting responses. It can be used to clarify meaning, stimulate further responses given, confirm consistency or gain encouragement. Probing questions can be constructed to stimulate further response and obtain more information from a question or line of questioning already used.<sup>3</sup> A previous question is often reworded in order to an earlier answer to establish consistency in the interviewee’s answers or to seek further detailed information.

Good listening skills are a necessary part of probing also. The interviewer must not only listen to what is said, but also understand the subject matter. An interviewer will not take notice of what the interviewee is expressing if they are forming their own opinion on the information they hear. A useful tool for improving listening skills<sup>4</sup> is to paraphrase what you think the interviewee has said.

Examples are; “What you’re telling me is...”, “You said...” Paraphrasing keeps the interviewer focused on the conversation, reduces misunderstandings and helps both parties remember what has been said.

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<sup>3</sup> Keats 2000

<sup>4</sup> Dr Thomas Gordon, 1974

Some types of probing questions include:

- Silent Probe
- Encouragement
- Immediate Clarification
- Retrospective Clarification

### **A Silent Probe**

A non-verbal or silent probe is a means an interviewer can use as a way of asking for more information. This can be as straightforward as a nod of the head for acknowledgment of an answer, or by simply using a pause, and waiting for the interviewee to collect their thoughts and review their answer.

### **Encouragement**

Encouragement for the interviewee to continue talking can take the form of a simple “Uh, uh”; “I see” or “Go on”. These brief words encourage a response by confirming that the interviewer has comprehended what has been said up to that point but expect further information.

### **Immediate Clarification**

When probing in this nature the interviewer is asking a question for clarification. For example, “Can you explain that one to me again?”

### **Retrospective clarification**

Under this type of probing questioning the interviewee goes back to an earlier answer and tries to confirm both answers for clarification. The interviewer may also use retrospective clarification to review progress so far and to check whether major points have been covered.

An example of this would be;

“Previously you said..., could you explain that to me a little more now in the light of what you have just told me”.

## Body Language

When someone is called perceptive or intuitive, it refers to their ability to read other peoples non verbal cues through the awareness of their physical appearance, posture, gestures, and especially the changes in facial and eye movements. When we say we have a gut feeling or a hunch that someone isn't telling the truth, we really mean that their body language and their spoken words do not agree. Body language is often described as 'the art of seeing what others are thinking'<sup>5</sup>.

It can be used in investigation procedures as an indicator to gauge whether the person being interviewed is telling the truth or not, or is perhaps unsure of what they saw.

For example: If the person being interviewed was sitting back in their seat with their chin down and arms crossed on their chest, then a perceptive speaker would get a hunch or feeling that his delivery was not getting across. He would become aware that he might need to take a different approach to gain some involvement.

Faking body language is difficult to do as the subconscious mind acts automatically and independent of our spoken, or unspoken untruths, and our body language gives us away.

Following are examples of common body language gestures which an interviewee may demonstrate:

- Palm gestures
- Hand to face gestures
  - Nose touching
  - Mouth guard
  - Eye rub
  - Ear rub
  - Neck Scratch
- Folded arm gestures
- Eye signals
- Conflicting non verbal messages

### Palm Gestures

An open facing palm gesture will indicate that the person is being open and honest with their responses. Adversely if a person is not telling the truth then they may be subconsciously holding their palms from being seen, either behind their back or in their pockets.

### Hand to Face Gestures

Recognition of non verbal hand to face gestures is a very effective observation skill to acquire when conducting interviews. If a witness uses hand to face gestures it does not always mean that they are straight forth lying. It can however indicate that the person

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<sup>5</sup> Pease 1987

may be misleading the investigation, and further observation of other gestures may confirm suspicions.

Of the hand to face gestures there are five examples commonly used as an indicator to the interviewer that their witness may be deceitful, uncertain, lying or exaggerating.

When someone either speaks or hears untruths, they often attempt to cover their mouth, eyes or ears with their hands. The hand to mouth or mouth guard may be displayed by a hand covering the mouth, from a more subtle few fingers covering the mouth, or even a cough into a closed fist. It can be used when either person does not agree with what the other has said.

Nose touching gestures may comprise of several light rubs of the nose or one quick hardly noticeable touch. Like the mouth guard gesture it can be used by the interviewee who is not quite honest, or by the interviewer who may doubt what is being said.

The eye rub is displayed when a person wants to avoid looking into the face of another, usually the one they may be telling a lie to. This signal can be quite obvious from a vigorous eye rub, to a subtle scratch under the eye. A person may also gaze at the ceiling or sky to avoid eye contact.

The ear rub may be displayed by rubbing the back of the ear, pulling at the earlobe or bending the entire ear forward to cover the ear hole. An interviewee displaying these gestures may suggest they've heard enough and wish to stop, or that they wish to block out what is being said.

The neck scratch may be displayed by a simple scratch using the index finger along the side of the neck, below the ear lobe or in front of the neck. This gesture is a sign of uncertainty or doubt. For example a person who answers that he saw someone cock his pilot chute as they rub their neck may be indicating uncertainty in their recollection.

