

"Guidelines for Interviewing Your Prospects and Customers AFTER You're Done With Your Survey!"

(One of Several Audios In Your Series of FREE Marketing Research Trainings from Drs. Glenn & Sharon Livingston)

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Dr. Glenn Livingston: Hi Sherry.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Well, hi Glenn. How are you?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Good, I've got my radio voice on.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: All right honey. Let's talk radio.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: {laughter} I like that.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: {laughter} I'm sorry. I don't know how to talk radio.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That's okay. I wanted to talk to you today a bit about qualitative research.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Oh, I don't know a thing about qualitative research.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right. You've been doing it for 20 years.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Uh-huh. That's true. Even before, even in college.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Do you think everybody knows what qualitative research is, as opposed to quantitative research? Or do you want to maybe say a word about it?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Well, quantitative research is when you put together a survey that is asked in the exact order and you try to take out as much interviewer bias as possible. So, the interviewer is reading the survey, almost in a monotone, question by question. There are a lot of closed ended questions. You know, yes or no questions, things that have absolute answers. There are a few open-ended questions, where people are allowed to say what's ever on their mind and they have to be coded. But there are only a few of them. There are multiple-choice questions. The writer of the questionnaire has an idea already about how people will probably answer the questions and they give them that selection.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Okay. I got it.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Whereas, in a qualitative interview, when it's done properly. It's very open ended and basically, you're fishing. You have areas where you're looking for information and you want to get as broad as possible response and as deep as possible response as you can. When it's done properly, it's a little bit more anxiety producing.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: For the interviewer, you mean?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: For the interviewer, well, and for the interviewee, for both. But, you know, that's that kind of thinking outside the box, as you get to the box there's a little anxiety and that's when you get more of the creative process. You're looking for that because you are looking for insight. I think the reason that you're asking me this question, is that unschooled interviewers trying to do a qualitative questionnaire where they want to just go and ask prospect what they're thinking become uncomfortable. What they will do is make some mistakes.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Yeah, well because it requires a totally different set of personal skills. Like for the quantitative interview, you're really not looking for creativity in the way the questions are asked. You're not really looking for someone that can follow their line of thinking. You're really looking for someone that can stick to the structure. It's relatively hard to mess it up, a quantitative interview, right?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. It's a little bit more boring, so if you have someone that's a more creative spirit, they are not going to enjoy doing it as much.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: But, you can't make a mistake with it.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right, you're right. That the reason that I was asking is that I think that intuitively, most business owners know it's a good idea to talk to their prospects and customers and most people probably aren't aware of the special skill that they could use in doing that to get the most out of it. Many people may feel uncomfortable as their getting involved with that and not really know how to get to the insights that really will help them in their business. So I was hoping that you could talk a little bit about that.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: So for example, let's do something for fun.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Okay.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Let's pretend I have a dog store. You know how much you and I love our dog.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I know.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: You knocked on my door and you come in and I say; so can I help you?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Yes, I was thinking of getting a Great Dane. Do you have any Great Danes?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Well, I, uh. Well, actually we sell clothes for Great Danes. Were you interested in maybe some clothes for Great Danes?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I don't have a Great Dane yet, so I don't really have anybody to put clothes on.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: So that was very interesting right there. Which is going in with an expectation of what the person is coming in for and you selling something else. There would be a tendency to try to push tem in that direction.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: So that's interesting right there. We just demonstrated a fascinating thing. Our keyword was on Great Danes. The person comes to the door, looking for a Great Dane, but we sell Great Dane clothing.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: That wasn't what I was trying to demonstrate but that was great.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: What were you trying to demonstrate?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: What I was trying to do, was demonstrate that when the customer is not sure of how to articulate what they want and they hmm and haw a little bit or they pause, a lot of interviewers get very nervous.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I see.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: They start asking leading questions. So for example, we don't have any Great Danes, but we do have German Shepard's and we have Doberman and we have Great Pyrenees.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Which is perfectly appropriate if you're selling. But if you are really trying to find out what's on peoples minds, they are coming in, and how you can best please them.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Yeah.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. Before you could do that though, notice the assumption that I was making about the Great Dane that it was all about size. Maybe they'd heard something else about the Great Dane, like they are extremely loyal. They are very easy with children.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So you think that the major mistake that people make when they are doing a qualitative interview with their customers and prospects is that they ask leading questions?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: I think that is one of them. They make assumptions. A leading question is because they are making an assumption.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Could we redo that scenario and show me how you would do the interview if you were going to ask any leading questions?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Sure.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So I am coming in. Now would you ask me if you can take a minute to survey me first or would you just come and talk to me?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Well, I hadn't thought of it that way, I was thinking about it the way that I do an interview once I've already had a prospect who has said they are willing to do an interview. So I guess, yes, of course. I'd say; Well, I see you here in the store. I'm wondering if I could take a moment and talk to you a little bit about why you're here.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Of course you can.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Well, thank you. Glenn, what brought you here?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Well, I've got two dogs at home.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I'm interested in getting a Great Dane, because I think my wife would love it. I'm a little bit worried about how it would get along with the other two dogs. I've had situations before where I had. I brought an extra cat into the house, it started a territory war, they just kind of made all over the place, and it was horrible. So I guess I wanted to see if you had any Great Danes and I wanted to get a little bit of an education about how do you choose a Great Dane. How do you introduce them to other dogs and how do you make sure you don't start a territory war. I guess I've also heard that Great Danes have health problems, so I was hoping you could teach me a little bit about that or maybe you have a book or something that I could look at.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: That was really, really wonderful. Now, if I had been an astute listener and interviewer, what I would have been doing is quickly taking notes on a whole bunch of things that you said. For example, you said that you wanted a Great Dane because you thought your wife would like a Great Dane.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Specifically, what makes you think you're wife would like a Great Dane.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Well, she said she wants a Great Dane. {chuckle}

