

The Columbo method – A legacy of antipotency and rhetorical inquiry to redirect resistance

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ABSTRACT

The increasing numbers of trade articles about the almost trademark “Columbo Method” evidences a growing phenomenon. As demonstrated by the fictional television detective of *Columbo* 1968-2003, the method is an approach to investigation characterized by rhetorical inquiry (system of questions and timing), an antipotent persona (nonauthoritative, unassuming Everyman), and tenacity in overcoming a responder’s resistance to collaboration or influence. The essay provides a theoretical analysis of Columbo’s informed but indirect questioning, pretense of ignorance, solicitation of help, folksy congeniality, and the false exit. A literature review presents applications of the Columbo Method by professionals to describe effective workplace interaction with resistant responders (conflicting values or allegiances, lifestyle and demographic differences, shyness, anxiety, fear of change, etc.). Third, the theory is applied in an in-depth rhetorical analysis of cases of communication in academia. Most importantly, the work strives to make an impact in ethical approaches to communication with implications for developing rhetorical pedagogy.

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While the 1950s and 1960s television hits indulged in the realism of the Old West and urban street violence with an emphasis on action, writers/producers Richard Levinson and William Link had other plans. The duo began their 43-year-long friendship in 1946, on their first day of junior high school:

Both were avid Ellery Queen fans from boyhood and enjoyed mental puzzles and challenges, a characteristic that would spill over into their work. Beginning with radio scripts, the team wrote plays and then prime-time TV

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scripts. They went on to co-create and sometimes produce the detective television series, *Columbo* (NBC 1968-1978 and ABC 1989 -2003), *Manix* (CBS 1967-1975), *Ellery Queen* (NBC 1975-1976), *Murder, She Wrote* (with Peter S. Fischer-CBS 1984-1996), [among other television films and series]. The team [was] proud of creating 'intelligent' rather than violent programs. (Abramson, August 23, 2002)

As explained in their autobiographical work, *Stay Tuned. An Inside Look At The Making Of Prime-Time Television* (Levinson & Link, 1981), creators of *Columbo* argued with network executives to produce a gentler, more intellectual, non-violent, British armchair mystery with strong influences. They describe the show as an "American drawing-room mystery" (pp. 88-9). While a nonviolent detective genre, Levinson and Link's detective is not an amateur, as with many Golden Age Mysteries (Miss Marple, Father Brown, Lord Peter Wimsey, Dr. Thorndyke, Mrs. Bradley). Instead, Lieutenant Columbo of the Los Angeles Police Department was modeled after the shrewd, informed, criminal behaviorist, who downplayed his investigative talents with suspects. Porfiry Petrovitch, the investigating Magistrate from Fyodor Dostoevsky's classic 1866 philosophical crime drama, *Crime and Punishment*, is the writers' inspiration for Lieutenant Columbo as well as the classic novel's format of the inverted mystery (Levinson & Link 1981, p. 89). They were successful in developing a cop show that steered away from the violent drama of the real and fictional worlds around them (Dowler, 2016). Rather than realistic police drama, the show luxuriates in stylized settings, colorful characterization, ingenious plots, and witty, competitive banter among the Lieutenant and the suspects.

This essay argues for the relevance of studying the methods demonstrated by the lead detective in the long-running, popular American television series, *Columbo* (1968-2003). As an approach to effective detection, *Columbo* investigates crimes primarily by asking deceptively purposeful questions of a secretive suspect (rhetoric of inquiry) while playing ignorant, nonthreatening, and cooperative (antipotent). The seemingly informal conversations enable him to patiently build a case – garnering evidence for likely suspects, opportunity, ability, and motive for committing the murder. To be clear, the resistant responders that I now want to feature in the application of this rhetoric of inquiry are not of the same violent caliber as the killers of *Columbo*. In fact, some aspects of the Lieutenant's investigative method are irrelevant or inappropriate for most rhetorical situations of our daily lives. However, several tactics merit examination and application in everyday communication. The narratives originate in previous print and video publications, as well as from two qualitative interviews with past colleagues, who have permitted me to

retell their stories anonymously.

Barring Columbo's various strategies designed to irritate suspects and wear down their patience, the investigator employs a wide range of professional and personal situations to illustrate practical lessons in overcoming attitudinal and communication blocks to successful cooperation. While certainly not foolproof, there are rhetorical questioning strategies – not interrogation techniques – that we can apply to elicit some collaboration, if only because resistant responders are not expecting those types of inquiries. The following reports how professionals across disciplines practice particular engagement strategies with resistant interlocutors, which they refer to as “The Columbo Method” or “The Columbo Tactic.”

Resistant responders

As villains of *Columbo*, suspects assert an active resistance to divulging their secret culpability in the murder investigation. The “responder” participates in the dynamic nature of a conversation in constantly shifting roles of listening, speaking, reacting, questioning, and the like. Their interaction with the inquiring detective is to prevent Columbo from discovering their horrible truth. Anticipating prosecution and prison, the suspects attempt to distract suspicion from themselves by feigning a desire to solve the murder case in cooperation with the detective. In turn, suspects endure relentless rhetorical inquiries designed to break down their resistance to him.

In professional, noncriminal contexts, the domains of resistance vary. Resistance is self-protective. Some exhibit a willful refusal to cooperate, while others a passive avoidance of expressing or sharing facts, records, special projects, and strong viewpoints that contradict others.’ The pressure to conform by more powerful employees and executives creates a tense or precarious work environment that stifles conflicting views or generates unfriendly competition for an individual reward. The self-protective measures are formidable obstacles to effective collaboration if employee promotions are based on individual performance and not on functioning as a team with a shared goal.

If cooperation becomes a goal within a work organization, then management must shift the corporate culture. In other words, the relationships and interactional dynamics invite implementations of the questioning strategy to broader rhetorical contexts – organization, occasion, communication genres, and work goals. In S. Berglas's *Forbes* article “The Top 5 Ways to Manage Closed-Minded, Defensive, Truth-Resistant People” (2013), the practicing

psychiatrist and 25-year faculty at Harvard Medical School of Psychiatry defines the term relative to his private practice patients and executive clients:

These folks regularly interrupt or terminate coaching relationship with what I call Ostrich Moments: Hiding, avoiding or ensuring they won't get touched by the reality-based feedback they ask coaches to provide[.] In psychiatry, the behaviors people engage in to ensure they will be spared the stress of handling the truth is called resistance; a complex form of shooting the messenger that blocks the delivery of hard, cold, facts to someone who fears them (p. 1).

