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# Introductory Speech and Behavior of Telephone Interviewers

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PAPOR

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# Three Studies

- ❑ Practitioners' Study: responsible for hiring and training interviewers
  - ❑ Listeners' Study: exposing respondents to excerpts from survey introductions
  - ❑ Tailoring Study: coding survey introduction transcripts
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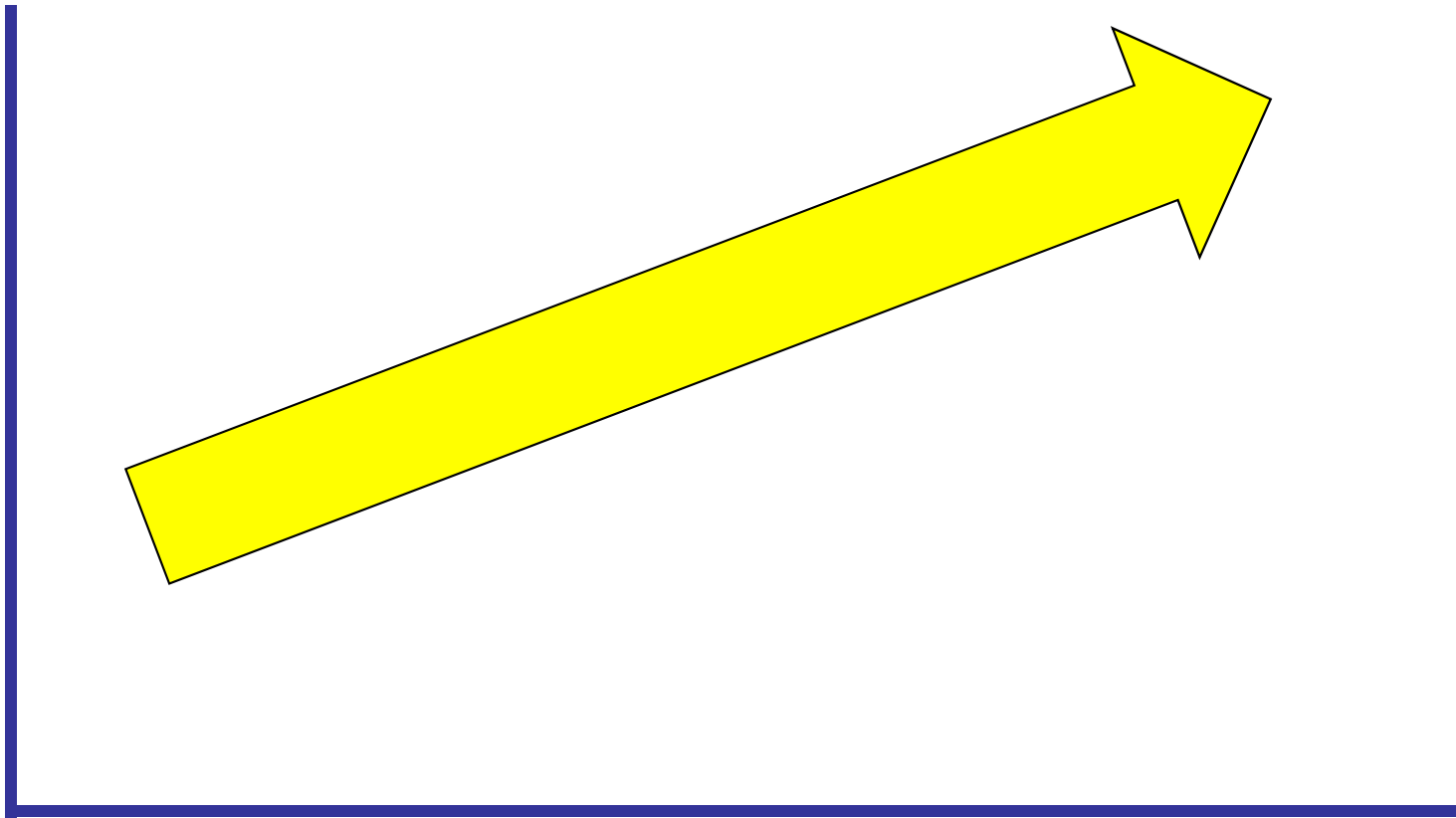
# Chapter 1: First Impressions of Telephone Interviewers

