

Avoiding Interview Traps

Cambridge Public Health Department

Don't speculate about facts:

Q. *Out of the 50 exposed students, how many do you expect will test positive for whooping cough?*

A. "I don't want to speculate, here is what we know..."

If you don't know the answer...

- "I'm not the right person to answer that question, let me put you in touch with SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT."
- "That's a great question. Let me put you in touch with Subject Matter Expert."
- "That's a great question. I don't have that information in front of me. Can I call you back?"

Don't speak for another person or organization:

Q. *We haven't been able to reach the school superintendant and we're going live in 30 minutes. Do you know if she is planning to close the schools?*

A. "I can't speak for the superintendent, I can give you the number of her assistant/chief of staff.

"I can't speak for the superintendent, have you checked the schools' website?"

Use "Bridging" Techniques to Stay On Message

Bridging allows a smooth transition from the question to your message.

Examples:

- "That brings up a related point..."
- "Another thing to remember is ..."
- "Before we get off that issue, let me add/say again that..."

Reframe Leading Questions:

Q. *In California, a number of babies have died from whooping cough. Should we expect the same here in our town?*

A. "Let's put this in perspective..."

"What's important to remember..."

"The real issue here is ..."

Reframe "Left Field" Questions

Q. *Do you believe there is a connection between whooping cough and UFOs?*

A. "I can't speak to that issue, but what I can say is..."

Reframe simplistic "choice" questions

Q. *If the superintendent doesn't close the schools, isn't he putting more children at risk?*

A. This is not a straightforward issue, the latest approach to school closures is...."