



# CALI JOURNAL

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF LICENSED INVESTIGATORS



*L-R: Anthony Hopkins, DAA Chair, Dan Alvarez, 2025 DAA recipient, and CALI President Frank W. Huntington, III*



## About the California Association of Licensed Investigators (CALI)

Founded in 1947, CALI is a not-for-profit organization devoted to protecting and enhancing the private investigation industry in California and the United States.

CALI is the largest Private Investigator association in the world. With more than 1,100 members throughout the country, CALI is focused on advancing the industry through a strong legislative program and numerous educational offerings, including an annual conference, Webinars, new licensee training, professional development programs, and CALI's proprietary Certified Professional Investigator (CPI) designation to qualified investigators in California.

CALI has a full-time lobbyist in Sacramento. CALI's legislative advocate interfaces with California legislators to protect Private Investigators' ability to serve their clients, as well as to support and oppose legislation impacting all California Private Investigators.

CALI strives to protect the consumers' rights while advocating for access to all public records and data that professional investigations can responsibly access.

CALI Active members are licensed by the California Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) and the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS). As a professional organization, CALI is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors comprising members throughout California and an Executive Director, retained full-time to support CALI and its programs.

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# President's Message

Frank W. Huntington, III, CPI



This will be my last journal article as President. I want to take the opportunity to thank everyone who put their faith in me. I had some specific goals when I took over the helm, including moving the conference dates out of June, promoting more online training, and encouraging newer, younger faces to join in leadership positions. With the help of the Board and other members, we were able to accomplish these goals.

There were some goals that I truly wanted to accomplish, but unfortunately, I was not successful. I was hoping to finally resolve the PI identification issues, but fell short. Although there have been some improvements in the quality of the product, the process of getting the ID still seems to be causing issues. I will continue to assist the new leadership in addressing these issues.

We had some battles (and continue to do so) with SB 861, which created the Business and Professions Code 7524; the records retention and fee agreement requirements. Although CALI was in discussions with the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services for some time regarding the issue of records retention, we were never advised of their intent to require fee agreements in all cases, despite what you may have heard from, well, uninformed sources. CALI's Government Affairs Committee continues to work on correcting this misguided law.

Over the last several years, the number of newly issued private investigator licenses has been declining. Unfortunately, many of those professionals who would be drawn to the profession, such as retired police officers, are leaving the state upon retirement. It is therefore imperative that we do everything we can to encourage those who do stay to obtain their license and join us in this great profession. Toward that end, I want to take this opportunity to extend a special thanks to CALI's Membership Committee.

Almost every day, I see a notification that there are new CALI applicants, and it is these folks who vet and, in most cases, approve. Thanks to you all! Please join me in thanking the Membership Committee members: Chair Dan Alvarez, members Paul Mason and Mark McClain, assisted by Vice-Presidents Chad Ragan and Roberto Rivera.

One of the most underappreciated committees is, without a doubt, the ListServ Committee. These committee members take time out of their schedule, seven days a week, to monitor and approve messages, yet often face unwarranted criticism. For those newer members, many years ago, CALI had an unmoderated listserv. Posts included vulgarity, unlawful requests, and personal insults, to name a few. Many were opposed to switching to a moderated version, but after a few months, the thanks started pouring in to us for making the switch. So, please join me in thanking the members of this committee: Anthony Hopkins (Chair), Juan Alarcon, Chad Ragan, Roberto Rivera, Don Lewis, Tracey Kroot, and Todd Orlando.

This Association has several other committees that make it run, including, but not limited to: Budget & Finance, CPI, Elections, ELITE, Journal, NLITE, Membership, Professional Development, Scholarship, Social Media, and CALIPAC. I want to thank the Chairs and members of each of those for your outstanding efforts.

CALI was founded in 1968 with the primary goal of legislative advocacy. Some 57 years later, our Government Affairs Program has become, without a doubt, one of the most, if not the most, influential programs in the industry. Our Government Affairs Committee, the GAC, has been chaired by the unstoppable Francie Koehler. I want to thank Francie and all the members of the GAC personally for their hard work and dedication. Of course, the work of the GAC would not be possible without the guidance and commitment of the team at Desmond & Desmond. Thank you, Jerry Desmond Jr., Anne Schillig, and Claudine Irwin, for your representation and tenacity.

In August, CALI held its 56th Annual Conference in the beautiful Sonoma Wine Country. Attendees were treated to two outstanding keynote speakers, excellent breakout sessions, and some excellent social activities. None of this would have been possible without the hard work of the numerous members who dedicated many hours to making this event happen and our conference sponsors. I also want to thank Christie Vicars for volunteering her time as our conference photographer.

I was pleased to present the President's Award to two of those individuals, Anna Stowe and Ashley Torbohn, who, for the last few conferences, have been key players in conference preparation and execution. I also presented the President's Award to Natasha Emmons for her behind-the-scenes work in helping to produce these journals.

Congratulations to Lindon Lilly, who was presented the Investigator of the Year Award by last year's recipient, Justin Hodson. After hearing Justin's presentation, there was no doubt that the award was well deserved.

CALI's most coveted honor, the Distinguished Achievement Award (DAA), was presented to Dan Alvarez. Dan received numerous nominations outlining his multiple accomplishments throughout his career, as detailed by the last recipient, Anthony Hopkins. Congratulations, Dan, you are precisely the type of CALI member who exemplifies the DAA.

The 2026 Conference will be held October 8-10 back at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Golf Resort Palm Springs. Please mark your calendars now!

The current Board's term ends on December 31, and we are in the midst of our elections. Although I usually would not endorse any particular candidate, in this case, I am going to make an exception: Roberto Rivera and Chad Ragan for President and Vice-President, respectively. I have had the pleasure of serving with these two individuals for several years and have personally witnessed the hours of behind-the-scenes work they have accomplished for the Association. I do not doubt that they are the absolute best to keep CALI moving forward.

