

October 26, 2011

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**I. 5 tips for officers in use-of-force interviews**

Part 2 of a 2-part series

In Force Science News #188 [[Click here](#) to read it], Dr. Ed Geiselman, an internationally recognized authority on interviewing techniques, offered 5 critical reminders for investigators on how to elicit accurate and comprehensive statements from involved officers and eyewitnesses in OISs and other use-of-force cases.

But what if you're an involved officer being questioned by an investigator who doesn't understand or adhere to these "best practices" for fair and impartial interviewing? What can you do to protect yourself from bias or ineptitude on the part of your questioner?

First, of course, you need to be knowledgeable about the methods of *proper* interviewing. So take time to review Geiselman's pointers in Part 1 of this series before heading into the interview room. Then you'll be better equipped to recognize if and when your interviewer employs undesirable tactics--and prevent yourself from inadvertently cooperating in sabotaging your own statement.

Beyond that, Geiselman offers the following advice. These are lessons the UCLA psychology professor has drawn first-hand from analyzing officer interviews as an expert witness in disciplinary hearings and as a faculty member of the certification course in Force Science Analysis. They represent his observations from a behavioral science perspective but you should check with your attorney for his guidance from a legal-strategy standpoint.

**TIPS FOR INVOLVED OFFICERS**

**1. Request a delay.** As explained in Part 1, fatigue can contribute significantly to memory "failures," including incomplete and disorganized recall, inconsistencies, delayed recollections, and the inability to adequately articulate your thoughts. "If you're tired and overly stressed, you'll also be more susceptible to suggestion, intimidation, and biased questioning by the interviewer, Geiselman says.

"Yet many departments still require that officers submit to detailed questioning immediately after a shooting or other critical incident, even though in some cases the involved officer has been awake for 36 hours or more." In contrast, the Force Science Institute recommends a delay of 24-48 hours, including at least one good sleep cycle, before a detailed statement is required from an involved officer after a major force event.

"If you believe that you are not in a frame of mind to perform adequately in a full investigative interview because of lingering stress and/or sleep deprivation, request a delay," Geiselman counsels. "Don't ignore or minimize your mental and physiological state in an effort to appear strong in the face of potentially negative factors.

"If the request is denied because of department policy, you can then state at the outset of the questioning that you have asked for a postponement and why. Having that in the record may prove valuable later in helping to explain shortcomings in your memory."

(For a report on the connection between rest and memory, based on a research study Geiselman conducted, see *Force Science News* #156. [Click here](#) to read it.)

**2. "Interview" yourself, using cognitive techniques.** "Become familiar with the memory-enhancement elements of cognitive-style interviewing and use them to help recollect what happened during the force incident," Geiselman suggests. "You can 'interrogate' your own memory both before and during the interview itself."

Some of these techniques were described in Part 1. They include a full-sensory reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the incident...thinking about it in detail "frame by frame"...trying to remember what happened in reverse order as well as forward order...looking at the scenario from the different perspectives of people at the scene, etc.

"All these can often surface details that may elude you if you try just to verbally recite the bare basics of what you think happened in sequence," Geiselman says.

"It's good to start by getting a picture in your head of what was going on *before* the incident erupted. Mentally and emotionally put yourself back there in the moment. Slow down your thinking and take time to remember as much about the experience as you can. Concentrate on being as complete as possible, rather than just hitting highlights.

"Ideally, you want to give as thorough a report as possible in your the first session with an interviewer so you don't have to make corrections later, and this approach can help."

**3. Communicate your concentration.** "Let the interviewer know when you are taking time to concentrate on responding to his or her questions," Geiselman advises. "This will free you from feeling pressure to give immediate answers in order to appear truthful.

"Sometimes memories are difficult to retrieve, and the mannerisms and body language of concentration, such as long pauses, deep breaths, and breaking eye contact, may look like the classic indications of deception if the interviewer doesn't realize you are focusing intently on recollecting.

"If you consciously struggle to avoid these natural reactions to deep concentration in order to maintain an artificial appearance of truthfulness, you're devoting your energy to the

wrong priority and you may be bypassing opportunities to surface important buried memories."

**4. Take the initiative to make the record complete.** "Be sure to address critical issues in your statement if the interviewer fails to do so," Geiselman says. "Your initial feeling may be to shut down and say little beyond what you're asked, but in some cases it may be to your advantage to get information that's neglected into the record."

"In particular, comment spontaneously on your state of mind throughout the incident. This would include your understanding of any advance information you were given by dispatch or other sources."

"Also comment on your threat assessment throughout the encounter. Include elements of your training and experience which were triggered in your mind by the circumstances as they unfolded."

