

► SUMMARY

The Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation for detectives is similar to the basic negotiation techniques used by crisis negotiators. Reid & Associates offers a three-day course to law enforcement professionals around the country. The course teaches how to develop a theme to get a confession even with little evidence.

► MORE INFORMATION

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THE REID TECHNIQUE OF INTERVIEWING AND INTERROGATION

▲ Big-time body language: arms crossed, upright in the chair, non-cooperative expression—this is a deceptive person in defiance.

Get that confession with the
Reid Technique.

By Ed Sanow

► The Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation® has a success rate, when properly conducted, of between 85 and 90 percent—an astonishing statistic in the field of human behavior.

Think of the Reid Technique for detectives in the same way as the basic negotiation techniques used by crisis negotiators: know when to talk and when to listen;

know what “hooks” to listen for; know what changes to look for, when the changes should occur; know when to be stern, frank, open, honest, insistent, and when to interrupt; know what to ignore and what to cut off; and know when to be caring, empathetic and understanding.

The core of the Reid & Associates training is their three-day basic course. Between Reid-sponsored courses and the ones co-hosted by a law enforcement agency, they conduct about 10 of these three-day training courses a week, all across the country. Advanced courses are also available, as is a certification process. They also offer a variety of books, CDs, DVDs and online newsletters.

Physical Evidence

The Reid Technique specializes in solving cases where there is little or no physical evidence. The focus is on the exact verbal words and the non-verbal behavior of the subject. Those words and behaviors typical of the truthful-innocent person, and those of the deceptive-guilty person, are very different



and surprisingly easy to recognize.

Non-verbal behavior is more reliable than spoken words. Non-verbal behavior is responsible for more than half of the meaning of the communicated message. Non-verbal behavior may support, or contradict, the verbal words. The key is how to evaluate what the detective sees and hears. But most importantly, the Reid Technique teaches how to develop a theme or series of themes to spring the trap even with very little supporting evidence.

In Reid-speak, a theme is a face-saving, rationalized, or good and acceptable excuse (in the mind of the guilty) for why they committed the crime. This is a critical part of the Reid Technique. After a carefully structured preparation, the suspect is going to be given the choice between a really good reason and a much worse, less-acceptable reason for having committed the crime. Accepting either is an admission of guilt. And properly timed, it works.

Investigative Interview

The Reid Technique picks up where the routine criminal investigation leaves off. This course does not deal with the basics investigation. It assumes all of the facts and physical evidence have been gathered. Instead, the Reid Technique is about interviewing and then interrogating, which are two separate and very different phases.

Even the interviewing phase of the Reid Technique picks up after all the standard clerical, non-threatening, background questions are asked. This phase begins with all the who, what, when, where, why and how questions, all of which may have been asked of the suspect before by another officer.

During this phase, the Reid Technique teaches the detective to pay attention to comments volunteered, or answers to questions, that can be later used to develop the theme—that good, face-saving excuse for why the suspect did the deed. Theft of money? Listen for problems paying bills—even if you are pretty sure this is not the reason for the theft. Sexual assault? Listen for comments about provocative actions or clothes.

This phase moves to one of the Reid Technique trademarks... behavior-provoking questions. These are a series of 17 primary questions where the responses (both verbal and non-verbal) of a truthful person are clearly different from those of a deceitful person. Of the 17 innocent sounding, thought-provoking questions, only half of them will need to be asked for the detective to have confidence about innocence or guilt.