Dr. Sharon Livingston: What do you imagine it is about a Great Dane that is attractive to her?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Oh, I see. She had a very big dog a long time ago and she felt very safe. We lived in New York City and she liked to run around Central Park and sometimes she had to be out late and she felt good when the dog was coming home with her in the car. Something about the big presence, made her feel very secure. I think that he was kind of like a substitute for me when I was gone, because I work a lot and she can't always be with me but he is always very cuddly and I think that's what she likes.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: What kind of dog was that.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That was a great big Doberman.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Uh-huh.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: People used to actually say he looked like a Great Dane, but he was Doberman Pinscher. Very, very friendly Doberman Pinscher.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: So, if you don't mind me asking, why not just get a Doberman?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Because people are scared of Dobermans and they are not necessarily scared of Great Danes and, you know, we live in a neighborhood with a lot of kids. We no longer live in the city. We live up in New Hampshire, in the suburbs. I like to hike and I like to be able to walk with him off leash without worrying that I'm going to give someone a heart attack or they are going to slip and fall on a rock or something like that. That's why.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mhmm, what else do you know about Great Danes?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I know that they all white ones can be deaf sometimes and that's something to be concerned about. I would imagine because of their size, that if you get one that is ill bred, it's possible they could have congestive heart failure. I know that

they are generally very trainable; they have a nice temperament for the most part. I don't know much else about them.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: And there other aspects that you talked about. You talked about the type of dog, the size of the dog. How important is the size of the dog?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I am going to break character for a second to just kind of observe what you are doing.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: You're saying that, as I'm talking you're looking for...

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Areas to probe.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Areas to probe.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: You want to avoid asking leading questions. Well, maybe you would prefer a German Shepard?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Or maybe you would prefer a Bull Mastiff? That would be leading.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Another way of saying that is, are there any other dogs besides the Great Dane that you wife might consider.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Got it.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Are there any other dogs besides a Great Dane that your wife might consider?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I want to think if there was really another dog that I really wanted, she would consider anything. But it's kind of her turn to choose a dog. I choose one and she choose one.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: What would you choose?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I kind of like the idea of a Great Dane, actually.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: You do? Now what do you like about it?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I like big dogs. I'm a big guy. I'm six four and I weigh two and a quarter, more or less. I suppose if you think about the relative size of your average dog to me, it's really like having half a dog.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: {laughter}

Dr. Glenn Livingston: {chuckle} So, for me to have the experience of having a full dog. It would really have to be a double dog.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: I got it.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So, a Great Dane is like a double dog for me.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Uh-huh. What does it mean to have a double dog?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: It's just a nice feeling to have a big thing around the house that...

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Nice?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Yeah.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Like what do you mean by nice? Nice means so many different things to people.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: It makes me feel secure. I feel like my other dog will have real company that he can run around and chase with. My wife is very petite and it makes me feel secure to know that she'd feel more secure, because I can't really give her all the attention that she needs. That's why.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So if I break character again there.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Yep.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: What you were doing was looking for ambiguous adjectives.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Trying to clarify them with word dimension.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Okay.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: There are four basic guidelines; one is to avoid leading questions and keep it as open ended as possible without suggestion an answer. Even a question that gets a yes or a no is suggestion that there is possibly a right or wrong answer.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: What do you mean?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Do you want a gentle dog?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Yes or no. There is a presumption that I have in mind a right or wrong answer to that.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: I see. You've dug me into a paradigm already. As opposed to asking, what kind of a temperament would you like?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Got it.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Because maybe it would seem like you are supposed to want a gentle dog.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Or if you were a defiant person, you might feel compelled to say, NO! I don't want a gentle dog. I want an assertive dog.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So as the interviewer, you really have to clear yourself of any expectations or judgments.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. Right. So you have to avoid leading questions. Or even if it's not a leading question and you don't have an interest in the answer. You're just kind of curious. That was our dog shaking off his, whatever. It might come across to the interviewee, that you have a stake in it.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Got it.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Like if I had asked if you wanted a gentle Great Dane, you might have thought, that I thought you should want a gentle Great Dane.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Got it. The first guideline was don't ask leading questions.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. Or another way of putting that, in a positive way, is be as open as possible, even when you have to put up with silence from the interviewee for a moment.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Which is probably the hardest thing, right?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: That's the hardest thing because the person is silent and you want to fill in the gap because you're afraid you're going to lose them. That's not true, they're just thinking.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Edward R. Murrow was famous for his question at the end of any interview he did, no matter what the interview was. He would say, and?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Interesting.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: He could have been on an interview for hours and no matter when it was, he was at the end, he would say that and he would just wait and then they would say something really important. It's so interesting. So, the idea is to be as open ended as possible, rather than leading. The other two basic rules are probing and clarifying, so you want to probe. There's two parts to probing. You want to probe for breadth. Tell me every single thing about a Great Dane.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: You know, it has to do with size. It has to do with temperament. It has to do with color. It has to do with health issues. You're going to get all the breadth about Great Danes and then you want to get depth on each one of those. Tell me about the size. What did you have in mind specifically? I mean, like some people want an oversized Great Dane. They don't want just a hundred and ten pound female, they want a hundred and fifty pound female. Now, there's congestive heart failure possibilities with that but I'm not going to say that. I need to hear what this person wants.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That's a really easy structure to remember, to first...