The Big 3 continues to go strong. Thank you, TALI President Bob Washington and FALI President Tim O'Rourke, for your leadership.

And, if I may add, for the friendships that we have developed! If you are not yet a Big 3 member, I strongly encourage you to join. Please click [here](#) for more information.

Again, this will be my last journal article as the CALI President, as my term ends on December 31. After that, I will remain on the Board for one more year as "Past President." Hopefully, I will continue to serve the Association at the next "President's pleasure." I want to thank those who have served with me over the last several years, and I look forward to watching as the newer CALI members advance into various leadership roles.

As with every article, I want to express my gratitude, appreciation, and yes, love, for our outstanding Executive Director, Maria Lagunas. Maria has not only been the absolute backbone of this Association since she took on the role in July 2020, but has also been my friend. Maria, I do not possess the ability to accurately express the gratitude I have for you, so I offer a simple, Thank you.

Lastly, thank each of you for your continued membership in the Association. As stated above, CALI has been around for more than 50 years, and hopefully, it will be for many more!

*F.W. Huntington, III*

Frank W. Huntington, III, CPI  
CALI President, 2021 - 2025

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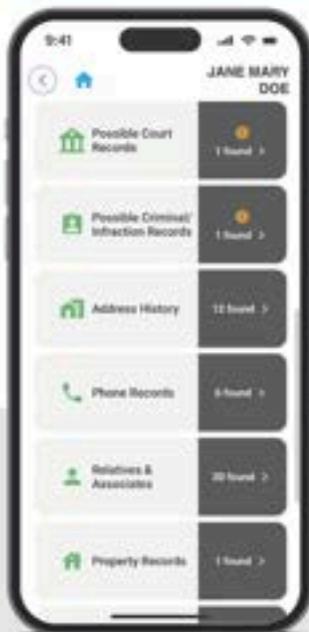
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# 2025 DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



L-R: Anthony Hopkins, 2024 DAA recipient, Dan Alvarez, and CALI President Frank W. Huntington, III

Award Presentation Speech by Anthony Hopkins, CPI

## Award Criteria

CALI's highest honor, the Distinguished Achievement Award, is open to any CALI member who has, over the years, contributed an exceptional amount of their time, energy, and effort to CALI and the betterment and professionalism of the investigative or security professions.

Examples of the following criteria must be submitted in support of the nominee:

- Length of continuous membership in CALI
- Contributions to CALI and the industry
- Leadership skills and their results
- Demonstrated ability to work with others
- Participation in training and education
- Sustained support of CALI
- Why the nominee will enhance the continued integrity of this Award

The Selection Committee for this award is made up of three outstanding members of the business, government, or legal community with no ties to any investigation or security businesses. This committee must arrive, independently, at the same selection, or no award is presented. Neither the nominees nor the members of the Selection Committee are revealed prior to the final announcement.

President John F. Kennedy once said, "We need leaders who can envision things that never were, and ask why not."

It's always a challenge to honor someone whose career is so broad, so impactful, that you can't capture it in a single title or a single story. But tonight's recipient has left a trail of accomplishments that speak louder than this introduction.

This member began his professional journey as a County Sheriff's Deputy. From there, he broke ground in the insurance industry as the very first multi-line Special Investigations Unit investigator on the West Coast. He later became the SIU Director for a major insurance carrier building out operations in 14 cities nationwide. In 1989, he established his PI firm, a firm that has since become a trusted name in risk mitigation and investigations for corporations, public agencies, and school districts across California. He is a Certified Fraud Investigator, Certified Title 9 Investigator, Certified COVID-19 Compliance Officer and a Certified Active Shooter Instructor.

Over the years, he has handled cases that most investigators only read about. He dismantled organized theft rings. He uncovered multimillion-dollar embezzlement schemes. He carried out sensitive Title 9 investigations with professionalism and discretion. In one case alone, his work revealed a multi-million dollar embezzlement scheme—resulting not only in prosecution, but in recognition from this association.

His expertise has made him a "go-to" professional for some of the largest corporations in the country. Dozens of statewide school districts have turned to him when the stakes were high and the answers weren't obvious.

What sets tonight's honoree apart is not just the caliber of his investigations—it's the reach of his contributions to safety training and awareness. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools, he didn't wait to be asked. He obtained a CDC compliance certification, produced a film entitled Return to Campus Guidelines, and distributed it at no cost to dozens of school districts. He also created Pathways, a navigation system that helped campuses safely manage the return of tens of thousands of students.

His service to CALI reflects the same spirit. Since joining CALI in 2004, he has served in several elected capacities and has served as the important Membership Chair and on several other important committees. He introduced a CPR and First Aid certification course for CALI members. He created his own district award to celebrate members who might otherwise go unrecognized. He is always finding ways to bring others closer to this association.

Colleagues describe his ability to make people feel at ease, even in the most intense situations. Corporate leaders describe him as the most respected investigator they have ever worked with. School district officials call him a visionary who helped modernize campus safety without ever losing sight of the "boots on the ground" reality.

Still with all of this, he has given to his local community as a head school football coach, Little League baseball coach and soccer coach, youth sports referee, Scout troop leader. For more than 30 years, he has been a substantial donor to St. Jude's Hospital.

It's hard to summarize a lifetime of contributions that reach so far in law enforcement, private investigation, anti-fraud investigation, school safety, community service, and professional mentorship. But what is clear is that our profession, our association, and our communities are safer and stronger because of him.

He was honored as CALI's Investigator of the Year, but tonight we honor him for a lifetime of professional achievements and caring for people around him.

