



*Shane Sturman CFI®, President of Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates, Inc. (WZ) discusses the differences between Confrontational vs. Non-Confrontational interview and interrogation techniques.*

There are really only two ways to interrogate a suspect, either by being aggressive or using non-confrontational methods. Some interrogators think being aggressive brings admissions that would be obtainable in no other way. Certainly, Jack Bauer, on the TV show 24, would agree since he extracts information in ways that violate the Constitution and the Geneva Convention. Still, it is interesting how the use of aggression is a favorite approach. The military refers to it as the “fear up” technique; police the “good cop/bad cop”, but regardless, it confronts the individual on his primal emotional level, fear.

What is even more interesting, these aggressive methods contradict the most successful techniques used by American and German interrogators during World War II. A common thread between the most successful World War II interrogators was the use of rapport to open lines of communication between the interrogator and his subject. Yet in light of the success of the non-confrontative approach, investigators continually return to a confrontational interview or interrogation style.

The confrontational approach forces the suspect to initially deny his involvement in the incident under investigation. Once the suspect has lied to the interrogator, he is now committed to protect that position with further denials. In essence, the suspect now has to admit not only his crime, but also the fact he has lied to the interrogator. The direct accusation often limits a suspect’s admission to a single issue while limiting the possibility of obtaining additional admissions to other crimes.

The non-confrontational approach provides an interrogator many more opportunities to succeed. If the confrontational approach is successful, one can almost always be certain the suspect would have confessed more quickly and with less of a struggle using the non-confrontational method. The non-confrontational approach encourages the suspect to make a rational, rather than an emotional decision to confess. In addition, the non-confrontational approach may reveal a pattern of criminal behavior, rather than the single incidence the investigation had revealed.

When we examined the structured non-confrontational method of interrogation in property crimes we found that those interrogators conforming to the non-confrontational structure had a confession rate of 73 to 85% depending on the group examined. In addition, the interrogator’s overall admissions were three times higher and with a greater variety of methods used to steal than interrogators using a confrontational or unstructured approach.

It seems clear a non-confrontational method of interrogation is likely to provide an easier path to confession for both the suspect and the interrogator. As the World War II interrogators discovered, a non-confrontational approach to interrogation delivers multiple benefits.

There is another benefit to be considered by those departments recording their interviews and interrogations. The non-confrontational approach often leads directly to an admission of guilt without the suspect ever having said they were not involved in the crime. Viewing a non-confrontational interrogation easily illustrates the voluntariness of the suspect’s admissions and ultimate confession.