

Red Flags: Information Theft



While we all want to be helpful, in many situations it is important to also be wary. Any of the following situations should raise a “red flag” that someone ***could be*** seeking information for illicit purposes:



Offer of goods or service — for example, “I’m here to verify that your software licenses are up to date,” or, “I can help you organize and clean up the files on your computer,” or, “My company is offering free duplication services for one month to entice you to switch to our service. I just need to know your manager’s name and the department charge number.”



Emotional appeal — for example, “This will be good for RIT....” or, “This will help lots of students who are in need,” or, “Your cooperation in supporting our effort will be recognized in public,” or, “This information can be used to help save lives... jobs...”



Authority — for example, “I am a research associate of Dr. Jones...” or, “I am a representative of a corporation or national association,” or, “I’m calling from the Chancellor’s Office for information on...” or, “I am a reporter...”

If they give you a business card, hang on to it. You might need it for verification.



Flattery — for example, “Dr. Jones said you are very knowledgeable and thorough and would provide the information I need,” or, “I understand you’ve become a real expert in this field and you might be able to help me out with...”



Temptation — for example, “My company is very impressed with your research. We’ve followed your excellent progress for some time. It could be very valuable to us and we could sponsor you to do further work to the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Can you send the latest details on your research so that we can complete our evaluation?”



Distraction— for example, it is the end of a day, work week, or quarter, when everyone is busiest or most rushed, and the person makes an unusual request for information, “I need financial records for...” or, “I need academic records from fall quarter for...”



Urgency — for example, “I need to publish that information in the conference program and we’re printing it in an hour!” or, a call comes in over lunch hour and they say, “Hi. I’ve been working with Dr. Jones. I know he’s out to lunch now, but it’s urgent that I do this for him now. Can you please give me the password to his computer?”



Threatening behavior — for example, “This is the third time I’ve asked for those records and now I’m not going to ask again!” or, “This is your last warning. I need those records now.”

Tactful Responses to Suspicious Inquiries



“A request for that information may be made in the form of a written letter on college (company) letterhead.”

Or, “I’m sorry. I can’t help you right now. Let me take your name and number and I’ll get back to you shortly.”



“I too am working in that area of research. Can you send me copies of your work and I’ll send you copies of mine?”

Or, “Can you tell me more about why you need this information?”



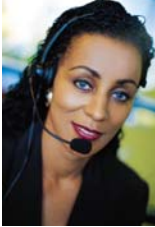
“You said Dr. Jones referred you to me. When was that?”

Or, “If you provide references, I will get back to you as soon as I have verified the authenticity of this request.”



"I am sure you can understand the importance of not giving out information to people I do not know. I hope you don't mind if I verify your conversation with Dr. Jones first."

Or, "I'll have Dr. Jones call you directly with that information."



"This type of information is not shared over the phone (or Internet) without the approval of..."

Or, "I am sure you can understand the importance of not giving out information to people I do not know. Let me refer this call to Dr. Jones."

After a Suspicious Inquiry



Speak to your manager or the person who supposedly referred this person to you. Be forthright and relay exactly what happened (and any feelings you had about the suspicious inquiry).

- "A person called and said they knew you, but I didn't give them any information."
- "Our conversation ended when I asked that the request be in writing on letterhead."
- "When I checked his references, they had no knowledge of him."
- "I felt uneasy about her need to have the information immediately. Then she accused me of being uncooperative."



Try to avoid judgments or inferences such as, "She seemed like a sneak," or, "He was trying to con me," or, "She was a liar."

Remember, you may not have been the ultimate target. You may be giving your manager or the other person enough information to save ***them*** from being taken in.

Contributor	Company	E-Mail	Phone
Ginny Hronek	Dynamix Training & Consulting, LLC	learn@dynamixtraining.com www.dynamixtraining.com	585-241-3020 voice
John Sforza	ISRisk jsforza@isrisk.net http://www.isrisk.net	jsforza@isrisk.net http://www.isrisk.net	585-230-3516 voice 720-294-6533 fax
Jim Moore	Rochester Institute of Technology	Information Security Office jhmfa@rit.edu	585-475-5406 voice
Rita Cronise	Cronise Communications and Curriculum Design	RMCronise@aol.com	585-924-7936 voice