

Investigators' Dirty Tricks



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No Trace Project

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This article will show you the tricks that federal, state and local investigators use to encourage you to give up your right to remain silent¹. It is intended to prepare you for their underhanded ways while stressing the importance of not talking or trying to deceive them.

Do not communicate with any agents. To begin with, it is a federal crime to make a false statement to an FBI agent or other federal investigator. By talking, you may be digging your own grave as a violation could be charged on the basis of two inconsistent statements spoken out of fear or forgetfulness.

It is also very dangerous to try and outsmart them. They are trained on how to extract information out of people, and in tripping people up who are lying to them. They have learned how to get people to talk by making them feel scared, guilty or impolite. They exploit our trust, honesty and sensitive nature to get information and further harass us. They would prefer you lied to them than not talk, so stay strong and stay silent!

Below, is a list of the arsenal of dirty tricks investigators use against activists to get them to talk:

- “Your friends have told us everything; why don't you just come clean.” They will act as if your friends have already snitched on you, making you want to snitch on them in return. It's generally a lie—besides, even if that did happen, how does it benefit you to be a witness against yourself?
- “If you don't talk now, we will come back with a subpoena.” Most of the time this is an empty threat. They approach you without a subpoena because they don't have enough evidence against you to justify getting a subpoena from the courts. If you talk, they might get that needed evidence, so it's best to stay quiet. Make them get a subpoena. At least ninety percent of the time, they simply won't do it. But if they do, there are legal and political ways to challenge the subpoena.
- “If you talk, we will go easy on you.” Agents will promise you the world to get you to talk. However, when they have people sign statements of guilt, notice they never sign anything saying they will stay true to their promises. They lie. Don't believe their promises.

¹*No Trace Project note:* This text is written in the context of the United States.

- “We know everything you've done and have all the evidence we need to convict you.” If this was the case, they would go ahead and charge you with a crime and convict you. Most of the time it's a lie, but sometimes they will show or tell you the “evidence” they have against you. This “evidence” will often have been obtained illegally—meaning it cannot be used in court—or be lies like “we found your prints on the glass” that they hope are correct enough to scare you. They show and tell you about this “evidence” in the hopes that you will break down and confess everything. Because—although their lies and illegally obtained “evidence” cannot be used in court—your confession can. And they will use that as the main evidence to convict you. The moral of the story is say nothing.
- “You seem to be an intelligent kid with a promising future. You don't want to destroy your life over this, do you?” They act as if they are really concerned about your welfare and are just trying to help. But, for some reason, they can't help you unless you help them by talking. The truth is, they don't care. This is just another way to manipulate you to talk.
- “These extremists hurt your movement. They alienate people and make them angry. Help your cause by telling us who they are.” These “extremists” are winning so many victories that the repressive, status-quo loving government can't handle it and have sent their agents in to crush the “extremists”—be they illegal or legal. They are trying to use your own desire to help the cause against your fellow comrades. This line rarely works among grassroots militants who know how effective we are, but it is another trick we should be aware of.
- “I support your goals, just not your (friends') tactics” or “my daughter's a left-winger.” Again, they will try to act as if they support your cause, but that they have to uphold the law—and can't you help a fellow traveler? If they really supported us, they wouldn't harass those activists who work legally to change the system. Turning in fellow warriors helps no one.
- “If you are not guilty, then why don't you talk?” This is one of their most used tactics. We all have the desire to defend ourselves, especially when we know we are innocent. However, they will attack and

dissect everything you say, continually prying to get more and more information—and if you stop answering their questions because they get out of line, they will say, “A ha! So now you don't want to talk? It seems we have found the flaw in your story!” and again try to make you feel guilty and rekindle your desire to vindicate yourself. But even if you are innocent, don't talk! An activist's innocence has never stopped the authorities from convicting or jailing them. Furthermore, the more you talk, the more likely you are to mention other people's names, leading the police to more people who they can harass and question.

- “Your supposed friends are laughing at you. They manipulated you into doing these things and now you're taking the fall for it while they get off scott free. They used you and now they are laughing at you.” Investigators will try to pit you against the real or imagined “others” who they think you conspired with. They will say your alleged “co-conspirators” used you, manipulated you, and deserted you. And then they will ask you why you are willing to protect such worthless people who have been so abusive to you and don't care that you were caught and face years of prison. They are trying to create doubts in your mind about the other members of your affinity group while giving you reasons to justify informing on them. Again, this is pure manipulation, so don't talk. However, it is good to make sure your affinity group is made up of people who you fully trust and respect, so that you could never believe such lies by the authorities.
- Repeatedly asking the same question. Agents will ask the same question in different ways numerous times. This is how they can usually trip up those people who are trying to outsmart them. It also helps them weed out more information from those who are telling the truth, but being stingy with their answers. And sometimes it just simply wears down those people who are not telling the truth, so that finally they come clean. Don't ever think that investigators are going to just ask you a few questions and let you go. The more you give, the more they take, and once you start talking they will do whatever it takes to keep you talking.
- Good cop/bad cop. This is their oldest trick in the book. It allows one officer to use all of the above listed plays that are negative (like

threats), while the other one uses the positive scams (like promises). It allows them to use their full arsenal on you. Sometimes the Bad Cop acts so angry and unstable that you fear they will use physical violence against you. The Good Cop then ushers the Bad Cop out of the room to “cool off.” Then the Good Cop warms up to you, and promises you a light sentence if you talk, however if you don't talk, the Good Cop fears that the Bad Cop will come back and make good on her/his threats of violence—so just admit your guilt so you can avoid that. Again these are usually empty threats, but just be prepared for the Good Cop/Bad Cop ruse.

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No Trace Project / No trace, no case. A collection of tools to help anarchists and other rebels **understand** the capabilities of their enemies, **undermine** surveillance efforts, and ultimately **act** without getting caught.

Depending on your context, possession of certain documents may be criminalized or attract unwanted attention—be careful about what zines you print and where you store them.