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Academy Blog
Book**

As of July 2019

Introduction

Private Investigators fill an important role in society. They focus on an investigation where law enforcement is either overwhelmed with other investigations, do not have the resources, or expertise to complete the investigation, or the investigation is an administrative matter where police are not able to assist. Private Investigators have assisted families in finding lost loved ones, gaining new information, insight into an investigation, and saved companies millions of dollars in potentially lost revenue.

ProPI Academy was established to promote professional private investigation practices through education. In addition, the academy provides information to practitioners in the private investigations industry that will assist them in being professional private investigators. Sharing of knowledge, information is one way we hope to support our colleagues in the private investigations industry so that they may be successful.

Content in this ebook is taken directly from our Academy Blog website www.propiacademy.com with minor edits to the wording. We have grouped the articles into three categories in no particular order.

Content for our blogs comes from a variety of resources, primarily based on our experiences and observations of practices in the industry. We have put this ebook together as a resource for our students and members of the private investigations industry.

We hope this information is helpful to you. If it is, please send us a note at office@propiacademy.com

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Business Practices

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Traits of the Best Private Investigators

There is a difference between being a “good” private investigator and being the “best”. Often students ask the question, what does it take to be the best? The first response is, “You must be honest, trustworthy, motivated, and creative”, among other traits. But these are the baseline, or foundational traits required for all investigators. The real question is, “*What separates the best investigators from the good ones?*”

Here are my thoughts:

- Objective - Whether interviewing a “hostile” witness, or conducting surveillance where all signs point to the individual’s guilt or innocence, the best investigators remain objective - viewing the situation without the influence of personal feelings, and/or biases at all times. A colleague shared an example; “Everyone thought this guy stole the money. He was angry when I talked to him. I had to put aside the influence of my client, the witnesses that presumed he did it. I found that he did not take the money.”
- Critical thinker - (Being objective is the foundation of critical thinking.) The best investigators are critical thinkers - completing an objective review/evaluation of their case. They consider all alternatives, investigate, then make an objective evaluation of the facts. They separate facts from opinions which can be difficult to do in some circumstances. Consider the alternative in every theft case that the items “stolen” may only be missing.
- Ability to simplify complex problems - Above average investigators break down a complicated investigation into manageable parts, whether in a timeline, or other factors. Simplifying complex investigations allows the investigator to get to the facts, identifying those that are relevant, and those facts that are not. Simplifying fosters an objective view of the case at hand.
- Adapting Interpersonal Skills - Highly successful investigators adapt their interpersonal skills to the individuals and the situations they are working in. They can change in an instant, whether talking with a Fortune 500 CEO, or a young line worker. Being adaptable allows them to solicit information more easily from the individual they are interacting with at the time. Being adaptable allows them to be empathetic, viewing the situation as the individual does and then using that information to establish rapport and gain insight into the individual’s perspective.

Excellent investigators use these skills and abilities together in a consistent manner. The good news, these skills can be learned through practice, exercising mental discipline to be objective,

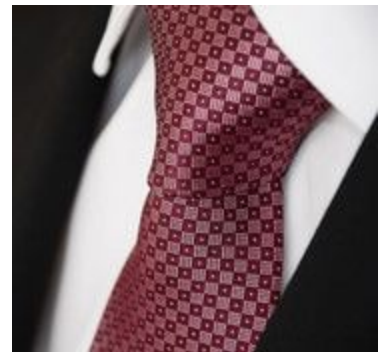
thinking critically, simplifying complex problems, and adapting their interpersonal skills to the situation.

Private Investigator Professionalism

Being a **Professional** Private Investigator requires attention to a lot of detail. Here are some of the most frequent pitfalls that will damage your professional reputation as a private investigator:

1. Not returning emails or calls to clients promptly - You are a busy person, but failing to communicate with your clients in a prompt manner is a sure way to damage your professional reputation. Make sure that you respond promptly, even if it is to say you are very busy and will respond to them as soon as possible.

2. Dressing like a- Your appearance sets the stage in your client's mind about your professional attitude toward your private investigator duties. Meeting with a client for the first time? Suit & tie for men, business dress for women, everything neat and pressed. It's a business meeting, dress appropriately. Save the pullover polos and BDU pants for the barbeque. Oh yeah....take off the sunglasses! One investigator shared this tip, *"Dress like it's a job interview because it is!!!"*



3. Not paying attention to someone - I once met with a private investigator that constantly checked their phone. When asked something they responded with, "Uh, what did you say? Whether meeting with a client or talking with a witness, give them your undivided attention. Make eye contact, paraphrase what they say to you to show you understand and more importantly, that you are listening to them. Put the cellphone away!

4. Sloppy reports - How you write your investigative reports, attention to detail, proper spelling, and grammar create an impression. Make it a good impression! Remember, the report you write may be viewed by several other people. People that may be a future client. Proofread, proofread, proofread, and yes, proofread your report before sending to your client.

5. Failing to be on time or meet deadlines - Arrive early for appointments. Give yourself plenty of time to beat the traffic and find the meeting location. If you provide your client with a deadline, meet it. Sometimes problems happen. Let them know before the deadline that you may be late and let them know why.

Word of mouth advertising is the best!!! If you exceed your client's expectations you can bet on a positive review, callbacks, and future referrals. Your reputation as a professional private investigator is an investment. Protect it all times and don't make these mistakes.

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The Ethical PI

No industry is free from individuals that choose to do the wrong thing from time-to-time and this applies to private investigators as well. Unfortunately, there are those limited few that bring discredit to our profession and it often reflects badly on all of us.

Ethical, professional private investigators are always alert to conduct that may breach or violate ethical professional standards. Here is a simple decision making method to determine if your conduct during an investigation is ethical. This method is extremely important when the decision is not clear.

1. **Is the action(s) a violation of any local, state, or federal law?** If yes then STOP. If no, continue to the next item.
2. **Will the action(s) if taken negate being presented in court?** If yes then STOP. If no, continue to the next item.
3. **Is the action(s) considered immoral, unjust, or otherwise a questionable practice?** If yes then STOP. If no, continue to the next item.
4. **Are the action(s) contradictory to professional private investigative standards?** If yes then STOP, if no then continue to the next item.
5. **Will completing the action(s) make you, your investigators or client feel uncomfortable?** If yes, then STOP, if no then continue to the next item.
6. **Will the action(s), if known to others, put your company at risk of obtaining additional business?** If yes then STOP, if no then continue to the next item.

If you answer Yes to any of the questions above, then you should not take that action. If you can answer No to all of these questions, there is a great chance that others will not question your conduct.



One question that often comes up from students, "*Is there any situation where violating ethics acceptable, maybe more ethical?*" This is a tricky question as it seems to imply the private investigator is conducting an unethical act when they learn something that is of such great importance to reveal that it would make the unethical act ethical. Our answer, considering the context of the question, is *No - we are not aware of any "excuse" to make unethical conduct ethical. Otherwise the action(s) would be ethical at the time.*

The biggest risk a private investigator takes when deciding to pursue an unethical or questionable actions in their investigation is the harm that may be done to a client. This is unethical behavior aside from the action - *creating risk for the client*.

