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Problems Developing the Admission: Part 2

Some of you may have noticed the title of the column in the last March-April edition and wondered, what the heck does “devolving the admission” mean? Is this some new interview term being introduced that I should be aware of?

No, this was operator error and since spell-check missed it, it must be a word. In fact, it means *to pass on, such as a right*, which clearly has nothing to do with developing an admission. We had hoped to blame the editor and his blind faith in us, but no, a simple check revealed it to be our error; so let’s talk about developing, not devolving, the admission.

Establishing Rapport

Development of the admission is one area of the interview whose success strongly depends on what was said and done earlier in the conversation. What seems like a problem in development is often only a symptom of the real problem occurring much earlier in the interview.

For example, the interviewer’s failure to establish rapport can have a significant effect on the number of admissions the subject is willing to make in the development phase of the interview. Rapport is strongly related to trust of another through common experiences, but the development of trust or the lack thereof can be self-limiting depending on the actions of another.

Most of us have been in the position of being ready to make a purchase, but for one reason or another we do not like or don’t have confidence in our salesperson. We are predisposed to buy, but the salesperson makes us uneasy, as though he does not have our best interests at heart. Would you walk away and not buy? I know we have walked away, or bought less than we would have otherwise, because we just were not comfortable.

Rapport is a funny thing. We know when rapport is there and when it is not, but not always *why* it happens or why it happens so strongly. Some have suggested rapport can be achieved by mirroring another’s behavior, like sitting or talking in the same way. Instead, mirroring is a naturally occurring phenomenon that is the result of rapport.

We can all relate to instances where someone expressed an interest in us, but there was the lingering sense the person was trying too hard or was insincere. There was the tingle that something was not right and to be careful. A subject can feel the same way and not be as open because he does not trust.

Lessons from Another Era

With all the interest in interrogation of prisoners and developing an admission, we thought it might be appropriate to hear from an interrogation expert from the Second World War.

Major Sherwood F. Moran was an interrogator in the United States Marines during World War II and was legendary for obtaining admissions from Japanese prisoners of war. In a letter dated 1943, he addressed his success and from that we paraphrase. Major Moran writes:

What I have to say concretely is divided into two sections:
 (1) *The attitude of the interpreter towards his prisoner;*
 (2) *His knowledge and use of the language...*

After all, the first and most important victory for the interviewer to try to achieve is to get into the mind and into the heart of the person being interviewed. The fundamental thing would be to get an intellectual and spiritual en rapport with the prisoner.

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But in relation to all the above, this is where “character” comes in, that I mentioned on the preceding page. One must be absolutely sincere. I mean that one must not just assume the above attitudes in order to gain the prisoner’s confidence and get him to talk. He will know the difference. You must get him to know by the expression on your face, the glance of your eye, the tone of your voice, that you do think that “the men of the four seas are brothers,” to quote a Japanese (and Chinese) proverb...

I can simply tell you what my attitude is; I often tell a prisoner right at the start what my attitude is! I consider a prisoner (i.e. a man who has been captured and disarmed and in a perfectly safe place) as out of the war, out of the picture,

and thus, in a way, not an enemy. Notice that in the first part of this paragraph I used the word "safe." That is the point; get the prisoner to a safe place, where even he knows there is no hope of escape, that it is all over. Then forget, as it were, the "enemy" stuff, and the "prisoner" stuff. I tell them to forget it, telling them I am talking as a human being to a human being....

I consider that the Japanese soldier is a person to be pitied rather than hated. I consider (and I often tell them so) that they have been led around by the nose by their leaders; that they do not know, and have not been allowed to know for over 10 years what has really been going on in the world, etc. etc. The proverb "Ido no naka no kawazu taikai o shirazu" (The frog in the bottom of the well is not acquainted with the ocean) is sometimes a telling phrase to emphasize your point. But one must be careful not to antagonize them by such statements, by giving them the idea that you have a "superiority" stand-point, etc. etc.

