

April 1989

**TO: Executive Addressed**

**FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman**

**RE: How Reporters Probe for Information**

Believe it or not, there are a limited number of ways reporters can expand on their questions and your answers to get at information they think you have. These probe questions are easily recognized and you should expect them.

They ask for clarification:

- "Exactly what do you mean?"
- "Say it again, please."
- "What else?"
- "What do you mean by that word?"

They ask for justification:

- "When you say that, what are you assuming?"
- "What's your reasoning on that?"
- "Is that all there's to it?"
- "What would someone on the other side say?"

They may refocus the question:

- "If that's so, what about . . .?"
- "How would you relate that to this . . .?"
- "How does (someone's) statement relate to . . .?"
- "Let's take a closer look at that."

They may prompt you:

- "If you say that, then you mean this. Right?"
- "Here's one answer to that . . ."

In a panel, they may redirect the question:

- "Sam, do you agree?"
- "Ms. X, how would you answer that statement?"

Some interviewers may probe until you say what they appear to want you to say. It's easy to forget that these probing techniques have two positive goals:

1. They make sure everyone understands what you said.
2. They give you a chance to elaborate beyond your first response.

Unfortunately, I don't know the source of this information. It's rattled around in my files for many years. If anyone reading this knows the source of these probe questions, I'd appreciate knowing it so that I can properly attribute the author for this valuable information.

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