It is my honor and privilege tonight to present the California Association of Licensed Investigators Distinguished Achievement Award to Daniel Alvarez.

*Congratulations, Dan!*

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# 2025 INVESTIGATOR OF THE YEAR: LINDON LILLY



*L-R: Justin Hodson, 2024 Investigator of the Year, Lindon Lilly, and CALI President Frank Huntington, III*

By Justin D. Hodson, CPI

The California Association of Licensed Investigators (CALI) has named Lindon Lilly as the 2025 Investigator of the Year. Lilly's path into investigations is remarkable not only for its professional milestones but also for the resilience and service that define his career.

## **The Selection Process**

This year's Investigator of the Year award drew six nominees, each recognized for significant contributions to the profession. The selection committee, consisting of Jay Paulino, Roberto Rivera, and Justin Hodson, carefully reviewed each nomination packet. While the pool of candidates was strong, one nomination stood out. Lindon Lilly received over ten separate letters of nomination and support, far exceeding the others. The breadth and depth of his endorsements—from attorneys, investigators, legislators, and community leaders—underscored his exceptional impact on the profession and the community. After thorough review, the committee unanimously selected Lilly as this year's honoree.

## **Early Career and Public Service**

A native of San Francisco, Lilly was raised in the Hunters Point housing projects and entered the foster care system at the age of five. His perseverance led him to study criminal justice at the University of Nevada, Reno.

By 1991, he was working as a process server, and in 1994 he launched L&L Legal Assistance, a firm that grew to three offices and secured the California Safe Streets Contract from the Department of Motor Vehicles, requiring due diligence and service of more than 500,000 subjects.

After selling the firm in 1999, Lilly spent more than two decades with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, retiring at the rank of sergeant. During this time, he worked on specialized units and interagency task forces, including Project Boo, a collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation that targeted child predators. His work earned recognition from the California State Assembly for service to victims' rights.

## **Leadership in Private Investigations**

Following his public service career, Lilly founded Rhino Investigation and Process Serving in South San Francisco. His firm has handled missing person investigations, infidelity cases, digital investigations, and complex process serving assignments. His work contributed to the Impossible Foods v. Motif FoodWorks case, which clarified lawful investigative pretexting under California law.

Lilly has also taken on leadership roles within CALI, serving as Governor of the San Francisco District and as a current member of the Board of Directors. Beyond CALI, he is active in the National Council of Investigation and Security Services (NCISS), the World Association of Detectives (WAD), and other professional organizations.



### **Mentor, Advocate, and Author**

In addition to his investigative practice, Lilly is a recognized mentor. He has guided many newer investigators, hosted training meetings, and authored articles such as “Why You Should Hire a Process Server” (Apartment Owners Association of California, 2022) and “Vehicle Accident Scene Investigation” (Plaintiff Magazine, 2023). His writings emphasize both legal frameworks and the real-world challenges investigators face, making them valuable resources for peers across the profession.

He is also a legislative advocate, regularly participating in NCISS’s “Hit-the-Hill” events in Washington, D.C., where he has engaged directly with lawmakers on issues affecting investigators and security professionals.

### **Community Commitment**

Lilly’s contributions extend into the community. He has supported Today’s Youth Matter, the Charles Houston Bar Association’s Scholarship Fund, veteran initiatives, and local shelters. In 2024, he was a sponsor of the Veterans Film Festival, highlighting his commitment to honoring those who served.

### **2025 Contributions**

This past year, Lilly has continued to demonstrate why he is a worthy recipient of this honor. He handled complex covert assignments and high-stakes surveillance cases while mentoring new investigators entering the profession.

He represented CALI in legislative advocacy, ensuring the investigative community’s concerns were heard at both state and national levels. Locally, he organized district meetings, fundraisers, and youth-focused outreach efforts—demonstrating that leadership in investigations is measured not only by results in the field but also by contributions to peers and community.

### **A Worthy Honoree**

Peers and leaders across the industry and legal community have praised Lilly’s integrity, expertise, and generosity. California Assemblymember Catherine Stefani noted that Lilly “exemplifies the values of integrity, service, and collaboration”, while colleagues such as Michael Joffe described him as “a consummate professional... motivated and committed to the profession”.

Through his investigative skill, mentorship, advocacy, and community service, Lindon Lilly exemplifies the highest standards of CALI’s profession. For these reasons, and with overwhelming support, the California Association of Licensed Investigators proudly honors him as the 2025 Investigator of the Year.

*Congratulations, Lindon!*



L-R: CALI President Frank W. Huntington III, Anna Stowe, and Ashley Torbohn

# President's Award

Congratulations to the 2025 CALI President's Award recipients! This well-deserved honor goes to Natasha Emmons, Anna Stowe, CPI, and Ashley Torbohn, CPI

Thank you, Anna, Ashley, and Natasha for your service to CALI and the Private Investigation profession!

## Happy Retirement, Dan Largent!

Congratulations to Dan Largent, former CALI Redding/Chico District Director on his retirement! Dan simply wants to enjoy his retirement by spending more time at his mountain cabin with his wife and their dog Toby.





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*Please join the California Association of Licensed Investigators in welcoming our newest members who joined from January 1 to October 10, 2025.*

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Salvador Mendoza, Clear Trace Investigative Services  
Paul Spencer  
Kyle Sternjacob, Higher Resolution Investigations

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Olive Demar  
Andrew Hill, Aletheia Legal Investigations  
Jennifer James, J Cubed Investigations  
Danny Maldonado-Santizo, DMS Investigative Solutions  
Angela Perez, MCR Investigations & Consulting

## **GOLDEN VALLEY DISTRICT**

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Scott Heller, Heller Consulting Services  
Kyle Jaspersen, Guideway Investigations

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Tim Heusterberg, TRCH, LLC  
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Wei Zhao, American Professional Investigations

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# THE BENEFITS OF SURVEILLANCE IN FAMILY LAW CASES



*Anna Stowe, CPI, CEO of Proven Private Investigators*

As a private investigator with over 26 years of experience, I've seen how surveillance can play a pivotal role in family law cases. When emotions run high and the stakes are deeply personal, surveillance provides factual, unbiased evidence that can be crucial in resolving disputes and protecting interests. Below, I outline some of the key benefits of using surveillance in family law matters.

