

Another Erroneous, Inaccurate and Significantly Flawed Description of the Reid Technique

In an article entitled, *Forensic Psychology: The Reid Technique*, by Jason Frowley, he makes numerous misinformed and erroneous statements about the Reid Technique.

For example, he writes that the decision to interrogate a subject is predicated on whether or not they exhibit the verbal and nonverbal behaviors (as described by Reid) that are suggestive of a truthful vs deceptive individual during the investigative interview (the Behavior Analysis interview or BAI):

“You will have noticed the major, controversial assumption of the BAI: that the interrogator is capable of telling if and when you are lying. This is far from a given. Psychologists have found laypeople to be able to detect deceit about 54% of the time (slightly better than guesswork); professionals slightly more often.”

The author fails to inform the reader that the primary basis for an investigator’s decision as to whether or not to interrogate a suspect is the basic principle, **do the case facts and evidence support the subject’s statement, or do they contradict the subject’s statement?** Consider the following case:

On a Saturday night, John was found dead in his basement, shot in the head. John worked in real estate and had a home office, which several of his co-workers also utilized on a regular basis. As part of the investigation, we interviewed many of John’s colleagues, including a co-worker we will call Dennis. One of the questions that we asked Dennis was when the last time was he had been over to John’s house, either on a social occasion or to work out of the real estate office. Dennis replied that it had been quite a while, at least 4 or 5 weeks ago.

Unbeknownst to Dennis, the police had canvassed the neighbors and found a lady who lived caddy corner from John, who was filming her kids playing soccer in the yard that Saturday morning, and in the background, you could see somebody going up to John’s front door and then entering the home at about 10:00 am. When the film was enhanced, it was Dennis going into John’s house the day of the murder. Regardless of any verbal or nonverbal behaviors displayed by Dennis during the interview, the fact that he tried to conceal the fact that he was at the victim’s home on the day of the murder would be the basis for any subsequent questioning or interrogation.

This is an investigative principle that critics of the Reid Technique oftentimes fail to mention: *Do the case facts and evidence support or contradict the subject’s statement?*

The article goes on to completely misrepresent the core principles of the Reid Technique. When describing the interrogation process, the author writes that during the interrogation, there are going to be “threats, leading questions or inducements on the way.”

For decades, we have taught in our training programs that investigators should **never engage** in any of the following practices:

- Physical abuse of the subject
- Threats of physical harm
- Threats of inevitable consequences
- Promises of leniency
- Denial of rights
- Denial of physical needs
- Excessively long interrogations
- Disclosure of crime details
- Failure to properly take in to account the subject's mental limitations and/or psychological disabilities
- Failure to properly modify approaches with socially immature juveniles
- Failure to properly corroborate confession details
- False confessions

The best way to avoid false confessions is to conduct interrogations in accordance with the guidelines established by the courts, and to adhere to the following Core Principles and Best Practices:

- Do not make any promises of leniency
- Do not threaten the subject with any physical harm or inevitable consequences
- Do not deny the subject any of their rights
- Do not deny the subject the opportunity to satisfy their physical needs
- Withhold information about the details of the crime from the subject so that if the subject confesses the disclosure of that information can be used to confirm the authenticity of the statement
- Exercise special cautions when questioning juveniles or individuals with mental or psychological impairments
- Always treat the subject with dignity and respect

- Conduct an interview before any interrogation. Absent a life-saving circumstance the investigator should conduct a non-accusatory interview before engaging in any interrogation
- Conduct an interrogation only when there is a reasonable belief that the suspect committed the issue under investigation or is withholding relevant information
- Attempt to verify the suspect's alibi before conducting an interrogation
- When interrogating a non-custodial suspect, do not deprive the suspect from his freedom to leave the room
- Do not conduct excessively long interrogations
- When a suspect claims to have little or no memory for the time period when the crime was committed the investigator should not lie to the suspect concerning incriminating evidence
- Electronically record the interview and interrogation
- The confession is not the end of the investigation.

Following the confession, the investigator should investigate the confession details in an effort to establish the authenticity of the subject's statement, as well as attempt to establish the suspect's activities before and after the commission of the crime.

Unfortunately, when authors write about the Reid Technique, they oftentimes parrot what some other author has published about the Reid Technique and simply restate the same erroneous statements, without making any effort to determine the accuracy of such statements. It is a never-ending circular process.

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