



THE Connection

Official Newsletter of the Georgia Association of Professional Private Investigators, Inc.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Next
GAPPI Atlanta
Upcoming Meeting

January 14, 2014

General Membership
Meeting

Networking and lunch
from
11:30 a.m.—12:00 noon
Meeting from
12:00 noon—1p.m.

The cost is \$15.00 for
GAPPI members

\$20 for non-members
(includes lunch and
beverage)

\$10 for meeting only -
no lunch

Students and potential
members are always
welcome.

“We look forward to
seeing you all there!”

Valuable Files to Review in an Investigation

When conducting a background check, investigators may have established routines of where to start on the hunt to uncover everything about a single individual. When specific resources continuously yield results, it's only logical to revisit those places, thus forming the routine. We spoke with two private investigators, Brian Willingham and Pamela Hay, curious to learn some of their favorite and most yielding places to look for data when working on a background investigation. They both agreed that although an investigator's go-to files are important, it's also a good idea to constantly be widening the spectrum of sources, to open the door for new and pertinent information. They suggested divorce filings, bankruptcy proceedings, UCC filings, and sources, as being some of the most valuable files to review in a background check.

Hay teaches a professional investigations course at Boston University, along with running her own investigations firm, Broad Range Investigations. Willingham owns The Diligentia Group, an investigations firm specializing in background checks, and has been in the field for more than 11 years. Each investigator shared their goto places, and some of them overlapped. Coming from two experienced professionals, this will hopefully provide a valuable resource to investigators looking to break the routine, and revisit a source they haven't checked in awhile.

Here's a list of the files they recommend reviewing:

Divorce Filings

Both investigators couldn't say enough about the success they have had searching through divorce filings. They can hold a plethora of information that isn't available anywhere else. The individuals list their income, their assets, and details about their children.

They can also be a gold mine with descriptions of issues within the marriage, such as any violence or abuse that occurred, a possible restraining order, adultery or unfaithfulness. Investigators can also find out which medications the individuals were on, if there were any addictions within the family, and more.

Bankruptcy Proceedings

People are required to supply a good bit of information in order to file for bankruptcy, regardless of whether they are filing voluntarily or involuntarily. These files detail their assets, income, information regarding their children, their pension plan, and all liabilities they have had or are currently holding.

Generally, United States bankruptcy proceedings offer a payment plan. This could be something to follow up on was the subject able to comply with the payment plan? Were they punctual?

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UCC Filings

Willingham believes UCC filings are most frequently overlooked. A UCC filing is a recording of a person's valuable liens or material items they list as collateral. People put up things like art collections and coin collections which are usually items that an investigator could not know about without entering the individuals home.

A UCC filing could seriously change a subject's worth after being reviewed.

Interviews with Sources

Although sources can be more difficult to reach, they can yield some of the most valuable information. It's worth the time it takes to get consent from the source and find a time to meet that caters to both parties, to hear what the source has to say.

A source will most likely reveal information that an investigator never would have had access to in a record or a file. Discussing a subject with a source can also lead to a tip to explore a new area, city, or state for records and further the investigation.

Both investigators did advise to keep in mind that not all of these files are publicly available in every state. All investigators need to be cognizant of what is legally accessible to them during an investigation. There are rules and guidelines to what is accessible in every state. Divorce filings, for example, are not legally obtainable in New York. Hay and Willingham also noted to continue to look for new sources of information and new ways to investigate a subject. "That's one of the beauties about doing background investigations," Willingham says, "you really never know where you're going to find that one piece of information that might make or break a deal."

This article was written by Amy Thomson and originally published on www.pinow.com.

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Focusing on Your Interview Technique: The Cognitive Interview Process

Focus on your interview technique to increase the quantity and accuracy of information you receive. Interviews provide facts, identify leads to additional evidence, support physical evidence and are critical to the investigation. Experienced investigators often fail to adequately assist victims, witnesses, and suspects in recalling an incident, which reduces the quality of information received. To gain the most from an interview, prepare in advance, avoid bad habits/tendencies, and use cognitive interview techniques to gain accurate information to improve the quality of your investigation.