It's unfortunate that a few investigators decide to continue moving in the wrong direction when they know better, or are just not sure. When they do, and get caught, this reflects badly on them and badly on the private investigator profession. Any time the action is questionable, you are not sure if the answer is Yes or No, the best course of action is to find an alternative approach or discuss with legal counsel, or other trusted colleagues in your profession.

For fun, [watch New York Private Investigator, Michael McKeever, by clicking here, Fact-Check some private investigator movies.](#)

Managing Difficult Clients

At one time or another, all private investigators have encountered a client that is difficult to manage. Notice the word "manage". Clients that call constantly for updates, their expectations exceed their fiscal resources, or those that do not accept the factual results of an investigation can be challenging to deal with. Disclaimer: We have learned there is no one technique or method that will always work.



As a private investigator you must manage your clients to ensure you are providing the best investigative services. Managing a client's expectations is a two phase process: 1. Prior to the investigation; and 2. During the investigation. (We've found that phase 1 is often the most important)

1. Prior to the investigation - Prevention is the best management technique for any private investigator. Taking preventative steps, prior to the investigation, will help reduce the chances of conflict with the most difficult of clients.

First, gain a clear understanding of the investigation to use in developing a clear investigative estimate. Investing the time to gather the information during the intake phase of an investigation will allow you to identify any potential areas where the client may have unrealistic expectations. Listen for verbal clues for example when the client says; "It's obvious they are cheating", "It's a simple case that shouldn't take long." Warning - if it is "obvious" or "it's a simple case..." then they don't really need your services. This is often they attempt to reduce the costs of the investigation.

Second, write a clear investigative scope statement for the contract. Review it with the client and of course have them sign acknowledging the statement. This will assist you in the event they refuse to pay. When discussing the investigative scope be careful what you say. Stick to the content of the statement. Making comments like, "Of course we will take extra steps where needed", Or, "This is just a formality." Will only add to the client's expectations. If you have investigators working for you, make sure they understand to stick to the scope of the investigation.

Third, develop a communications plan. Identify a schedule for providing the client with updates as to your progress. It may be once a week, once a month, whatever the schedule make it reasonable for both you and the client.

2. During the investigation - One guiding principle we always encourage investigators to consider during an investigation is to, "Under promise and over deliver." Using this principle,

your client should be happier with your response to their investigation, for example if you promise to update them weekly, but call them twice a week you are exceeding their expectations. Another example of this principle is identifying the timeline for your investigation. Most client complaints are it took too long to complete. So if you feel it should only take a week to complete, consider setting a goal of two weeks. This allows for those unexpected occurrences such as illness, or being unable to schedule interviews.

With these ideas in mind, following are some specific ideas from private investigators in dealing with a few types of difficult clients:

- Client that calls a-lot - One investigator explains their approach - *"When I start receiving multiple calls from a client, outside of the communication plan, I'm always professional and always take their calls. You never know when they may have information that can assist with the investigation. If they are only calling for updates, then I politely refer them to the communications plan. Like, "I don't have any additional information at this time. I will update you on such-and-such date as we agreed. That will allow me time to further develop information."*

- The "add-ons" client - An investigator has a great way for handling the client, that once the scope has been agreed upon, they call and want the investigator to do more. This investigator, when talking to the client, offers to revise the investigative scope statement then provide them with an estimate for the additional cost. She shared, *"Some clients sign the contract then either they think of things later they want done, or think of how the investigation should be conducted either by talking with friends or colleagues. I had one client that got ideas on what I should be doing by watching crime shows. When I explain it would increase their costs and require a revision to the contract they often decline."*

- "You're not doing anything!" - The most difficult client to deal with is the one that is almost never happy with your investigation. They feel you are not fast enough, or you are not completing the investigation appropriately. (This can include the "add-on" type client as well) One private investigator shares the harsh realities of managing this type of client - "If early in the investigation I realize that I am dealing with a client that will never be happy I consider terminating the contract. It's hard to give up the opportunity to make money, some returns are not worth the challenges. If I decide to terminate the contract I explain to the client that I may not be able to meet their needs or expectations then offer suggestions of other investigators that might be able to help them. Sometimes they calm down and listen to me, others will take me up on the offer to release them from the contract. I always bill them for the time and offer to share the

information I have gathered with the new investigator. This helps protect my firms reputation, and avoid spending an inordinate amount of time fighting with the client."

One investigator offers the best advice for dealing with any difficult client - "I always practice empathy with my client's. I mostly deal with divorce types of investigations and receiving numerous calls, or having upset clients about the progress in an investigation is routine. I try to put myself in their place - realizing they are emotionally involved, totally wrapped up in the investigation. I often find I am as much a sounding board for them, like a counselor, as much as an investigator."

As a private investigator you can never completely avoid the difficult client. In some cases you may even stop the investigation when the difficulties outweigh the potential risks to your firms reputation. Thinking proactively, in a preventative fashion during the intake phase and carefully responding to a difficult client during the investigation can help you lessen the impacts of challenging clients. And, yes, sometimes you just have to listen.

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Managing Multiple Investigations

Managing multiple investigations can be challenging when you have limited investigative resources. Great time management is critical to being successful, by meeting client deadlines while completing quality investigations. Here are a few tips we share with our students in how to manage multiple cases effectively and efficiently:

- Map Timeline for each investigation - Outlining each investigation by the type of investigative action only takes a few minutes and will allow you to find commonalities in tasks and time frames. Start by writing the date(s) then the category of task like interviews, surveillance, research, etc. Include estimates for the amount of time you will need to complete each task.
- Identify conflicts - Based on your investigative map timeline look for any conflicts where tasks must be completed at or near the same time. Maybe you have double-booked interviews, etc. Work to resolve those conflicts by sharing the work with colleagues or rescheduling where possible.
- "Time-Chunking" - One of the most effective/efficient methods is to put like tasks together. Wherever there is an opportunity to conduct like tasks across multiple investigations in a series it will provide better results. Consider that when you get into the "zone" conducting interviews, you can work more effectively/efficiently by conducting as many interviews during the same time period for different investigations. Same goes for report writing, conducting surveillance (which is often more difficult to schedule), and research tasks.
- Schedule Reserve Time - You need time after each group of tasks to complete paperwork, evaluate the results, and to allow for unforeseen changes in schedule. When conducting interviews at one location, make sure to leave an hour before starting the next round of interviews on another investigation. Chances are you may run over the scheduled time, and you will need some down time to prepare for the next set of interviews as well as travel time.

Whenever you take a case it is important to start with the map timeline. As you add additional cases you will already have the information you need to coordinate schedules with your client and look for opportunities to use your time wisely.

Seldom can investigators conduct their investigations in a totally linear fashion - completing one investigation before beginning the next. Managing your time wisely will improve your ability to

complete investigations in a timely manner, while ensuring you maintain the highest quality which includes accuracy, being effective in completing your tasks.

