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TDC Tip

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Personal History Questionnaire

This month, we are going to examine the *real* purpose of the Personal History Questionnaire (PHQ). The PHQ is perhaps one of the most misunderstood documents we use. Many interviewers think that the PHQ is used to obtain biographical information from the interview subject. This is only partially true. The *real* purpose of the PHQ is to establish a baseline for the subject's truth-telling verbal and non-verbal behavior as well as to establish rapport. Let's examine these more thoroughly.

Let's first acknowledge that the PHQ can certainly be used to verify and/or obtain biographical information about your subject. However, it is useful—essential in fact—for building the **rapport** necessary to successfully conduct later interviews and interrogations. Asking the subject non-threatening questions such as his name, address, and date of birth, allows the subject to get comfortable speaking with you. Since these questions are not “reasonably likely to elicit an incriminating response from the subject”¹, you are able to ask them without obtaining a Miranda waiver.

From a technical standpoint, the PHQ is an important tool for establishing a **baseline** for the subject's *truth-telling style*. What do we mean by *baseline*? A subject's baseline is what she looks like (non-verbal) and sounds like (verbal) when providing truthful information. Since the PHQ elicits information that is essentially unrelated to the crime and thus non-threatening, the subject is most likely going to provide truthful information in response. The interviewer must both *listen* and *observe* the subject while she is providing responses to the PHQ questions. During the subsequent interview and interrogation, the interviewer will then look for verbal and non-verbal deviations from the previously established baseline.

It is critical to understand this concept of baseline behavior. Whether you're speaking to someone from a different country, culture, or socio-economic background, deceptive indicators will vary from person to person slightly. For example, if a person avoids eye contact, does this mean he is lying or could it possibly mean that in his culture, direct eye contact is disrespectful? Without establishing baseline behavior during non-threatening questions, we might make a critical error in assessing this gesture.

¹ Innis (1980) 446 U.S. 291

Typical PHQ Information Collected:

- **Agency Case Number**
- **Interview Facts** (Date, Location, Time Started/Ended)
- **Name** (Legal Name, What does the subject prefer to be called - Joe v. Joseph)
- **AKA/Salient Characteristics** (all AKAs, Scars/Marks/Tattoos)
- **Personal** (Race, DOB, Height/Weight, Hair, Eyes, Male/Female)
- **CDL/SSN**
- **Home Address and Phone Numbers** (Home, Work, Pager, Cell, Carrier, Email)
- **Company Name and Work Address** (including Title and Length of Employment)
- **Marital Status, Name of Significant Other** (Married/Single/Divorced, Name of Spouse/Significant Other)
- **Names/Ages of Children**
- **Education** (Highest Grade Completed, Last School Attended)
- **Military** (Branch, Dates, Rank, Specialty)
- **Nearest Relative Not Living with You** (Name, Address, Phone)
- **Prior Criminal Record** (Crime Types(s), Agency, When)
 - If the suspect lies about prior arrests, do NOT challenge him or bring it to his attention; this is a great opportunity for you to see how he looks and sounds during a lie
- **Health Issues/Present Condition** (Under Doctor's Care, Medications; Feel, Sleep, Eat/Drink)
- **Vehicle Information** (Year, Make, Model, License, Color, Style)
- **Social Worker, Parole/Probation Officer** (Name, Phone Number, Email)
- **Ask if previously questioned but not arrested in another matter?** (Where, What, When)
 - This may reveal prior information from a different agency that you otherwise would have no knowledge of
 - Previous questioning that did not result in an arrest or conviction is something that you most likely won't find in any database
- **Custodial/Non-Custodial** (Custodial: Give Miranda warning / Non-Custodial: Give Beheler Admonition)

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