Even experienced investigators often fail to prepare properly for an interview. It is critical to spend a few minutes to prepare for the interview process. Review any physical evidence you have already collected. Prepare a simple outline with a few questions to focus on the information you want to obtain from the individual. Identify interview techniques you will use to assist the interviewee with memory recall of important facts about an incident. Advance preparation reduces tendencies to use less productive interview techniques.

A common problem with the interview process is the tendency of the investigator to shortcut the interview process in an effort to “get to the facts”. Shortcutting deviates from standard interview and cognitive investigation methods.

Avoid these common tendencies to shortcut the interview process:

- Interrupt the interviewee; redirect their attention to another topic or time period during a narrative response. This reduces the quantity and quality of information received.
- Jump in and ‘assist’ the witness or victim in recalling facts. This alienates the interviewee and potentially leads to inaccurate conclusions.
- Ask closed, short answer, “fill-in-the-blank” questions as the primary interview method. Opt instead to use open ended questions. Interviewees will not freely share information or feel a need to recall information when asked closed, short answer questions.
- Selectively listen to statements made by the interviewee. Investigators miss or discount important information the interviewee may provide if they selectively listen. Further, investigators reduce their ability to recall information from the interview.

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The cognitive interview process is proven effective in several studies to increase the amount of accurate information recalled by witnesses by 60% or more. Cognitive interviewing is a simple 5-6 phase process that centers on three psychological processes; communication, cognition (memory recall), and social interaction (rapport building).

Phases and techniques of the Cognitive Interview Process

About Cognitive Interviewing

Cognitive interviewing is a 5-6 phase process that centers on three psychological processes:

1. Communication
2. Cognition (memory recall)
3. Social interaction (rapport building)

1. **Introduction** - Introduce yourself to the individual to be interviewed, state the purpose of your interview and emphasize the importance of them providing information. This mentally prepares the interviewee to become an active participant and is the first step in establishment of rapport.

2. **Establish rapport** - Spend a few minutes getting to know the interviewee. Listen and look for commonalities that you can use to establish rapport. Listen carefully and thoughtfully to the interviewee and show empathy where appropriate.

3. **Interview** - To start, encourage a narrative response e.g. "Tell me what happened." Maintain rapport with active listening. Resist the urge to interrupt them. Ask them to diagram the scene to aid in memory recall. Have them restate what occurred from another person's perspective that was present during the incident. Instruct them to close their eyes and visualize a person or scene they are describing.

4. **Followup** - Clarify facts or details where needed. Ask neutral, non-leading questions. Always ask the interviewee if there is any other information they can recall about the incident that was not covered. To improve recall, ask the interviewee to restate the incident in reverse chronological order.

Tip: If you are interviewing a suspect, listen for discrepancies between the first narrative account and the reverse chronological order version. Other questions that will assist the interviewee's recall is to ask them to describe the environmental and psychological factors, e.g. "What was the weather like that day?" "How did you feel at the time?"

5. **Challenge** - If the interviewee gave contradictory information or you are interviewing a suspect, challenge any contradictions you noted during the interview phase. Be respectful and listen carefully. Maintain neutrality in your questions and responses to encourage them to provide more information.

6. **Closing** - Remind the interviewee the importance of the information they provided. Continuing the rapport you have established will encourage them to contact you if they remember additional information. Interviews are critical in gathering facts about an incident. A small investment of time in preparation greatly improves the investigator's performance during the process, which results in a better quality investigation. Experienced and inexperienced investigators improve their interview process with advance preparation, when they avoid the tendency to shortcut the interview, and they implement cognitive interview techniques to improve the interviewee's memory recall about an incident.

Reference: McLeod, S. A. (2010). Cognitive Interview Technique. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitiveinterview.html>

This article was written by Bruce Holmes and was originally published on www.pinow.com.

