How To Investigate, and Legally Terminate, any Corrupt Official

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The corrupt can't counter-measure two distinct weapons of justice:

1.) Transparency and 2.) **The Unexpected.**

This WIKI Booklet will teach you how to terminate corrupt officials, from the comfort of your living room, using those two, aforementioned, resources and a bit of patient work on your personal computer.

The following techniques usually only work on entities who are actually engaged in criminally corrupt activities. If you don't like someones face, or are jealous of their girlfriend, these tactics are unlikely to work. If the target is an actual crook, you can nail them.

The following links, articles and DIY "how to" tips will get you, and your community, well on the way to the documentation, case building and termination of those who abuse the public.

You are going to "take down" the corrupt politician and the sneaky campaign financing billionaires hiding behind them and pulling their strings.

You will use the ***"Three D's"***: You will **D**iscover, **D**ocument and **D**isclose to publicly expose: Secret PAC cash trails; covert family trusts; stock market payola; hiding of cash with friends and family members; prostitutes; illegal expense use; revolving door bribes; junket and sports ticket bribes; illicit hirings; rigged-game grants and government kick-back contracts; and much, much more…

You will create a "non-survivable scenario" for your corrupt official, all without breaking a single law, and WITH the help from journalists and law enforcement professionals.

While you are doing all of the strategic investigation, you will also have a number of scenario packages ready for the unexpected event that will, eventually, occur, that you can instantly react to, piggy-back on to and use to flood the media with your disclosures, or put the target in an inextricable position.

You will learn how to build your case file, assemble a virtual team, produce your evidence and deliver it globally to everyone who might have an interest.

How to investigate your elected officials

By Clay Johnson

With last week's Iowa Caucuses in the United States, we're starting the long haul to November's election day where we'll be inundated by hundreds of advertisements and speeches filled with all kinds of promises. But how do you know whether those promises will be kept, or what the your member of Congress is really about? The truth is, a candidate can tell you a lot more about what they're going to do via their actions and their associations than their advertisements and speeches. And thanks to the work of a lot of great watchdog groups, a lot of that information is now publicly available online.

So how do you get started digging underneath the rhetoric and into the good stuff?

First, let's figure out who all your representatives are. Project VoteSmart makes this easy just type in your zip code, and they'll tell you who all your representatives are from the state level on up. If you live in a relatively dense area, chances are you live in a five digit zip code that has more than one legislative district in it, so the chances are that you'll need to know your Zip+4— you can figure that out courtesy of the USPS.

Now that you know who your rep is, it's time to put on your private investigator hat on. Start local! — but I think that's a much better place to start. Your local city council and state representatives impact your daily life far more frequently than your representative or even the president. If you live in California, Texas, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Maryland or Minnesota, you're really in luck, because OpenGovernment.org is pulling together a great website for you to see what's happening in your area. For everyone else, Google for your state's state legislative website, or if you're a developer, check out the Sunlight Foundation's OpenStates project, which has bulk data available for 44 states.

We're still a little behind with county and municipality votes and websites. But search for yours, you may have something useful out there. The most important thing about local candidates is that they're accessible. While you can (and should) try and meet with your federal representatives, sometimes the travel to Washington can be too burdensome. But local candidates are there and waiting for you to call them. Call their office, and ask for a meeting, and ask them what they're about. You'll be amazed at the reception you get.

There are two great tools for researching federal (President, Congress) office-holders: GovTrack.us and OpenCongress.org. If you live in the 7th Congressional District of Virginia, for instance, here's Eric Cantor's page in on GovTrack, and on OpenCongress. Take a look at the bills they've sponsored and co-sponsored, and what they've voted on, and see if they align with your issues. And if they don't — well, you know what to do.

As important as the voting record is the company your member keeps. InfluenceExplorer.com, from the Sunlight Foundation is a great place to start. If you're interested in Ron Paul for instance, you can see how much money he's raised, as well as what his top Earmark requests are. Over on OpenSecrets.org you're able to see what industries have Ron Paul as a top recipient of money, and even sort donors by zip code. At the state level, the National Institute on Money in State Politics offers the same service on FollowTheMoney.org.

