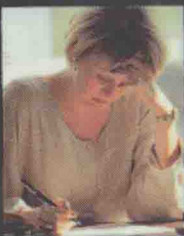


# Security Investigations

## *A Professional's Guide*

LARRY G. NICHOLSON, PH.D.



# ***Security Investigations: A Professional's Guide***

**Larry G. Nicholson, Ph.D.**

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This text is for those who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of the truth!

I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic,  
and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose.

. . . SHERLOCK HOLMES, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*

# ***Preface and Acknowledgments***

After dedicating twenty-one years of my life as an investigator to every level of public service imagined, I realized that not all aspiring investigators had the opportunity to attend the same courses that I attended. Today's rising security professional is a college graduate who has the desire to learn, but often times doesn't have the means to attend courses by law enforcement organizations, or the ability to travel to major cities to gain the knowledge required to be an investigator.

I wrote this text with two primary goals in mind. First, I wanted to give new security professionals a guide to follow that would help them achieve their aim of becoming good investigators. Not because I know everything, which should be obvious from the list of contributors, but because I owe this to the people who have helped me along the way. Secondly, as a professor of management, and a former special agent, I have discovered that the management of the investigation unit often lacks guidance on the process of managing the investigation and leading people. It is my hope that this book will help you meet your goals.

This text was developed by researching the latest information available, both through written sources (private and public) and per-

sonal interviews with successful people in the field. I quickly discovered several topic-specific sources on different types of investigations or techniques, but I found few publications that put the information together in one investigation handbook. Other sources of information which may be of assistance as you put together an investigation are cited throughout the book, as well as listed in the reference section of each chapter.

This book is designed to be an aid in the learning process. It offers you the ability to establish habits based on step-by-step procedures. By following the processes presented, and adding your personal desire to work and apply the techniques, you can assure your success in achieving the aims of your investigation. What this book cannot provide is the experience of conducting your first investigation. It doesn't tell you that the interview you just conducted was a waste of time; it doesn't stop you from making bad decisions, or pat you on the back when you've done a good job.

I offer this advice to the new security professional: "Seek out mentors, people whom you can trust, who have experience and are willing to teach." And to the experienced security professional who has the potential to be a mentor, I offer this advice: "Seek out those with a desire to learn (even if it's hidden); teach what you know; show them how to do it; and after awhile, let them go."

I would like to note my special thanks to the following contributors to this book: my wife, Beth, for her understanding and editing; my friend Russell Kirkpatrick for his contribution in writing Chapter 7, "Basic Photography and Video"; my intern Loren Maxwell for his research; and GOD for seeing me through this work. I would also like to thank three very special people whom I admire and whose help I greatly appreciate: Jerry Glazebrook, Fred Foster, and Jerry Vander Veen.

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# ***Becoming an Investigator***

## **GOAL**

The goal of this chapter is to provide a basic understanding of the requirements to become a good investigator and to perform a successful investigation.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Identify the attributes an investigator should possess.
2. Identify the traits of a competent investigation.

The term investigation is defined as an inquiry into allegations or circumstances in order to acquire factual information. This text is to be used as a guide for people wanting to learn more about the investigative process, the various types of investigations, and the techniques used by successful investigators.

What attributes should someone possess to become a successful investigator? Frederick Foster, President of Seventrees Corporation, an international investigation firm, believes that the successful investigator should possess qualities that compensate for the law enforcement tools not available to a private-sector company.

First, he believes the investigator should possess a high level of curiosity. This instinct for seeking out more information should drive the investigator to look beyond the obvious. Secondly, the investigator should have some basic understanding of surveillance techniques. Although the thought of going on a surveillance assignment may sound glamorous, reality dictates that it is often boring and monotonous work. Lastly, the investigator should know how to conduct research. In the past, the investigator would spend hours knocking on doors, asking questions around the community, or calling people by phone. Today's investigator must be equipped with the ability to conduct on-line searches and gather data quickly and efficiently. Background investigations once required the investigator to visit the various reference locations, actual physical sites where individuals listed as references live or work, but now such inquiries can be made via the Internet.