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# The Premise

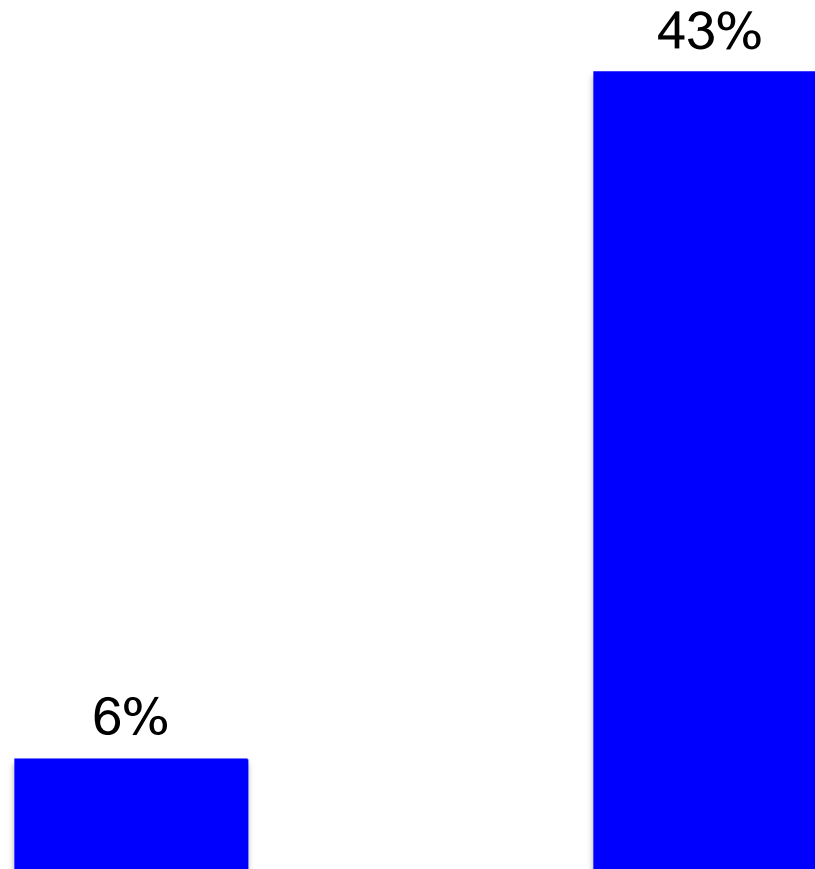
Nonresponse:



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# The Premise

Interviewer Response Rates (Oksenberg and Cannell 1988)



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# The Premise

□ Voice matters



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# My Questions

- ❑ What is behind these effects?
  - ❑ How does voice impact perception?
  - ❑ How does perception affect participation?
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# Person Perception

Competence

Warmth



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# Hypotheses

- ❑ Initial impressions of telephone interviewers as warm and competent matter to outcome of contact
  - ❑ Research practitioners' thoughts about the importance of first impressions will align with which characteristic(s) can predict outcome.
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# Methods: Practitioners' Study

- ❑ Small online survey among 44 individuals responsible for hiring/ training phone interviewers
    - Academic, government, and for-profit organizations
  
  - ❑ Areas of questioning:
    - Contributors to an interviewer's success
    - Emphases in interviewer training
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# Methods: Listeners' Study

- ❑ 1380 survey introductions: recorded, transcribed, coded, acoustically measured
    - Systematically selected from 5 actual UM surveys
    - Have outcome
  - ❑ Selection criteria:
    - Agree/refuse
    - Female interviewers
    - Can't ask for R by name or indicate interview started
    - At least "My name is \_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from \_\_\_\_"
    - At least 3 turns
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# Methods: Listeners' Study

- ❑ 283 excerpts
  - ❑ First interviewer speaking turn— ranged from 2-49 seconds, mean 10 seconds.
  - ❑ Examples