Berglas's taxonomy describes five types of resistant people, which he likens to animals (the narcissistic and intimidating Gorillas, the most knowledgeable Owls, denying and closed-off Foxes, the stubborn and refusing Horses, and the offensive attacking Skunks). Each type of resistance to unpalatable information is delineated, along with strategies for helping them to overcome their resistant barriers, if it is possible to do so. More specifically, "truth-evaders" react with defensiveness about their poor performance by challenging another's expertise or status. They deny the value of proposed changes that may be contributing to their failure. Pridefully arrogant, truth-evaders protect themselves from accountability for their circumstances, preferring to play the victim and lashing out with personal insults. With so many ways that people actively react to, reject, and avoid hearing the reality of their situation, mentors are frustrated in pursuing their goal of helping their employees improve.

Some resistant responders are closedminded to information that contradicts their own set of assumptions, values, and life truths. Voting solely according to political party affiliation can be an example of such closed-mindedness as priorities are on feeling belonging and righteousness with whom they have invested trust, finances, and affection. Blind and aggressive certitude protects the individual from seeing alternative viewpoints, which have the potential to disrupt their secure relationship with the group. Similarly, resistance in responders emerges from pre-existing preferences for and against a persuader, organization, or subject. Even when presented with indisputable facts, such individuals resist acknowledging how the new information challenges their position, which could beg for painful change. Such individuals are least likely to change their minds, compromise, or admit fault (Berglas, 2013). Their resistance is so adamant because change terrifies or, in the case of the murderers, going to prison threatens the freedom and power they treasure.

Also, resistance can be in the form of shyness or introversion. The sense of vulnerability can inhibit positive professional engagement, whether as the

persuader or the audience. With timidity, individuals may be unfamiliar with, uncomfortable with, or unaccustomed to establishing concert with others. Their social inhibitions prevent them from expressing agreement, disagreement, partial agreement, counterpoints, or the like. In some cases, the person may have social anxiety or a psychological disorder that is an inhibiting force in their communication. Further, a call for cooperation may trigger an individual's inhibitions to avoid feelings of vulnerability, fear, paranoia, and threatened security that causes a psycho-intellectual shutdown. In turn, resistant responders deny their collaborators access to desired information, relationships, complicity, or resources. When resistance is a personal and emotional desire to protect oneself from unflattering implications, an inquiring person may experience a defensive tactic to derail an effort to expose vulnerability or error in viewpoint. Therefore, resistant responders are highly motivated by their need to feel potent, correct, or superior, which means denying sensitive information.

The reasons for resistance may be a symptom of incompatible values, allegiances, personal histories, demographics and psychographics, preferences, beliefs, educational profiles, fear of change, and the like. Further, some people are simply unmovable, despite the awareness of conflicting information. As demonstrated by Klosterman (2013) when articulating an example of his resistance to changing his mind: "I know the truth, but I just don't care" (p. 199). Addressing opposition in responders does not require a conquest subject position of "targets," "wins," and "victims," such as some argue, particularly in the sales field (Greene, 2003). In turn, these attitudes inhibit engaging in discussion, exploration, negotiation, and decision-making. Those interacting with shy people would benefit from a less direct, argumentative, or interrogative persuasive approach. To draw out the individual's feelings, thoughts, and goals, inquirers use questions to initiate collaboration. However, if the responder disengages from feeling overwhelmed or offended, the inquirer loses the opportunity to engage in cooperation.

"The Columbo Method" in *Columbo*

In addition to being an expert at reading people and nuances of language, scrutinizing implications, and deducing the accumulation of minute details, Columbo's method of investigation employs an antipotent persona and numerous questions about little things that eventually lead to an arrest of the guilty. During an interview on *The Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson

(October 5, 1973), actor Peter Falk explains why he thinks Lieutenant Columbo appeals to audiences around the globe, explicitly contradicting journalists' repeated description as bumbling, foolish, or stupid:

I don't think he is dumb, and I don't think he plays it being dumb. There's a difference between playing being dumb and playing being distracted. And there's a difference between being dumb and being perplexed, being stupid and being preoccupied. And I think if you play it being a chump or an oaf, there's no dignity there, and I don't think that people would like a character who has no dignity. You know, Columbo's always with a lot of important people. Now, it's one thing to be meek; it's another thing to be polite (Falk, 1973, 4:07).

At this early part of Season Three, Peter Falk elaborates on clearing up a misconception about his character's crafted persona with suspects to achieve underestimation by those guilty villains trying to maintain their façades of innocence. The component of dignity manifests in the Lieutenant's noted tenacity, productive ruminations on perceived minutia, and satisfaction with his call to justice.

The show began with the made-for-tv movie *Prescription Murder* (Levinson, Link, & Irving, 1968) and, after successful ratings, the pilot episode *Ransom for a Dead Man* (Hargrove, Levinson, Link, & Irving, 1971). The detective's tactics of self-deprecation, inane and meandering storytelling about relatives, profuse apologies, formal politeness, misdirection, fixation on trivial details, and worship of the celebrated villains construct his antipotent persona. However, the antipotency must be shrouded or lose effectiveness with the suspects. In the following excerpt, the wife-murdering psychiatrist, Dr. Flemming (Gene Barry), realizes Columbo's pretense for producing underestimation:

Dr. Flemming: I'm going to tell you something about yourself. You think you need a psychologist. Maybe you do, maybe you don't, but you are a textbook example of compensation.

Lt. Columbo: Oh, what, Doc?

Dr. Flemming: Compensation. Adaptability. You're an intelligent man, Columbo, but you hide it. You pretend you're something you're not. Why, because of your appearance, you think you can't get by on looks or polish, so you turn a defect into a virtue. You take people by surprise. They underestimate you. And that's where you trip them up. (Levinson et al, 1968, 1:10)

In addition to addressing his “adaptability,” Dr. Flemming insults his appearance, belittling him, but following it up with a compliment. The astute psychiatrist calls Columbo out for who he is and what game he’s playing and why, as well as the fact that he is successful at it. Flemming’s arrogance enables his directness as he feels invulnerable to the law.

Columbo’s method is a combination of antipotency in unpolished appearance and unpretentious deference to suspects and through inquiries of seemingly innocuous questions about little things within informal conversations. In doing so, the Lieutenant facilitates the entitled murderers to let down their guard with the unsophisticated and preoccupied detective. The investigator’s explorations present less as official police business and more as friendly interest in the case’s specifics and the suspect’s accomplishments. *Columbo: A Rhetoric of Inquiry with Resistant Responders* (Berzsenyi, 2020) expounds on Columbo’s method of Antipotency and Rhetorical Inquiry, which is referenced here for the unique application in professional communication. The passage provides an outline of standard comments and questions the Lieutenant makes, starting from his initial appearance and meeting with suspects, through his partnerships with begrudging villains, until just before the murderers know he is onto them.