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Probe for breadth.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: For breadth first, to go wide and then go deep.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Go wide and go deep. Sometimes the person naturally goes deep on a particular aspect.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: But then you have to remember to come back up and go for breadth again.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So I think that what's really paramount in all of this is that you maintain a natural human connection with people.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So, even though we are trying to come up with a couple of rules.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That this is an area that you can break all of the rules if you have to.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. You can move around.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: You can bend. Yeah.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. Then the other thing is clarifying. You were saying it, you did a good job of saying it before. When you said nice. Well what does nice mean?

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: It could mean a whole bunch of things.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mhmm.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Nice could be, oh, this dog has the smoothest coat. When you touch his ear's they feel like velvet. That is so nice. Nice, it's comforting.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Wait, this can be whole other conversation, but when you are really probing in depth. What you are thinking about is; what are the features that create the desired feeling and then what are those feelings themselves?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: So you can really get dimension from the mood and the tone of the communication.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right, but even before we're probing for emotional end benefit. Although, we were going there naturally, but to know what "nice" means. When anybody says; good, better, nice, convenient, those mean different things to different people.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Beautiful. Picture a beautiful woman, of course you're going to picture me, but if we were, because you are a very kind husband. But I have done this in a room full of, you know, like twenty people and I say; standing outside the door is a beautiful woman. Everybody take a snapshot in your mind right now, you go around the room, and you get redheads, blondes, and brunettes. You get skinny people. You get voluptuous people.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Oh, I see. That's what tells you that...

Dr. Sharon Livingston: It means different things. So, just because someone said, you know, there's a beautiful woman standing outside the door and I have in my mind what that means. Doesn't mean I got what the consumer wanted.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Mmhmm. When I am doing qualitative interviews, which is really not my forte, because I've kind of gone to the quantitative side. But when I'm doing it, one of the things that I have in the back of my mind is; how am I going to feed the agency?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: How am I going to feed the advertising agency?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: If someone says, well it feels nice, later on I go back, and I report back to the advertising agency. Okay, I want you to create a dog food picture that makes people feel nice.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: They are going to say, WHAT?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: You're kidding me.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: What can I do with it?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: And when you know you are getting at what you need is when there's like a vivid picture that is being painted for you. So if you had to put together an advertisement, you'd know exactly what to do.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Exactly.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: If you don't have that vivid picture in your head yet, then you're not done with the interview.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Right. So you want to think of all the senses. You want to have a full experience from that person's point of view. You need all the qualifiers. Maybe that is why it's called qualitative research, because you kind of qualify exactly what the person is looking for.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Interesting.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: So not just the visual picture, but an auditory story. You want to get the scents, the feel, the texture, the dimensions, the smells, the tastes. You know, if you ask somebody about apple pie, they'll tell you it tastes good. Well, what is it about the taste? Is it the sweetness? How much sweetness? Is it the tartness? What's the balance between sweet and tart? Is the amount of apple flavor? So to dimensionalize all of that is to really understand how to make that person an apple pie.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Yep.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Otherwise, it tastes good, leaves me cold.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That's really cool. So the four rules are to probe and clarify, to avoid asking leading questions. What's the last one?

Dr. Sharon Livingston: To probe for breadth and probe for depth.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Probe for breadth and depth. I got it.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Clarify ambivalent answers or generalized words. Go from the general to the specific. Feed the agency. Feed your sales letter and avoid leading questions.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: That's about the biggest mistake you see people making are the leading questions.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Yeah, well, you know, all of them. They make all those mistakes equally.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Okay.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Probably the ones that have the most disastrous effect are leading them to where you want them to be because so many marketers are like; Oh my God, I've got this brainstorm. I've the coolest idea in the whole world. Everyone's going to love it! It turns out, it's just not true.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Right.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: That's disastrous. So to ask a leading question, where people aren't going to really tell you the truth, that's probably the worst mistake. You're right.

Dr. Glenn Livingston: Gotcha. Well thank you sweetheart. That was very interesting.

Dr. Sharon Livingston: Thank you.

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