How Background Check Techniques Differ

With the multitude of scenarios that call for a background check, such as a nanny, a potential employee, or an investment banker, surely there are a multitude of techniques investigators utilize depending on the subject. We were interested to hear what investigators had to say on how background check techniques differ from case to case. We learned that one of the most important parts of differentiating between types of background checks, is keeping good communication with the client about the mission, goals, and capabilities of the project. When a client calls for a background check it's important to specify exactly what kind of results the client is looking for, and what type of person the investigator will be researching. This way the investigator can explain to the client exactly what's legal, what's possible, and for the investigator's sake, know what kind of files should be reviewed, and what kind of questions the investigator is looking to answer.

In our discussion covering background checks, we invited two experienced professionals, Brian Willingham and Pamela Hay, to comment on the different types of background checks and what they entail. Brian Willingham of The Diligentia Group, he has been a private investigator for more than 11 years and has completed thousands of background checks. He blogs and owns The Diligentia Group, an investigations firm specializing in background checks. Pamela Hay is a professor of the professional investigations course at Boston University. She also has top secret clearance with the government to conduct civil background checks.

“What I would do on a member of a public company or a CEO of a public company or a hedge fund manager would be completely different than a nanny, or a pre-employment matter.” - Brian Willingham

Hay stressed the importance of communicating with the client how a background check should be tailored and what information should be obtained in reference to the type of subject that will be investigated. Once the investigator has the objective of the investigation, he or she can fine tune the groundwork on what files need to be reviewed for the specific subject.

“What I would do on a member of a public company or a CEO of a public company or a hedge fund manager would be completely different than a nanny, or a pre-employment matter,” he said. There are different types of records an investigator would be interested in, determined by the subject's occupation. With a CEO or public official, for example, an investigator would want to focus on financial records and regulatory issues; such as if he or she has been fined by a regulatory agency or a state regulatory agency. It's very important to check the subject's education and work history, to be sure they are completely accurate. “When you're talking about very public positions, they're going to have a high level of scrutiny involved,” Willingham said.

Hay agreed, commenting on the importance of selecting the appropriate files to review based on the subject. “You necessarily wouldn't do a civil investigation for a bus driver but you may check all civil cases for a CEO. And you may not check a CEO's motor vehicle driving history, but you certainly would check the bus drivers,” she added.

Willingham also noted the weight of an investigator's search spanning as far back as possible. “I'm searching every public record that I can, searching back as far as I possibly can,” he said. And as the investigator, it's important to be the first to present the background information, requiring careful attention that no stone goes unturned. “You want to check every little piece of information, because somebody is going to dig it up at some point.” Willingham said.

Deciphering the method of investigation based on the subject, is something that becomes ingrained in an investigator's mind with time and experience. With each investigator also comes different opinions and ideas of what is necessary based on a subject's occupation or the mission of the client in the investigation. As a thinking piece, it could be interesting for an investigator to monitor the differences in a background check based on the subject, and record how each subject requires different methods of investigation. This could open the door to finding the most efficient way to complete a background check.

This article was written by Amy Thomson and originally published on www.pinow.com.

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Annual Financial Report for GAPPI

As we close out the year we are proud to announce that GAPPI is financially sound. We ended the year with nearly 200 members and, once again, we had very good turn-outs for the Spring Training, the SEIC Fall Conference and at our monthly lunch meetings.

There are still legislative issues that could adversely affect our members and your livelihood. The cost of legislative advocacy still exceeds the basic GAPPI budget. We are dedicated to covering this expenditure by continuing to grow our membership, increasing the participation and sponsors at our Spring Training and the SEIC Fall Conference and by soliciting voluntary donations. Times are tough for a lot of our members, but please give what you can to help us protect our industry. If you can't donate right now please consider giving of your time to talk to our State Legislators so that they will be better educated on issues that affect Private Investigators and Security Agents.

If you have any questions please give me call at 404-766-1632 or you can e-mail me at vernon@ahqi.com.

Vernon Thomas
Executive Director, GAPPI

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