1. Rhetorical Inquiry of Self-Introduction and Relationship Initiation

With controlling suspects who demand to know who he is and what he is doing on their property, Columbo commences his relationship with self-identification, followed by an open-style of question such as, “Ah, [searches his coat for his badge] Just a moment, please. [Fumbles with the badge] I have it. I’m Lieutenant Columbo of the LAPD. And you are?” He fumbles, is disorganized, and appears to be a stranger with his own symbol of authority, which undermines his accomplished police rank. The most arrogant suspects bully or dismiss other characters, which is why Columbo must establish his professional role and counters with a challenging but not antagonistic question in kind. However, with quieter or “grieving” suspects, he enters gently with sympathy, expressing an open question: “Excuse me. I’m Lieutenant Columbo. Would you tell me who is Mrs. Danvers?” Typically, this kind of scene includes searching for his badge or pad of paper or pencil, and stating that he is “supposed to be here,” or he is here “about the deceased.” Looking around, out of place, Columbo announces his high rank and name but then

needs help, though he knows the answer before having arrived. With celebrity suspects, the Lieutenant fawns over them, their notoriety and superior accomplishments, before stating his identity, which functions as deference to the villain. While suspects vary in personality, they are all resistant to Columbo in different ways, warranting minor modifications to his understated self-presentation and relationship initiation.

2. Rhetorical Inquiry of Clear, Closed Questions

Easing into an investigation and getting a feel for the other person, Columbo asks about the victim and case particulars such as “Were you close to the victim?” “Did you know he wasn’t well?” Without accusation or implication, the questions function as routine information-gathering but, more importantly, familiarity with one another. During friendly conversations, the Lieutenant maintains his antipotent persona by offering personal self-disclosure in the form of lengthy anecdotes about his unsophisticated family with details that appear pointless (whether real or fabricated for effect for the moment).

3. Rhetorical Inquiry of Relevant Responses

Columbo listens to suspects’ answers to his more open questions and follows up with related questions. Designed to elicit elaboration on their alibis, the questions dually establish a foundation for praising the villains, demonstrating Columbo’s engagement and receptiveness. For example, in *Ransom for a Dead Man* (Hargrove et al., 1971), the Lieutenant creates dialogue with the villain by incredulously confirming, “You fly a plane?” To which, Leslie Williams (Lee Grant) responds as-a-matter-of-factly, “Yes.” Further instilling his amazement, he concisely asks her, “By yourself?” Again, she simply states, “Yes.” but she placed vocal emphasis on its verity. Then, Columbo exasperates, “No kidding?” Enjoying his bewilderment, Williams echoes but in the declarative, “No kidding.” Nodding his head, he walks away in puzzlement while Williams drinks her coffee with contained delight. By using the echo questions, the detective expresses wonder at the exceptional nature of the circumstances conveyed, which projects antipotency and praise (Straker, n.d.).

4. Rhetorical Inquiry of Cultivating Cooperation

These questions have a call to action, such as obligating a suspect to assist in an investigation: "Would you help me? It would be an honor." Here the strategy of acknowledging the suspect's talent, knowledge, and value are key to dismantling competitive tension and opposing subject positions. His inflated deference to the villain's impressive abilities and enormous egos engenders a cooperative facade. Also, Columbo thanks the suspects profusely for every little gesture of help. While exchanging ideas about the nature of the murder, alibis, modus operandi, the victim, and such, Columbo and the suspect posit and disprove theories. Their conversations address probabilities, facts, interpretations, and experiences while cooperatively assessing the merit of arguments. For example, in *Ransom for a Dead Man* (Hargrove et al., 1971), the Lieutenant discusses with the widow Leslie Williams an incongruity he tries to make sense of relating to the ransom money bag being left behind by her husband's kidnapper and murderer. He questions the logic in taking the money but leaving the sack behind, which elicits Williams to posit a rationalization about how people act out of "immediate emotion" rather than logic when under stress. In response, Columbo agrees but adds, "In fact, I'll go even further. That's what does most criminals in, [pause] eventually." Of course, this statistical information reveals his experience, putting a chink in the anti-potency armor, a misstep that Williams soon after deliberates as Columbo's method. At this point, Williams knows what she is dealing with, a formidable opponent and not a simpleton to be underestimated.

5. Rhetorical Inquiry of False Exits

The false exit is a method of asking questions after the suspect thinks that the interview with the Lieutenant is over. Once the suspect feels temporarily safe in his absence, Columbo returns with "Just one more thing," which is his signature rhetorical move. Rhetorical scholar and teacher Jay Heinrichs identifies the Lieutenant's false exit questions or pronouncements with another key rhetorical device: "Kairos, the art of timing" (2013). Like all great detectives, Columbo asks a range of questions designed to reveal the details of the case. However, the false exit sustains his absentminded, disorganized, and non-accusatory persona. The seemingly unplanned afterthought follows an already lengthy or disruptive inquiry. Relieved for the investigator's departure, villains relax momentarily from the tension of maintaining their phony

façades – that they like Columbo, want to help him find the killer, and are not entirely irritated by his suffocating inquiries. Off guard, the villains cannot control their appearance, expressions, or raw reactions to “Just one more question,” “I almost forgot,” or “one more thing.” In particular, these phrasings precede an explanation of incongruous information, another character’s verified alibi, or newly discovered evidence. With each version, there are unspoken implications regarding the suspect’s involvement in the murder.

Columbo plays an ironic game with his credibility, easing suspects to over-share, reveal attitudes and emotions on the subject, and self-incriminate. In moderation and strategic application, these methods allow one to communicate and potentially work with resistant individuals. Obviously, his practice of badgering suspects at all hours with trivial information or questions, relentlessly intruding on their personal lives and spaces, being deceitful, trapping others in a lie, and the rest have no place in professional communication. In the following sections, professionals across the spectrum explain how the adoption of parts or all of the Columbo Method serves the interactions and relationship building with resistant individuals.

Columbo supporting underwriters and fraudulent claims investigations

In his web article titled “Lieutenant Columbo’s Lessons for Detecting Insurance Fraud,” Executive Director of Underwriting at the Reinsurance Group of America Colin M. DeForge (2017) identifies several practical uses for the Columbo Method for employees:

Underwriters have a lot in common with Lieutenant Columbo. Like the detective, underwriters can be dogged investigators – and we are often the first to detect fraud. This matters more than ever: The Coalition Against Insurance Fraud estimates that U.S. insurers lose an estimated \$80 billion a year to fraudulent schemes... The definition of fraud is complex, but the victims are clear: the honest policyholders who must absorb premium increases to offset the expense of these schemes (paras. 2 & 4).

While DeForge acknowledges many different roles played by insurance underwriters, he argues that “first and foremost, we are detectives,” who must discover and deter fraud with these four methods:

1. **Never stop asking questions.** Columbo used little more than healthy curiosity and common sense to uncover falsehoods. Underwriters should never be afraid to ask for additional evidence or to speak up when they see signs of fraud.
2. **Trust, but check.** Colombo never took any fact for granted. As insurers, we must trust agents and applicants, but we must also use available tools to verify the information they provide.
3. **Recognize that might isn't right.** Powerful suspects often tried to intimidate Columbo, but he never backed down. While many agents and applicants can be legitimately frustrated by the insurance process, pressure to issue a policy can be a sign of fraud, as is reluctant and incremental disclosure.
4. **Communicate.** In many ways, Columbo never stopped talking. He conducted every investigation publicly, communicated openly, and always explained his reasoning.

