Perhaps the most frequent question psychologists get asked after, ‘are you analysing me?’ is ‘can you make other people do things for you?’

Seminal psychology papers on influence are often referred to in advertising, and techniques derived from these classic works are often used in corporate contexts and elsewhere to persuade others. Just occasionally, these techniques are used to persuade people to do things that they might not otherwise consider. Some of the techniques are covert, for example mere frequency of exposure to an idea makes it more palatable, whilst other techniques are more overt, such as using authority and perceived credibility to persuade someone.

However, in law enforcement and security contexts we must consider the legal acceptability of a technique as well as whether it actually generates the truth. We must be mindful of any technique in which the influencer, rather than the ‘target’, has either deliberately or unwittingly generated the account. We must also be wary of generating an account from a vulnerable target. Consider, for example, the seemingly benign theory of recovery in which in offering the target something (I can expect that the person then feels obliged to give me something in return).

There are some basic tenets about this approach that we found especially relevant to investigative interviews.

**FOCUS ON VALUES AND BELIEFS**

Those interviewers that didn’t simply rattle off questions or seek facts throughout, but instead showed an interest in the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the detainee fared better in the long run at establishing what they wanted to know. We have argued that individuals are not simply fact-giving machines that if asked will simply respond. Instead, interviewers that genuinely showed an interest in an individual’s unique perspective were far more successful.

**NON-JUDGMENTAL QUESTIONING**

Interviewers who asked any judgement either about the individual in front of them, or in any way insinuated they already knew the facts were far less successful. Instead those that demonstrated an open mind, curiosity and seeking all sides of the narrative were more successful.

These therapeutic approaches have long been established as particularly effective means by which to encourage behavioural change, such as violence reduction, more healthy lifestyles and a reduction or abstinence from alcohol or drugs. However, when we observed similar approaches used by interviewers, even though not trained in any of these methods, the outcomes included: (i) a reduction in aggressive and resistant detainee behaviours; (ii) an increase in detainee engagement and willingness to talk and; (iii) the production of more information, intelligence and evidence.

Critically, because these approaches do not rely on any aspect of covert or overt persuasion or influence, they should protect the innocent and put only internal pressure on the detainee when there genuinely is (i) some guilty knowledge and (ii) a degree of conscience or at least ambivalence about what they have done or intend to do.

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