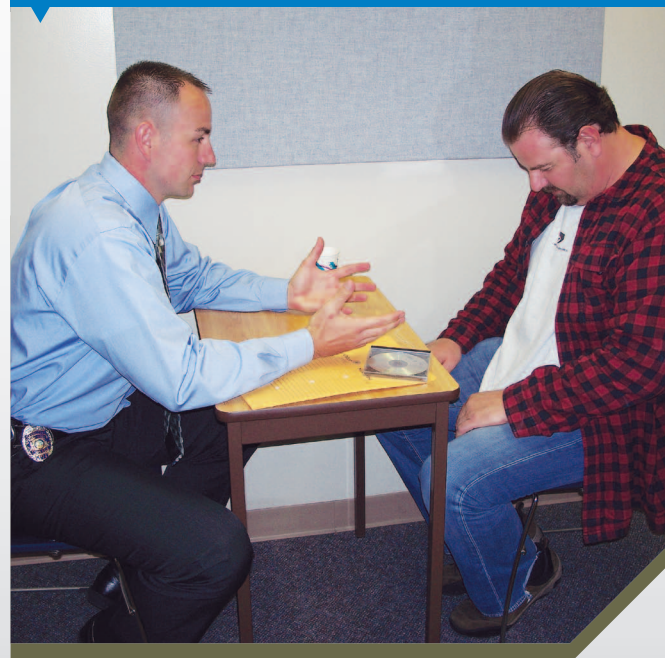
These are the kind of questions designed to elicit some kind of a response. The detective must carefully watch the suspect before, during and just after the answer to note that response. The detective is looking for attitude, body posture, eye contact, tension-relieving gestures, facial expressions, as well as listening for the precise verbal content.

With attitude, both truthful and deceptive persons can be nervous, fearful and angry. The timing of their anger, and if it is constant, spikes or diminishes, are all factors indicating guilt or innocence. Facial expressions, of course, reflect the person's attitude. Look for sincere expressions as opposed to the phony, fake, rehearsed ones.



Forward or upright in the chair, head up, eyes looking at investigator, open arms—he is listening, and the investigator needs to keep him listening.

With the head down, shoulders slumped, looking at the floor, yielding, the deceptive person now totally defeated.

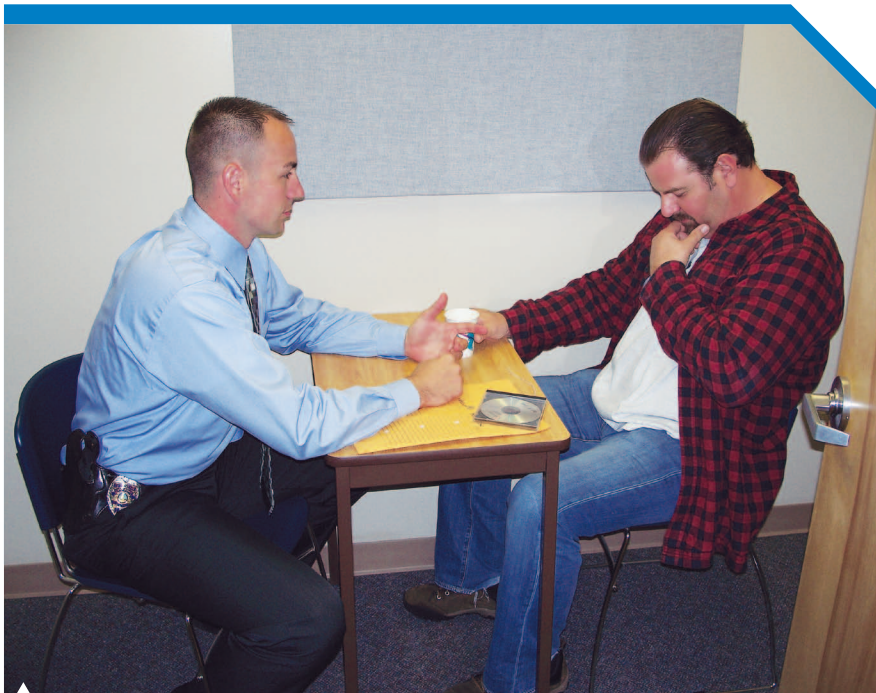


Body Posture

Body posture is pretty easy to read, but watch for changes in posture in response to specific questions. Tension, anxiety and stress-relieving gestures are important and also pretty easy to read. The key is to correlate the timing and the consistency of these gestures with the exact behavior-provoking questions.

Eye contact is important—the eyes are windows to the soul—but should be put in perspective with all the other non-verbal indicators. Normal eye contact is maintained between 30 and 60 percent of the time in normal conversations between two people. Be careful not to rely too much on this one aspect.

In the same way, a neurolinguistic evaluation may be over-rated. (This is where the subject breaks the gaze up and left, or down and to the right.) Instead, during the clerical, non-threatening part of the interview, concentrate on establishing the normal baseline of eye contact this person uses.