In addition to the appropriate professional and practical strategies, DeForge (2013) reminds readers to be accurate, thorough, objective, and specific in all documentation, just like Columbo.

Implementations in a religious organization's evangelism and apologetics

On Greg Koukl's organization's website, *Stand to Reason* (2013), he states his mission for training "ambassadors" of Christianity: "Stand to Reason trains Christians to think more clearly about their faith and to make an even-handed, incisive, yet gracious defense for classical Christianity and classical Christian values in the public square" (Koukl, 2013, para. 1). He explains how he applies his rhetoric of apologetics with nonbelievers (recruitment). Further, Koukl describes his use of "The Columbo Tactic" as a method of asking questions in a seemingly innocuous way as not to alarm or put a resistant person on the defensive. He advises, "'Columbo' is most powerful if you have a game plan for the conversation. Generally, when I ask a question I have a goal in mind. I'm alerted to some weakness, flaw, or contradiction in another's view that I want to expose in a disarming way" (Koukl, 2013). Developing his evan-

gelical method, Koukl (2016) has written a section dedicated to applications of the television detective's approach, offering recorded presentations, as well as alluding to the tactic on his website. In anticipation of conflict, aggression, and obnoxiousness from nonbelievers about bringing Christ into their lives, Koukl teaches "a nonconfrontational game plan."

However, his rhetoric only superficially integrates the detective's use of questions throughout the show and the array of question types that are designed to discover the facts of the case. In contrast, Koukl advocates using "The Columbo Tactic" for persuasion purposes as a more diplomatic style of proselytizing: "The key to the Columbo Tactic is that, as a Christian, you should go on the offensive in an inoffensive way to advance the conversation" (2016, 27m). If the questions are asked correctly, Koukl promises that they will be followed by Christ's support, presumably in converting the nonbeliever, who is in the wrong, lost, without faith in Christ. From a critical perspective, the rhetorical scholar, book author, and weblogger argues that Koukl's method is more like asking "questions for tactical reasons to reveal flaws in an opponent's argument. We'd qualify it as a form of *aporia*, the tactic of feigning ignorance" (Heinrichs, 2011, March 21). The purpose is to discover the nonbeliever's reasons and justification for not being Christian to prepare for the "next play." After this seemingly agenda-less prelude, the Christian is asked to argue an apologia: "Contrary to a popular misconception, this does not refer to people 'apologizing' for their faith. Instead, Christian apologetics is the practice of *defending* the Christian faith through reason and logic" (Literary Terms, 2015, para. 2). However, a key element of apologia is that it is a defense against an accusation made, which is argued once the Christian engages the nonbeliever in an exchange that starts in a rhetorical inquiry with a presumed resistant responder. Then, the dialogue intensifies to an apologetic debate about whose position is more justifiable. While *aporia* may initiate an innocuous conversation with the resistant nonbelievers of Koukl's evangelism, an apologetic argument of self-righteousness ends the discussion.

A significant discrepancy between Koukl's stance as an evangelical preacher and Columbo's position as Lieutenant of law enforcement is the assumption of moral self-righteousness. Both have authority ("the higher power and human law respectively"), but Columbo does not moralize with suspects as he does his job well, leaving the punishments and moral judgments to the court of law. Contrarily, Koukl's (2016) apologia is predicated on certitude and superiority, elitist assumptions masked in his persona of Christ's servant. Asking questions without the search for discovering facts and truths is a significant ideological and methodological departure from the Lieutenant's rhetoric

of inquiry. If the investigator neglected to learn the facts of a crime, he would never solve a case or provide the necessary evidence for arrest and conviction. While Columbo is not arguing that he has the right and only answers to life, Koukl (2016) argues that nonbelievers make egregious errors for their lack of faith. If the nonbelievers do not adhere to the evangelist's aporia-apologetics, they will die and suffer eternally in hell, away from God. As a countermeasure, Christians argue that their salvation in heaven is guaranteed (faith) in their surrender to Christ. Columbo does not claim that suspects should do as he does; in fact, he expresses admiration for their talents, abilities, and accomplishments. Instead, if they breach the policies of the law to which he has sworn to uphold, he does his job, discovering and demonstrating with evidentiary support that it is accurate or it has happened. Then, the court system will judge, prosecute, and punish. With villains, the Lieutenant is not out to get the suspects or convert them so much as he is fulfilling his duties as an officer of the law. In turn, he lacks certitude, moral superiority, and malice, though he abounds with sound, strategic investigative methods, tenacity, and cunning.

Implications for psychotherapists with resistant patients

Columbo's approach to eliciting self-condemning evidence from his homicide suspects has clear parallels with both Sigmund Freud and Georg Groddeck's approach to working with patients within a psychotherapeutic context. In a letter of response to Georg Groddeck, Freud wrote on June 5, 1917, "The discovery that transference and resistance are the most important aspects of treatment turns a person irretrievably into a member of the wild army" (Schacht, 1977, p.4). The letters discussed whether Groddeck felt he was practicing psychoanalysis or some other approach to patient therapy. Despite the patients' resistance to self-exploration or self-expression, Groddeck concurs with Freud about the nature of a psychoanalyst's role with patients:

Yet the person who does the interpreting should no longer be the physician; only the patient himself can supply the necessary information about his intentions and activities. ... The role of the therapist is restricted to that of making the recalcitrant IT talk and, even more significantly, being as open as possible in order to allow the patient's IT the least possible excuse for mistrusting him" (Groddeck, 1977, p. 35).

In other words, the practicing clinician's function in rhetorically-based inquiry is to enable the patient to reveal, even unknowingly, the signs or causes of undiagnosed symptoms, i.e., the mysterious pathology. Similarly, Inspector Columbo rhetorically performs diagnostic inquiry in vetting necessary information to make a professionally sound and legally binding charge/diagnosis (Sutton, 2013, p. 168).

Implications for bioethics: Interviewing patients

Bioethics and medical law consultant Christopher James Ryan participates in a multi-specialist commentary about the medical care and communication of a deceased kidney failure patient. In offering a revised way of understanding patients' needs and advising them of their options and consequences, Ryan analogizes his critical and interactive facilitation process with patients with Lieutenant Columbo's dialogic mode of inquiry:

Columbo would get to the bottom of things by asking the right questions in the right way. With a faux naiveté, and usually as apparent afterthought, he would politely point out inconsistencies in a person's story and hoist these into the light. He never accused; he simply wondered out loud, and let his interlocutor wonder with him (2009, p. 15).

Ryan delineates his use of The Columbo Approach as about "genuine musings, uttered out loud, aimed at learning what [someone] really wants and what is really motivating [that person/s]" (p. 15). His argument is presenting the applicability of questioning from humility for many aspects of health care network communications.