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# Methods: Listeners' Study

- ❑ Web Survey– 3,403 raters, 5 contacts each

- Competent
- Confident
- Knowledgeable
- Professional

Competence

- Natural-sounding
- Friendly
- Enthusiastic
- Pleasant to listen to
- Genuine

Warmth

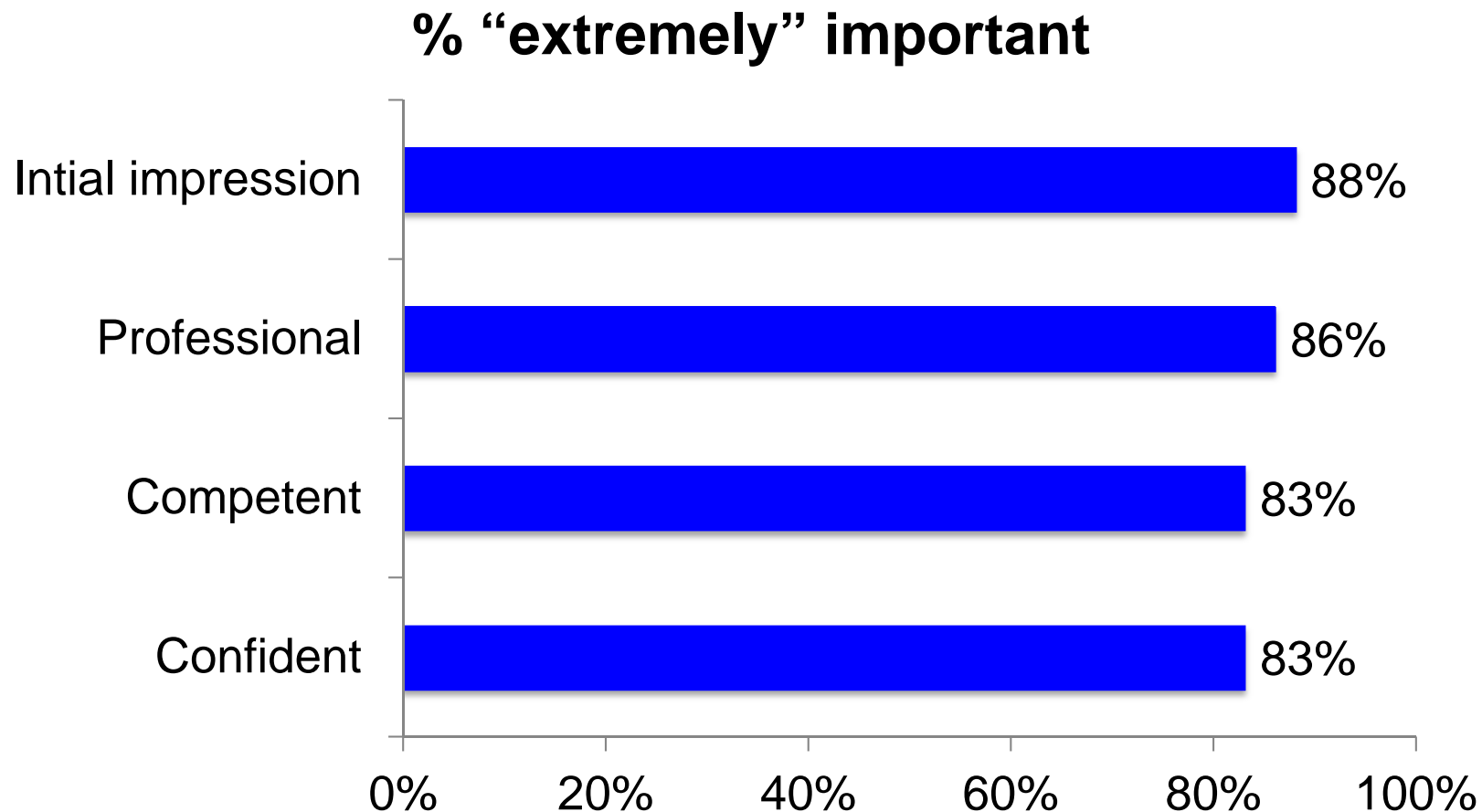
- Scripted
- Irritating
- Uncertain

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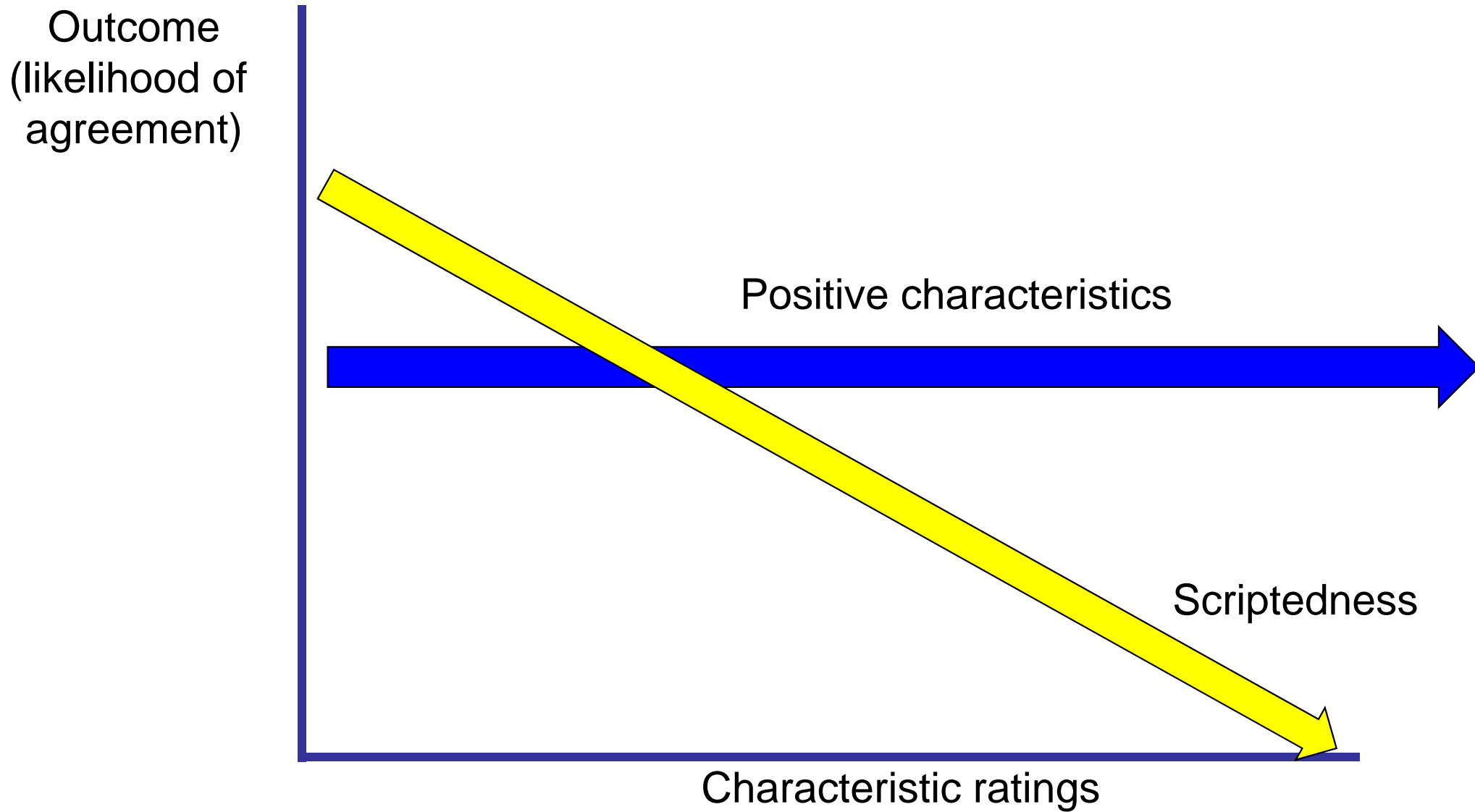
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# Results: Practitioners' Study

18 skills/ traits: Importance to an interviewer's success



# Results: Listeners' Study





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# Results: Listeners' Study

## Mean Scriptedness Rating

Agrees

3.72

Refusals

3.82



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# Results: Listeners' Study

Predicting agreement:

Scriptedness

Positive characteristics factor score

Length of exposure (2 -- 49 seconds)

Interviewer's experience

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# Comparison to Practitioners' Survey

- 18 skills/ traits: importance to an interviewer's success

Initial impression an interviewer gives to answerers:

#1  
88% extremely important

Interviewer's ability to ad lib or deviate from a script during an introduction:

#15  
29% extremely important

# Comparison to Practitioners' Survey

- 13 items: primary focus, secondary focus, not a focus in interviewer training

#1: Administering interviews (98%)

#3: Standardized interviewing skills (90%)

#6: Following introductory scripts (78%)



#13: Developing a personalized or non-scripted introduction (15%)

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# Conclusions

- ❑ In initial exposure, ratings of most interviewer traits are NOT predictive of ultimate contact outcome.
  - ❑ Scriptedness is an exception, but awareness/ emphasis on this among practitioners is lacking.
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# Chapter 2: Interviewer Responsiveness

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# Three Studies

- ❑ Practitioners' Study: responsible for hiring and training interviewers
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# Background

- Tailoring: critical to interviewer success

- Most research in f2f setting

- Tailoring on the phone:

- Responding to concerns

- Responding to conversation starters by answerers

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## Methods: Tailoring Study

- ❑ 626 contacts
  - ❑ Agree, refuse, scheduled callback
  - ❑ Entire contact (from “hello” to hang-up or first question of interview) coded
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# Coding: Tailoring Study

## Answerers

- Concern
- Conversation starter

## Interviewers

- Address concern
  - Respond to conversation starter
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# Examples

❑ Concern addressed:

Answerer: There's a lot of questions that we probably couldn't even answer.