Hand to face gestures as pointed out, may be an indicator of deceit or uncertainty, however further observation of other gestures coupled with those above can confirm suspicions.

### **Folded Arm Gestures**

A person who has folded arms can be indicating that they are hiding behind a barrier. The barrier is intended to block out hard to answer questions, or the person could feel threatened and is showing a defensive attitude. The folded arm position has several variations. From the standard arm fold it can enter into a reinforced arm cross where the person clenches their fists. This indicates a hostile and defensive attitude. A subtler version of the arm fold is partial arm cross where one arm grips the other across the body.



### **Eye Contact**

For interview purposes it is important that the interviewee feel comfortable and one way to assist them is through the understanding of eye contact, or eye to eye communication. This is primarily to do with the length of time a gaze is held during conversation. If a person is being dishonest or holding back information their eyes may meet the interviewer's eyes less than one third of the time. An interviewer who keeps eye contact with their interviewee 60 to 70% of the time will build a better rapport than one who does not.

### **Conflicting Non Verbal and Verbal Messages**

If the non-verbal messages are produced more automatically than the verbal responses, we would expect that there should be less control over this behaviour than over what is said. Often the interviewee will send out conflicting messages in which the body, face or tone of voice conveys a message that goes against the verbal response.

The interviewer must ask themselves if this is an attempt to obscure the underlying emotion or lie about the behaviour being asked about. In this situation probing for clarification and elaboration could suitably uncover the truth.

The interviewer must be aware of what facial expressions and gestures, they themselves are exhibiting. A facial expression from the interviewer of disbelief, anger or disapproval will quickly take away trust and rapport that has already been developed. Smiling must reflect a genuine interest and accepting attitude. Genuine attempts to understand and develop empathy will usually be met with an accepting response.

## **Interviewing During Times of Stress**

The behaviour of the interviewee can affect the interpretation of their meaning of a response to a question. Especially if a serious skydiving accident has occurred you might expect those people who witnessed the event to be under greater emotional stress. The interviewer must be aware of this stress when interviewing witnesses. Situations of extreme distress may evoke strong feelings of sympathy, while evidence of aggression, unkind or illegal behaviour may evoke feelings of anger, disgust or strong antipathetic judgmental attitudes. This can cause the interviewer to look at the interviewee in an unfavourable light, or in a biased way.

An example of this could be where a jumper has been cautioned not to hook his canopy on numerous occasions. Ignoring this advice the person hooked in and broke their leg.

To maintain a professional approach the interviewer will have to keep such judgmental attitudes separate from the relationship with the interviewee. A few ways in which the interviewer can benefit, understand and interpret statements from the interviewee are by using:

- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Memory

### **Empathy**

Empathy is a cognitive process involving the understanding of another person's way of looking at the same situation. You are actually putting yourself in their position. The effect may in some cases lead to a judgement involving less antipathy. Empathy allows the interviewer a greater range and depth of understanding. As the interviewer strives to gain this understanding, the relationship between the interviewer and respondent is likely to improve and be maintained from there on. Empathy helps to understand the reasons why people behave and think the way they do.

### **Sympathy**

Means 'feeling with'. The difference between sympathy and empathy is that feelings are an essential component of sympathy but not a necessary component of empathy. Sympathy does not necessarily involve an attempt to understand a situation from another person's viewpoint; it may be merely feeling sorry for a person in distress. In most cases expressing sympathy is unhelpful for developing an effective interpersonal relationship in an interview.

### **Memory**

The behaviour of people in stressful situations is often characterised by memory loss and cognitive disorganisation. Accounts of an accident may not be cohesive but fragmented. It is necessary during an interview that the person in question is asked to recall what was said in earlier conversations or answers to previous questions. This is to ascertain and verify the truth or correct answer.

## Difficult Cases

It is possible every now and then to meet a person who is difficult to interview, no matter how meticulously the interview has been set up, and how cautious the interviewer has been to build a healthy rapport.

Careful consideration must be paid to emotional responses, attitudes and behaviours that may inhibit mutual co-operation and effect interpersonal relationships between interviewer and the interviewee in any interview situation. Common problems are:

- Hostility
- Anxiety
- Acquiescence

### The Hostile Respondent

Hostility from a respondent is the most common problem recognized by interviewers. It can be overt or covert in expression. The spoken word is the most obvious way in which it manifests itself, but non verbal messages such as those already explained can also convey hostility, both overtly and covertly. Hostility to the topic can arise when the theme of the interview touches some feelings which seem unacceptable. There could also be other demands upon the person's time as the interview may be preventing them from doing other things. A typical example of this is a witness who wants to be on the next load, while the interviewer would like assistance in the accident/ incident investigation. Although the respondent may have unfavourable feelings about the topic or content of the question, hostility may be directed towards the interviewer rather than the content of the interview.