Another interesting thing to look at is how politicians invest their money. OpenSecrets also has the neat feature of being able to see the kinds of investments that your member of Congress makes — they've catalogued each member of Congress' "Personal Financial Disclosure" form — the form all high-level government employees have to fill out when they get their job. What's the top asset held by a member of Congress you ask? That'd be the Milwaukee Bucks, owned entirely by U.S. Senator Herb Kohl.

If you want to dig deeper, *all* of this data is generally a hard-working non-profit compiling and delivering government data in a usable format. The federal financial contribution stuff comes from fec.gov, laws come from Thomas.gov (which celebrates its 17th birthday this week), and state official information comes from elections, ethics, and secretaries of state websites across the country. With a little sleuthing, you can figure out whether or not your politicians are right for you and make a little more sense out of how your government works.

In 2012, don't just listen to what the candidates have to say, or even listen to what everybody else has to say about them. Part of a healthy information diet means getting closer to the source: watch what they do, instead. If you can, meet directly with them, too. In my 10 years working in Washington, I've yet to hear a scheduler complain that their member has too many meetings with their constituents. Book some travel to Washington (April is a great time to visit, for the Cherry Blossoms), meet with your member of Congress, and participate in democracy.

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Notes: Also see:

www.maplight.org

http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2013/oct/10/help-investigate-politician-expenses

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqF9019Nytw

How to investigate the actions of public officials

In this post, Michael Corwin, a professional investigator who resides in New Mexico, provides five steps for investigating the actions of public officials. While many of the decisions of public officials are made behind closed doors, Corwin explains that with the right preparation, it is possible to find quite a bit of useful information about the actions and motivations of public officials.

The investigator I trained with called people with information “walking, talking sources”. Intelligence agencies refer to them as “Humanint”. People possess vast amounts of information and are often a critical source of information when conducting an investigation. The interview is the process that investigators use to access that information.

Your ability to investigate the actions of public officials, including those in your state making decisions about public education that can lead to profiteering by private companies, will be enhanced by your ability to conduct interviews and document that information.

There are five steps to an effective interview. Within each of these steps there are actions you can take that will improve your chance for success. Familiarize yourself with this process, but understand that just like in life, interviews are not cast in stone. You might receive a “tip” call from an insider at the education department or from a legislator’s office wanting to provide you with information, and in that case you will need to jump right into the interview and bypass some of the steps entirely.

Step One: Preparation

Interviews are not meant to be a fishing expedition. Every interview should have a purpose and a path to achieve that purpose. Rowing out into the middle of the ocean and dropping a line with whatever bait you have on the boat is a much less effective way of catching a fish than going to a location where you know the type of fish already inhabiting that location and what food they like to eat. Preparation is the key to success for most interviews.

For example, through court records research you learn that there is a former administrator from your state’s education office that is suing the department for being terminated. Part of the fired employee’s claim is that she reported suspected illegal conduct within the department such as “pay to play” involving the director.

The information contained in the lawsuit becomes your basis for the interview preparation. Break the information down that you want to document into categories based upon the who, what, where, when, why and how that we all learned to use as students in school.

Rather than create a script of questions to ask, use the categories of information you created to develop an outline of information to cover during the interview. Scripted questions lead to stilted interviews and missed opportunities.

Interviews meander like rivers rather than follow grid patterns. You must be able to follow new or unanticipated information that surfaces during the interview to its logical end. Using a checklist of questions also makes it harder to truly listen because you are focused more on your own questions than upon the interviewee's answers.
Once you have prepared your outline your next step is determining the manner of contract.

Step Two: Determining the Best Method to Make Contract

There is a great scene in the film "All the Presidents Men", in which Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford show up unannounced at a series of front doors of people they want to interview. The in person cold call, as investigators refer to this process, is often the most effective approach to someone you think may be reluctant to speak with you.

