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TDC Tip

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Obtaining Admissions with Alternative Questions

There you are deploying theme after theme in the interrogation phase and now you're wondering—how do I move this guy past his denials and into an admission of guilt? First and foremost, please remember that we are only interested in obtaining the TRUTH. Pushing someone into making a false admission does no good whatsoever and should never be an objective. That said, one of the most efficient ways we know of to move a subject from denial to admission is by the use of an *alternative question*.

The timing of the alternative question is crucial. If we have deployed the right themes during the interrogation, the subject will react by displaying the “defeatist posture” (body slumped forward, hands over the face, and/or hanging the head). When you see the subject doing this, what you've been saying to him has taken an emotional toll on him. He can no longer maintain his stance of denial and realizes that he has been defeated. His body is telling you so.

Now is the time to move-in with the alternative question. You should mind your tone of voice—become softer, quieter. Use a tone of voice that is non-judgmental. Obtaining this initial admission is the hardest part of the whole process. The objective here is to make it psychologically as easy as possible for the subject to make that first admission.

The alternative question provides the subject with two choices, both of which admit guilt, but one choice is more appealing than the other. For example, you might ask the subject, “Is this something you do all the time, or was it an isolated incident?” You see, something he does “all the time” isn't nearly as appealing as a one-time mistake. Here are some other generic alternative questions you could consider using:

- “Is this something you planned, or did it just sort of happen?”

- “Did you take the money to buy drugs, or were you just trying to provide for your family?”
- “Did you intend to hurt this person, or was it an accident?”
- “Were you trying to take advantage of her, or were you just trying to show love and affection?”

Each of these alternative questions works on the same principle—the lesser of two evils. When faced with such a choice, most subjects will opt for the alternative which allows them to save face.

These questions are only going to be effective when the subject is telegraphing non-verbal behavior that suggests he/she is ready to admit his/her culpability. Asking an alternative question to a subject who is turning away from you, arms crossed, and in a defiant posture will most likely result in a volatile response.

If, after deploying an alternative question, the subject does not make an admission, simply transition into another theme and try a different alternative question several minutes later. Once the subject makes his first admission, be sure to respond with positive reinforcement. Thank him for his honesty and ask him to tell you more about what happened. This is what takes us from admission into confession—the subject of our next article!

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