INTERVIEW BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

This guide combines the best practices for conducting meaningful interviews and strategies to avoid common pitfalls. It's designed to help you navigate your Listening Tour and gather insightful perspectives on evangelism in your city. Feel free to personalize and adapt this guide to suit your needs and the tone you're aiming for with your Evangelism Team. Best of luck with your Listening Tour!

CONVERSATION OR INTERVIEW?

Distinguishing between chats and interviews is critical. Interviews have a precise aim, which is absolutely fine. As an interviewer, you're the guide steering discussions toward insightful findings. While conversations may flow effortlessly, interviews occasionally require gentle realignment. Picture your questions as guiding markers. If off-track, feel free to say, "Wow, fascinating! Let's steer back to the questions because I'm eager for your insights." Our interviewees anticipate your guidance. Your ease in steering lets their insights shine.

Prepare your Posture

Be prepared for diverse viewpoints and to respect differing opinions. Every perspective adds value to the conversation, and it's your job to help people feel comfortable sharing. Appreciate that it can feel vulnerable to share candidly. Leading with curiosity and warmth goes a long way in helping people feel comfortable sharing courageously. A comfortable interviewee is more likely to share candid insights.

Build Rapport

Before jumping into interview questions, take a few minutes to use small talk to help them feel comfortable. Asking them softball questions makes them comfortable with the question/answer format. How long have they been in the city? What neighborhood do they live in? Did they catch the game last night? The goal is to help them feel connected and comfortable.

Set Expectations

Once you have spent a few minutes building rapport, it's time to transition to your interview questions. Set the tone by introducing the purpose of the interviews, how long you think it will take, and what will be done with their responses. If you are audio recording the interview, ask their permission before you hit record. Here is an example script:

> *"Thank you so much, NAME, for agreeing to chat with me today. We are trying to better understand what is going on in evangelism in our city, what unique challenges we face, and what opportunities we have. I have about 8 questions to get through today, which I find takes 45-50 minutes to complete. I want to respect your time, so I'll do my best to keep our conversation on track. If it's okay with you, I'd like to record our conversation so we can capture your voice and give you my full attention. Is that okay? Great. After we finish all the interviews, we will theme what we learn in a report and share it with all the participants and other pastors in our network."*

Listen Actively

Prioritize the interviewee's perspective by listening attentively and showing genuine curiosity and interest in their responses. Here are a few reminders about strong listening in an interview context:

- Let people finish sentences and never interrupt.
- Don't rush to fill silences; they can encourage more profound reflection. Give interviewees time to gather their thoughts and share more authentically.
- Suppress the instinct to share your thoughts and perspectives about what they are sharing. In conversational dialogue, it's normal to express both agreement and disagreement. In interviews, however, we should express appreciation without commentary.
- Maintain eye contact, nod, and use positive body language.

THE MAGIC OF GRATITUDE

If you want to show that you're actively listening without providing commentary, a simple "thank you" works wonders. Whether someone expresses a differing viewpoint or surprises you, and you're unsure how to repsond, consider saying, "Thanks for sharing that with me." If the interview seems to be veering off track and you need to steer it back, you can smoothly transition with, "Thank you so much for sharing that story; my next question is . . ." The concept is clear: a few sincere words of appreciation help establish a connection with the interviewee, navigate potential tensions, and maintain the conversation's focus.

Ask Clarifying Questions

It's crucial to seek clarity whenever something isn't fully understood to deepen your understanding and ensure accurate insights. Preparing a list of prompts in advance can help you keep your questions concise, avoiding interruptions to the interview's flow. However, it's essential to vary your prompts and avoid overusing them. Using the question "why?" too frequently might inadvertently trigger defensiveness, so use it sparingly.

Prompts:

- Clarify: What do you mean by . . .?
- Continuation: Then what happened? Can you tell me more about . . .?
- Elaboration: Could you give me an example?
- Steering: You mentioned that… I want to circle back to that for a moment…
- Non-verbal: Employ silence along with eye contact to encourage further response.

End Where You Started

Thank the interviewees for their time, honesty, and valuable contributions. Your appreciation reinforces the significance of their insights. Make sure to let them know what they can expect next. Will you share the transcript with them? When can they look out for the report? Will there be a follow-up event? Is there an email list they can get on to follow along with the E-Team journey?

Reflect and Record

After each interview, allocate time to review and contemplate the collected insights. Additionally, ensure you complete any recording steps your team has agreed upon for analysis preparation. Typically, this involves spending around 15 minutes reviewing the audio transcription for accuracy and tidiness, then ensuring the transcription is correctly placed in the designated document or file folder.

Common Interview Mistakes

We've paired common pitfalls with supportive prompts to encourage open dialogue, respect interviewees' perspectives, and foster insightful conversations. These prompts empower interviewers to steer discussions while creating a welcoming atmosphere for valuable insights.

Mistake 1 – Talking Too Much: Talking excessively, and overshadowing the interviewee's input. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "I'm here to listen and learn from you. Could you share your experiences with evangelism in the city?"

Mistake 2: Leading Questions: Posing questions that steer interviewees toward desired answers. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "What various approaches have you witnessed regarding evangelism in your community?"

Mistake 3: Interrupting: Cutting off interviewees before they finish expressing their thoughts. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "Please take your time to share , I'm eager to hear the complete picture."

Mistake 4: Not Allowing Silence: Hastily filling gaps in conversation, depriving interviewees of reflection time. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "If you need a moment to gather your thoughts, feel free. I'm ready to listen whenever you're comfortable."

Mistake 5: Lack of Empathy: Failing to exhibit understanding or empathy towards the interviewee's experiences. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "I appreciate your perspective. Could you elaborate on the challenges you've encountered?"

Mistake 6: Ignoring Non-Verbal Cues: Neglecting interviewee's body language and emotions as valuable indicators. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "I noticed you mentioned 'X' with a thoughtful expression. What are you feeling about that?"

Mistake 7: Judging or Disagreeing: Sharing personal opinions that might discourage open sharing from interviewees. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "Your perspective is essential in this assessment. Could you provide further insights into how you see evangelism impacting your community?"

Mistake 8: Rushing Through Questions: Swiftly transitioning between questions without delving deeper. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "Let's delve into this subject more. Can you offer an example of an evangelism initiative that left an impression?"

Mistake 9: Not Acknowledging Contributions: Neglecting to express gratitude for their time and insights. ***Supportive Prompt:*** "Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Your insights will significantly shape the future of evangelism here."

If you have any questions or feel your Evangelism Team would benefit from a one-on-one conversation about the ideas in this resource, please email us at eteams@palau.org. Our team is here to support you!