Protecting Your Data

Information you collect from interviews, documents, and your investigative logs are the foundation of your work product. As a private investigator you are not immune to data losses that may occur accidentally or as the result of a criminal act. Further, the information you collect is private and belongs to your client. As a private investigator you must protect your digital and hard-copy information.



Protecting Hard-Copy Data

You collect documents, and other forms of paper information for use in your cases. In many cases, these documents are evidence for the case. Here are a few tips to protect these hard-copy, paper documents:

* **Make working copies** - Using your scanner or copier, make copies of the original documents. Once complete, seal the documents in sealed envelopes, (writing identifying information on the envelope before placing the documents inside), then store them safely and securely. You can use the copies for your investigative file as you work the case. You can make notes, highlight information, etc. on your working copies making it easier to find the information you need.

* **Store in a secure manner** - Originals should be stored in a lockable, fire-proof filing cabinet or safe. Fire-proof, lockable storage is not inexpensive, but when you consider the protection afforded the investment is well worth it. Also, the cabinet or safe should be stored in a secured room for extra protection. Not only do these cabinets protect the documents, they also help maintain your chain-of-custody when you keep a log to show when the room and cabinet was accessed and by whom.

Protecting Digital Data

Chances are you are using a lot of digital data in the form of electronic documents, photos, videos, etc. Loss of this data can cripple your investigative efforts. Protecting your digital data is more important than ever. Consider these tips:

* **Secure Online Storage** - Several years ago we would not have considered storing digital information online. Secure, online data storage, or "in the cloud", has become a preferred method for private investigators today. Several companies offer secure cloud storage solutions. With

criminals changing their tactics on a daily basis, using a secure online data storage service ensures there is someone protecting your data around the clock. Most importantly, your data is maintained in the event you have a hardware failure. Ever turn your computer on and it never boots up?

* **Working Copies** - Depending on your investigation you will want to make working copies. This is easily done in hard-copy or by creating a copy for your use while working the case. (Remember, every time you access a document it is time/date stamped.) For emails and documents make a pdf copy that you work from, make notes, etc.

* **Two-step authentication processes** - Of course if your password is compromised or an employee clicks on one of those phishing emails, all of your digital information could be at risk. Two-step authentication protects your email, and data (if you select the right service) from phishing scams, or if your password is compromised. You can purchase security keys that protect your accounts from phishing scams.

As a private investigator you are responsible for securing hard-copy and digital evidence, protecting it from tampering or inadvertent loss. This has become so important that we train our investigators in data protection methods to include secured storage, enforcing strong passwords, and using two-step authentication with security keys.

Invest some time, and yes, money, to protect your documents and digital data.

Organizing a Case File

Chances are as a private investigator you have a format that you use for organizing your case files. Periodically, it is important to ensure your case file is organized to meet your client's needs. Here are a few tips that may help you tune-up your case files, or check to ensure you are providing the best product for your client.

- **Remember who you are writing the report for** - You are writing the report for your client. It needs to be written for ease of use by your client. Avoid using industry jargon that may not be familiar to everyone; verify proper use of grammar and of course spell check. NOTE: It's important when you spell check to ensure you are using words correctly for example; "there" vs, "their".
- **Case summary/synopsis** - Client's want to understand the results of the investigation quickly. Write a brief summary/synopsis of the case. Some PI's write the summary/synopsis in the email then attach the report as a pdf file. The summary simply answers the questions the client had when they contracted you to investigate.
- **Use a table of contents** - Using a table of contents will help the client, and you, find information quickly. Consider organizing content based on the type of information it is. A section for the investigative narrative, interviews (include a list of dates, times, locations and names), section for evidence collected, and other content arranged by type. Creating a table of contents that lists the sections will make it easy to locate information. ([Click here to learn how to create a table of contents in Word](#). [Click here to learn how to create a table of contents in Google Docs](#))
- **Use lists or inventories for each section** - Incorporate a list of information at the beginning of each section. This allows you to quickly locate where specific information is in the report as well as serving a double-check that you have included all information in the report.
- **Proofread, proofread, and proofread** - As you have read in our other articles about proofreading reports you know this is the most important step. We suggest you write the first draft concentrating on getting all of the information into the report. Then proofread for accuracy and to verify all information is included. Then proofread a second time for spelling and grammar. Try to put yourself in the place of the client. Does the text make sense? Could someone unfamiliar with the case understand the information you have included in the report. And, then let the report "marinate" for a day or two before the final



proofreading. This allows you the opportunity to think about it. What information may you have missed? Are there important facts you need to emphasize? After a day or two, plan to spend plenty of time on the final proofread to verify everything - all information is included, spelling, grammar, and readability.

PROPIACADEMY TIP: When proofreading for spelling and proper use of words, try reading the report backwards. This allows you to focus on spelling and proper word use.

Your report is the final product that represents your work. Chances are it will be read by several individuals depending on the type of case. It may be presented in a court of law, read by prosecutors, law enforcement or others. Proper organization will improve your final report product and reflect well on your work.

Safety First!

As a private investigator you often find yourself in situations where your safety may be at risk. Interviewing aggressive suspects; conducting surveillance; and being in unsafe areas. Often private investigators can become complacent about their safety, whether having interviewed several individuals without incident; working in unsafe areas several times without incident; or conducting surveillance without being approached by the target. It is important that you always think "**Safety First!!!**"

Safety First!!! As a private investigator you have to be aware, identify the potential risks you face and be prepared to take action. Think through the following every time you leave the office:

- **Locations** - Threats do not always come from the investigation you are conducting. You may be traveling to crime ridden areas, or areas where other individuals may be present that are not happy you are there. Whenever traveling to a location, or conducting surveillance, be aware of your surroundings. When possible, gather information about where you are going by searching the Internet for news stories about crimes, review local police web pages for incidents being reported, and/or locate crime maps to understand what crimes are typically committed.
- **Environmental factors** - be aware of safety concerns in your immediate area. If you are called to an industrial plant, or other locations where hazardous work is being performed, you need to be alert. Understand the potential hazards you may encounter such as construction sites.
- **Individuals** - Unfortunately, anyone you may encounter could be a potential threat. Whether a witness, suspect or victim, they may perceive your presence in a negative way and react violently. Review your verbal de-escalation techniques, ensure that you have a clear path to an exit at all times when interviewing, and have assistance from other investigators whenever possible.

Unlike law enforcement, most private investigators do not have the assistance of others to rush to their aid in seconds. Private investigators must identify the potential risks and be prepared to implement mitigating responses which can include protective equipment, maintaining an awareness of evacuation routes, surroundings or taking other evasive actions. The key is to always think **SAFETY FIRST!!!** If you encounter a situation that is potentially dangerous? Exit, evacuate, run if needed to a place of safety. Only use physical force as a last resort to protect yourself.

Here are some other safety tips whether working or off-duty to help you develop habits that will make you think **Safety First!!!!!!**:

- Maintain an awareness of exits anytime you enter a building.
- Keep your head on a swivel - look around and be aware of your surroundings for potential threats.
- Think about potential evasive actions you can take in any situation. (We encourage our students to play the "What if?" game. For example; "What if the person I am interviewing attempts to reach across the table at me? Push the table against the individual and move to the nearest exit."; "What if I am in a building and there is a fire? Know where the nearest exterior exit is."; "What if my surveillance target approaches me in a hostile manner? Make sure I have a clear route to evacuate the area.")