Below are a few ways in which the interviewer can handle a hostile interviewee:

- Recognize the signs, both verbal and non-verbal.
- Do not try to trivialize or minimize the hostility but accept the respondent's feelings.
- Avoid soothing reassurances; try to find the cause through probing.
- Do not promise help to alleviate or change the condition which has aroused the hostility, if you cannot in fact do so.
- Prepare the interview schedule and the appointment carefully so that the time is available and urgent matters and distractions will be avoided.
- Use cognitive restructuring to help the respondent look at the issue in different ways.
- Place the emphasis on verifiable facts and actions and ask questions on these first.
- Allow the respondent to express feelings later.
- Above all, do not return hostility with hostility.

### **The Anxious Respondent**

The respondent's behavior can indicate many signs of high anxiety levels. A highly anxious respondent may give confused answers, not finish off a sentence, forget what was said, hear questions partially or incompletely or change their answer halfway through their responses. Following are a few ways to help reduce the respondent's anxiety levels<sup>6</sup>.

- Take time to develop rapport.
- Make the purpose of the interview clear so those irrelevant sources of anxiety are removed.
- Begin with the least threatening questions.
- Provide a calm quiet environment free from distractions.
- Do not rush the respondent when responses are hesitant or confused.
- Keep calm, don't become flustered yourself.

Because the interviewer-interviewee relationship is a dynamic one, difficult behaviour by the interviewee can trigger a reaction by the interviewer. Care must be taken to guard against adopting the same attitude as the interviewee. Hostility from an interviewer must not be allowed to arouse more hostility, nor must anxieties be escalated.

### **Acquiescence**

Some people seem very easy to interview by agreeing with all that is said and appear to be helpful and pleasant. It is only after the interview is well advanced that this good nature seems false. This can be a way the respondent may be hiding their private thoughts and feelings, which are contrary to what they have said.

These people have a strong need for positive feed back. The interviewer will need to show support, trust, and encourage them to respond more thoughtfully. Probing in this instance can be used to obtain more depth in their replies.

## **Interview Closure**

At this point, the person conducting the interview has the opportunity to clear up any ambiguities that remain. The interviewee should be given the opportunity to ask any questions or add anything further to what has already been said, or feel should be discussed. The interviewer should read the transcript or listen to the recorded interview and be asked if they are satisfied that it is a true and correct record of the interview. Thereafter the record of the interview is signed and/or verbally recorded as being accurate.

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<sup>6</sup> Keats, 2000

A long interview can become tiring for both parties, especially if it has been to deal with a serious incident/accident. A gradual wind down rather than an abrupt finish will leave a greater sense of purpose and satisfaction. Thank the interviewee for their efforts and time taken to deal with the matter.

## **Preparing Statements**

Following the interview it is generally required for all notes to be transferred into a more accurate, detailed statement. All statements should be written in ink and not pencil to negate any later claims that a statement was somehow altered or changed. All pages must be signed and dated by the interviewee to verify that their statements are indeed what they have said. A copy should also be provided to the witness.

In completing the statement the interviewer should include matters which may be obvious during the interview which could provide valuable information at later stages when deliberating the outcomes. Such details may include whether a gear check was conducted on a student before exit.

As far as practicable use the interviewee's own words. If the person uses slang or colloquial expressions, include them in the statement with an explanation as necessary. Errors should be crossed through with a single line and initialled by the persons both preparing and giving the statement.

At the end of the statement the interviewer should read it back aloud to the interviewee, giving them the opportunity to also read it in their own time. By doing this the interviewer can be certain that the person has not just glanced through it. This aspect may be important if the person elects to retract something that they have said in the statement at a later date.

While all the witnesses are still present you should have a search through the statements to see if there are any glaring omissions. Things like the state of mind and appearance of the deceased before the jump may be relevant.

## Compiling a report

Your final report should be as short and concise as possible. A suggested lay out is as follows.<sup>7</sup>

- Covering statement outlining who you are and what qualifies you to present this report.
- Cover page.
- Contents.
- Preamble-outlines any general observations leading up to the accident/incident.
- Background-covering the history of the situation and the deceased if applicable.
- Jump-the actual events leading to the fatality.
- Post accident investigation – detailing your actions.
- Conclusions – and how you arrived at them.
- Preventative measures – any suggestions on how we may prevent this occurring again.

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Parachute Federation ASO's hand manual

## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis does not instruct an interviewer on every aspect of investigative interviewing and procedures. It does however provide a range of skills, techniques and knowledge that will help an interviewer to understand the different ranges of interviewing skills, when and how to use them.

Many different aspects of conducting an interview have been covered in the course of this document. It is an involved process that takes time to develop and skill to undertake effectively. Interviewing skills come only with experience, practice and a sound understanding of many of the principles covered above.

Once developed, these skills of interviewing can give the interviewer the ability to handle a wider range of interactions with different people, and also widen horizons as we meet and come to understand others.

Whilst this thesis has primarily been written for the purpose of interviewing for skydiving related incidents or accidents, a wider range of interviewing skills and levels can be obtained from the Memon & Bull's Handbook 1999.

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