**The Path to Becoming an Investigator**

For many people, their idea of what an investigator does is based on what they see, hear, and read in the media, movies, TV, and books. These depictions characterize personas ranging from dysfunctional violent rebels fighting for justice by their own rules, to by-the-book forensic investigators who get the job done clinically using advanced science and technology. The truth is, good investigation and real-life investigators are unlikely to make a captivating fictional script. Professional investigators and competent investigation is about the tedious processes of fact-finding and sorting through evidence and information. It is about eliminating possibilities, validating events, and recording evidence, all the while engaging in an intentional process of thinking, analyzing, and strategically working towards predetermined goals; not to mention extensive note taking and report writing.

Not just anyone can become an investigator. There are certain personal traits that tend to be found in good investigators. Among these traits are:

* Being passionate about following the facts to discover the truth, with a goal of contributing to the process of justice
* Being detail-oriented and observant of the facts and the timelines of events
* Being a flexible thinker, avoiding tunnel vision, and being capable of concurrently examining alternate theories while objectively using evidence as the measure to confirm or disconfirm validity of theories
* Being patient and capable of maintaining a long-term commitment to reaching a conclusion
* Being tenacious and not allowing setbacks and false leads to deter continued efforts
* Being knowledgeable and skilled at the tasks, process, and procedure while respecting legal authorities and the limitations to take action
* Being self-aware of bias and intuitive responses, and seeking evidence to support gut-feelings
* Being trained in the processes of critical thinking that provide reliable analysis of evidence that can later be described and articulated in reports and court testimony

Considering this list of traits, we can appreciate that good investigators are people with particular attitudes, aptitudes, and intentional thinking processes. These traits all form part of the investigative mindset. Although you cannot teach someone to be passionate about discovering the truth, anyone who has these traits can work towards developing and refining their other traits and skills to become an investigator. Developing the mindset is a learning journey, and the first step of this journey is to become intentionally aware of and engaged in your own thinking processes.

To achieve the investigative mindset and be an objective investigator, it is important to be aware of other negative investigative tendencies that can become obstacles to successful outcomes. For example, a good investigator needs to be focused on the objective of solving the case and making an arrest in a timely manner, but becoming too focused can lead to “tunnel vision,” which is the single-minded focus on a favourite suspect or theory to the extent that other suspects or alternate theories are ignored. Moreover, a good investigator needs to take responsibility and be accountable for the outcomes of the investigation; however, taken to the extreme, this can lead to an investigator taking complete ownership of the investigation to the exclusion of allowing the ideas of others to provide guidance and influence. Finally, a good investigator needs to be careful about how much information is shared with others. However, excessive secrecy can inhibit information sharing with those who might contribute to the successful conclusion of the case.

Thinking as an objective investigator, it is often necessary to consider and evaluate several competing theories or possibilities of how a crime was committed and who the suspect may be. Often, new investigators, or those uninitiated to the objective mindset, will focus on a favourite theory of events or a favourite suspect, and rush to be first to reach the conclusion and to make the arrest. There is a trap in shortcuts and the focused rush to make a fast arrest. In this trap, other viable suspects and theories are too quickly ignored or discarded. This sometimes leads to investigations being derailed by “tunnel vision.” Worse yet, tunnel vision can lead to the misinterpretation of evidence, ultimately leading to charges against an innocent person, while the guilty remain undiscovered.

**Some other Qualities which are needed**

## 1. Professionalism

This is a quality required for any career stream. As a professional investigator, you have to be extremely professional. This goes a long way in building credibility and reputation in your field. You have to be committed to the tasks you undertake and have an inclination towards continuous improvement and excellence.

**2. Integrity**

One of the most important virtues of a professional investigator is integrity. As an investigator, you will be dealing with a variety criminal cases where you would have access to people’s private lives. It’s up to you to be discreet and confidential about your work and to not use this information in ways that is inappropriate.

**3. Persistence**

Investigating cases of fraud and crime can be frustrating at times. This is because, most criminal require persistent and proactive  work until the end when the case is closed. Basically, a professional investigator does not have the option of giving up.

**4. Self-driven**

When you are a professional investigator, you are mostly working tirelessly on your own. You do not have someone else directing your work. It is you who decides everything. So, in order to be a successful professional investigator you have to be self-driven.

**5. Problem Solver**

You need to have analytical skills and the ability to think logically. Only a good problem solver will be able to work under immense pressure and successfully close the case.

**6. Reliable**

When people come to you with their private cases, you have to be able to give them the assurance that you will help them with their problem.  People should have complete faith in your ability to investigate cases and unmask the culprit. You should be reliable and keep your client up to date on all progress.

**7. Courage**

The job of a professional investigator can be risky at times. You might have to deal with people who are potentially unsafe for you. You should be prepared to deal with all kinds of situations to become a successful professional investigator.