Hopefully you have gathered that this article is to get you to think??????? Yes!!!! **Think Safety First!!!! At all times!!!!**

Private Investigators Compared to Police Detectives

We are often asked by the public and students new to the private investigations industry, what are the differences or similarities of private investigative work as compared to police detectives. So we thought it would be helpful to compare and contrast both roles.

Similarities

- Police detectives and private investigators use similar methods and techniques for conducting an investigation. Interview techniques, gathering evidence, and even processing evidence if required. Tried and true techniques for getting and gathering information are used by both.
- Writing reports about the information they learn from the investigation is another similarity of both professions. Information collected and gathered must be documented by either investigator. The reports provide a written record of the facts they have gathered, and a written record, “chain-of-custody”, of evidence, interviews, and test results which may be presented in court or as a part of legal documentation. Some states, such as Georgia, require that private investigators write a report about their investigation.

Differences

- The obvious difference between the two is that police detectives work for the public while private investigators work for a specific person or company. Private investigators are contracted to investigate activities on behalf of a private person or company, often activities which the police are not able to fully investigate, or lack the authority to investigate. Police detectives work for the public at large to identify suspects that pose a threat to the community.
- Crimes
 - Police detectives investigate potential violations of criminal law. They often do not have the time, resources, or authority to investigate cases that are non-criminal in nature. Their authority as law enforcement allows them to apply for search and arrest warrants based on the results of their investigations.
 - Private investigators may investigate potential criminal violations, but they also conduct investigations that are not criminal in nature. Investigations of missing persons, which is not a violation of criminal law, is one example. Consider that police detectives work for the benefit of the public at large and do not work specifically on behalf of an individual. Therefore, they often must prioritize their investigations based on the largest threat to the community. Private investigators, often working for company’s investigate violations of policy such as sexual

harassment, or behaviors that may indicate lack of work ethic. When they investigate criminal activity, it is often where the local police do not have the resources in time or personnel to adequately complete an investigation.

- Specialization
 - Most police detectives are trained to conduct criminal investigations. They are experts in violent crimes, sexual assaults, and other criminal activities commonly encountered in the communities where they work, but most often in smaller departments they are general practitioners.
 - Private investigators are also experienced in a variety of cases, they may be called upon to investigate, but some are specialists. Some specialize in computer intrusions, conducting surveillance, missing persons, or administrative type investigations for company's. The variety of cases that private investigators are skilled and trained to investigate is much larger in general than the local police detectives as they often work with criminal, civil, and administrative type of investigations.

Although both use the same techniques and methods for conducting an investigation, there are significant differences. If you are a victim of a crime you may work with the local police detectives. If you have the need for assistance with a civil matter, administrative type of investigation or when the police do not have the needed resources, then you will call upon a private investigator. Infidelity, internal company investigations, or even crimes where the local police are unable to dedicate resources, are examples of when hiring a private detective is the right choice.

Who's the Client?

Some of our students have asked the question, "*When working a case where an attorney is involved on behalf of another party, who is the private investigator's client?*"

Great question and the quick answer is "Your client -- the one that is paying you." Of course that does not always answer the question satisfactorily depending on the circumstances. Actually the better question is; "**How does a private investigator work with multiple client's, or when there are two needs that are potentially in conflict?**"

Consider this case study:

Investigator is contracted by an attorney for an infidelity case. Attorney's client, the "spouse-client", calls the investigator and shares information that may be helpful in scheduling surveillance, but the attorney disagrees. The spouse has received a call from a friend that says his wife is meeting her alleged boyfriend tomorrow night at a restaurant.



The easy response for the investigator is to follow the instructions of the attorney as they hold the contract and that may be the only answer as working outside of the contract could place the investigator in a situation where they will not be paid. Of course, there may be a missed opportunity in identifying, or not identifying, potential infidelity on the part of the spouse.

What would you do?

Click the Read More link below to learn what the investigator actually did in this case.

In this case the private investigator faced a dilemma. The times and dates identified by the attorney were primarily during the day when the spouse, target, was at work as it was thought the boyfriend was a fellow employee.

First, the private investigator met with the attorney to discuss the information that was received and to discuss the information the attorney's client provided her. Still the attorney disagreed

feeling that this was a "wild goose chase", that the spouse-client may be caught up in do to her emotional state. The attorney knew there were very limited financial resources on behalf of his client and he wanted to maximize the use of the limited funds. (Attorney is looking out for the client, not trying to be difficult)

Second, the private investigator was having difficulty conducting surveillance on the target as the office she worked in was access controlled and there were no exterior windows to her office that were visible from a public location. Again, the attorney felt the times when the target was arriving to work, going to lunch and leaving work were the best times for the surveillance.

The investigator has a challenge as she feels she is not conducting adequate surveillance of the target but understands the financial challenges. After all, as the investigator she has to get paid as well. So what did our investigators do in this challenging situation?

She made a deal with the attorney. She did not want to conduct surveillance on the night in question without his approval as the client. She offered to conduct the surveillance at night, at the restaurant, free of charge if nothing came of the tip that was given to the spouse-client. If the tip was correct, then they could adjust the surveillance schedule and she would be paid. The attorney agreed.

Now a couple of thoughts about how clever our investigator is....first she considered how far the restaurant was from her office and decided that eating a meal at the restaurant was an acceptable loss to her in time and financial costs. The worst outcome was she would lose the cost of a dinner and some time at the restaurant. Second, she obtained permission from the attorney first. This helped her continue good customer relations with the attorney while still conducting, what she felt, was an adequate investigation.

So what happened? Are you curious? *Here is an excerpt from the report, names and some syntax changed to protect the investigation.*

Investigator observed target leave work in her vehicle traveling northbound on Rogers Street at 1745. Mr. Doe called investigator at 1805 and told investigator that the target called and said she was working late at the office. Investigator traveled to 123 Noname Lane to Roberto's restaurant.

At 1810, while inside the restaurant, approximately 30 feet away, investigator observed target meeting with a male, approximately 35 years of age. While in the restaurant, the target and male were holding hands and kissed three times (see surveillance photos and video). At 1905 both left the restaurant holding hands, (see video), and sat in the male's vehicle in the parking lot of the restaurant. Investigator was able to observe that on a few occasions both were kissing, and target

was observed laying her head on the male's shoulder (see surveillance photos and video). At times neither individual was visible to investigator (see stationary video from entry in the parked vehicle to the time they departed the parking lot).

Target exited the vehicle at 1947hrs, got in her vehicle and left the parking lot. Mr. Doe called investigator at 2109 and stated that the target was pulling her vehicle into the garage at home.

Now this case had a happy ending as the attorney and investigator agreed to work together. Whenever there is a conflict with multiple parties we will suggest the investigator should try to find a mutually acceptable solution but in the end side with the one who holds the contract as long as it is not unethical, immoral, or illegal. After all, you are in a contract with them and they are how you get paid.