The interrogation theme is a good excuse, a face-saving way for the suspect to admit guilt...but it has to be one the suspect buys into as his own.

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Verbal Responses

As for the spoken answers to behavior-provoking questions, most people will tell a direct lie only as a last resort. Instead, the deceptive person will give an evasive answer, a vague answer, a delayed answer, or a non-answer like a head shake or shoulder shrug. The guilty, deceptive person will try to manipulate the detective.

The verbal response may also change in rate of speech, pitch/tone, and volume depending on what is being answered or described. In fact, in some cases, when the manner of speech does not change, that should attract the attention of the detective.

Two of the more revealing Reid Technique questions are: "What do you think should happen to a person who did this crime?" and "Do you think the person who did this would deserve a second chance under any circumstance?" Truthful-innocent people and guilty-deceptive people give very different answers to these questions. The Reid Technique has 15 more primary behavior-provoking questions such as these, as well as a dozen secondary behavior-provoking questions.

Transition Phase

During the investigative interview phase of the Reid Technique, the detective is completely non-judgmental, non-threatening, non-accusatory and non-confrontational. At no time, should the detective signal by his own verbal or non-verbal behavior any kind of suspicion of guilt or conclusion of innocence.

After a short break "to check on further, expected information related to this case," the detective makes a transition. The transition is from the interview to the positive-confrontation interrogation. With firm and direct language, the detective tells the suspect the results of the investigation clearly show the person is guilty of the crime.

This will be the first time the suspect gets this message from the formerly non-confrontational detective, and that change in the detective's approach will be part of the wake-up call. Note the verbal and non-verbal response.

Then the detective will immediately transition roles again—this time from being an accuser to being sympathetic

and understanding. The detective is trying to figure out why this "otherwise good person make this one-time mistake in judgment." What factors, people or circumstances simply forced the suspect to do this?

Interrogation Theme

The most important phase of the Reid Technique is developing and delivering the interrogation theme. The theme, again, is a good reason, excuse or face-saving way for the guilty person to admit guilt. The detective develops the

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CONCEALMENT,
WE JUST PERFECTED IT!**

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theme by carefully listening to the suspect during the interview phase. That is, the theme must be an excuse or reason the suspect will buy into and adopt as his own. It has to be something he thinks anyhow.

The entire concept of the theme is to place the blame on someone or something else, other than the suspect. The suspect is not likely to outright admit guilt. However, the theme allows him to tie his admission of guilt with a really good, reasonable excuse to save self-respect. As a part of this, the detective can downplay what the suspect did—contrast it to something much worse that he did not do.

The theme, the excuse, can be almost anything. However, it needs to relate to the crime, and it has to be something the suspect can adopt as his own. It must hit close to home or the suspect will reject or ignore it. That is why the detective must listen so carefully during the interview for what would make good themes for this particular suspect.

The Reid Technique workbook has dozens and dozens of such themes, divided by the crime. A list of good excuses for shoplifting is obviously different from a list of good excuses for child molesting. If the theme (excuse) is good enough, anyone would know the person had no choice but to do the crime. That is the kind of theme the detective wants to find.

Blame Someone Else

While really good excuses for committing the crime are almost endless, they all involve putting the blame somewhere else. It was the way she dressed. He was flaunting his money. It was the alcohol. If someone else had just been doing their job. It was someone else's idea. It was just circumstances—an opportunity came up and you gave into temptation like anyone would do.

Because this is the cornerstone of the Reid Technique, a great deal of time is spent on learning how to listen for clues for what would be a couple of credible

themes with this particular suspect. During the interrogation, if one theme doesn't resonate with the suspect, the detective needs to keep presenting other themes until he gets interest from the suspect. The detective will begin the interrogation with the most likely theme.

Denials & Objections

The themes are delivered in a non-stop monologue. Of course, the suspect may try to interrupt—any interruption will be a denial. Do not let the suspect interrupt. Cut off their denials and return to the theme. Tell them they had their chance to explain during the interview. Heavy denials, or the opposite extreme, total withdrawal, are probably signs the theme the detective has selected is just not registering. Drop that one and go on to the next one.

