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Obstacles to Interrogation Training: Part I

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Abstract. This article continues the series on research presented at the 1998 American Psychological Association Annual Convention, San Francisco, California. Part I of the article describes two types of obstacles to effective interrogation training. Part II of the article (to be posted in next week's IBPP Issue (September 16th) describes approaches to overcoming the obstacles. The article is very closely based on the research of Meir Gilboa, formerly the Commander, National Unit for Serious Crime Investigation, Israeli National Police, as presented at the symposium "Four National Approaches to Training Interrogators" that was chaired by Dr. Paul Ekman of the University of California-San Francisco. (Meir Gilboa can be reached at mgilboa@netvision.net.il.)

Gilboa posits that there are two types of obstacles to effective interrogation training--(1) misconceptions about the nature of interrogation and (2) human psychological propensities that seem contrary to what is necessary for effective interrogation.

Misconceptions about Interrogation. (1) It is a misconception that interrogation is an art, that one must have a natural ability for it. Interrogation, therefore, cannot be taught. (2) It is a misconception that interrogation can be taught--but only through the "real thing." Role playing and the study of research are, therefore, judged to be inconsequential--except for being a waste of time. (3) It is a misconception that interrogation can be taught only through supplying very structured procedures, methods, and prescriptions. Without such substantive content, therefore, training is useless. (4) It is a misconception that interrogation is just a list of questions. Various dynamics and processes of the interrogation experience are, therefore, judged to be irrelevant and of little worth in influencing the interrogatee during the social situation labelled "the interrogation." (5) It is a misconception that interrogation is based on "just the facts." Emotional, motivational, and various behavioral phenomena are judged to be irrelevant and superfluous for delineating facts and for being considered facts pertinent to law enforcement, investigative, and criminal justice needs. (6) It is a misconception that interrogation is based on anything more than interpersonal competence--something that people practice throughout their lives. Improvement, therefore, is unlikely or is already occurring without the need for formal training.

Contrary Psychological Propensities. (1) Many interrogators are unaware of how important their own psychology is to the interrogation and interrogatee--e.g., physical appearance, behaviors, expressed and inferred attitude, expressed or inferred emotions and complexes of stress. The interrogator's psychological makeup can have extremely significant effects on the most structured and standardized interrogation procedures and sequences. (2) Many people--and, perhaps, many people within a pool of interrogation trainees--may have more experience in and motivation for hearing another's speech than actively listening to it. Expressing speech is often viewed as more valuable than receiving the speech of another. This point can be generalized to other types of language--nonverbal, vocal and other variants of nonverbal. Much valuable information can be missed. (3) Many people--and, perhaps, many people within a pool of interrogation trainees--may unwittingly or impulsively expose important information to others. This phenomenon may be related to the observation that expressing speech is often perceived as more valuable than receiving the speech of another. (4) Many people--and, perhaps, many people

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within a pool of interrogation trainees--may be more likely to employ pressure and coercion as a tool of choice when another individual is not cooperating in imparting desired information. Yet psychological and communications research suggest that noncoercive, non-pressure, and cooperative techniques may be more effective in eliciting information and in inducing cooperation from another individual. (5) Many interrogation trainees may be primed to catch an interrogatee in a first lie. This response set affords the interrogatee the opportunity to claim that the interrogator misunderstood the information or to make adjustments in the story as imparted to the interrogator. (6) The huge social cognition literature explicating perceptual and processing constraints, limitation, and biases- -conscious and unconscious in both interrogator and interrogatee--may well have untoward effects on the reliability and validity of attentional and analytic products. (Of course the 5 previous points may apply to the interrogatee as well.)

What can be done to at least partially overcome the many obstacles to effective interrogation training? Next week IBPP will describe Meir Gilboa's recommendations. (See Biderman, A.D. (1960). Social psychological needs and "involuntary" behavior as illustrated by compliance in interrogation. *Sociometry*, 23, 120-147; Gilboa, M. (1998). Overcoming obstacles in interrogation training. In P. Ekman (Chair), *Four National Approaches to Training Interrogators*, Symposium at the 1998 American Psychological Association Annual Convention; Kubis, J.F. (1957). Instrumental, chemical, and psychological aids in the interrogation of witnesses. *Journal of Social Issues*, 13, 40-49; Leo, R.A. (1996). Miranda's revenge: Police interrogation as a confidence game. *Law and Society Review*, 30, 259-288; McMahon, M. (1995). False confessions and police deception: The interrogation, incarceration, and release of an innocent veteran. *American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, 13, 5-43; Porter, S., & Yuille, J.C. (1996). The language of deceit: An investigation of the verbal clues in the interrogation context. *Law and Human Behavior*, 20, 443-458.) (Keywords: Interrogation, Investigation, Law Enforcement.)