Interviewer: Well, it's not a test or anything.

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## Examples

### ❑ Concern not addressed:

Answerer: There's only two of us and my husband's in the shower and I'm in the middle of making dinner.

Interviewer: Well, this is a very important study.

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## Results: Prevalence of Concerns



Agrees: **55%** contain concerns



Refusals: **89%** contain concerns



Scheduled call backs:  
**99%** contain concerns

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## Examples

### ❑ Conversation starter addressed:

Answerer: Just so you know, the next time Nebraska plays Michigan {laugh} we're going to root for Nebraska even though you're giving us fifty bucks.

Interviewer: That's all right. I'll root for Nebraska if you do the interview. How's that?

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## Examples

❑ Conversation starter not addressed:

Answerer: The economy? I don't like it and that's the end of it.

Interviewer: Oh. Well.

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## Results: Prevalence of Conversation Starters



Agrees: **73%** contain conversation starters



Refusals: **40%** contain conversation starters



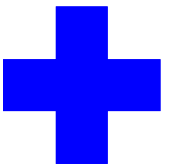
Scheduled call backs:  
**53%** contain conversation starters

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# Responsiveness Scoring

- ❑ Concerns addressed immediately (1)
- ❑ Concerns addressed later (1/2)
- ❑ Concerns never addressed (--1)
- ❑ Conversation starters addressed immediately (1)
- ❑ Conversation starters addressed later (1/2)
- ❑ Conversation starters never addressed (--1)



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❑ Total concerns + total conversation starters

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## Results: Mean Responsiveness Scores



Agree: **.63**



Refusals: **--.32**



Scheduled call backs: **.80**

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# Conclusion

- ❑ Responsiveness, especially to concerns, is critical.
  - Might not lead to agreement, but can fend off refusal



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# Recommendations for Practice

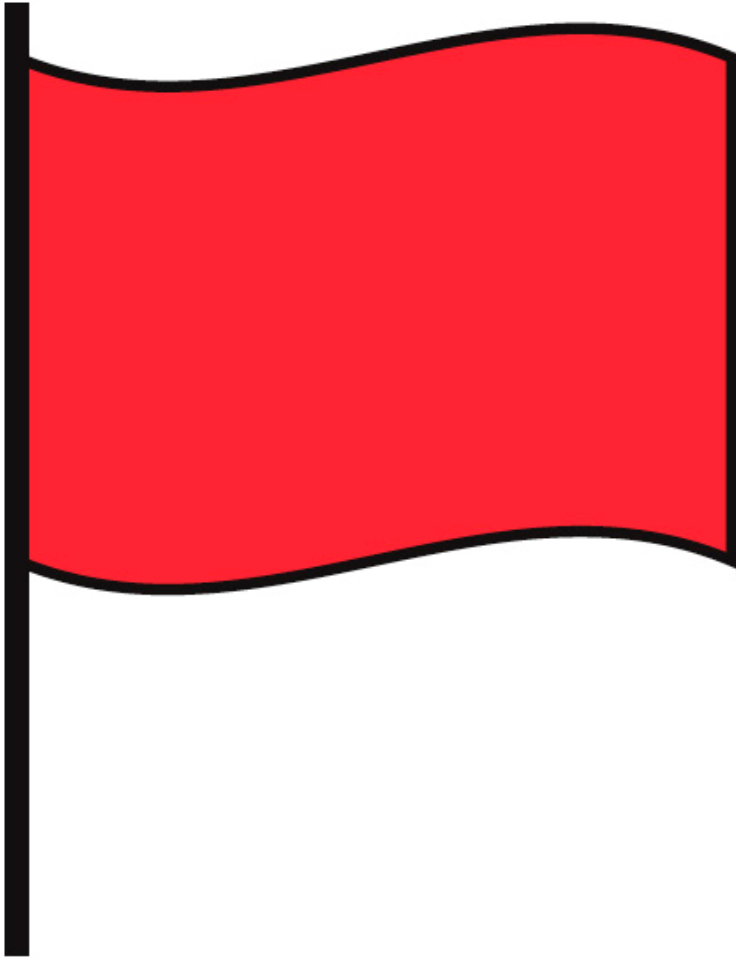


Interviewer training: focus on responsiveness

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# Recommendations for Practice



