

PART FOUR

THE ESSENCE OF THE GOOD INTERVIEW

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THE COMPETENT INTERVIEWER

THIS CHAPTER summarizes the attributes of the competent interviewer and recapitulates the differences between more competent and less competent interviewers. What follows is a general prescription, applicable to almost all interviews, of the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize the competent interviewer. The competent interviewer brings to the interview that constellation of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that are conducive to establishing a positive relationship with the interviewee. The relevant literature repeatedly describes the configuration as including elements of warmth, acceptance, respect, care, interest, empathy, and compassion (Norcross 2010). Research regarding interviewees' perception of the competent interviewer tends to endorse these characterizations (Norcross 2010).

However, while this describes the basic general requirements characterizing the competent interviewer, competent interviewing requires more specificity. The context of each interview and the idiosyncratic nature of each interviewee may require adaptations and modifications of the general prescription. The competent interviewer needs to be sensitive to the particular requirements of the interview situation and capable of making the needed adjustments.

Different contexts will induce different interview demands. An assessment of eligibility for certain benefits may require a more probing, intrusive approach as contrasted with the demands of a supportive, therapeutic interview. A social study for a custody decision may require a more assertive approach than an interview with a mother concerning child rearing problems. Making a diagnostic assessment for managed care purposes may require a more structured interview approach than an interview concerned with a marital problem. These different contexts make different demands on interviewer competence.