

The Columbo Approach

What a TV detective can teach us about evoking

Time
About 20 minutes

Group
Groups of four

You need
A short Columbo clip

Watch a short scene of Lieutenant Columbo questioning someone. Notice any MI skills, such as OARS, and how he shows (or doesn't show) the spirit of MI. Then, in groups of four, spend about 8 minutes on these questions. Choose a note taker who will also share with the larger group.

1. What did you notice about his approach? What makes it unique?

2. Which MI skills did he use? Any examples?

3. Two phrases he used (or could use) to develop discrepancy

4. How did he show, or not show, the spirit of MI (CAPE)?

5. How might a Columbo approach fit with our clients? When would it fit, and when wouldn't it?

Facilitator notes: possible answers

His approach	Non-judgmental, humble, empathetic, personable, non-intrusive, guiding, flattering, “confused,” just trying to get it straight, wants to hear you out, curious, genuine.
Open questions	“Can you account for that?”
Reflections	Short reflections and paraphrases of the person’s own story.
Affirmation	Praising a speech as “wonderful, very touching.”
Siding with the negative	Agreeing the problem might all be in someone’s mind.
Rolling with resistance	“That’s a good point, sir... that would explain it.”
Developing discrepancy	Pointing out details that don’t fit together, gently and with curiosity.

Phrases for developing discrepancy

- “Something’s missing here...”
- “It’s probably nothing, but...”
- Help me understand...
- I’m confused...
- I don’t think I’m following...

For discussion

Consider rapport and readiness for change, the four processes (engaging, focusing, evoking, planning) and the spirit of MI. When might this style be helpful, and when could it feel like a trick?