As of July 2019

Know Your Limits, Then Prepare

From the business perspective you can find it hard to say "no" to client when discussing a potential investigation. It is important to know your limits and respond accordingly. As an experienced investigator you have, or will, receive that call to consider an investigation. An investigation that may be beyond your level of expertise, or capabilities.

So how can you still say "yes" to an investigation, when your resources and capabilities are limited?

Start by identifying your weak points, areas where you may not have the required expertise, or for times when you have a heavy case load then, prepare in advance.

- Identify potential partners - Through your association meetings, individuals you meet through the course of your work, establish potential partners that can work with you to fill the gaps you have identified.
- Establish pricing and/or agreements - Knowing what a specific skill may cost you will help you work with the client in determining pricing. For example; you are asked to work an investigation that will require computer forensics, that may be a weak point for your skill set. Identify qualified computer forensic analysts and developing pricing for common tasks.
- Reciprocal Agreements - Consider offering the same assistance to them if they encounter similar situations. This will expand your potential business opportunities as well as further cementing the partnership.

By identifying partners with the necessary skills and expertise, establishing agreements in advance, and offering your services in return, you can expand your investigative offerings. This will put you in a position to accept almost any investigation at times you have a heavy workload, or the investigation requires skills you do not have.

As of July 2019

"No Results" Investigation

You have conducted your investigation. Conducted interviews, reviewed countless hours of video, written documents, and other potential leads that will help you identify the suspect. Unfortunately, no suspect has been identified. So how do you handle your client?

Your client expects results. Your investigation has hit a dead-end with no results. You still need to get paid for your time, maybe your client will not agree. You need a game plan to respond to your client, providing them with the bad news.

1. Complete your report. You need to establish, in written form, all of the steps you have taken to successfully conclude the investigation. Your time records are important as well. You need to clearly identify the time you have invested in the investigation.
2. Be prepared. Expect your client to be unhappy. After all, in their mind, they contracted you to find the suspect, or to identify and recover the loss they experienced. When you are ready to present the final investigation to your client, expect them to be upset. As a private investigator you will need to control yourself when faced with unkind comments. Allow them time to vent their frustrations, some of their frustrations will target you.
3. Explain your investigation. Prepare an overview of your investigation. Include the steps you took, the interviews you conducted, and more importantly, all of the areas you covered. Your expertise may be challenged by the client, you need to be prepared to respond to their inquiries about your investigation.
4. Avoid speculation. When faced with criticism, you may want to argue, provide an explanation of why you could not locate the property or identify the suspect. If your argument is not based on facts, then don't say it. Speculating on the investigation could lead the client to deciding that you are not competent in your duties. Worse, they may act on your speculation opening you to potential civil actions if they take adverse actions against employees.
5. Expect threats refusing to pay you for your services. Again, you will need to exercise restraint. Your interpersonal skills will be put to the test. If you have a contract in place, let it work for you. Avoid getting into arguments, or responding negatively to their comments. Often threats will be made during a bout of emotional stress. You can address non-payment at the time they actually refuse to pay you. If they do, you may need to contact legal counsel to help you pursue the payment for your services. Save this action for the last resort, and most importantly, allow them time to cool off before you make any threats of taking legal action.

Unfortunately, there are times that your investigation will not come to a successful conclusion. You need to be prepared, have your documentation in order, and to deliver in accordance with the terms of your contract.



Interviews

As of July 2019

As of July 2019

Establishing Rapport During an Interview

Interviewing is one of the critical skills that private investigators bring to the table in any investigation. Gaining information from witnesses, suspects, and subject matter experts often is the primary method that private investigators use to solve a case.

Establishing rapport with the person being interviewed is the first step in any interview, increasing the chances that the private investigator will gain the information they need. Before an interview, gather information about the individual such as reading statements they have provided prior to the interview, understanding their role in a company, or the reason they are being interviewed. Then;



1. Start with a conversational approach - Introduce yourself and state the purpose of your interview. Remember to smile.
2. Ask about the individual - Spend a few minutes talking with the individual about their position, role in the company, or how they are associated with the investigation. Chat about their hobbies, interests if time allows.
3. Show genuine interest in the individual - Let them know you are listening to them. Paraphrase information they share with you.
4. Use their name - Get their permission, "May I call you Rob?". Then use their name when talking, asking questions. This helps to establish a connection with the individual, personalizing the interview.
5. Be friendly, empathetic - Let them know you understand or are trying to understand their position in a specific investigation. "I can imagine that you feel threatened about being interviewed." Or, "It's tough to be under-appreciated in your work."
6. Maintain rapport throughout the interview - Private investigators that continually build rapport with the interviewee gather more information. Those being interviewed that feel comfortable with the investigator are more willing to share information that may be relevant to the case.

Building rapport requires effort on the part of the private investigator in an interview situation. Think of building rapport as making an investment in the investigation. It requires a few minutes of time but can provide excellent results.

As of July 2019

Preparing to Confront a Suspect

When working on a criminal case, or suspected violation of company policy you need to prepare in advance for conducting an interview, or follow-up interview, and identify a strategy to confront the suspect with their actions. Following are a **few** suggestions in preparing to confront a suspect.

Preparing in advance can help you during the interview or interrogation process.

- Start by gathering the facts that point to your suspect. Have them in the order they happen. Sometimes creating a timeline with notes as to what evidence supports each fact is a great place to start. This will allow you to focus your interview/interrogation to gain additional insights into each fact.
- Learn about the suspect. Talk with the client to gain additional information about their habits, possible personal issues they may be facing, and ask if there have been any noted changes in their behavior since the incident before you meet with the suspect.
- Identify any legal requirements, or policy requirements that may include notifications you must give to the suspect at the beginning of your interview/interrogation. These may include policy notifications, depending on the client, that require them to cooperate with an administrative investigation.
- Develop your question list in the order you want to begin. Starting slowly with open-ended questions, then working up to more specific questions is one technique that works for most situations. For example; "Tell me about what you did yesterday from about 9:00 am to 11:00 am?" Then getting more specific, "At 9:15 am you said you were in Jane's office. Why did you go in her office while she was gone?", "What were you carrying when you left her office?"

Starting the interview/interrogation:

- For safety you should have a second investigator with you in the event the suspect becomes violent. Also, having a second investigator will allow one to focus on questioning, monitoring body language while the second investigator focuses on taking notes.
- Continuing with safety, arrange the meeting location so you have a direct route to the exit.
- Always start by developing rapport, even if you have interviewed the suspect before. Your goal is to get them comfortable in talking to you. This increases the chance that

they will open up to you as the questioning progresses. Starting off in an aggressive manner often results in resistance from the suspect. One investigator shared with us, "*I get more confessions with sugar than I do with salt.*"

- When appropriate, be empathetic with the suspect during questioning. Being empathetic furthers their trust in you and they may be more likely to open up about the incident. If you are aware of personal issues, such as financial problems, drug use, etc, you may want to emphasize with them during the interview with verbal "clues". "We know you are facing some financial issues. Facing financial issues is stressful, makes me feel trapped." (*Notice the change the use of "me" in the second sentence*)
- TIP: One private investigator uses a technique he calls, "mental braking". After the interview has progressed for awhile he will intentionally sit back in a relaxed manner, and ask the suspect, "What are you thinking right now?", to slow the interview -- "slowly apply the brakes". Depending on the suspect's response, the investigator will ask further questions. For example; if the suspect says, "I'm thinking that you suspect me." The investigator says he always responds with, "Why is that? What makes you think that?"