## **Uncovering the Truth**

Family law cases often hinge on issues like custody, support, and property division. Surveillance helps to uncover the truth when one party suspects dishonesty or deceit. Whether it's a question of hidden income, neglectful parenting, or improper behavior, surveillance offers an objective lens to verify claims.

## **Strengthening Custody Arguments**

Custody battles are among the most emotionally charged aspects of family law. Surveillance can document a parent's behavior and habits, ensuring the child's safety and well-being are prioritized. For instance, if a parent is suspected of engaging in unsafe activities or failing to meet a child's basic needs, surveillance can provide concrete evidence to support or refute these concerns.

## **Identifying Hidden Assets**

Divorce cases often involve complex financial disputes. Surveillance can uncover hidden assets, such as unreported income, undisclosed business dealings, or property concealed to influence settlements. By documenting a subject's financial activities, investigators can provide valuable information to ensure equitable division of assets.

## **Validating or Refuting Claims**

In family law cases, one party may make claims about their lifestyle, income, or ability to care for children. Surveillance can either confirm or disprove these claims. For example, a spouse claiming financial hardship might be observed engaging in extravagant spending, while a parent accused of neglect may be seen providing excellent care.

## **Peace of Mind**

Beyond legal outcomes, surveillance can provide peace of mind. Knowing the truth allows clients to make informed decisions about their future. It empowers them to protect themselves and their loved ones with confidence, armed with verifiable evidence.

## **Ensuring Compliance with Court Orders**

Surveillance is also useful in monitoring compliance with court orders. If a custody or visitation agreement is being violated, surveillance can document breaches, providing evidence to take further legal action if necessary.

## **Why Work with a Professional Investigator?**

Surveillance requires skill, discretion, and adherence to legal guidelines. A professional investigator ensures the evidence gathered is admissible in court and collected ethically. With years of experience, a licensed investigator knows how to handle sensitive situations with professionalism, respecting the legal and emotional complexities of family law cases.

## **Conclusion**

Surveillance is a powerful tool in family law cases. It brings clarity to complex disputes, protects children, uncovers hidden truths, and ensures fairness in legal proceedings. While the process can feel invasive to some, it ultimately serves to provide the facts needed for justice and resolution.

If you're navigating a family law case and need clarity, consider reaching out to a licensed private investigator. With expertise and discretion, an investigator can help you gather the evidence you need to protect your interests and those of your loved ones.

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# THE PERSONALITY TRAITS NEEDED TO SUCCEED AS A CRIMINAL DEFENSE INVESTIGATOR

By Katherine Mayer, MA, C.C.D.I.

On a cold January morning in a Texas courtroom, a defense attorney struggled to poke holes in the prosecution's case. The evidence was stacked high—eyewitnesses, phone records, even a supposed confession. But something wasn't right.

Enter the Criminal Defense Investigator (CDI). With methodical precision, the investigator had spent weeks tracking down an overlooked witness, uncovering inconsistencies in the police report, and verifying an alibi that had been ignored. When the investigator took the stand, their report shattered the prosecution's timeline, turning what seemed like an open-and-shut case into a hard-fought battle for justice.

This is the power of a skilled criminal defense investigator. If you're considering this career path, developing the right traits isn't just important—it's essential.

## 1. Mastering the Art of Interviewing

At the heart of every great CDI is the ability to conduct interviews that uncover critical facts. Unlike casual conversations, investigative interviews require strategy, patience, and skill. Witnesses may be hesitant to share information, so it is essential to build trust and maintain professionalism. Effective CDIs develop the ability to read body language, interpret verbal cues, and establish rapport quickly. Knowing when to ask open-ended questions, when to push, and when to remain silent can mean the difference between a breakthrough and a dead end.

**Key Skill:** Conducting strategic and ethical interviews to extract useful information.

**Pro Tip:** Enroll in specialized interview training programs to refine your ability to ask the right questions and read between the lines.

## 2. Communication That Commands Respect

A great investigator must be able to translate their findings into clear, precise reports that attorneys can trust. The ability to tailor communication to different audiences—whether explaining evidence to a lawyer or establishing rapport with a reluctant witness—is a defining skill. Writing detailed, organized reports that attorneys can rely on is just as important as verbal communication.

**Key Skill:** Adjusting your communication style to fit the situation.

**Pro Tip:** Regularly practice writing investigative reports and seek feedback from legal professionals.

## 3. Organizational Excellence: Managing Chaos with Precision

A CDI often juggles multiple cases, each with its own set of deadlines, evidence, and witness statements. A well-organized investigator ensures that no crucial piece of evidence is overlooked and that attorneys receive timely, well-documented information. Developing a system for managing case files, interview notes, and digital records is essential for efficiency.

**Key Skill:** Efficiently managing case files, timelines, and evidence.

**Pro Tip:** Use case management software or a structured filing system to streamline organization and ensure no lead goes unchecked.

#### 4. Confidence & Persistence in the Field

Unlike civil investigators who often work behind the scenes, CDIs must knock on doors, engage with people, and press for answers—sometimes in difficult, high-pressure, and emotional environments. The ability to confidently and tactfully approach potential witnesses and persistently pursue leads is vital.