In his conclusion, Ryan asserts the dialogical communication method as an ethical issue as well as an essential component of his communication model: "The practice of medicine is all about talking to people and letting them talk. It's about discovering their stories and what lies beneath. Creatinine levels, five-year survival rates, and dialysis machines are important, but clinical medicine is much more like *Columbo* than it is *CSI*" (p. 15). Indeed, Ryan makes an astute connection between the rhetorical inquiry by a detective investigating a crime and suspects and a clinician gathering information about a patient's patterns of symptoms to synthesize and relate to a diagnosis. Both employ abductive reasoning and investigative process in which the investigators discover clues that lead to a diagnosis or conclusive evidence supported

in sound, rhetorical demonstration.

Implications for sales with resistant prospects

Adaptation of the Columbo Tactic by sales industry professionals is more common than by those in any other field (McCarthy, 1964; McDonough & Ackert, 1987). The approach is described in detail in a recruitment training video for lead agents of a pyramid structure company Ca\$hCard. Max Brandon, the founder and trainer in the videos, explains that the brilliant detective lulls his prime suspects with his characteristic “unassuming demeanor.” Further, the method of interest to him is Columbo’s “signature interrogation technique,” which is

a wholesale departure from hard pressing, course heavy, tough guy investigators who try to bully their suspects with their badge or gun or gruff demeanor. Comparably, through the use of a Columbo-style of questions, Cashcard lead agents become far more effective than traditionally trained representatives, qualifying prospects Columbo style. (Brandon, 2012, 2:07)

More specifically, he identifies several features of this approach: briefly acknowledges a reply, follows with a simple question, gathers information, avoids pushing Ca\$hcard on the prospect, listens to the trainee’s needs and concerns, and responds to gage if he or she is a qualified prospect for one’s territory. Since the goal is not to force an agent prospect to commit to employment, the Lead Agent inquires to learn about the person, allowing them to share their motivations for applying. Ultimately, the agent determines if that trainee would make a productive addition to the team. While the result is not as dramatic as arresting an alleged murderer in the pursuit of justice, the Lead Agents can assess their prospect’s affinity for sales, which has future consequences for themselves, their employees, and the company.

On his blog, “Five Lessons That Everyone in Sales Should Learn from *Columbo* (2015),” author D. Davidoff instructs sales professionals on how to implement five strategies. Phrased in both assertions and questions of interest in the client’s bigger picture, a salesperson positions themselves on the same side as the prospect in a bonding function. Davidoff’s five lessons include the following:

1. **Be underestimated** like the bumbling detective: Davidoff reflects, “While I’m not suggesting we go to the lengths of Columbo, I found that when I de-powered my approach, and initiated the conversation with just a bit less confidence I gained far more traction, much faster. Allow yourself to be underestimated and see what opportunities it opens up.”
2. **Let the suspect prospect feel in control:** Just as Columbo enables the suspects to feel that they are safe with the detective and hold the power in the relationship [antipotency], so does a great salesperson keep in mind “what they’re looking for and uses a variety of techniques to allow their customer to maintain the feeling of control throughout the [progressing] process.
3. **Ask resonating questions** that are not mundane, superficial, or unchallenging. Davidoff clarifies Columbo’s approach: “No matter how simple, every question he asks has a purpose to it. Every question takes the conversation deeper.” The questions get to what matters for a person, not wasting their time.
4. **Play the long game:** The Lieutenant realizes that a crime is not solved in one inquiry, nor is a sale done in one conversation. Long term thinkers commit to multiple interactions, some won and others lost, to a strong finish.
5. **“Oh yeah, one more thing...,”** Davidoff says, “is the killer [Columbo] technique...just when the criminal feels like they’ve gotten away with it and Columbo is leaving, he stops, scratches his head, turns and says, “Oh yeah, one more thing...”.” Doing so catches people a bit off guard as they may think the interview or discussion is over. Also, it can open a resistant responder to a quick question that moves the presentation to the next landmark or have a planned offhand remark or question to challenge defensiveness.

The sales and marketing professionals are aware of how the understated, rhetorically inquiring person can more successfully elicits personality traits, values, and motivations than the hard-sell approach. In turn, that information enables the salesperson to assess ways to make the sale.

Implications in professional journalism

In a televised interview called “Barbara Walters: Her Story (2014),” there is a segment entitled “The Art of an Interview” in which the famous and highly

respected journalist describes how she comes up with questions. She explains that she strives to ask ones not asked by most journalists, ones that ask for dramatic moments of worst and best experiences in their lives, over-prepared with extensive research: "I do do my homework," and "I come up with 50 to 100 questions on 3/5 cards," and "if someone delivers the soup, I ask, 'do you, by the way, have any questions for so and so?' ... I can spend hours... days arranging the questions." Walters puts some questions away, crosses some out, puts them in order, throws some away, and puts others in.

With her reputation of making guests on her show cry during interviews, Walters has a way of constructing her persona as more friend or, at least, ally than someone with whom they must be on guard. Her professional integrity precedes each interview, having demonstrated during countless interviews that she does not humiliate celebrities or political figures. While Walters is a respected professional reporter and anchor, and well-known individuals limit what they say, resisting Barbara's invitation to tell all. They are resistant and on their guards, protecting their pasts and present private lives from the scrutiny of media and the general public who support their livelihoods. Prior to the interviews, guests are vetted and invited to be interviewed. Guests approve of the interview, but that doesn't mean that they are not nervous and guarded.

Perhaps the most challenging interviews are with politicians, many of which dodge questions. However, she pushes by asking the question multiple times to get at some key details of interest to the viewers. Characteristically, renowned guests protect their reputations and exercise control over their public image with publicists, not wanting to look silly or undignified. With any interview, there is some risk of unflattering and inadvertent self-exposure in response to questions, provocative and unexpected. Unlike many reporters and certainly paparazzi, Walters maintains a line between getting show guests to be more open about their lives and feelings for viewer's delight and offering her interview as a vehicle for promoting themselves. With tough questions about their life's high and lows, she does challenge her guests to provide a more intimate interview than in more promotionally-oriented short appearances on talk shows. Topics include their guests' childhood dreams, motives for doing something, assessments of their lives, regrets, and a sense of themselves in contrast with how they are perceived by the public and by the media. One of her routine questions asks people, "What is the biggest misconception about you?" Some of her guests' responses to this question include: "That I'm flakey." (Cher), "That I'm a bitch" (Diana Ross), and "That I'm not a real person" (Lady Gaga) (Barbara Walters: Her Story). Such questions demand the

guest to discuss something potentially hurtful, embarrassing, or distressing for them, which is why some guests may want to hold back this information, not wanting to become emotional about it on television.

