

ELICITATION: THE ENEMY IS LISTENING

Elicitation is a commonly used and highly effective intelligence-gathering technique to subtly collect information through face-to-face interaction with sources of information. Conducted by a well-trained and skillful intelligence professional, elicitation appears to be a normal, perhaps even mundane, social or professional discussion and can take place virtually anywhere and at any time. In actuality, though, elicitors focus their questions on issues of importance to their intelligence service and exploit the subject's desire to be cordial, interesting, and helpful.

Personal information, information regarding your colleagues, and information not publicly available concerning your employment, for example, may be very valuable to an intelligence service or terrorist organization. Consequently, these types of disclosures, though seemingly harmless individually, can jeopardize the safety of Americans and compromise national security in the aggregate.

ELICITATION: WHAT'S THE APPEAL?

You never know if a conversation is being used casually to pass the time or if it is being used to gather intelligence data, elicitation.

- Elicitation is nonthreatening. It is hard to recognize as an intelligence technique, and it is easy to deny.
- Elicitation is easy to disguise. It appears to be just conversation among colleagues and friends. However, the goal is to obtain non-public information.
- Elicitation is effective.

THE THREAT

Intelligence and terrorist organizations are adept at taking advantage of professional and social opportunities to interact with people who have access to classified or propriety information.

Typically, the objectives of foreign intelligence officers are to identify and assess people for their suitability as spies or as an individual who is careless with work-related knowledge. As you should be aware, employees, contractors, and other DoD affiliates are of intense interest to foreign intelligence services and terrorist organizations. Intelligence officers can look like anyone, from a neighbor to the regular at your local bar.

THE METHOD

You are at a social gathering, deep into a conversation with someone you don't know very well. There are questions back and forth over a wide range of topics. How do you know when the conversation is merely social and innocent and when it is being conducted for other purposes?

You don't know, really. However, recognizing the following common methods used by intelligence and terrorist organizations to **GET** you talking and to **KEEP** you talking is the first step:

- » **Flattery/Appeal to Ego.** They may ask your opinion or give value to your opinion
- » **Quid Pro Quo.** They may share some bit of info with you so you feel obligated to share as well
- » **Mutual Interest.** Real or feigned
- » **May involve a cover story to explain why you are being asked a particular question**

Elicitation exploits fundamental aspects of human nature:

- » Most of us want to be polite and helpful, so we answer questions, even from strangers.
- » We want to appear well informed, especially about our profession.
- » We want to be appreciated and feel we are doing something important and useful, that our profession/work is valuable.
- » We are often reluctant to withhold information, lie, or be suspicious of others' motives.

YOUR RESPONSE

Don't be overly wary of meeting new people to such a degree that you avoid establishing contacts and friendships. In some instances, you may not be able to avoid contact with a foreign intelligence service or terrorist organization, despite your best efforts – if they really want to meet you, they will find a way. Feel free to expand your professional and personal horizons, but keep in mind that not everyone you meet has the best intentions.

Be mindful not to draw special attention to yourself and your professional affiliation with DoD when meeting new people. At the same time, a guarded demeanor may actually set you apart and could highlight you as someone of particular importance, should you come in contact with an intelligence officer. An obvious and clumsy avoidance of talking about where you work and what you do during certain conversations will seem strange and could draw further and unwanted attention to you.

Give forethought to what you will say if your employment or personal questions come up in conversation. Be prepared. Be ready to tactfully deflect questions that are intrusive and too probing regarding your job, private life, and coworkers. Never feel compelled to directly answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

TIPS ON DEFLECTING ELICITATION ATTEMPTS

- » Don't allow others to control the conversation; the person that asks the questions controls the conversation.
- » Listen more than you talk.
- » Deflect a question with another question.
- » Change the topic.
- » Provide a general or a nondescript answer.
- » Plead ignorance rather than share information you shouldn't.
- » Don't answer. Being blunt is OK; you are not obligated to tell anyone anything they are not authorized to know.

It is never too late to stop talking! Think before you speak!

REPORTING

Keep in mind that a key element in any espionage operation is to make it as easy as possible for the target to share information. After all, the elicitation is only conversation among colleagues and friends. What is more natural than that? We do it all the time.

Many professionals encourage conversation, especially discussion of theories, concepts, and plans. It's a spy's dream come true!

Because elicitation is subtle and difficult to recognize, you should report suspicious conversations.

So, remember, on your next trip or during any conversation with a foreign colleague, be aware of the person with whom you are speaking and of where your conversation may be reported. Don't be paranoid, just be careful.

Report all contact with individuals of another nationality, either within or beyond the scope of official activities, in which:

- » Illegal or unauthorized access is sought to classified or otherwise sensitive information.
- » You have concern that you may be the target of actual or attempted exploitation by a foreign entity.

Rule of thumb, if you feel uneasy with the nature and direction of a conversation, report it!



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Report information about any contact or circumstance that could pose a threat to the security of U.S. personnel, resources, classified information, or controlled unclassified information to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.
REPORT IT! Phone 1-800-543-6289 | Web www.ncis.navy.mil | Text "NCIS" + your tip info to CRIMES (274637)