It uses the element of surprise to catch people when their guard is down, and allows them to see that you are a nice person, which hopefully humanizes you to them.

But this is a labor-intensive process, which is not practical when there is time pressure or a significant geographic distance between you and the interviewee. You also must consider personal safety too. When possible it is best to have two people go since you will be entering a stranger's home.

The telephone is often a poor substitute when contacting people, as you have to get past caller-ID, protective family members and voice mail. It is best used when time is short, or you are too far away to go in person. Though it is the preferable approach when you believe the person you want to interview is willing to speak with you.

For those that you think are cooperative and nearby, you can use the telephone to set an appointment and then meet with them in person at a place like a coffee shop where you can do the interview face to face. Face to face is always preferable because the ability to read a person and demonstrate that you are hearing what they have to say is much better face-to-face than over the telephone.

Emails can also be used as a manner of contact, but are less effective because you are unable to engage in the give and take that an interview requires. Perhaps instant messaging or Skype video chats can work as a hybrid process for willing interviewees that are too far away to meet in person.

Once you have figured out the method of approach, the next step is to take a deep breath and make contact.

Step Three: Making Contact

Whether face to face or over the phone you have about ten seconds to convince an interviewee to speak with you. Start with who you are and why you are contacting this person. Give them a reason to speak with you.

"Hi my name is Mike Corwin, and I am looking into (always better to say than investigating) some information involving the public education department." Follow up your introduction with "have I caught you at a bad time?" or "would you have a couple of moments?"

This serves two purposes. The first is you are acknowledging that you are imposing upon the interviewee (empathy) and the second purpose is to ferret out any objections to being interviewed.

Just as in sales, overcoming objections is part of the process of conducting an interview. If the interviewee does not offer up any objections then you can go directly to step four, and begin the interview itself. If the person offers up an objection, then you must determine if the objection is one that can be ignored or must be overcome.

The most common objections are: "I don't have time", "I don't know anything", "I don't want to get involved", or "I could lose my job if I talk to you."

Of those objections, fear of losing a paycheck is the most difficult to overcome. If the interviewee says, "I have to get my kids to soccer in twenty-minutes", or some other genuine time constraint, ask for a better time to contact them. If the they say, "I have a bunch of (nonspecific) things to do today" then respond with something like, "I understand, this will only take a few moments" and ask your first question. Generic time objections usually fade away once the interviewee begins talking.

"I don't know anything" can be addressed easily, respond with something like, "I hear you, then this won't take more than a moment, I just wanted to run something past you and get your take on it." Then ask your question. Once you get the person talking they will tell you what they know. You are contacting them because you already know that they know something that you need to confirm.

"I don't want to get involved" or "I could lose my job" are tougher objections to overcome. You must respect genuine fear, such as getting fired and losing a paycheck. The best approach is to demonstrate that you understand the concern, "I can see that you are worried" and then say something like, "I am speaking with several other people", which downplays the fear of being singled out. You can also offer to speak with them for "background information only" so that only you will know what they have to say. You must then honor that promise and look for other ways to document that information should the person agree to speak with you. However, if the person still objects to speaking with you, the best thing to do is to thank them for their time and try again at another time.

The importance of how you make contact cannot be overstated as it often determines the success of the interview.

Step Four: Conducting the Interview

Interviews are about listening. Not about talking. They are about building rapport when you can in order to help make the interviewee comfortable with you and the process. Pets, kids, hobbies, or work are topics that can help put people at ease. This is harder to do over the telephone than it is to do in person since you lack visual cues.

A simple way to build rapport over the phone might go "so how long did you work at the education department? What was it like?" If the interviewee responds that it was great until the new director started. Ask what the person liked about the work before the new director came in and caused problems. The trick is to get the person comfortable speaking with you.

Once the person is comfortable with you ask your first question and then be quiet. Do not rush in to fill silence with additional questions. Let the interviewee fill the silence. The more she does the more information you will get from her.