During the interview/interrogation:

- Address contradictions in the suspect's statements.
- Practice active listening. Use your body language to let them know you are listening. One technique is to mirror their body posture. If they are leaning back then do the same.
- Be alert to their body language. Hands touching their face repeatedly, breaking eye contact, etc. These signs can help guide you on your questioning in changing from a casual approach to a more pointed approach.



Closing the interview/interrogation:

- Some experienced investigators, when concluding the interview with or without a confession, will ask the suspect to write a statement about the incident, even if they have already written one. One investigator shared that in her experience, the suspect that was involved often will refuse to write a statement, but cautions that this is not a sign of guilt in all cases. It often allows her to continue the interview with more discussion.
- Near the end of the interview/interrogation, if the suspect has not confessed, you can decide if you will confront them with some or all of the evidence you have. Being empathetic, if the suspect has been generally cooperative, may help solicit a confession.

"Unfortunately, I don't believe you. I have witnesses, and video evidence that shows you at the scene when the incident occurred. I can understand that you are under a lot of stress right now with everything that is going on in your life. Stress clouds my thinking. It would help me if you could explain how that happened if you weren't the one?"

These are just a few ideas, or tips. How you implement them will depend on your specific case, the evidence you have, reactions of your suspect, and your personal preference in conducting interviews or interrogations.

As of July 2019

Work after the Interviews

There's nothing more rewarding than conducting an interview of a suspect and getting a confession, or completing an eye witness interview that clearly identifies the suspect. But wait, your work is not done.

Even when an interview is completed, the information you are searching for has been obtained, you must verify the information ensure it is factual, then document it in the report for your client.



to

Why is it important to verify the facts when you get a confession or eye witness accounts?

Because the suspect may change their story, or if the court is in the future, they simply plea the fifth amendment and do not testify. Witnesses disappear, they move away or over time their memory recall becomes fuzzy. Also, a defense attorney may seek to poke holes in the information you gained through interviews by pointing out you did not verify information leaving doubt in the mind of the judge or jury.

Following is a simple checklist to verify information from a confession or eyewitness statements:

- **Identify timelines** - Was the suspect at the location when they committed the crime? Was the eyewitness accounted for at the scene? Were there others that saw them immediately prior to or at the time. Creating a timeline that shows the movement of the suspect, and locations of the witnesses is one method for verifying information collected during an interview.
- **Verify descriptions** - Verify the clothing worn by the suspect in comparison to the witness statements. Video surveillance immediately prior to the incident, e.g. suspect entering the store, that shows the clothing worn matches the description given by the witness. Look for others that match the clothing and physical description.
- **Time cards (employee's)** - Whether the suspect is an employee, or the witness, simply asking the client to verify that either, or both, were working that day is another verification method. Having this information in the report supports they were at the site when the incident occurred.
- **Follow the property** - If property is involved, whether altering time records, or items stolen, follow the property in the next step in the timeline. A suspect says they gave the items to a friend? Talk to the friend to see if they received the items. Of course you want

to try and recover them as well. Ask the client to conduct an inventory where appropriate to verify the item(s) are missing.

- **Identify & Interview "supporting" witnesses** - As a part of the timeline, conducting follow-up interviews with supporting witnesses that can verify the location of other witnesses, or the suspect. Supporting witnesses provide information about the presence and/or disappearance of items are critical as well. For example; Supporting witness observed the eye witness and the suspect enter the area where the incident occurred are great ways to verify statements of both.
- **Identify & Interview "informative" witnesses** - Primarily in incidents involving employees, it is important to gain information about processes and procedures. For example; employees are not allowed to take items from the store. Interview a human resources representative, or manager to verify that this is a prohibited act. Other informative witnesses may include inventory clerks, or others with information that supports the incident did in fact occur, even if they were not at the scene at the time it occurred. One PI said he makes a point to interview custodial staff. They often move around the workplace without anyone paying much attention. They often are great sources of informative or supporting witness information.

Verifying each piece of information provided by suspects and witnesses will ensure that your case is complete and accurate. Any discrepancies should be investigated further until there is no doubt. This will help maintain the integrity of your case in the event memories of witnesses fade, or the suspect refuses to talk anymore.



Investigations

As of July 2019

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Background Investigation “Musts” for Private Investigators

Employers are conducting background investigations of potential employees on a more frequent basis than before. Ensuring employees are truthful in the information they provide the potential employer, avoiding potential civil liability from negligent hiring claims, to increasing the chances for the success of the employee in their position are all reasons approximately 70% of all employers conduct some type of background investigation or screening.

Private investigators often provide background investigation services for their clients as they have the expertise and experience in conducting interviews, verification of credential information, and providing written reports. As a private investigator conducting background investigations there are steps you need to take. Following are a few critical steps:

1. Notify the individual(s) in writing that you are conducting a background investigation on them. Notices included in a job posting, or on a job application are not sufficient.
2. Get the applicant or employee’s written permission in advance to conduct the background investigation. Include the specific permissions you need from them to obtain information from credit reports, or previous employers for example.
3. Ensure you follow the same steps for each applicant, gathering the same information. It’s tempting to cease a background investigation when you find negative information that will disqualify them, but you should complete all steps of the investigation as you do for other applicants. Remember, it is up to your client to eliminate them or not.
4. If you find negative information about an applicant or employee, you should share the information with them and gather information from them about the information. For example; if you receive information from a previous employer that is different than what the applicant provided, ask the applicant to provide a written statement explaining the discrepancy.
5. If you are obtaining a credit or criminal background report, make sure you are in compliance with the [Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\)](#).

As a private investigator conducting background investigations for private employers you need to ensure that you comply with all laws to protect you and the client. Conducting background investigations that follow the same format, gather the same information, that comply with all laws, are a must to protect your firm and your client.

Internet Search Information

The Internet, is a great place to begin a search for information, but there are pitfalls you always need to be aware of:

First, your client has probably completed an Internet search. It's too easy not too. Although you may find social media posts, links to stories posted, or other information, chances are it is not going to be new information. As a private investigator you are responsible for finding facts. Not all information found on the Internet is considered to be factual.

Second, you need to verify dates of information you find. The Internet stores information for years. Information posted two years ago that may contain a name or address can be dated. If you are looking to locate someone, it does provide a starting point, but you will need to verify the information you find to ensure it is up-to-date and accurate.