**Key Skill:** Professional and confident engagement in fieldwork.

**Pro Tip:** Develop comfort in field investigations by practicing interpersonal interactions in varied social settings.

#### 5. Deep Knowledge of the Criminal Justice System

A CDI's effectiveness hinges on a strong grasp of legal principles, impacting evidence admissibility and case strategy. Thorough knowledge of laws, including search and seizure, is crucial for preventing evidence suppression and ensuring legal compliance. Understanding legal elements and procedural rules, such as statutes of limitations and discovery obligations, allows investigators to identify weaknesses and uphold ethical standards. During witness interviews and evidence collection, investigators must navigate legal boundaries to avoid misconduct and protect privileged information.

Familiarity with sentencing laws and mitigation strategies enables investigators to contribute to favorable outcomes, while their legal insights support motion drafting and anticipate prosecution tactics. Ultimately, an investigator's role is to ensure all defense aspects are legally sound, strategically effective, and ethically executed.

**Key Skill:** Comprehensive understanding of legal procedures and protocols.

**Pro Tip:** Take criminal justice courses or attend legal seminars to stay updated on investigative best practices.

#### 6. Analytical Thinking: Seeing What Others Miss

Great investigators connect dots others overlook—identifying inconsistencies, reviewing discovery documents with a critical eye, and piecing together seemingly unrelated details to form a compelling case.

**Key Skill:** Precision in analyzing evidence and timelines.

**Pro Tip:** Regularly review case studies and practice reconstructing case timelines to sharpen analytical skills.

#### 7. Adaptability & Resilience: Thriving in Unpredictability

A CDI's work is unpredictable. Witnesses may change their stories, evidence may take unexpected turns, and deadlines may shift. Staying focused despite uncertainty is what separates great investigators from the rest.

**Key Skill:** Maintaining composure in high-pressure situations.

**Pro Tip:** Develop stress management techniques and maintain a support network of experienced peers.

#### 8. Ethical Judgment & Discretion

Handling sensitive information comes with the territory. Investigators must uphold strict ethical standards, maintain confidentiality, and never compromise the integrity of their work.

**Key Skill:** Upholding ethical standards and ensuring confidentiality.

**Pro Tip:** Familiarize yourself with legal and ethical guidelines specific to criminal defense investigations.

#### 9. A Passion for Justice: The Most Important Trait of All

At the core of criminal defense investigation is a relentless pursuit of the truth. A great CDI follows the evidence wherever it leads—whether it strengthens the defense or not.

**Key Skill:** Dedication to impartiality and justice.

**Pro Tip:** Always reflect on your motivations for entering this field, and let your commitment to fairness guide your work.

#### Building Your Career as a Criminal Defense Investigator

Success in this field requires more than just technical knowledge—it demands a commitment to continuous learning, skill refinement, and ethical excellence. By cultivating these traits, you can become an indispensable part of the defense team, ensuring every client receives a fair trial.

Whether you're transitioning from civil investigations or starting fresh, your journey to becoming an exceptional CDI begins with the decision to learn, adapt, and strive for excellence.

Are you ready to build a career in criminal defense investigation? The first step starts with mastering these traits. Your ability to seek the truth, handle challenges, and stay committed to justice will define your success in this field.

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# THE ART OF TESTIFYING: WHY INVESTIGATORS MUST BE PREPARED FOR COURT



*By Justin D. Hodson, CPI – Hodson P.I., LLC*

As private investigators, our work extends beyond gathering facts—we must also be prepared to present our findings in legal proceedings. Whether testifying as a fact witness or an expert, our credibility and professionalism on the stand can directly influence the outcome of a case. Yet, many investigators underestimate the importance of thorough preparation when called to testify in depositions or trials.

## **Professionalism Starts with Appearance**

First impressions matter in court. A well-groomed, professional appearance reinforces credibility, while a sloppy look can undermine even the strongest testimony.

- **Dress for the Courtroom, Not the Field** - Wear a suit or professional attire—no jeans, polos, or sneakers. A neatly pressed shirt, polished shoes, and subtle accessories convey competence.
- **Grooming and Hygiene Matter** - Neat hair, trimmed facial hair, and minimal cologne keep the focus on testimony, not distractions.
- **Body Language and Demeanor** - Sit upright, avoid fidgeting, and maintain steady eye contact. Confidence without arrogance earns trust.

Your appearance influences how your testimony is received. Dressing sharply, maintaining good grooming, and projecting confidence ensure the jury focuses on your findings—not your presentation.

## **Understanding the Courtroom Environment**

Unlike field investigations, the courtroom is a structured, rule-driven setting where presentation and delivery are just as important as the facts. Investigators must familiarize themselves with court procedures, the roles of attorneys and judges, and the flow of questioning.

Preparation should include working closely with attorneys to understand expectations, reviewing all case materials, and anticipating challenging questions. Consistency with previously submitted reports is crucial, as discrepancies can weaken testimony. A well-prepared witness is not only knowledgeable but also adaptable under pressure.

## **Communicating Clearly and Effectively**

Expertise means little if the jury or judge cannot understand it. Investigators should avoid technical jargon and present findings in a manner accessible to all.

The key to effective testimony is clarity—responses should be clear, direct, and concise. Over-explaining or using overly technical terms can confuse jurors and weaken the impact of testimony. A useful approach is to think like a teacher: break down complex investigative findings into simple, logical steps that anyone can follow.

## **Handling Cross-Examination with Confidence**

Cross-examination can be the most challenging aspect of testifying. Opposing counsel's goal is often to challenge credibility, expose inconsistencies, or provoke an emotional response.

To navigate cross-examination effectively, investigators should remain composed, listen carefully, and take a moment before responding. Short, direct answers are the best defense against aggressive questioning. It is critical to avoid guessing or speculating—if an answer is unknown, it is always better to say so. A well-prepared investigator remains calm and responds only to what is asked, without volunteering unnecessary information that could be used against them.