The basic point is that the investigator should be prepared and skilled to deal with a wide variety of situations. Each investigation may require a specific area of subject knowledge that the investigator needs to learn, or the acquisition of such subject matter knowledge through an expert opinion. The investigator works in an environment that is continuously changing. An inability to change quickly will leave behind the unskilled and untrained.

## INVESTIGATOR ATTRIBUTES

When I assess someone's ability to be an investigator and evaluate his or her potential for success, there are several general guidelines that I follow. These are not absolutes, of course, but knowing and understanding these guidelines enhance a person's ability to perform the investigative tasks. These characteristics have been adapted into a self-evaluation format, included in this chapter, to allow you, as an investigator, to evaluate your own areas of strength as well as identify areas needing improvement. This will help you develop your own skills improvement plan. This format may also be a useful tool for the security manager during the hiring process.

An investigator should have:

- ◆ *Highly developed powers of observation.* An investigator needs observation skills that are keenly developed and employ each of the investigator's senses.
- ◆ *Innate curiosity.* An investigator needs a natural curiosity that keeps the investigator asking questions, even if the answers appear to be obvious at first.
- ◆ *Writing skills* to ensure that every reader clearly understands the investigator's message. Successful writers develop a Five Ps (pre-planning-prevents-poor-performance) strategy to their writing.
- ◆ *The ability to talk with strangers and gain their confidence.* The investigator must develop effective skills of communication and an ability to interpret responses as truthful or deceptive.
- ◆ *The ability to work without close supervision.* Investigators are self-motivators. They can't afford to wait to be told what to do next. They are responsible for developing information and following up on the information they receive.
- ◆ *The ability to be open-minded.* It is important that investigators do not jump to conclusions. It is often difficult to ignore our prejudices and not assume that what we perceive is reality.
- ◆ *Patience.* Investigators need great patience to handle stakeouts, details, and long court proceedings. Patience is a virtue that every investigator must possess and learn to cultivate as some assignments drag out.
- ◆ *The ability to logically reconstruct the sequence of an investigation.* Successful investigators acquire the ability to organize information and assemble it in report form for future reference.
- ◆ *Above average intelligence, memory, and recall,* and the ability to identify the value of evidence and information.
- ◆ *The ability to collect evidence and conduct investigations without partiality.* The investigator must understand what physical evidence is and what types of evidence to expect in a particular investigation. It's important that all evidence be collected, not just the evidence that would aid the investigator's client.

- ◆ *The ability to determine why a private investigator is being retained to conduct the inquiry.* This is particularly important in the event that criminal activity may be involved in the investigation. The private investigator will want to identify early on any potential contact that might exist between the investigator and law enforcement personnel.
- ◆ *The ability to identify the goals and objectives of the investigation and any parameters that may exist.* This will help the investigator identify any areas that the client may not want investigated or disclosed publicly. The investigator is obligated to provide all information discovered to the legal authorities if asked, as well as testify to any such information if called into a court of law.
- ◆ *The desire to act ethically and seek the truth, even though it may not compliment the client.* The client has the prerogative to accept or reject the findings of the investigation. Remember that the investigator's reputation is critical to future success. Never present circumstances or information in any way that would allow people to question your integrity.
- ◆ *The ability to respond to the needs of the investigation.* Interview questions should be prepared prior to the interview. The results will be worth the long hours spent in preparation.
- ◆ *Objectivity.* People are often fooled by what they see; an open mind and unbiased perception should be maintained. Preconceived ideas may hinder the progress of the investigation and cause the investigator to overlook specific investigative procedures.
- ◆ *Control over the interview process.* The investigator shouldn't allow others to take control. Besides wasting time, the focus of the investigation may be deterred and cause embarrassment for the investigator.
- ◆ *A chronological timetable of factual events.* When prepared as quickly as possible, a timetable will help the investigator maintain the focus of the investigation.
- ◆ *The ability to be an effective liaison with local authorities.* These contacts can be invaluable. Be willing to share information should criminal activity become part of the investigation.