Third, much of the information you may find on the Internet may not be correct. Shocking right?! Depending on the subject of your investigation information may have been posted that is intentionally misleading. Further, you need to ensure it is the right person, right location, or right anything! Drive by a location - you may find it is a vacant lot, or mail drop, or it doesn't exist. Ans, there is nothing more embarrassing than providing results of an Internet search about an individual only to learn it is the wrong John or Jane Doe.

Fourth, you are a professional private investigator. You need to obtain, verify, and verify again any information you intend to provide as factual information. One good method is to verify any information you find by locating two additional, non-linked sources that points to the same information. Some call this the "Intelligence Triangle". NO, that does not mean finding the information on three different websites. Various websites obtain information from the same sources so you can find the same information in several locations, but it will probably be from the same source. (If you use a paid online information source for your information - read the disclaimers. The information you pay for is not verified or considered accurate by itself.)

Fifth, you are being paid for your expertise, which includes good old fashioned investigative work. Interviews, surveillance, and obtaining court or other public records still remain as your primary, tried and true, investigative methods. Don't shortcut your investigation relying solely on information you have obtained from the Internet.

Again, the Internet can be a great source for information to assist you in starting your investigation. As you can see in the pitfalls above, verification of any information is critical. You either observe it first hand, verify via unrelated and reliable sources, which requires great investigative work. If you provide the information to your client, make sure it is accurate, and factual.

When Is the Investigation Over?

A question was asked by a student in private investigations; "When is the investigation over?" Of course the obvious answer is when the facts are gathered that are required by the client. But, upon further discussion, the real question was "When do you stop the investigation that hasn't found the required facts?" Great question.

First, let's be clear. Private investigations is a business. It requires profit to make it a viable operation. Unlike law enforcement, private investigators rely on payments from their client's to conduct the investigation which includes compensating the investigator for their time.

Here are a few ideas, suggestions to help determine when the investigation stops:

1. Evidence required for the scope of the investigation has been collected, and you are within the agreed time constraints of your contract - In an infidelity investigation you project 12 hours surveillance. In the first three hours you collect enough evidence for the client to prove their case. Although there should be discussion to determine if the client wants you to continue, in many cases, your work will have concluded, even though you did not expend the full amount of time agreed upon. A professional private investigator, if agreed upon by the client, will cease the investigation at that time and bill for the expended hours.

2. When the money runs out, or the agreed time spent on the investigation has been reached - Let's reverse the example we used before. You are conducting an infidelity investigation. You have conducted surveillance for the agreed time of 12 hours. No results. The contract agreement has been reached and it is time to cease the investigation. Of course you will discuss with your client if they want to extend the terms of the contract for the investigation to continue, but it is concluded at that point.

3. When you encounter an "Unfounded" conclusion - In criminal investigations, you may find through your investigation that a crime may not have been committed. For example; missing funds are the result of sloppy bookkeeping, or you know you will not be able to identify a suspect with the evidence available. It is time to meet with the client and share what you have found, or not found, and cease the investigation.

4. When it doesn't feel just right - The toughest to determine, but all investigators have or will encounter that investigation where "something isn't quite right." Maybe you suspect a spouse of using you to stalk an ex-spouse, or there could be immoral reasons the client has engaged you in

an investigation. It's often best to cease the investigation immediately, even at the risk of losing money.

5. When the client says so - Seasoned investigators have embarked on an investigation. Then after a short time, before the investigation is fully underway, they've been contacted by the client asking them to stop. They may have second thoughts, or financial challenges have arisen. Of course, when the client says stop, you stop.

It can be a difficult decision to cease an investigation, primarily when it hasn't been concluded. As a private investigator, you are in a business, and continuing investigations beyond a certain point will begin to erode your bottom line, which is your paycheck and your co-workers.

“All we want are the facts...”

Recognize the title? It was the common phrase used by Detective Sgt. Joe Friday, not “Just the facts” that is often erroneously attributed to the television series actor. Ok, enough trivia.

In any investigation the primary responsibility of a private investigator is to gather facts. But what exactly is a fact. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines “fact” as; (paraphrasing); the quality of being actual; something that has actual existence; an actual occurrence.

Private investigators have the burden of proving something to be factual. So how do you do it? Although it’s not fool-proof, one method is to verify the “information” from two different sources that are not related to each other, or at least directly related. For example; Witness stated that the office door lock would not secure properly. Investigator observed the locking mechanism on the office door with a piece of tape over the lock throw preventing it from extending into the door jamb.

The witness said it did not work and the investigator observed that it did not work properly.

A simple model

Verifying a fact with a second source will ensure that the information is factual. Consider that a statement made is just a statement, a piece of information. Verifying the statement from a second source then establishes a fact.



This simple model is important when reviewing witness statements. Further, Witness # 2 could be replaced with observation of video footage, or a document.

Verifying Facts

Verifying information with a second source, when possible, will establish a "fact" from information. This will improve the accuracy of your final findings in the investigation. Focus on using this simple method for facts that are relevant to the case to ensure you are providing proven information.

Sometimes this can be tricky if you have only one witness. Look for information the witness provides that can be verified from another source. Here are a few examples:

Suspect was in a room at a specific time.

Video of suspect heading toward the specific room with timestamp.

Secondary witnesses that observed suspect heading toward the room.

Suspect's own statement.

Suspect removed a specific item.

Verify the item was in the specific location prior to the time it was taken.

Depending on the item, a search of inventory records may help.

Location where item was found other than the initial location.

Ok, you get the idea of verifying information. As a private investigator, gathering facts is your primary responsibility in any investigation. Verify that you are providing facts relevant to the case versus providing information only. Failing to verify information to determine if it is factual can end in an incomplete, or worse, faulty investigation.

Problems with Eyewitness Testimony

Our last article, "All we want are the facts..." sparked some discussion about the reliability, or lack of reliability of eyewitness testimony and the importance of verifying statements made by eyewitnesses.

As a private investigator you need to understand the theory of "Reconstructive Memory". We often think that when we recall an incident we observed, it is like a video playing in our mind, or a photograph. Our memories of incidents we observe are not that accurate.

The theory of reconstructive memory is our memory recall is influenced by our individual perceptions, social influences, and our knowledge (past experiences and how we interpret information). In addition, our memories are influenced by the stress we feel at the moment, our biases, information inputs we experience during and immediately after the event, and our past experiences.

[Watch this news video about eyewitness testimony.](#)

When we witness a stressful event such as a vehicle accident, or an assault, our mind captures some of the information, not all of it. Our view of an incident is impacted by the existing lighting at the scene, sounds we hear, what others at the scene may be saying.

For example; a car drives by and a large bang similar to a gunshot is heard. Others nearby may start yelling, "He's got a gun!!". We look at the vehicle and see the driver with their arm hanging out of the window. Our minds, using the information we have received from others, our vision, we now see the driver holding a gun. We run for cover only to learn that the vehicle was backfiring.

Where there are gaps in what we see, hear, or smell, our mind begins to fill in the gaps. Our experiences may be from television, previously witnessed events that are similar. In our example, the stimulus of hearing others shout "He's got a gun!!!" makes us see a gun in the individual's hand. We may even think we saw a muzzle flash similar to a movie scene we have watched.

