

# THIRD DEGREE COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

## TRAINING BULLETIN

### *What Motivates Confidential Informants*

**By Gregory D. Lee**

Like many people, informants need motivation to produce. The more motivated they are, the more likely they are to apply themselves to the task at hand and remain committed to achieving success. Identifying an informant's true motives for providing information increases the chances of conducting an effective and safe criminal investigation. If an investigator believes that the informant is providing information because he is repentant for past crimes, when he actually is there to learn police tactics and intelligence to avoid detection himself, a disaster is in the making.

#### WALK-IN INFORMANTS

Investigators need to be good listeners and carefully evaluate a first time informant's information. Someone who visits the police department offering criminal information must be scrutinized to determine the motivation behind this initial step. A thorough debriefing will often reveal clues to why this person came forward.

#### FEAR

The fear of going to prison is the most common motivation for someone to provide information to the police. Fear is a strong motivator when someone has just been arrested and faces the probability of years of imprisonment for criminal activity. Drug investigators will often

attempt to convince a freshly arrested suspect to immediately provide information in the hopes of making other arrests in the ongoing investigation.

## REVENGE AND JEALOUSY

Both revenge and jealousy have historically motivated people to do things they might not otherwise do. Jealousy may stem from love or money, but business disputes between competing drug criminal organizations may prompt revenge.

Drug investigators should be wary of informants who seek to eliminate their own drug dealing competition. Nothing prevents a drug agent from using this information to target the competing drug dealer. However, once the competitor is arrested, the drug agent should solicit his help in eliminating the informant's drug enterprise as well.

## REPENTANCE

Informants often claim they are repentant for past crimes, but this is rarely the case. Expressions of repentance are sometimes used to convince an investigator that he or she is now a good person and wants to make amends for past bad acts. However, this is seldom the only motive for cooperating.

## ALTRUISM

People with professional obligations or feelings of responsibility frequently provide information to the police. Examples of altruistic informants include airline employees who see something suspicious about a passenger or his baggage, or express delivery service employees who detect drugs seeping out of packages. These informants are rarely involved in criminal activity and their usefulness is often limited.

## MERCENARIES

Some individuals provide information or services simply for money. These money-motivated informants are usually the most willing to follow an investigator's direction because they are paid based on performance. Although they frequently have a criminal history, this makes them a valuable asset who can introduce undercover investigators to members of criminal organizations.

## EGOTISTICAL

Egotistical informants often want an aggressive role in an investigation in order to justify as much praise and/or money as possible. They will sometimes prolong an investigation unnecessarily to justify more money or praise. An informant in this category may demand payment for services rendered, but in reality, the praise he expects to receive from authority figures is the primary motivating factor.

The ego of the informant should not be in competition with the ego of the handling investigator.

## JAMES BOND SYNDROME

Some informants see their role as an opportunity to have their life imitate art. While working as informants they imagine themselves in a particular police or spy drama. Sometimes they will even orchestrate events to parallel a scene from a movie or chapter of a novel. These informants are especially difficult to handle and often exaggerate their knowledge of criminal activity to enhance the likelihood of playing the role of their life.

## THE WANNABE

Usually, from a very young age, a Wannabe informant has wanted to become a law enforcement officer. For whatever reason though they did not qualify, and believes that becoming an informant is now the only way to fulfill their life's desire.

#### PERVERSELY MOTIVATED INFORMANTS

Perhaps the most dangerous and disruptive person an investigator will encounter is a perversely motivated informant. They offer their services to law enforcement agencies for the sole purpose of identifying undercover agents, learn the department's methods, targets, and intelligence, or eliminate their own competition in drug sales. Sometimes criminal organizations, especially outlaw motorcycle gangs, instruct girlfriends and others to infiltrate police departments as informants or employees to glean intelligence. These individuals may even provide genuine information about a specific event as a decoy to divert police resources away from another more significant criminal activity.

#### CONCLUSION

Criminal informants can make an investigator a star, or they can destroy a promising career. Informants can never be fully trusted, as they are inherently unreliable and hard to handle. They should be rewarded and praised when appropriate, tightly controlled, and never allowed to run an investigation.

Controlling the informant is the key; losing it will present safety problems, and jeopardize the successful outcome of an investigation.

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