

How this one interview technique can beat lying suspects

By Charles Remsberg Mar 27, 2014

Subjects seeking to be deceptive overwhelmingly prefer closed-ended questions that let them get by with abbreviated statements whereas truthful individuals will mine their memories for the truth

As an investigator, you may find a serving of 'TEDS PIE' to be helpful when you're taking statements about a shooting from involved officers and witnesses.

That acronym is offered as a questioning tool by Dr. Edward Geiselman, co-developer of the cognitive interviewing technique and a faculty member for the Force Science Certification Course.

The letters stand for various prompts you can use to probe deeper into a subject's memories.

Open-Ended Questions

Cognitive interviewing is a method for gathering descriptive recollections of an event by encouraging an uninterrupted, free-flowing narrative from the person being questioned. In contrast to the stereotypical interrogation approach, the subject in a cognitive interview does about 80 percent of the talking, while the investigator speaks only about 20 percent of the time, primarily by posing open-ended questions that keep the interviewee supplying needed, detailed information.

"Closed-ended questions require only short answers and can signal to the officer or witness that his or her role is to speak only when spoken to during the interview. This can stifle meaty responses," explained Geiselman, a psychology professor at UCLA.

"Responses to open-ended questions tend to be more extensive and are more likely to be accurate," Geiselman added.

During the subject's "grand narrative," Geiselman said, the cognitive interviewer notes areas that require follow up when the initial story is concluded. "The strategy then is to ask the interviewee to focus his memory and elaborate about one segment of the narrative at a time.

"This follow-up questioning begins with your asking an open-ended question: 'Can you tell me more about...' whatever element of the grand narrative — people, places, objects, conversations, etc. — you want to explore in greater depth at that moment.

"The problem is that if you ask this same question over and over as you move through the various sections you want to follow up on, the interview may begin to seem stilted, stale, and predictable, and the subject may become annoyed, fatigued, or disinterested."

Deploying TEDS PIE

That's where TEDS PIE comes in.

It's a means of prefacing follow-up questions that Geiselman says he learned from investigators with the London Metro Police, an agency that has worked on a number of research projects with the Force Science Institute.

TEDS stands for:

- "Tell me..."
- "Explain to me..."
- "Describe for me..."
- "Show me...."

PIE stands for:

- "Precisely..."
- "In detail..."
- "Exactly...."

"By pairing a term from TEDS with a term from PIE, you have a different way of introducing the same open-ended question as you go through the segments you want the interviewee to expand on," Geiselman said. "You're still making the same inquiry repeatedly, but it doesn't appear that way to the subject."

As a reminder of the effectiveness of cognitive interviewing, he added, "Truthful subjects generally like answering open-ended questions and will work hard to mine their memories for as full an account as possible. Not so much those subjects who need to be deceptive. Overwhelmingly, they prefer closed-ended questions that let them get by with abbreviated statements."

About the author

Charles Remsberg co-founded the original Street Survival Seminar and the Street Survival Newslines, authored three of the best-selling law enforcement training textbooks, and helped produce numerous award-winning training videos. His nearly three decades of work earned him the prestigious O.W. Wilson Award for outstanding contributions to law enforcement and the American Police Hall of Fame Honor Award for distinguished achievement in public service.

Buy Charles Remsberg's latest book, *Blood Lessons*, which takes you inside more than 20 unforgettable confrontations where officers' lives are on the line.