## **The Value of Self-Reflection**

Every courtroom experience provides an opportunity for growth. After testifying, investigators should review their performance with attorneys or colleagues, noting strengths and areas for improvement.

Self-assessment is crucial for refining testimony skills over time. By analyzing past testimony, investigators can enhance their ability to present complex findings with clarity, credibility, and professionalism.

## **Final Thoughts**

Private investigators play a vital role in the legal system, and our ability to deliver clear, composed, and credible testimony can significantly impact a case. By preparing thoroughly, mastering courtroom communication, handling cross-examination with confidence, and continuously improving our testimony skills, we not only strengthen our professional reputation but also contribute to the integrity of the investigative profession.

When the time comes to take the stand, preparation is not optional—it is essential.

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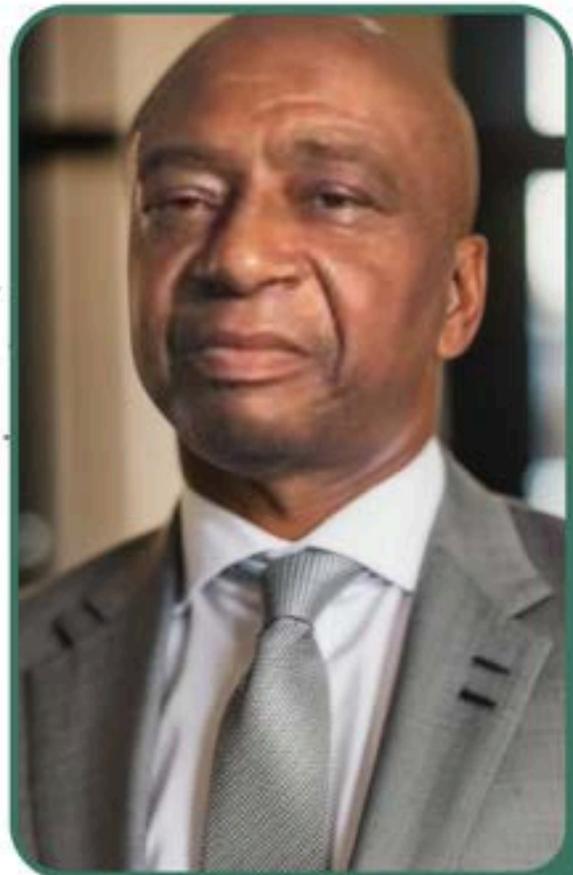
I truly believe this award could go to so many of us in this organization. The work you do—you do it alone, you do it quietly. The cases you take on, the thousand battles you fight, the territory you cover—no one sees it. No one knows. But I do. Each and every one of us has an Investigator of the Year inside of us. And each and every one of us is deserving.

No one sees you, but I see you. I see you.

From a little boy growing up on the tough streets of Bayview–Hunters Point in San Francisco, to standing here today as the 2025 Investigator of the Year—I am deeply grateful. Thank you not only for this award, but for truly seeing me.

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**Lindon**





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# THE IMPACT OF AB 747: WHAT CALIFORNIA INVESTIGATORS NEED TO KNOW

By Lindon Lilly, Founder & President  
Rhino Investigation and Process Serving



As a licensed private investigator and process server, I've spent years working on the ground in California, serving papers and providing investigative support for attorneys across a wide range of legal matters. Like many of you, I take pride in the integrity and diligence required to do this work the right way. That's why I think it's important we start paying close attention to Assembly Bill 747, also known as the Service and Process Accountability Reform and Equity (SPARE) Act—a bill that, whether we realize it or not, could significantly alter the way we work.

## What's in the Bill?

AB 747 includes several provisions that will directly affect our workflow, including:

- Real-time electronic tracking of service attempts: GPS-tagged documentation is becoming the expected standard.
- Stricter affidavit requirements: Servers must provide more detailed logs of attempts—including times, methods, and physical descriptions.
- New penalties for 'insufficient diligence': Courts will now have more power to throw out service attempts deemed 'unreasonable' or lacking proper effort.

On paper, these may sound manageable. But in practice, these changes could result in a greater administrative burden, more scrutiny from courts and opposing counsel, and potentially more liability for independent investigators.

## Why It Matters to Investigators

As investigators, many of us do more than just serve papers. We locate hard-to-find individuals, document evidence for litigation, and often navigate high-tension environments with caution and professionalism. The spirit of AB 747—ensuring service is fair and honest—is something we can stand behind. But the implementation may put smaller firms, solo operators, and those serving marginalized communities at a disadvantage.

The bill doesn't yet lay out standardized criteria for what constitutes 'due diligence,' which creates the potential for inconsistencies across jurisdictions. That's a concern when your reputation—and your client's case—depends on whether a judge or clerk decides your effort was 'enough.'

## What's Next?

AB 747 is still moving through the legislative process, but I believe we need to start having honest conversations now. Here's what I'd suggest to fellow investigators and servers:

- Stay informed – Read the bill and its amendments. Don't rely solely on summaries.
- Upgrade documentation practices – Digital records, GPS time-stamped attempts, and detailed notes may soon be necessary—not optional.
- Join the conversation – Get involved with CALI and CALSPRO. These organizations will be key in influencing how the bill is interpreted and implemented.

## Final Thoughts

This article isn't a call for panic—it's a call for preparation. AB 747 might not change the heart of our profession, but it could reshape how we prove our work was done right. As someone who's built a firm on transparency, accountability, and service to the legal system, I welcome reform. But I also want it to be fair and informed by the reality of our boots-on-the-ground experience.