**5. Above all: Don't speculate.** "Understand the strengths and weaknesses of your own perceptual and memory systems," Geiselman urges. "Inevitably there will be aspects of the event that you didn't see or hear, and your memory will be imperfect. No one can remember everything or recall all that they do 'remember' accurately. That's a human reality."

"Don't hesitate to state, 'I don't know,' and then maintain that you do not know throughout the interview if that is the truth. However, it's important to spontaneously correct inconsistencies and offer additional recollections as they come to mind without delay. The sooner errors are corrected or missing elements legitimately supplied, the less likely these alterations will be viewed with suspicion."

"Above all, do not speculate, guess, or fill in gaps of memory with what you think 'might' or 'must' have happened, even if pressed implicitly or openly by the interviewer to do so. This is quicksand too dangerous to venture into."

*[For information on instruction and consultation about interviewing techniques, Dr. Geiselman can be reached at: [geiselma@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:geiselma@psych.ucla.edu). Also see the authoritative text, Memory-Enhancing Techniques for Investigative Interviewing: The Cognitive Interview, by Geiselman and Dr. Ronald Fisher.]*

## **II. 1 step closer to understanding post-traumatic stress disorder**

New research that analyzed the genetics of students on a college campus where an active shooter killed 5 people (plus himself) and injured 21 may help in eventually predicting which individuals are most susceptible to Acute Stress Disorder, which is a precursor to PTSD.

The subjects studied were 204 young female undergraduates (mean age 20 years), most of them white and about half of them freshmen, at Northern Illinois University where a lone gunman went on a lecture hall shooting rampage on Valentine's Day 2008. Their exposure to the incident ranged from merely being on campus that day to seeing the gunman firsthand, although none was actually targeted by him. Conveniently for the researchers, the women were already participating in an ongoing trauma study at the time of the sudden shared event.

The researchers report a couple of interesting secondary findings:

Not surprisingly, proximity mattered. Those who were in the building where the shootings occurred or were close enough to hear gunfire and see the attacker firing were "significantly associated" with severe stress symptoms.

But the predominant difference between those who suffered persistent serious stress effects and those who did not was genetic. DNA testing revealed that the students with particular variants related to the regulation of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood and mental function, may be predisposed to developing Acute Stress Disorder and then PTSD symptoms after a traumatic experience.

Specifically, these variants are referred to as "the 5-HTTLPR multimarker and rs25531 genotypes of the serotonin transporter gene." Interestingly, another genetic variant that has been linked with psychosis and suicide did not appear to be associated with PTSD symptoms.

Only a minority of people exposed to traumatic or life-threatening incidents develop PTSD. "One of the critical questions surrounding PTSD is why some individuals are at risk for developing the disorder...while others appear to be relatively resilient," the researchers write in a report of the study.

The new findings, they say, will help unravel the exact mechanism involved in the genetic association and may eventually help in predicting the individual risk for PTSD symptoms in the weeks and months after a traumatic event.

More work with the study group is anticipated.

### **III. Quotable quotes on training**

From a recent officer-safety seminar co-produced by the Below 100 Initiative and Lifeline Training at the Suburban Law Enforcement Academy in Glen Ellyn, IL:

"Unrealistic training leads to unrealistic expectations, and unrealistic expectations are deadly on the street."

*Chief Jeff Chudwin*

*Pres., Illinois Tactical Officers Assn.*

"If you were going to be in a fight for your life tomorrow, how would you train today?"

*Sgt. Keith Wenzel*

*Dallas (TX) PD*

"There's plenty of intelligence in the world but the courage to do things differently is in short supply."

*Marilyn vos Savant*

*Author and Guinness Hall of Fame inductee*

"Complacency is the most dangerous and insidious threat we face because it makes us open to all the others."

*Chief Chudwin*

*[For more information on Below 100 training to reduce officer fatalities, go to: [www.lawofficer.com/below100](http://www.lawofficer.com/below100). For information on Lifeline's traveling seminar on "Ultimate Survival Instincts," go to: [www.lifelinetraining.com](http://www.lifelinetraining.com).]*

#### **IV. Bath salt chemicals now banned**

In FSN #175, transmitted 04/08/11, we featured an interview with Chris Lawrence, an instructor for the Ontario, Canada Police College as well as the Force Science Certification Course, focused on the disturbing phenomenon of bath salt abuse that results in dangerous and unpredictable subject behavior. [Click here to read the entire article.] It has now been reported that the DEA has declared a temporary 12-month ban on three of the drugs commonly sold under a "bath salt" label in retail stores. The ban will expire early October 2012 with the possibility for a six-month extension while plans to impose a permanent ban are finalized. The three chemicals, which are now considered highly restricted Schedule I substances, are Mephedrone, Methylone and Methylenedioxypropylone (MDPV, also known as NRG-1). FSN will report on additional developments as they surface.