

Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation

- Tips for Educators by: Steve Greiner

This article is intended for educators who have attended a presentation on The Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation, and are familiar with the process, terms and methods described therein.

Without that prerequisite baseline of knowledge, this article will have limited value.

I, and fellow Dean of Students Dave Shuttles, have been employing the Reid Technique of interviewing and interrogation at Crystal Lake Central High School for the last ten years. In that period of time, we have been amazed by the effectiveness and efficiency of the techniques developed by John E. Reid and Associates. However, Dave and I have come to realize that the techniques, while designed to be effective with adults, do need to be tailored somewhat for the school environment due to the uniqueness of schools and students. I would also like to preface this article with the fact that I do not claim to be an expert on the Reid Technique, nor have I ever interviewed or interrogated career criminals or anyone over the age of 21. I have, however, witnessed the presentation by Joe Buckley from Reid and Associates numerous times and have been practicing the technique for more than ten years with students between the ages of

thirteen and eighteen. This article is by no means an exhaustive list of techniques, rather it is a list that has been tried and has been proven successful in my school.

First and foremost, most students in the high school environment are minors and, as such, need to be treated with a little extra care. Although this factor does not diminish the end goal of the investigation nor the questions that will be asked, be aware that the Reid Technique is very powerful, and students, being children, may be emotionally affected to a greater degree than adults. Further, realize that the Dean's or Vice Principal's office can be an intimidating place for students and the associated nervousness they experience may cause a variety of behavioral reactions. A student may be so nervous or anxious that his reaction to the behavior-provoking questions may cause him to appear to be dishonest whether he is actually lying or not. The other side of the coin is, of course, the student who is a regular in your office and does not feel any additional anxiety by simply being in your office. The bottom line is to know your audience.

I realize the name is the "Reid Technique of Interview and Interrogation", but we, as school personnel, do not claim to interrogate anyone. We interview, we ask a lot of questions, we investigate, we make every attempt to follow the Reid technique to the letter; however, we do not call what we do interrogation. Interrogation stirs up mental pictures of smoke-filled rooms, bright lights, and other negative images portrayed in movies and on TV. The last thing you want going around your school/community is that the Deans/VP in your school interrogate students. It may be more palatable to describe what we do after initial interview as an effort to clarify any inconsistencies or discrepancies in the information that the student has given us.

With the previously mentioned ideas in mind, there are several tips that may make using the Reid technique a little more suited for the school setting.

1. Use proper investigative techniques.

Always start on the outside of a situation and move in toward the person who might be responsible. This means first, gathering physical evidence, reviewing video footage and interviewing witnesses. In addition, work to create situations and environments that will be to your advantage. In our dean's office, we require that students sign in when they arrive. Dave and I will instruct the secretary at the sign-in desk to remove the sign-in sheet after a certain student has been interviewed so that other students called down will not know who else has been interviewed. However, depending on the situation, it may be advantageous for certain students to see who else has been through the office. If a situation necessitates separating students to avoid them communicating with each other prior to the interview, make sure to take their cell phones - their ability to text one another may allow them to construct a lie or to "get their story together". Avoid interviewing the most likely suspect until the very end. Get written statements from witnesses if the offense necessitates. Establish a timeline. Often when people lie, they have a difficulty maintaining the sequence of events. Having a timeline makes noticing these inconsistencies in their story much easier. In addition, keep pieces of physical evidence in plastic bags—you may never send the evidence to a crime lab, but it sure looks good. Never allow students to examine physical evidence. They have been known to attempt to destroy it- or even delete it if the evidence is on an electronic device. Finally, pay special attention to the suspect's exact words, and follow the Reid technique closely. Take careful notice when the suspect uses or drops possessive pronouns like "I", "my" or "our". This critical listening skill can take some time to develop. As beginning interviewers, we tend to pay close attention to the physical behaviors the suspect displays; however, we may neglect or be unable to detect verbal patterns at the same time. With enough practice, this concurrent physical and

verbal evaluation can be achieved. When physical and verbal cues align, the certainty of a suspect being honest or not becomes much more solid. Further verbal cues can be discovered when a suspect denies guilt. For example, there is a difference between when the suspect provides specific denials about a specific time, place or event, and when a suspect makes the general denial about the entire situation. For example, when asked if they ever brought any illegal drugs into school, consider a student who answers "I have never brought cocaine into school". As compared to the student who says "I have never brought any illegal drugs into school at anytime".