We owe it to ourselves—and to the industry—to be ready, to speak up, and to ensure that the people who actually do this work every day have a voice in how it's regulated.

For any questions about this article, contact the author at [info@llegalassistance.com](mailto:info@llegalassistance.com).

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## TWO THINGS YOU MUST DO WHEN HIRING SUBCONTRACTORS



Isaac Peck, Senior Broker at  
OREP Insurance

Private investigators are no strangers to hiring other professionals, including other investigators, so they can better meet their clients' needs. Whether you are in a larger firm with a dozen full-time employees or a solo-operator, if you've been doing this for any reasonable length of time, you've probably hired an "independent contractor" to assist you in an investigation.

In many cases, PIs hire other licensed investigators to assist in some part of an investigation—be it surveillance, research, interviewing, geographic proximity, or perhaps they specialize in a particular area that is key to the investigation (asset searches, for example). This is a good idea. It makes your work easier, makes the clients happy, and keeps you in good working relationships with other professionals who can help you when you need them.

Subcontracting is risky, though, and to manage those risks, indemnification is a common and effective legal tool.

Subcontracting is risky, though, and to manage those risks, indemnification is a common and effective legal tool.

Whether you're hiring an unlicensed "birdog," another licensed investigator, or even another type of specialist or licensee on an independent contractor basis, there are two very important things the you needs to do with each subcontractor:

1. Get a copy of each subcontractor's liability insurance
2. Have a signed, written agreement with the subcontractor that includes an indemnification clause where the subcontractor agrees to indemnify you.

While some private investigators do take the step of verifying current liability insurance, very few go the extra mile and get a signed agreement with their subcontractors. And even fewer include an indemnification clause in that agreement.

Here is what that means and why it matters.

### **Why Proof of Insurance?**

In our work here at OREP, we've heard of private investigators balking at the idea of showing another PI proof of liability insurance. "That request is private and over the line!" the argument goes. However, showing proof of insurance is actually incredibly commonplace across the business landscape—in both professional services circles as well as the trades. Depending on the venue or the situation, there are plenty of scenarios where you can't even step onto a property as a vendor without first showing your proof of insurance. As a professional, showing proof of your liability insurance is normal and commonplace, and so is requiring that your subcontractors provide you proof of their insurance.

### **What is Indemnification?**

Let's start with what it means to "indemnify" someone. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "indemnify" as:

- To secure against hurt, loss, or damage;
- To make compensation for incurred hurt, loss, or damage.

In other words, with an indemnification clause, the subcontractor is agreeing to defend the PI and make them "whole" in the event the PI is sued or held liable for mistakes that the subcontractor makes.

These types of clauses are now incredibly common amongst the construction trades, professional service providers, financial services, and more. For example, if you are a general contractor hired by a wealthy patron to build a house—you likely are going to hire a framing company to frame the house, an electrical company to run the electrical, and so on. In each case, a smart risk management practice would be to have these subcontractors sign indemnification clauses where they agree to take responsibility for any property damage, mistakes, or errors that they make. After all, even though you are the general contractor, if your subcontractors make mistakes, you want them to take responsibility and pay for it, not you.

It's just good risk management. (OREP provides its Members with an attorney prepared Subcontractor Agreement they can use with their subcontractors—free of charge.)

### **Example**

Let's talk through an example of how an indemnification clause works. Imagine that your firm hires an investigator to conduct surveillance, and that investigator trespasses on the target's property (trespassing) and kicks over the target's expensive motorcycle in the process, putting a huge dent in the gas tank (property damage).

The target figures out that it was your firm that hired the investigator, and so the target files a lawsuit against the firm, even though it was a third-party, the subcontractor, who committed the tort. Let's further posit that you know the subcontractor carries insurance (or at least that's what he told you!), but you never asked for a copy of his liability insurance, and you never signed an agreement with him. You learn that he did not, in fact, have a current liability insurance policy. And now your firm is the one facing a lawsuit because of his actions!

What about the subcontractor? He's the one who did the trespassing and damaged the target's motorcycle. Do you think that he, his company, or better yet, his insurance carrier is going to voluntarily step up and take responsibility for this claim? It would be highly unlikely. The subcontractor and his insurance carrier are breathing a sigh of relief that they were not named in the lawsuit and that they are, so far, completely unencumbered by the entire ordeal. Whew!

And so you will left to defend this claim all by yourself. The only recourse a company has against a subcontractor like this would be to file a claim against the subcontractor and potentially sue them. In other words, you would need to sue the subcontractor yourself, while defending a lawsuit against the target. Many insurance companies and professionals are very uncomfortable with this approach (unless the dollar amounts are very high), and in many cases, the subcontractor will get off scot-free if there is no written agreement between the two parties outlining responsibilities and liabilities.

If you, the private investigator, have (1) a copy of the subcontractor's professional's insurance, and (2) a written agreement with an indemnification clause, it makes it much easier for you to tender the claim to the subcontractor's insurance carrier and seek retribution and defense in the lawsuit.

### **Be Smart When Hiring Subcontractors**

I tell these stories to private investigators when they ask me about proof of insurance and indemnification clauses. Common law indemnification theory dictates that the party responsible for the mistake should pay for it. From a practical standpoint (especially when it comes to insurance), indemnification clauses make all the difference.

In other words, from a risk management perspective, any business that is working with subcontractors, or even businesses that allow subcontractors on their properties (like builders or wedding venues, for example), should be asking those subcontractors to (1) show proof of insurance, and (2) sign an agreement with an indemnification clause. This is true for private investigators as well.

### **Be Smart When You're the Subcontractor**

If you're the one doing the subcontracting—maybe you're working for another PI, or a law firm with a small team of PIs—you shouldn't be surprised to see indemnification provisions in your engagement letters and service agreements. But there's one important difference you should keep an eye out for.