Even so, Barbara Walters has a reputation for making her guests cry, which is a source of worry for some guests such as Halle Berry, who rejoiced when she made it through the interview without crying. Becoming an unexplained phenomenon, Walters possesses a *simpatico* and intellect for composing poignant questions, based on her extensive research in preparation for the interviews. Upon reflection, Walters identifies the questions that typically elicit the most emotional responses with tears: "questions about fathers, more so than questions about mothers. . . and questions about the happiest moments of their lives, not the hardest." A question that Walters admits is provocative, thoughtful, and gets surprising answers is "Do you have a philosophy by which you live your life?" With the goals of having a strong beginning and a strong ending to an interview, she ends most interviews by asking them, "Finish this sentence." Within the confines of prescribed wording in the prompt, the question is open to the guest's interpretation of the type of response to provide. With the basic prompt of "[Name of Guest] is," Walters gets a variety of answers that are self-revealing: Will Ferrell is "funny, honest, and devilishly handsome;" Donald Trump is "a good person;" Anne Hathaway is "I'm very very very, over the moon happy;" Sharon Stone is "very very tired;" and Kanye West is "black." The antipotent Barbara Walters has made a career of crafting her interviews from well-conceived, provocative, expertly arranged, thoughtful, broad-ranging, and instinctively timed inquiries. With long-term success, she gently eases the resistant guests into braving her studio and engaging in an intimacy of conversation that reveals personally substantive truths.

Implications in Higher Education

On the webpages of ChangingMinds.org (Straker, n.d.), the think tank-like organization serves as a collective for individuals representing a broad cross-section of disciplines concerned about persuading others to change their minds. Among their online database of rhetorical and philosophical resources about principles, techniques, theories, and explanations, Changing Minds has an article titled "The Columbo Technique." Identifying and adapting the television detective's investigative process, they recommend: "Get them talking, Slip in the real question, One last thing." Explicitly but nonspecifically, the unnamed writer of the article asserts that Columbo's "questioning tech-

nique. . . has been successfully adopted by more than just policemen" (Straker, n.d.). Further, other techniques noted are the "confusion principle," "acting confused to put them off their stride;" making things seem too complicated" for him to comprehend and, therefore, needing the other person's help; and the anticipated tension relief from the "closure principle" that comes with his leaving the suspect alone. However, he, then, reverses the act of closure by making a false exit, causing more tension with another fact, discovery, or question with implications for moving the exasperated subject's position on the matter.

In his Introduction to Philosophy class at Saint John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, Tim Madigan writes about making Socrates and the Socratic Method relatable and comprehensible to his students by making an analogy with detective Columbo and his investigative method:

[A]s Shakespeare would say, there was method to the madness of both Columbo and Socrates, for their outward appearances did not correspond to their inner natures. . . . By playing dumb, he lulled them into a false sense of security. . . . Students were able to see for themselves the connections between Columbo's detective techniques and Socrates' method of discovering philosophic truth. Both were polite but persistent interviewers, and while people with nothing to hide usually enjoyed their company, those who did not wish to have their alibis or ignorance probed would react in exasperation or with violent threats to them (2007, paras. 1, 2 & 3).

Madigan notes that many of his students hadn't previously watched the police procedural, but they knew of the detective character. Madigan's pedagogical achievement was in bringing Plato's dialogues of Socrates alive in the video demonstration. By playing Columbo scenes, Madigan renders Socrates understandable and less unlikeable in his students' perceptions and learning.

In my Rhetoric and Literature courses, Columbo's method comes into relevance not only in the course content but also in the pedagogical approach with varying degrees of success with contemporary students. As Madigan states, many students have only heard of or seen references to Columbo, which makes studying the Lieutenant's method less attractive than a more current example of popular culture. Occasional practitioners of the Columbo Method include *Law and Order: Criminal Intent's* NYPD Detective Robert Goren (NBC September 30, 2001 to June 28, USA 2009, May 1, 2011 to June 26, 2011), *The Closer's* (TNT June 13, 2005 to August 13, 2012) Deputy Chief Brenda Leigh Johnson, several of the FBI profilers on *Criminal Minds* (CBS Septem-

ber 22, 2005 to February 19, 2020). These current examples can make studying research methods less painful to them once his method is analyzed into steps in the process of relationship building, investigative discovery, and abductive conclusion. For my Crime and Detective Stories course, students study a variety of investigator types, methods, formats, story media, and the like. Including Columbo's rhetorical inquiry allows me to develop a fuller repertoire of investigation techniques in context for them to analyze and apply: direct and accusative questioning/interrogations at the police squad, forensics gathering and analysis, psychological profiling, personal history and timeline constructions, victimology, alibi substantiations, accounting forensics, and the like.

In composition and rhetoric textbooks throughout students' education, teaching authors invest students in the process of discovery, text generation, and research through rhetorical inquiry as a matter of basic process. In primary and secondary levels of education, students build stories and essays by answering the who, the what, the why, the when, where, and the how. In higher education, questions that shape credibility-building, logical argumentation, and emotional impact with analyzed audiences follow adaptations of Aristotelian rhetorical principles of pre-writing. So, the use of questions to generate writing or communication is not new. Columbo's style of questioning is a dynamic, responsive form of rhetoric of inquiry that can benefit communication pedagogy and student-teacher interactions and transactions, particularly with resistant students.

Implications during resistant student academic advising

A colleague told me about an interaction with an unknown student during an advising session that impressed me. Her story exemplifies how she facilitated a resistant student to see his own reality – the Columbo way. Sandy calls a meeting with her advisee to review course performance and next semester's scheduling. First-semester and first-generation college student-athlete Nolan expresses bewilderment at his F grade in his composition class. A colleague asked the distressed student, "What do you think happened in the course?" He explains that his attendance was "solid," he did all of the work assigned, and participated during class discussions: "I have no idea how she gave me an F." Without responding to the apparent displacement of responsibilities on the instructor who gives grades rather than students earning

them, my colleague remains neutral and presents a non-threatening, supportive, and curious persona. To be more specific, she does not indicate what she knows about the instructor in question, nor does she show any skepticism about what Nolan was reporting. She explains that, for her to understand his crisis and sense of injustice, they should review his account on the course management space for this class. She asks in a gentle tone, "Would it be ok if you showed me your records?"

Seemingly unencumbered, he starts to type in his username and password to the site. "Checking in" with him to be sure that he is comfortable sharing his personal records with her, she asks, "Have you gone through your gradebook already or are we going to do it together for the first time?" Reaffirming his comfort with the process and his advisor's sincere desire to believe him and advocate on his behalf should they find an inappropriate calculation or assessment of his work. Once Nolan takes her to the site's gradebook feature, the advisor qualifies her actions to proactively reduce tension about the evidence: "Now, give me a few minutes so that I can gain an accurate sense of this big picture since I haven't seen it before." In turn, she emphasizes her respect for his privacy, diminishes any authority over him as his advisor, sets a slow and careful pace for the investigative process to reduce anxiety over a rash response, and promotes his agency as the owner of the records and conveyor of distress.