Questions should be open ended. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no. The more the person speaks the more information you will get. With each topic you want to cover start with general questions and work towards the specific. This helps to uncover and pursue information that you may not have been aware of before the interview began.

This is also why you want to avoid working off of a script. Working off of a script means you will miss this type of information that could be critical to your investigation.

A great way to get additional information is to ask questions like, “how so?” or “why do you think that is?” These types of questions get the interviewee to expand on her answers.

With an in person interview you can use bodily language to demonstrate your interest in what the person tells you. Lean forward and make eye contact. This is called reflexive listening and works wonders.

Over the telephone you have to balance your silence against interrupting the flow of the interview. A great way to do that is to give occasional encouragement with statements like, “wow, really?” or reword and restate it back to the interviewee “so what your saying is”.

Once you have covered all of the topics you wanted to cover, ask, “Is there anything else that you think I should be aware of” and let them respond. Follow up with questions to lock down anything they offer. Then you can close out the interview.

Ask if it is okay to call the interviewee if you run across additional information that you want to run by them. Most people will say yes. Thank them for their time and let the person know that you are truly appreciative of them speaking with you.

Step Five: Documenting the Information

When possible you should take notes during the interview. Try to avoid using bullet points as that means you are interpreting what the person tells you rather than documenting what they tell you. Try to write down what is said in the manner that it is said. This takes practice.

Saying “let me back you up for a second and make sure I understand” helps buys some time to complete your writing as you repeat out loud what the person told you. If you are more comfortable typing your notes into an IPAD or laptop, go ahead and do that. Though they are difficult to lug with you on an in person cold call.

There are some people who are comfortable being recorded, but most are not. Many smart phones have apps that allow you to record and works well with a person willing to be recorded.

After the interview is completed read through your notes and add anything that the person said that you missed as you took your notes. You can also add notes that provide context to what was said.

Interview notes can be tough to read months later. When possible type up a summary of the interview as you may need to come back to the interview months later.

How to investigate official documents

Written by Don Ray

25 questions you should ask any government document

How to find the stories behind official documents

The investigative journalist never takes things at face value. They probe and question to get to the truth. Some journalists accept official documents without question; not so the investigative journalist. If you are to uncover the story you need to keep asking questions.

1: Who’s your daddy?

Find out who created the document and why. Somebody had to have a reason to create a form or document. Figure out which person or agency went to the trouble of making a form.

2: When were you born?

Find out the issue date and ask about updates. In most bureaucracies, the form will change to adapt to conditions the makers never anticipated. There are times when earlier versions of the same form asked for different information.

3: What language do you speak?

Make sure you understand the terms. Agencies and departments and ministries love jargon, acronyms and codes. If you don't understand what everything means, you're missing out.

4: Where do you live?

You might need to make another visit. If you didn't get the document from its regular source, it's important to know where it resides. Sometimes you can meet its family.

5: Who else is in your family?

Find out what other documents may be on file. Government agencies are never content with just one form. When you learn everything about the function of the form, you'll find others with even more information.

6: Are you married?

Is there another document that is wed to this one? Purchase orders always lead to bills of lading and receipts. When you know to look for the related documents, you will always discover more details and new leads.

7: Why are you here?

Figure out the need for the document at the time of issuing. Usually it came about because of some need - maybe a crisis. Sometimes it's a law or regulation that required it. Get to the bottom of why someone conceived it.

8: Just what is your job anyway?

Understand its purpose today. As crazy as bureaucrats are, they still wouldn't make a form or document that has no purpose. When you understand what it's supposed to accomplish, you will figure out the system - and that's the key to knowing what's really going on.

9: What information do you have?

Ask about every piece of information. Make sure you understand what every speck of ink on the document means. This applies to what was on the blank form as well as the information someone filled in.

10: Who told you this stuff?