2. Prepare an "Interrogation Theme" right from the beginning.

The theme is that segment of the interrogation when the investigator goes into a monologue offering the student some type of rationalization or justification for their behavior. Sometimes, it may be necessary to draw upon it earlier than you had anticipated. A theme is of paramount importance in eliciting a confession; therefore, put together some ideas right from the start. Having a well developed theme can often make the interrogation phase proceed much more smoothly, so take some time to do it right. When developing a theme, remember the general rule of theme-development is to shift blame from the suspected person to another person or circumstance. Develop the theme related to **why** they committed the act, not **if** they committed it. A valuable resource for developing themes is the book Anatomy of Interrogation Themes by Louis C. Senese. This book is available on the John E. Reid and Associates website and has been of great value to us. This book contains numerous well -developed themes for more than fifty different offenses. Not that you need to use these themes word for word, but it is advantageous to view a professionally scripted, well developed theme after which you can

model your own theme. Think it through ahead of time; have a theme and a justification for the offense ready.

3. Use relationships to your advantage.

Anyone who has worked in a Dean's office for any length of time realizes the value of developing a relationship with students: during an interview, this relationship can pay off. In our Dean's office, we work to develop positive relationships with the students which can be drawn on whether the student is a witness or a suspect. Sometimes, the relationship developed is negative due to prior discipline actions, but you can still use this relationship to your advantage. At our school, the Deans' work load is divided alphabetically. This set up lends itself to a good cop/bad cop scenario. Many times- if one of Dave's students is the suspect, someone he has taken disciplinary action against on a prior occasion, he or she may not like Dave. This is when we use the good cop/bad cop scenario. Theatrically, I ask Dave to leave the room, complain about Dave, then play "good cop". Obviously, we reverse roles if the student usually sees me. Another technique that Dave and I use is to "tag team" the student. This tactic is usually employed when we have completed the interview, have solid evidence, and know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have the right person in our office yet the student just will not admit what he has done. We will each take turns working the theme, handling denials, overcoming objections, questions, etc... Dave and I found that as the interrogation continues, it is not as easy as it sounds to keep talking and not give the suspect the opportunity to refute the evidence. Dave and I will take turns 3-5 minutes at a time interrogating. This process is obviously impossible without a well developed theme. It should be noted that this method is seldom used, and when it is employed it is typically in extreme cases wherein we know the

student's history, are certain of his guilt, deem the offense significant, and decide preserving the relationship is not as important as resolving the case.

4. Use behavior provoking questions sparingly.

Due to the fact that you may have a student or one of his friends in your office repeatedly during the next four years, it is to your advantage not to show them "all of your cards" during your first encounter with them—we do not want them to know our game plan. Consequently, you may want to ask the behavior-provoking questions on a limited basis, and when utilizing them, couch them in the middle of non-threatening or investigative questions. Further, try not to use the same behavior-provoking question repeatedly or during consecutive interviews. Use enough behavior-provoking questions to ascertain guilt or innocence, but be aware kids can be very perceptive as to lines of questioning, especially if they compare notes with their friends.

5. Try not to be intimidating.

The Reid Technique is truly a "verbal finesse" type skill that can become a fear producing tactic if used improperly. Avoid yelling or pounding on the desk—frustration can become great when, as Deans, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that a student has committed a rule violation, yet refuses to admit it even in the face of irrefutable evidence. Emotions may be compounded by past history with the student who may have been dishonest, disrespectful, or insubordinate. Staying calm carries with it an aura of control, which is key in eliciting a confession. If the student realizes he has pushed your buttons, and that he is in control, it is less likely that he will give you what you really want: the truth. Further, a student is more likely to confess his violation to a sympathetic listener rather than a raving lunatic. Lastly,

if you do manage to produce a confession through intimidation, it is not uncommon for the parent to contend that you yelled at the student until he confessed, and that the student really did not commit the act, but simply admitted to it so you would stop yelling at him.

6. Learn to move from interview to interrogation seamlessly.

I realize that the way the Reid Technique is spelled out, there are two distinct sessions. First is the interview, which is primarily information gathering, followed by the interrogation, which is primarily designed to get the confession from the guilty party. Occasionally, with younger inexperienced people who do not have a significant amount of life experience, once they start to open up during the interview, they may continue to provide information (including a confession) if the right questions are asked and the correct environment is set. If, during the interview, the student begins to confess, don't stop the interview to make a formal transition to interrogation, but rather move directly into the theme phase of the interrogation. Come out from behind the desk, sit next to the student and begin modeling the confessional position - lean over, palms up. At this point, sitting next to the student is not intended to raise his anxiety level, but to demonstrate a personal connection and to create a comfort zone wherein he can confess. Some younger students, especially the ones who have not spent a lot of time in your office, will have heightened anxiety levels already. If a student's anxiety level continues to rise, he may shut down and it becomes advantageous to lower his level of anxiety. Success has been realized at this point by reciting a well developed theme, and by using the 'Alternative Question', (step 7 of the interrogation process): "Was this your idea or did your buddies talk you into it?" Remember to follow the alternative question with the supporting statement, "I'm sure you got talked into it, didn't you?" - Success with this combination can be attributed to providing justification for the violation, but also for the suspect to be able to tell himself that he