Guilty people use a standard set of deceptive denials. In a few instances, the detective will make an error in judgment and move truly innocent people from the interview phase to the interrogation phase. Innocent people will use a different set of truthful denials. The detective has to recognize the differences, which are sometimes subtle. The guilty person will eventually learn the denials are not working and move on to objections.

Objections are different from denials. Cut off denials but listen to objections. What they say in the objection will help the detective to refine the theme, or develop a new theme. In fact, objections may more clearly point to a theme that will work better than the one the detective developed based on the non-confrontational interview. Don't try to refute the objection. Instead, draw it out and use it against him.

The guilty person will eventually figure out the detective is not listening to the denials and is turning the objections against him. They might just withdraw and mentally tune-out the detective. At this point, they will start to focus on the consequences of telling the truth. The detective must get the suspect to focus back on the theme.

The Reid Technique has several ways to do this. Some are as simple as leaning in closer to the suspect and attempting to establish eye contact.

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The Alternative Question

When the suspect decides to tell the truth—linked with a really good excuse—he will go into a passive, defeated mode. This will be obvious by a number of non-verbal behaviors. However, they may still need incentive to tell the truth. That incentive is the alternative question.

At the same time, the detective will contrast what the suspect did with something much worse. This serves to downplay the seriousness of the crimes and feared consequences. “They could afford to be robbed, but at least you didn’t hurt them during the robbery.”

The good excuse, the good theme, the good choice is based on human weak-

nesses and temptations that everyone has. The good choice involves someone else’s fault, someone else’s provocation, or something that would force literally anyone into doing the crime. The bad choice is based on what is generally considered repulsive, degenerate, perverted or totally unacceptable behavior.

you learned from all this and are never going to do it again, or something you think you will keep doing? Fifth, were you talked into this, was it peer pressure, were you threatened, or was this all your own idea?

Keep asking the alternative question, or series of alternative questions. Then ask them in a leading manner. “This was the only time, wasn’t it?” “You are sorry, aren’t you?” When the detective gets the admission, reinforce it. “Good, that is what I thought. I knew you were basically a good person.”

Details of the Offense

An initial verbal admission in response to answering leading questions is a long way from a full confession with details of the crime. However, the hard part is over. With the same empathy the detective has shown almost the entire time, elicit a narrative of the crime, tie the suspect to the crime with incriminating details, and move on to the written statement. The Reid Technique includes a number of methods to smooth the transition and limit the chances for a retraction.

During the three-day course, each aspect of the behavior symptom analysis and each of the nine steps of interrogation are reinforced by video of actual interviews. Expect to see 15 to 20 interview or interrogation segments on crimes ranging from murder by stabbing, theft of evidence, child molesting, shots fired into passing vehicle, false claim of abduction, forged checks, drug dealing and armed robbery at an ATM.

The overall assessment? Every detective should attend the course. And not just new detectives. It will help every detective who has had the guilty suspect sitting right in front of them, but just couldn’t get the confession. The three-day course is also excellent for all patrol officers and sheriff’s deputies in smaller towns and cities without detective units – where the same patrol officer takes the initial call, performs the investigation, and conducts the interview. The Reid Technique deserves its legendary status in law enforcement.

Photos courtesy of Steve Tracy.



With a verbal admission, the hard part is over; however, the Reid Technique moves on to getting incriminating details and obtaining the written statement.

The alternative question is the second most important step in the Reid Technique. Timing of this question is critical. Accepting either one of the two choices in these questions is an admission of guilt. If asked too soon, the suspect will realize this and consider it a trick. Later in the process, the same exact question will elicit an admission of guilt.

The alternative question is simply a choice between a good excuse for the crime and a bad excuse for the crime. Either choice is incriminating. Once the suspect goes into a receptive, defeated mode, the detective will offer the suspect an alternative question based on the theme that has worked.

The alternative question can take many forms, but five main ones are frequently used. First, are you sorry for what you did, or do you simply not care? Second, was this the first time, or was it just one of many? Third, was this a spur of the moment thing, a loss of control, or was this something you carefully planned out? Fourth, have

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