It had to learn the information from someone. Did someone actually weigh the person getting the driver's license or did they rely on what the applicant told them? If you don't know how they came up with the information in a form or document, you leave yourself open to making errors.

11: Who else are you allowed to talk to?

Find out if it's a public record. The more personal or sensitive a document is, the more restrictions there may be on who is allowed to possess it, read it or process it. Always find out who's allowed to see it and, even more important, who's not allowed to see it and why.

12: Did you verify the information?

People can write whatever they want on a form. Forms are, in essence, questionnaires. Find out what systems are in place to ensure that the information is incorrect. If the agency or department is lazy in this situation, it could be an invitation for corruption and misuse.

13: How do I know you're telling me the truth?

Yes, documents can also lie to you. Think about your own resume. Do you really know how to use those machines and systems you claim you're efficient at operating? Just because it's in print doesn't mean that it's true. Be suspicious. Verify the information independently.

14: What other secrets are you keeping?

Look for codes and fine print. Too many investigative people look only at what's filled in on a document, and not what the document is specifically asking for. Some journalists request blank copies of every document or form an agencies uses. Then, they ask for the documents or regulations that explain the encoded information.

15: Who else have you been talking to?

Maybe there's a log of who's seen the file. Some documents are so important or sensitive that anyone who looks at it, copies it or checks it out must sign a register of some sort. Get that register.

16: If you don't know the answer, who might?

See if it leads you somewhere else. So the document provides someone's date of birth but not the place of birth. Figure out which related document (documents are often members of families) might have the missing information. Maybe even an earlier version of the same one.

17: Are you legal?

Make sure you don't have a fake or altered document. Never trust someone who introduces you to a document. Interrogate the document and be alert to answers that just don't sound (or look) right. Sure, you want to believe that someone gave you an official document, but don't get lazy. Find its twin and look for things that don't match.

18: How did you get here?

Find out how a document gets from A to B. If you ask the officially recorded death certificate how it got to that file cabinet, you might learn that it spent a month or so being processed somewhere else. Next time, you can look for newer documents while they're in transit.

19: Are you retired?

Some documents have become obsolete. Bureaucrats love to redo documents. Always check to ensure that the information in one document hasn't been superseded by a newer version. Sometimes the issue date of the document is at the bottom of the form.

20: What's your life expectancy?

Check records-retention policy. It'll happen to you for sure, unless you're careful. You look at documents in some public office and later decide you want copies. But when you get there, you discover that someone decided to put it in the bin or the shredder. Know how long they're allowed to exist.

21: Who have you been intimate with?

Find out who has processed or handled it. Signatures, check boxes, initials, rubber stamps and even metadata will give you clues as to who had reason to have contact with the document. Be suspicious of the signatures of top-level officials. They hardly ever sign documents themselves. Find out who really signed or initialed it.

22: Are you really a blonde?

Make sure someone hasn't altered the document. Many a journalist has lost his or her credibility because they didn't verify every piece of information in a document. Sometimes the changes are obvious to the eye if you examine it closely enough. Don't trust them.

23: Do you have any twin brothers or sisters?

There may be copies in other offices. Before computers, people made a fortune selling carbon paper to government agencies. It seems that they want everyone to have a copy of just about every document. If the distribution list isn't printed on the form, look to the laws, policies or directives to find out where all those copies go.

24: Would you be willing to testify in court?

A certified copy will save court time. When you can get a government official to certify that the copy is true and correct, you'll prevent a lot of potential problems. If it turns out that something is not correct, the burden falls on the official who certified it.

25: You're not planning on leaving town, are you?

Put your copies in a safe place. There's nothing more devastating than to lose the actual evidence you had that proved the corruption. Always scan your documents and keep digital copies in various safe places. There are forces out there who don't want you to be able to share the evidence you've found.

Don Ray is a seasoned broadcast and print investigative reporter. He has worked worldwide for IREX and many other training and consulting organisations. All his tips, techniques and modules can be reused under the terms of Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0. You can email Don Ray if you want his help.

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