She quietly and thoroughly examines the data, ensuring that she comprehends his status in the course, reassuring him of her genuine attention to detail and desire to help him. Referring to the information on the gradebook screen, the advisor asks for confirmation, "Do these grades seem to be what you got throughout the course on your various assignments?" In effect, the advisor wants to re-instill her openness to seeing his facts and story as he perceives them, securing their bond. After a minute or two, he takes his eyes off of the screen, looks at the advisor, and more passively nods his head in agreement. Acknowledging his response, she comfortingly smiles at him and takes another look at the screen of low scores and missing data. In a moment or two, the advisor interprets the information she is seeing: "Nolan, your records are telling a different story about your work in that course." She gestures him to look at the figures again on the shared computer station. In generous politeness and sensitivity, Sandy asks, "What do you see?" Awkwardly, reluctantly, but honestly, Nolan admits that he sees the scores that add up to a failing grade. His resistance remains but has morphed into a deep sense of betrayal from the teacher who inconceivably assigned him a failing grade, which, he claims, had never happened before in high school: "I always passed with C's."

Redirecting the advising session, Sandy maintains a calm demeanor, expresses regret that his grade in that class appears to be an F, while other courses also showed barely passing and failed outcomes. She validates his disappointment, acknowledges the challenges of adjusting to college from high school, and presents that learning curve as a universal freshman student experience. Without superiority or negative personal judgment of the student, Sandy reviews some strategies that would help him to succeed the following semester. Terminating the advising session, she encourages him to make sure that there are no completed assignments that were mistakenly overlooked by the instructor. By offering this explanation to Nolan, she lessens the authority but not the respect of dedicated faculty who do their best to help in fairness, despite errors that arise. She acts as an ambassador for his place at the university, providing helpful resources for him, such as advisors and instructors committed to teaching and learning. Getting up from his chair with a half-smile in appreciation but disappointment, Nolan nods his head in acquiescence to the truth Sandy delivers palpably with sincerity.

Implications with an anxious student

Tyana came to us from an inner-city apartment housing in a low income, high crime neighborhood to play basketball at our uncompetitive Division 3 program. While getting an education is presumably one of the goals for her enrollment in a university, good education had not been a strong force in her young life. Academically underprepared from her local public school system, she lacked the support for her education, having come from a culture that spotlights athletics as the way out of poverty while also having to work throughout high school to contribute to the family income. Saddled with student loans and the belief that playing for the basketball team was the answer, Tyana was overwhelmed and unfamiliar with her surroundings, which had little racial diversity in the white-majority demographics at our campus. While Tyana was at home on the basketball courts, she was sorely feeling out of her element in the classroom.

During the first day or two of our freshman Basic Writing course (pre-college composition), I used much of the short class sessions reviewing the syllabus contract to clarify academic and behavioral expectations as well as getting to know each other as a class discussion. In this context, each student was introducing themselves to the whole class, and the rest of us were listening. Fidgety, Tyana turns around to her fellow teammate and speaks

loud enough to be heard and cause distraction but not enough to know the point she was making. Going in order, around the room, Tyana takes her turn, briefly introducing herself to the class, and then resumes her conversation with her friend. I announce that everyone should be attentive to each speaker, but it doesn't lessen Tyana's disruptive behavior. After letting it go a couple of times, I asked everyone, again, to please not talk while someone is presenting because I am too distracted by the side conversations, which disrespect their peer who is performing. But, again, the polite request didn't seem to curb the conversation. This time, I looked right at her, walked over to her desk, discreetly, while a student was talking, and whispered, "I need you to stop talking now."

To this sensitive but, perhaps, embarrassing correction, Tyana stiffened her neck, looked away in a defiant dismissiveness, and pursed her lips in annoyance. Then, two minutes later, class ended, and she left the room with an athlete's swagger, looking cross back at me, audibly mumbling disapproval until exiting the room. Until that day, I had never experienced this kind of open expression of displeasure from a student. Her verbal and nonverbal response felt like what I imagined a rowdy, undisciplined high school classroom might comprise, but not an academic institution for learning.

I turned to the athletic director for advice, expressing doubts about my ability to reach this student who doesn't seem to know how to operate effectively in a college learning environment. That posturing with direct challenge to a faculty member unaccustomed to micro-aggressions felt threatening to a degree. Reassured by the athletic director that he will talk to Tyana, he suggested relaxing about it because she is "all bark and no bite." While even barking dogs are in my comfort zone, I wasn't sure how to communicate with her to avoid triggering the bark as I am explaining ground rules. However, during the next class session, she was quiet with her eyes down, which is what I wanted but not for her to shut down. Her diagnostic essay exam, by which I try to assess early on students writing skills coming into the course, showed good sentence structure but with little writing to make her point or vividly tell her story.

The second week of class, I brought a few extra rhetoric handbooks of grammar and punctuation to give to students with tight budgets. Feeling uncertain at the time, I walked over to Tyana's desk with a smile and a positive attitude. Discreetly so as not to embarrass her over financial need, I asked if Tyana had purchased her required handbook. Shiftily but reactively, she answers, "yes," a reply that felt like a lie and, later, proved to be so. Going on her word, I asked the same of her friend, who answered, "No." So, I handed her

one of the free copies. After this exchange, our relationship and communication improved. My offer of one of the two required books was made in good faith with goodwill toward her. Her nervousness came out as defensive and mistrusting resistance. I replaced my self-doubts with communication in the form of questions.

From there, I asked if she would like help, how she picked her essay topics, what interested her, what life lessons she had to teach, what goals she set for herself, what skills she has practiced and mastered, how folks on the college campus are different from those at home, and so forth. These were questions that helped me to help her write, in the formal English literacy, stories that draw upon her experiences without negating them. They allowed me to transfer agency with the power of her mind and writing-voice. Perhaps most importantly, the questions created a conversation between us that showed her I wanted to hear her.

As a result, she talked in writing more freely, vividly, joyfully, and she enthusiastically and intelligently participated in class discussions. Unfortunately, her overall grade point average kept her off the team for the first year, but that was likely for the best. Tyana had so many adjustments to make, leaving the comfort zone of her home. As brave as she was, she had many “at-risk” signs of not successfully finishing a degree and graduating. Early on, she struggled and had to work hard, but it got easier. Realizing that she needed help and that, through their questions, faculty and staff saw her, accepted her, and wanted to help her meet her goals. In the end, she graduated and is gainfully employed, which feels like a victory to all involved.