The manner we are asked to recall the information can influence our memory recall. Asking a witness leading questions is one example. "You saw a tall man robbing the store clerk?" Now we have added the memory stimulus that the suspect was tall.

Our experiences immediately following an incident influence what we recall as well. Consider you are with a group of friends that witness a vehicle accident. Everyone begins to talk about what they saw. Your mind starts to fill in the gaps with what you hear others saying they saw whether accurate or inaccurate.

The method in which our mind works to help us recall incidents is impacted by several psychological and neurobiological influences that can reduce the accuracy of our recall about a specific incident. Keep in mind, to the witness, what they recall is the truth because it is what their mind is telling them they saw. As an investigator, you need to be aware of these potential influences. Look for secondary sources to verify what witnesses state they observe as they may not always be accurate.

[Still not convinced, watch this video for more information about eyewitness testimony.](#)

As a private investigator, you are responsible for sorting through eyewitness testimony and identifying factual information from reconstructed memory information. Again, it is important to remember that the eyewitness is not being untruthful, only repeating what their mind has reconstructed as a memory in their mind.

Use of GPS

Disclaimer: This is an opinion, specific to privately owned vehicles or privately owned devices, and should not be viewed as legal advice....read on.

Use of GPS by private investigators to track a target for surveillance is a great tool and there are many opportunities where it can facilitate an investigation. As a private investigator you must consider all of the potential challenges when deploying GPS tools in the field for investigations involving privately owned devices or vehicles.

- **Laws, or absence of laws** - Some investigators feel that the absence of legal statutes in their state allows them to use GPS freely. Unfortunately, the lack of laws may widen the opportunities for lawyers in civil litigation. (Remember that most cases will be heard by a jury, some of which will resent the "invasion of privacy.") Always consult with legal professionals in each case where you plan to deploy GPS. The legal professional must have knowledge and experience in the use of GPS.
- **Controversial** - Depending on your specific case, the use of GPS will more than likely be a focal point of controversy. One side will surely scream, "FOUL!" if you use GPS even if it is used in a legal manner. It is important to discuss with legal counsel and your client the potential distraction that the use of GPS may bring to their case. *We give some tips further in this post on considering the use of GPS.*
- **Does not replace surveillance of the individual** - Sorry, providing a list of locations visited does not prove the case. Surveillance will always be required as GPS does not track the location of the individual, rather it tracks the location of the device. Attorney: "I see the vehicle was stopped at 123 Main St for an hour. Where was Mr. Jones at that time?" Private investigator: "I assume with the vehicle." You know where the attorney will go next....and it won't be pretty for the private investigator.

When considering the use of GPS we have compiled a few considerations before you deploy it in the field:

1. **Is a GPS device really necessary?** - In many cases, the movements of the target will be partially known. A spouse may suspect an interloper where addresses can be located, and surveillance easily established. If considering the use of GPS to make your job easier, then reconsider as the potential costs in litigation may not be worth the few hours saved.
2. **Will normal investigative work provide the same results?** - Creating timetables of the target's travels, conducting the required surveillance, and interviews will all be required

in addition to the use of GPS....so, if the investigative work will suffice, it might be best to avoid the potential pitfalls in deploying GPS.

3. **Is it the best investment for your client?** - GPS equipment costs money. Deploying, maintaining, getting legal advice, etc, all require an investment of time which is an investment of funds for your client. Determine if the funds could be better used elsewhere in the investigation.
4. **How do you handle the information collected from the use of GPS?** - Again, consulting with legal professionals is critical. Not all information collected via the use of GPS may be appropriate to share. Consider if the target is using their personal vehicle for work purposes, or there are times that movements of the target may not be considered to be in public view.
5. **Most important - Can you clearly identify ownership of a vehicle or device where you will deploy GPS?** - Placing a GPS device on a vehicle or device that is owned by the target will be difficult to sell to any jury as being appropriate - legally or ethically. You need to gather documentation to identify ownership of any device, or vehicle where GPS will be deployed. One investigator shared this advice: *"If the vehicle title shows the target's name as the owner, whether another individual, like the client, is listed on the title as well, I will not use GPS. I only look at the title, not the tag registration information. I also identify how the target came in possession. For example; a cell phone was given to the target as a birthday gift. I'm not comfortable that the client still has sole ownership even though they purchased it in their name."*

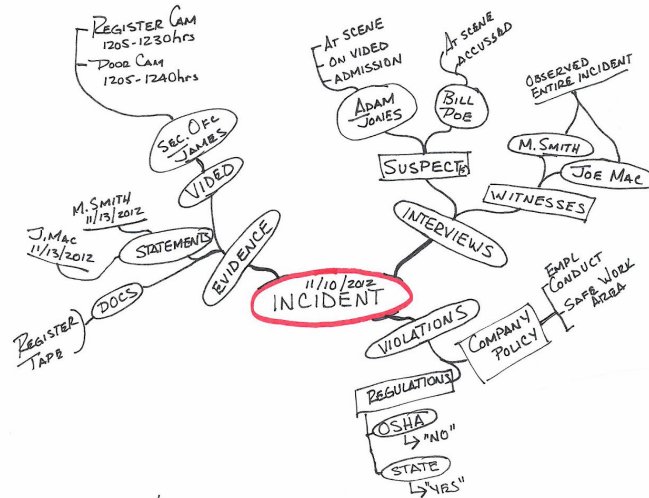
Use of GPS will continue for a while to be controversial in legal proceedings as well as in the public eye, with or without guiding laws. As a private investigator you must protect your business, yourself from potential civil litigation or criminal charges. Consider the alternatives, then get legal advice.

Mind Map Your Investigation

Ever think you have completed an investigation only to find there was one more interview to complete, another document that you need to collect, or a piece of evidence you forgot to look for? Ever had a difficult time explaining the linkages among interviews and evidence to a client?

How do you ensure you are completing all the tasks associated with your investigation? Creating a task list is one way, but sometimes it might lack the ability for you to visualize important information you need to seek out.

Using a mind-map is another technique that might be useful to you in completing an investigation. A mind-map is simple hand drawn chart, like the one in the graphic, allows you to visualize your investigation, look for links and create checklists.



ACME STORE #102
11/10/2012 INCIDENT @ FRONT COUNTER

Take a few minutes to scratch out a simple mind map to see how useful it can be on a current or upcoming investigation. There are [free programs online](#) you can use to create and print a mind map as well.

As of July 2019

About the Author

Bruce Holmes is an experienced law enforcement officer with over 34 years of law enforcement experience, consulting with law enforcement, private businesses, and author of articles for private investigators, law enforcement, and small businesses.

Bruce is a founding partner, with Tripp Mitchell, “The Professional PI”, of [ProPiAcademy](#) which has been recognized as a [Top Private Investigator Online Training Program](#) and [GuardStar Academy](#) providing online training for Georgia Security Officers. Bruce is also the owner of [Holmes-Tech LLC](#), a company experienced in consulting and implementing technology solutions for attorneys, private investigators, security professionals, and small businesses.