Awareness and responses to red flags and green lights

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# Recommendations for Practice



Interviewers need to wear two hats: introduction and interview

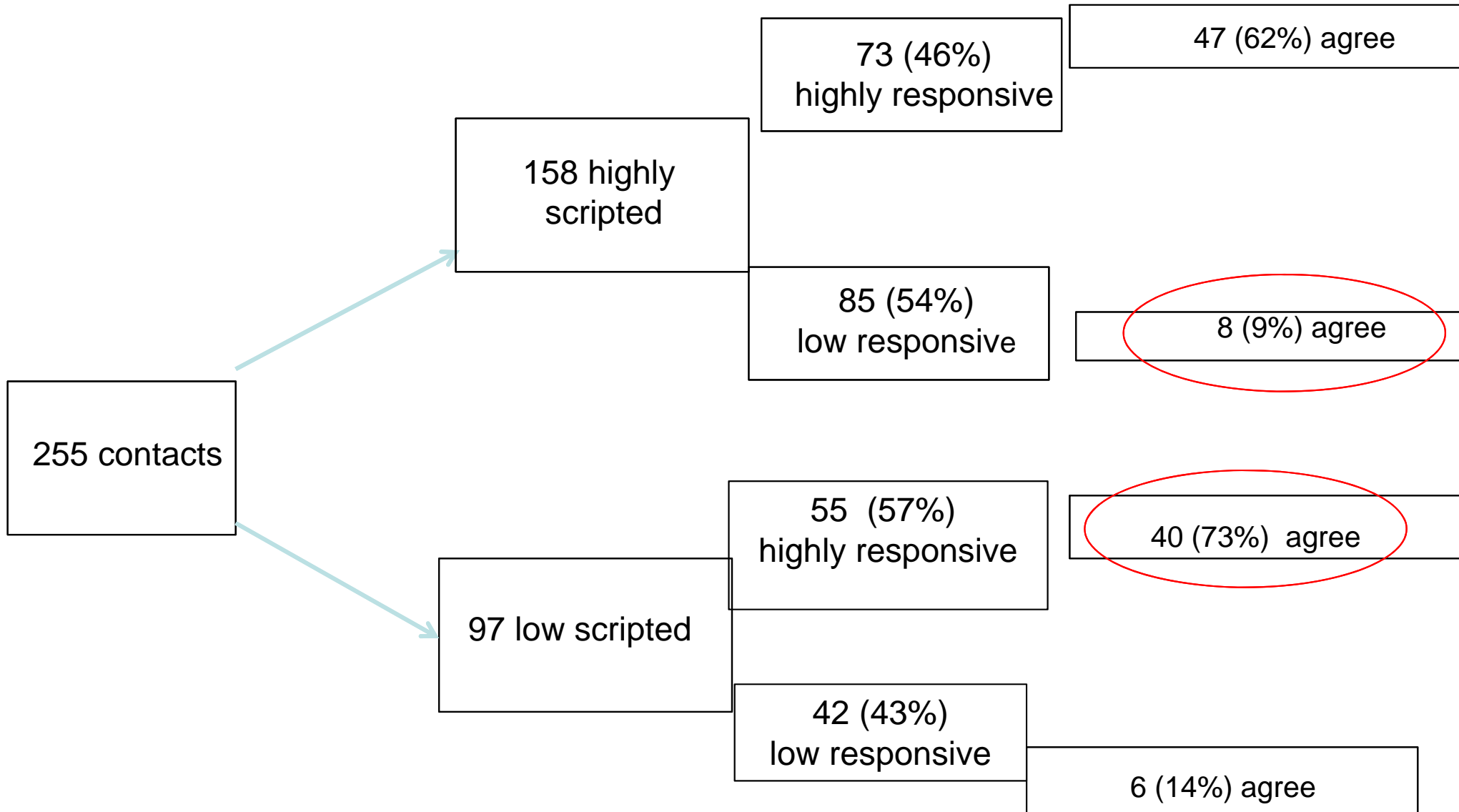
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# Thank you!

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# Demonstrating the Urgency of Responsiveness





# Most Common Concern by Outcome

“It’s a bad time.”

**Scheduled callbacks: 73%**

Refusals: 28%

Agrees: 5%

“How long does it take?”

**Agrees: 25%**

Scheduled callbacks: 19%

Refusals: 5%

“I’m not interested.”

**Refusals: 55%**

Scheduled callbacks: 9%

Agrees: 2%