- ◆ *Reliable sources of information.* Develop reliable sources of information that include people, public records, law enforcement agencies, and financial institutions.
- ◆ *The people involved.* Identify, as soon as possible, the people involved in the investigation and their relationship to the client (i.e., employee, relative, etc.).
- ◆ *Competence.* Develop competence through hard work, attention to detail, sacrifice, devotion, study, and continuous education.

Lastly, the investigator must be knowledgeable about the law and legal proceedings. The investigator must stay apprised of the latest laws effecting criminal activities, civil litigation, individual rights for privacy, and any restrictions placed on the private investigator.

The above list includes personal traits, elements of an investigation, what to do in an investigation, and other skills needed as an investigator. What if you feel that you are not adequately trained in each of these areas? What then? The question becomes, are you willing to spend the time it takes to learn and begin to develop those skills? People with years of experience will find this text helpful in identifying potential investigators and how to train them to be successful. Many of the prerequisites for a successful investigator are gained from prior security patrol experience in conducting preliminary investigations.

## TRAITS OF A COMPETENT INVESTIGATION

In general, each investigation should possess the same five traits. The investigation should be objective, thorough, relevant, accurate, and current. For an investigation to be *objective*, investigators must recognize their own set of prejudices and be willing to accept facts as presented without the influence of their own experiences and knowledge. This is difficult to achieve because an investigator will form opinions about the information and editorialize on matters in which the investigator has a personal feeling or position. Personal

opinions should not normally be a part of the official investigation, unless asked, and if so, it should then be clearly annotated on the report.

The *thoroughness* of an investigation requires checking each piece of information, not once but several times to ensure accuracy and relevance. For example, a statement taken during an interview requires that the investigator review the facts on the statement with the subject who is being interviewed. People often write differently than they speak. Their level of education may not allow them to effectively express their thoughts in writing. Clarity is of great importance, especially when a civil or criminal action could be taken against a subject of the investigation. Facts that are distorted or even undiscovered during the investigation can be damaging to your case if presented by the opposing counsel in court.

Information gathered during the course of the investigation should be *relevant* to the case. The investigator should ask, how does this information relate to the case? Is the information so significant that it is the primary supporting evidence, or does it require additional investigation to substantiate its relevance to the case? Caution must be taken not to disregard information because it first appears to be irrelevant to the situation. Each data point is analyzed to determine its effect on the case and what direction the follow-up inquiry should take. Relationships among the data collected are established and tied together to strengthen the accuracy of the case.

*Accuracy* of information is often distorted by our own senses. A technique used to train aspiring investigators deals with the accuracy of witness information. Student investigators are instructed to interview other members of the class, who have just witnessed an incident that has occurred outside the classroom. The student witnesses are instructed to give the student investigator only factual information that they personally witnessed. The results, as one can imagine, are often skewed according to each individual witness's perception of what took place. Witnesses and informants may color the information based on their motivations. Individuals may lie to cover up their own actions or those of someone else in an

effort to protect them. Sound investigative technique requires frequent tests for verification. The investigator should measure all the physical data presented, such as distances traveled within time limitations. Could the person possibly travel the distance in the time stated?

Currency of information is critical to the status of the investigation. Circumstances change over time, and old, collected data could be used to formulate the outcome of an investigation. As an example, employers are often reluctant to contact an applicant's present employer to obtain current information. The potential employee has an established credible work history, so why look further? The individual's present employer may not agree with the person's other superiors. Other examples can be found in accident investigation cases and financial investigations where the physical evidence changes with time. The next chapter will illustrate the importance of developing an investigative plan to help ensure a competent investigation.

## **LEARNING PRACTICUM**

The following Likert scale self-evaluation can be used to determine your personal attributes for becoming an investigator. It is not intended to discourage anyone but rather should be used to identify areas for improvement and additional education or training that may be needed. Using the numeric key, answer each question by circling the number that most closely reflects you.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Not Sure

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree



1. I like to take the time to get the details of a story.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I usually miss the things that others see.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I enjoy talking to other people.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I always follow my intuition, even if the facts don't support my position.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I am known for my honesty and my character.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I lose my patience when I am bored with my work.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I recognize my personal biases and adjust accordingly.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I liked taking notes in school.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I work best on a regular schedule.	5	4	3	2	1