is still a good person and that he committed the act for a good reason or understandable circumstances. Know your audience. This opportunity/necessity to move from interview to interrogation smoothly does not present itself often, but you need to be able to recognize and capitalize on it when it does. Once again, the Reid Technique is very powerful and needs to be used judiciously with younger people.

7. Use time as a tool.

Time can be extremely useful if utilized with the right student in the right state of mind.

There are several conditions that need to exist if this is going to be successful:

- a) The relationship with the student needs to be positive or neutral .
- b) The student must have a strong moral compass.
- c) The student requires a delicate approach due to his state of mind.

If these conditions are met and the seed is planted in the student's mind at the right time, success can be realized. Typically, this approach is reserved for very delicate individuals and is really about as watered down as the Reid Technique can be. If this situation necessitates, let time do the work. Once again, having the theme ready is a necessity. When it becomes apparent during the interview that the fragile student is guilty, seize the moment. Slip into interrogation mode, plant the seed of the theme, give them the moral "out" of the justification, then finish with the reassurance that "yeah, this sort of thing happens to good people all the time" and walk out. Leave him alone with his thoughts for fifteen or twenty minutes. Upon return, many times with very little provocation or further theme development, he will confess. This delicate approach only works if the student has a strong moral compass and is in a weakened or fragile state of mind. Having a positive relationship with his Dean who he doesn't want to let down is also a benefit to this situation, but it is not necessary. An advantage to this tactic is that time alone with one's conscience does the pushing, not you. You aren't the bad guy; you are the good guy who has just offered him the way out, thus allowing not only the

positive relationship to be preserved, but also the student's state of mind. Further, if after the twenty minutes he needs some further persuading, you have not done any damage to the formal interrogation.

The concept of relationships, and the importance of utilizing them in conjunction with the Reid Technique, especially with students who you see repeatedly, was addressed more than once in this article. This is a variance from what the law enforcement community usually encounters- most of their suspects they have never seen before, where as we, as school personnel, often times see the same students on a repeated basis. The most important guideline on relationships would be... preserve them! You will most likely need them again. Learn to repair the relationship even after a confession by utilizing the theme again. Reassure the person that he is not a bad person, that he just made a poor decision, and he absolutely did the right thing by telling the truth to make the situation right. Believe it or not, you can also get some miles out of the theme with the parents. No parent wants to hear that their kid is bad and does bad things. Parents are much more receptive to accepting a consequence for their student when you preface the consequence with statements such as: their student is a good person who made a bad decision for an understandable reason; he was mature enough to admit he was wrong, and now he wants to make the situation right.

There are some investigations, however, when all the aforementioned guidelines go out the window. If the situation is that of an expellable offense (weapons, assaults, bomb threats, etc), the priority is to solve the case-developing positive relationships or even preserving or repairing them becomes a secondary concern. In these most serious cases, use all the behavior-provoking questions you need, put everything possible in your favor, and use the Reid technique at 100% strength. If the offense is that bad, you will most likely not need to interview this

person again as he will be expelled or even possibly locked up, so go ahead and use your whole bag of tricks.

Finally, practice your craft. Interviewing is just like any other skill; if you don't use it, you will lose it. Practice the Reid Technique whenever you can. You don't need to be working an expulsion or felony case. Try it on kids who cut class. Throw in a behavior-provoking question and watch the response. Ask the punishment question and watch them shrug their shoulders. Practice developing themes on kids who steal food from the cafeteria, or who are late to class; the justifications for such behaviors can be almost irrational, but if it allows them to blame someone or something else for their behavior, they stick with it. The Reid Technique of Interview and Interrogation is truly amazing.

The focus of this article was simply to point out several factors that differ between law enforcement and schools. Behavioral and physiological differences between juveniles and adults do exist. Environmental differences do exist. Further, relationships that occur in school may not exist in law enforcement and can be a great advantage to you as a school official. Finally, the importance of an appropriate and well developed theme cannot be understated. This is by no means an all inclusive list of tips and strategies. If your school has been utilizing the Reid Technique for a period of time, you have certainly developed some strategies of your own. Hopefully, these tips can add to what you have developed and make you a more effective Dean.