

CREDIBILITY: CONTENT, CONSISTENCY & CORROBORATION

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The national headlines have placed a spotlight upon the credibility of testimonial evidence. Dramatic emotional impact is often used to promote an agenda in and out of the courtroom. However, the professional investigator recognizes that evaluation of an emotional delivery is not an effective measure of truth. It should not be dismissed as part of the evaluation process. However, emotion cannot be the primary veracity test. It is too easily manufactured and will often result in securing sympathy from the investigator on behalf of the witness. Sympathy is a hazard to the investigator and the process as it creates bias and diminishes objectivity. To remain objective and impartial, the investigator must replace sympathy with empathy. Empathy will empower the investigator to understand and create a shield against the potential bias created by sympathy. Correctly applied, the subject of the interview will often misinterpret empathy as sympathy and feel free to openly discuss the issue in question. The investigator must remain objective and impartial during the process of fact recovery and evaluation. The investigator must focus upon the content and not be misled by the potential deceptive influence of the delivery. The ability of the investigator to uncover the truth beyond the smoke and mirrors is crucial.

The investigator understands the many methods used to determine the veracity of information. The majority rules application is often applied with a pattern of unreliability. A democracy and our jury system is filled with examples of error and failure. The authority method also consistently fails, relying upon the subjective opinion of experts. Again, with the authority method the delivery is often the defining persuader as opposed to the content, consistency and corroboration of the information. Such methods should be considered during the investigation to facilitate the process. However, as a primary method, the majority rules and authority methods are unreliable.

An impartial and objective fact driven investigation demands an impartial and objective professional investigator. The investigator must first remain free of bias in respect to the objective. The objective must not be to prove or disprove but to uncover the truth. The facts should be recovered to lead to the truth. In contrast, facts should not be pursued to confirm a preconceived truth and agenda.

Content, consistency and corroboration utilizing the correspondence method is a pragmatic and reliable verification process. The claim/idea must correspond to the facts and supporting evidence. Subsequently, the investigator must enhance and further quantify and qualify the facts and evidence utilizing the coherence method. Fundamentally, the process is a puzzle and all the pieces must fit without forced manipulation, large gaps, and missing pieces. Otherwise, a complete picture of a questioned event is subject to interpretation and assumption. The objective and impartial process of investigation will identify facts and uncover evidence. The facts and evidence are evaluated and subjected to comparative analysis. The credibility of evidence is determined by content, consistency and corroboration. The lack of credibility is revealed by inconsistency, contradictions, errors, omissions, and flaws.

The Component Method of Investigation and the FTER Method of Forensic Interviewing engages the correspondence and coherence methods as a systematic process of investigation. The investigator must be disciplined and methodical, supported by an objective and impartial philosophy. Therefore, the professional investigator must be trained and practiced in a proven methodical approach of investigation. The Truth demands nothing less.