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Blind dates and investigation interviews are the same thing

By Meric Craig Bloch

As my 30th wedding anniversary approaches, I have been nostalgic about my former life as a single lawyer in Manhattan. But not too nostalgic—what they say about life in a big law firm is true. With so little personal time, I went on 30 blind dates in one year.

Fast forward to today. In my work as an investigator, coach, and instructor, I constantly polish my investigation techniques. Conducting effective interviews is the most important technique.

Don't we prepare for blind dates and investigation interviews the same way? The goals are different, but the techniques are similar.

I did some online research about blind dates. The articles are loaded with dos and don'ts about meeting someone new. The steps are essentially the same ones used to prepare for interviews.

Here are some of those blind date tips and how they apply to our work.

Bug your matchmaker

Don't approach the blind date unprepared. Learn as much information as you can about the other person. Learn about their personality so you will know what to discuss.

For an investigator, remember the witness has multiple dimensions. They have motivations and fears. They have a history with their coworkers. Learn about your witness from human resources colleagues or the witness' manager.

Every interview must have a purpose. What do you hope to learn from this interview? If an investigation is a jigsaw puzzle, where does this piece fit?

Be flexible in your expectations

Don't expect the other person to be perfect. Keep your expectations minimal. Leave your biases at home.

There is no ideal witness. No interview plays out the way you anticipated. The bully boss becomes a whimpering pile of emotions once you identify their fear of failure. The meek subject employee suddenly becomes aggressive.

Expect surprises in your interviews and prepare for them. Anticipate challenges. Have your responses ready.

Leave your insecurities at home

If you are nervous about your date, the other person might notice. They don't know who you are. Keep your head held high. Your date will think you have it all together.

All investigators have fears. We do serious work. A lot can go wrong. Can you turn your weakness into a strength?

I worked with an investigator from a generation younger than me. She quickly developed serious investigator skills. Her apparent youth became an advantage when subject employees assumed she was a novice, lowered their guard, and spoke too much.

Be honest with yourselves. Learn where your fear comes from. Is it a fear of failure? Then, focus more on your preparation than outcomes.

A fear about confronting someone? Then, interview professionally with respect, dignity, and empathy.

A fear of bringing pain to someone when discussing their apparent misconduct? Focus on the allegedly improper conduct. Even good people make mistakes.

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