

## **Interrogation - A Bad Word, An Even Worse Technique!**

Perhaps the best way to determine how you want to be perceived as an interviewer is to ask yourself this question. What kind of an interviewer would you want to be questioned by and how would you like to be treated? Regardless of the situation, would you prefer an angry, aggressive interrogator using methods that would be ruled inadmissible in most courts? Or a skilled, well spoken interviewer using rapport based systems that fall well within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I firmly believe that the word interrogation and most of the techniques associated with it by definition have no place in the Canadian interview process.

The word “Interrogation” conjures up images of aggressive and oppressive interview techniques where the interrogator uses fear, intimidation and sometimes violence to elicit a confession from a person.

One definition describes interrogation as **“the act or process of questioning somebody closely, often in an aggressive manner, especially as part of an official investigation or trial”**. Another states, **“interrogation may involve a diverse array of techniques, ranging from developing a rapport with the subject to outright torture”**. And the Cambridge Dictionary defines the word interrogate as follows: **“to ask someone a lot of questions for a long time in order to get information, sometimes using threats or violence.”**

From these three definitions the words aggressive, torture, threats and violence were all used. The only word I found that accurately described what we should be using as an interview technique is the word rapport. So if you agree with me that in theory and in law there is no place for aggressive tactics, torture, threats and violence, then why do we all buy into the idea of training in “interrogation techniques”.

Think about the public release of the confession of convicted murderer, rapist and former Colonel in the Canadian Forces, Russell Williams, and more importantly, the discussions in the media about the techniques that were used. This was the first time that the Canadian public saw inside what is known as a “police interrogation room” for such a high profile, horrific case. There were no harsh criticisms of the interview techniques, in fact quite the opposite. The response from the public about the techniques used in the Williams confession should be an epiphany for all of us who are involved in interviews. We do not interrogate suspects, we interview them!

In my discussions with my fellow Canadians; police officers, members of the media, the general public, there was a resounding response of surprise regarding the techniques used by police to gain the confession from Russell Williams. No hot lights, no angry aggressive interrogator, no threats or even a hint of harsh treatment. Even the most experienced crime reporters were generally shocked and pleasantly surprised by what they were seeing.

Detective Sergeant Jim Smith from the Ontario Provincial Police Behavioural Science Unit used rapport, kindness, empathy and mutual respect as some of his techniques to encourage Russell Williams to confess. Techniques that are proven to be far more successful, fall well within the Charter of Rights and are therefore admissible in court.

Working with a powerful team of highly qualified investigators, interviewers, certified criminal profilers, forensic psychiatrists, training and education specialists, we have developed the ISN Investigative Interviewing System to incorporate current criminal and corporate law using practical cognitive interviewing techniques based on a sound theoretical framework.

At ISN, we have taken the experience of a diverse group of subject matter experts to develop an interview technique that is appropriate for interviewers including police officers, corporate investigators, human resource professionals and virtually anybody who conducts interviews.

I read an interesting article in the National Post by Derek ABMA (Feb 4, 2011) titled “Good cop better than bad cop for confessions”. In the article it talks about criminology experts from the University of Montreal who looked at 221 prisoners at a Canadian federal penitentiary examining conditions in which they (prisoners) did or did not confess to their crimes. “In the study, published in the U.S. journal Justice Quarterly, researchers Nadine Deslauriers-Varin and Michel St. Yves concluded that offenders were more likely to co-operate with someone they trusted than someone they feared”.

Formerly as a homicide investigator, and now as a private investigator, I apply the same rapport based cognitive interviewing techniques to gather information, and in many cases, obtain a truthful admission through cooperation from the person responsible for the act in a manner that is both ethical and legal and most importantly, within the policies and guidelines of the corporations who retain us. For an interview process to be successful, it cannot contain any techniques that could be deemed as oppressive, intimidating, or perceived as an interrogation in any way and therefore admissible in any court, inquiry, litigation or arbitration. It is time to create a paradigm shift in our thinking and our approach to the entire interview process.

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Watch Dave Perry analyze the Russell Williams confession at <http://youtu.be/pFKaEdJwZXI>.