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Problems Developing the Admission: Part 3

AUTHORS' NOTE: In the last column we discussed the development of information by a World War II expert interrogator dealing with Japanese prisoners of war. Major Sherwood F. Moran used rapport as a tool to establish trust with prisoners and to make them feel safe.

Uncertainty in a situation makes a person feel unsafe, fostering a lack of trust with the other participants in the conversation. Establishing rapport, at its core, seems to be about trust. When in rapport we believe the other person will not act in a way that harms us and will act in our best interest. There are many things an interviewer can do to damage his rapport with the subject.

If the interviewer is too anxious to obtain an admission, several things occur to make it more difficult to achieve. First, rapport is damaged because the subject senses that if he gives the admission, he is giving an advantage to the interviewer. This loss of trust increases the price or perceived value of the admission in the subject's mind. The end results are denials and limited admissions.

In his book *Negotiate This! By Caring, But Not T-H-A-T Much*, Herb Cohen repeats the title when he says, "I care, but not that much." There has to be the impression the interviewer does not need the admission and can walk away from the encounter. The admission is really for the benefit of the subject, allowing him a chance to express his remorse and explain his actions. If the interviewer expresses too much interest in the subject's admission, suspicion is aroused and the individual's resistance rises as his trust waivers, resulting in a reduced admission.

The interviewer's attitude in general, and toward the subject in particular, can limit the subject's admission. Clearly, people tend to communicate more openly with those they feel comfortable with and trust. Abrupt, nervous, condescending, or insulting attitudes limit the subject's admission or eliminate it entirely. The interviewer is best served exhibiting a caring, knowing approach that is not needy. An approach that verbally and physically says, "I understand the problem, some of the issues and concerns. Let's talk them through, if *you* want."

Some interviewers tell the subject they know everything, so it is alright to talk with them about the issues. This type of statement is designed to convince the subject his guilt is known and reduce his resistance to a confession as a result.

Unfortunately, it can also reduce the development of the admission if the interviewer says something wrong, and the subject recognizes the interviewer is not omniscient. Wrong evidence or the interviewer's acceptance of a lie can create suspicion and lessen rapport. The subject no longer trusts the interviewer's intent, and correspondingly this reduces his cooperation and further admissions.

However, people *are* more likely to admit to actions they believe are already known. If the subject believes these issues are known, his fear is diminished and it is easier to talk about the indiscretions. If the interviewer chooses to use a direct accusation, "Our investigation indicates you did [blank]," he divulges to the subject what is likely known, but more importantly what is not. The subject now has a sense of his exposure and limits his admissions to those things mentioned by the interviewer in his direct accusation, concealing those he believes are undiscovered. In addition, the interviewer has now changed the rapport established moments earlier. Instead of companions, the relationship has become one of opponents—let the games begin.

Admissions can also be concealed from an interviewer who has not established the subject's behavioral norm. The subject struggling to hide information will have to fight with his internal conflict—confess or conceal. This cognitive conflict will often result in observable behavior changes, both physically and verbally, aiding the interviewer in identifying where admissions may be found. Pauses, movements, or the shift of the eyes may help the interviewer locate where the subject is creating, lying, or accurately recalling information. Each of these decisions helps determine the interviewer's pattern of questioning, selection of emotional support, or when to accept or contradict the subject's statements.

One of the primary causes of minimal admissions is not recognizing where a subject is concealing information. If the subject makes a denial to conceal dishonesty, and the denial is not handled correctly by the interviewer, the subject feels safe lying because he believes the information is unknown to the interviewer.

Another common error is for the interviewer to reveal what evidence has been uncovered during the investigation. Since the evidence has been disclosed, the interviewer now has no way to determine when the subject is still lying to him. Also, once the

subject has been told what evidence has been discovered, several things will likely happen. The subject may:

- Be able to determine what else is known and how it was discovered,
- Offer excuses to explain the evidence or minimize its importance,
- Increase his resistance since the evidence was not conclusive or he was able to offer a plausible explanation, and
- Make an admission to what he believes is known, but deny other areas of dishonesty.

The interviewer may also limit the subject's admissions if he fails to ask about other areas of dishonesty. Focusing on what is known and desperately seeking an admission, the interviewer may simply fail to ask about other dishonest activity. This often occurs if the interviewer uses a less than adequate introductory statement style accusation. The second part of the introduction lists methods dishonest employees use to steal from the company. Careful observation by the interviewer often behaviorally identifies other methods of theft used by the subject besides those uncovered in the investigation.

When we compared interviewers who adequately followed the non-confrontational approach, they consistently got larger admissions than those who used it partially or not at all. The non-confrontational introductory statement continues the rapport established, convinces the subject his guilt is known, allows the interviewer to determine other things the subject has done, conceals the evidence, and supports the subject emotionally so it encourages additional admissions. The subject believes he is caught, but must guess what the interviewer knows. The resulting admission is often in an area other than what the interviewer knew, so there will naturally be a larger confession.

Every subject will have unresolved fears the interviewer must address. Loss of employment and reputation, arrest, restitution, or fears for personal safety can often limit an individual's admissions. An interviewer who fails to support the subject's self-image with rationalizations will likely see lower admissions. The

subject's sense of self is powerful and must be carefully handled by the interviewer. If the interviewer simply presents evidence of the subject's guilt to him, you are asking him to make multiple admissions—I did it, I am a terrible person, I used the money for drugs, and I did it over and over again.

By using rationalizations the interviewer minimizes the seriousness of what has happened, offers social proof of others doing similar things, and shifts the subject's thoughts from the consequences to the resolution of the problem. Some interviewers limit the subject's admission by focusing on the consequences or using harsh terminology, such as, *steal, embezzle, fraud, or police*. These statements just increase the individual's fear and uncertainty about the outcome of the encounter.

Another area limiting admissions can be the interviewer's use, or lack of use, of the assumptive question. If the interviewer uses a choice question, "Did you plan this out or do it on the spur of the moment," to obtain the initial admission, he will usually find the subject acknowledging involvement in a single issue. The subject may limit his admissions since he believes this is the only area of dishonesty discovered.

If the interviewer incorrectly uses a soft accusation to obtain the first admission, "When was the very first time you used a void to take money from the company," he has likely told the subject the focus of the investigation—voids. The development may also suffer because the subject did not think he was caught doing voids, instead he believed it was taking money directly out of the terminal. Surprised, the subject now reassesses whether he was really caught and may increase his resistance to making or expanding any admissions.

These and other interviewer statements and strategies directly affect the development of the admission. We focused here on those problems primarily occurring prior to the interviewer attempting to develop the subject's admission, but there are many occurring during development itself. ■

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