Implications in addressing a disinterested student

Steven was in my Advanced Business Writing Web course, having made it to his senior year without developing even basic business writing abilities and document preparation skills. With a vigorous start, his work declined as the semester progressed: late submissions, poor quality of writing, and projects without an audience-directed, purposeful, and context-appropriate achievements. With multiple attempts at reaching out to him, inquiring about his responsibilities, availability to complete tasks, and opportunities for working with me to ensure his learning and course success, I received insubstantial and delayed replies about being “fine.” Finally, after agreeing to meet with me, he misses the appointment. When I emailed him with concerns about the missed meeting, he replied the next day, stating a regret that something had

me, he misses the appointment. When I emailed him with concerns about the missed meeting, he replied the next day, stating a regret that something had come up and apologizing half-heartedly. After a few more weeks, we rescheduled the appointment, which took place for fifteen minutes of him nervously smiling as I expressed concern over his work and the possibilities of not passing the class. While he said that he understood what I was saying, nodding his head continuously with eyes down, I wasn't convinced. Despite multiple questions, Steven could not explain to me why he wasn't doing the work or accepting my help or anyone else's. Not knowing what else to do, I offered to work alongside him, reiterating when I would be in my office, encouraging him to drop by. Alas, he never did.

With only two and a half weeks left of the semester, I checked in with each project group to assess their collaboration, address project-specific questions, and give feedback on rough drafts. These inquiries led to the discovery that Steven had been out of touch with his group members for almost two weeks and had not provided any portion of work to contribute to the joint effort. Asking about his absence in communication and productivity, I received hazy and insufficient excuses about waiting to be told what to do by group-mates, suggesting it was their fault and not his. I took him off of the team to complete an independent project on his own but with an additional ten weeks to finish the incomplete course grade, emphasizing my availability to help him. Early in the spring semester, I sent reminders and suggested we meet to be sure he is making good progress. Again, he forgot to come to our scheduled meeting. While the system had been generating reminder emails as well, I sent my last correspondence before the ten weeks lapsed. At this point, the incomplete grade automatically turned into an F.

To sum up, this is a story about a young man's resistance to seeking help for his academic needs, to accepting help offered to him, and to prioritizing his education, despite reminders and warnings of failure. With this said, Steven contacts me at the end of the spring semester with a brief, poorly written, cryptic, and dramatized request to see me to discuss "his future." I waited over a week to respond until I had a calm, carefully thought through plan of communication, which initially could have been described with curse terms of frustration.

In the meantime, I happened to get an email from another professional writing student, "Alex," who had also stopped attending and submitting assignments halfway through the semester. While he had not replied to my inquiries about his well-being, the email letter is articulate, well organized and edited, mature, responsibility-taking, external blame-avoiding, unexpectedly

requesting the opportunity to make up work for some amount of credit. He wrote wholly and concisely, explaining his absence since his mother's illness and recent death. His details and his request to attend to his missing assignments felt sincere. Additionally, his writing quality and document-submission rates were excellent before he disappeared from campus. Immediately, I wrote a reply, expressing empathy and reciprocating personal disclosure of my own father's death from pancreatic cancer while I was in graduate school. Earnestly, I offered my help, the incomplete grade with the extra time, and I expressed my trust in his ability to complete the work for the course, acknowledging his excellent professional communication.

Within a day, I reply to "senioritis" Steven and receive an email from him that illustrates how little he learned about business communication during the advanced business writing course. By contrast, I gained the terms for comparing Steven's short and inarticulate email with Alex's effective professional rhetoric, adapted to me as his primary reader. So, I called a meeting, assuring Steven that I was not making any promises for a grade change in any direction. When he arrived, I asked him to examine the confidentiality-protected email transcript between Alex and me, noting the times and dates of transmissions. While maintaining as much neutrality in my tone as I could, I asked him numerous questions without prefacing my intension in doing so:

1. What all do you know about this student from these emails?
2. How would you describe his approach with the instructor to making his request to make up the missed work?
3. What do you notice about the style of writing in this business email?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this business correspondence?
5. Do you believe that the student's mother died? Why or why not?
6. Focusing on my reply to the student's initial email, what attitude toward her student is apparent to you? What reveals how she feels and thinks about his request and explanation?
7. How long did it take for the instructor to reply?
8. To which of the other student's points does the instructor respond?
9. How would you describe the instructor's relationship with this student and the student's relationship with this instructor?
10. If you were the instructor, would you grant the student's request? Why or why not?

Then, I showed him the transcript of our exchanges of curt and delayed inter-

actions in contrast. He could see the difference, though I had to keep asking, first open questions and then more direct and probing questions to elicit a more specific discourse analysis of the two distinct electronic conversations:

1. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in the anonymous student's business writing (clarity, concision, completeness of information, consistency of content, organization);
2. Reader-focused writing vs. writer-focused writing;
3. Counter-rhetorical elements that undermine the writer's purpose with the audience;
4. Pro-persuasion elements in the writer's credibility, professionalism;
5. Evidence of respect for the educational plan and institution that might compel readers to react, feel, act, connect, and communicate in particular ways. Letting Steven realize on his own what effective communication looks, sounds, and feels like in contrast with his own proved to be more effective pedagogically than any explanation or rubric I could have offered. He could see the difference before him. Steven felt how compelling the student's writing is. He recognized how his inquiry email fell short of numerous tools of persuasive communication in a professional context.

I could not ethically give him a passing grade for the Advanced Business Writing course when we had both concluded that he had not learned enough about professional writing to pass. So, I assigned work that needed to demonstrate what he did not learn prior. In addition to three missing homework assignments on writing style and mechanics, I asked him to write a metawriting report (writing about his writing). Further, this report required him to describe and evaluate his course performance in terms of the six stated course learning objectives. He was asked to illustrate what he has learned and not learned by offering a course overview. I sent him off to be a detective, investigating his productivity history, artifacts of his written work, synthesis of instructor feedback, and short assignment data from the course. In the report's conclusion, he needed to judge his own professionalism and communication, identifying weaknesses in writing as well as student behavior.

Agreeing on a deadline, he stared at the handouts I printed for him, sighing deeply at the overwhelming challenge ahead of him—to learn what he would not during the course and under the pressure of having to do it or not graduate. Steven is the student with the most resistance to learning while insisting on getting a degree that I have ever taught over my 26+ years in the

classroom. This experience taught me that people can surprise me. At the end of August, at the last possible minute to complete his requirements for our class, Steven comes through with outstanding work and a well-designed and written report that details his personal growth experience from hard work and maturity over the summer months. With the pressure of a new career uncertain until he finishes his degree, Steven prioritized his education, expressing gratitude for his second or third chance to do the work, pass the course, and graduate. With our shared goal of his learning how to write business documents effectively, mission accomplished! We could celebrate his preparation for career communications.

In sum, the above applications of the Columbo Method serve professionals across a spectrum of contexts and situations with colleagues or clients who resist mutual understanding, sharing of time and resources, and compromising for outcomes and rewards. As much of these recommended behaviors, attitudes, and relationship boundaries are common sense, the application is challenging because of the emotional triggers of working with a resistant responder. Reactions of defensiveness, agonism, fatigue, and frustration are understandable consequences of struggling to move a stubborn person. Even with the best efforts, cooperation may not manifest. When it does work, the opportunity promises new developments for both.

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