In regard to all the above, a person who has lived in Japan for a number of years has a big advantage. One can tell the prisoner how pleasant his life in Japan was; how many fine Japanese he knew, even mentioning names and places, students and their schools, how he had Japanese in his home, and vice versa, etc. etc. That alone will make a Japanese homesick. This line has infinite possibilities. If you know anything about Japanese history, art, politics, athletics, famous places, department stores, eating places, etc. etc. a conversation may be relatively interminable.

Right here all this goes to prove that being an "interpreter" is not simply being a Cook's tourist type of interpreter. He should be a man of culture, insight, resourcefulness, and with real conversational ability....He must be alive; he must be warm; he must be vivid. But above all he must have integrity, sympathy; yet he must be firm, wise...Two characteristics I have not specifically mentioned: patience and tact.

Now in regard to the second point I have mentioned, the knowledge and the use of the language. Notice that I say "knowledge" and "use." They are different. A man may have a perfect knowledge, as a linguist, of a language, and yet not be skillful and resourceful in its use. Questioning people, even in one's own language, is an art in itself, just as is selling goods. In fact, the good interpreter must, in essence, be a salesman, and a good one.

Now in regard to the use of the language. Often it is not advisable to get right down to business with the prisoner at the start....Begin by asking him things about himself. Make him and his troubles the center of the stage, not you and your questions of war problems....You can go on to say, musingly, "This war is a mess, isn't it! It's too bad we had to go to war, isn't it! Aren't people funny, scrapping the way they do! The world seems like a pack of dogs scrapping at each other." And so on. Notice there is yet no word of condemnation or praise towards his or his country's attitude, simply a broad human approach....But when I say it is well not to be too systematic, I mean in the outward approach and presentation from a

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conversational standpoint. But in the workings of your mind you must be a model of system. You must know exactly what information you want, and come back to it repeatedly. Don't let your warm human interest, your genuine interest in the prisoner, cause you to be side tracked by him! You should be hard-boiled but not half-baked. Deep human sympathy can go with a business-like, systematic and ruthlessly persistent approach.

...some visitor comes to look over the equipment and general layout, as he comes to each individual cell where a prisoner is kept, the prisoner is required to jump up and stand at attention; even if he is asleep, they prod him and make him stand stiffly at attention. Now for my own standpoint, I think all this is not only unnecessary, but that it acts exactly against what we are trying to do. To emphasize that we are enemies, to emphasize that he is in the presence of his conqueror, etc., puts him psychologically in the position of being on the defensive, and that because he is talking to a most-patient enemy and conqueror he has no right and desire to tell anything. That is most certainly the attitude I should take under similar circumstances, even if I had no especially patriotic scruples against giving information.

In the case of a salesman selling goods from door to door; the emphatic "No" of the lady to whom he is trying to sell stockings, aluminum ware, or what-not, should not be the end of the conversation but the beginning....those of us right out at the front have what is sometimes a great advantage: we get absolutely first whack at them, and talk to them when they have not had time to develop a technique of "sales resistance" talk, as it were.

"Why did you lose this battle?" That was the question put to me to interpret (in the broad sense) to a prisoner who had been captured the day after one of the terrific defeats of the Japanese in the earlier days of the fighting on Guadalcanal. Here is the way I put the question: "We all know how brave the Japanese soldier is. All the world knows and has been startled at the remarkable progress of the Japanese armies in the Far East. Their fortitude, their skill, their bravery are famous all over the world. You captured the Philippines; you captured Hong Kong, you ran right through Malaya and captured the so-called impregnable Singapore; you took Java, and many other places. The success of the Imperial armies has been stupendous and remarkable. But you come to Guadalcanal and run into a stone wall, and are not only defeated but practically annihilated. Why is it?" You see that this is a really built-up question. I wish you could see the interest on the prisoner's face as I am dramatically asking such a question as that. It's like telling a story, and at the end he is interested in telling his part of it.

The document can be found on our website, www.w-z.com.

In the next column we will focus on Major Moran's narrative and its application to developing an admission in the business environment. ■

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