Specifically, you never want to sign any agreement where you agree to indemnify any third-party for their mistakes or errors. You should only indemnify a third-party for your own errors or omissions. From an insurance standpoint, if you agree to indemnify a third-party for their own mistakes and errors, that is not something your insurance will cover. So watch out for that!

For any questions about this article, contact the author at [isaac@orep.org](mailto:isaac@orep.org).

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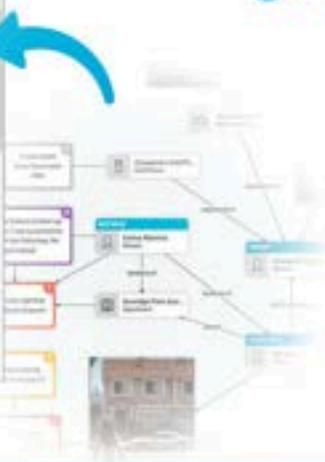
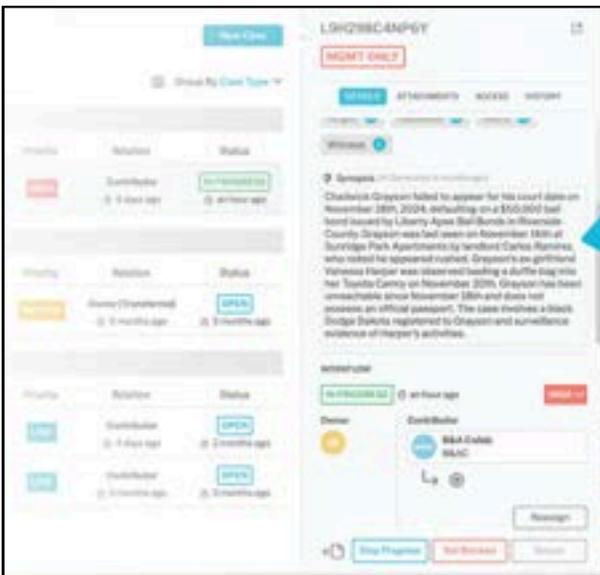
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# MEET SUSIE WRIGHT: CALI'S FIRST SERVICE & INDUSTRY MEMBER!

*By Susie Wright*



Susie Wright, Owner of Wright's Transcription Services, has been a member of CALI for 43 years.

CALI proudly presented Susie an Honorary Life membership in May.

I worked for Daniel Y Jones in-office for six years as a transcriber before the days of computers.

One afternoon Dan asked a group of his employees if we would like to attend a CALI meeting as his guests. I had heard Dan talk about CALI many times and decided to go. I remember the CALI Los Angeles District meeting was at Taix' French Restaurant.

After the meeting, Dan and I were talking. I told him I had been thinking about starting my own transcription business for private investigators only and asked him what he thought. He replied that he didn't know of anyone who had worked as an independent contractor, transcribing just for private investigators.

Two years later, I had established myself in business, and in 1986, I called Dan and asked him how I could become a member of CALI. Shortly thereafter, an individual contacted me from the CALI office advising me that there had never been a vendor like me applying for membership, and that my membership would be brought up at the next BOD meeting. The individual added that the vote would have to be unanimous in order for me to become a CALI member. I was unanimously voted in.

I started attending CALI conferences. I never wanted to stand behind a booth as I preferred walking around and introducing myself. I attended every speaker session I could and took notes. Investigations interested me.

During this time, my business branched out and I became a Preferred Vendor for State Farm Insurance Companies in their SIU, subrogation, and Workers' Compensation units, followed by Allstate.

I noticed what seemed like a universal problem in many of the investigation agencies of the time. How to train Investigators to uniformly dictate their reports. I was seeing supervisors spend all day correcting reports. I decided to teach my staff of 50 to transcribe a corrected version (according to each client's specifications). Instead of turning in verbatim reports with the permission of each office, I turned in final reports. This cut out some of the fat but I saw another way I could streamline reports by training private investigators in-office at lunchtime. I made appointments with the owners of agencies. Those who were told to take my report writing class showed up and anyone else who wanted to join was welcomed. We met in a conference room and I brought sample reports from the respective agency and guidelines along with pizza and sodas. I tried to make the writing reports class as easy as possible. I did not charge for these classes and came back as often as I was asked.

I started a regular column in the CALI Journal called, "Just Ask Susie" with various topics of interest that we're suggested by investigators.

PI Magazine contacted me one day and asked if I would consider writing articles for their magazine and I began writing for them.

Ralph Thomas asked me if I would be interested in writing articles for Thomas Investigative Publications, so I continued my writing journey.

I met Ben Harroll one day on the phone. He had The PI Museum on Wheels and he asked for some business brochures and said he had read some of my articles and enjoyed the read.

About this time I joined The World Association of Detectives, (WAD) and was a member for five years. I also joined PICA for about two years. I continued going to CALI district meetings every month, listening and learning.

One day I met a businessman named Bob Zasa at a Chamber of Commerce event. The concept of 'Outpatient Surgery Centers' was in its infancy. Bob asked if I would take over the divisions of medical transcription for every new surgery center he opened in California. I bought a 24hr Phone-In Dictation Machine where multiple doctors could call into their reserved line 24/7 and use a code specific to them. I had a background in anatomy, surgical and medical procedures, physiology, operative reports and medical terminology as well as experience working as an office manager for a neurosurgeon.

In the early 1990's, while attending a CALI conference, I entered the CALI Pistol Shoot. I had been competing in combat shooting events or IPSIC shooting for the past three years nationally. I had a tricked out .45 with a beveled magazine well, a compensator, an ambidextrous safety, and copper weights at the bottom of each magazine for fast reloading.

After the tournament there was an awards luncheon. A CALI member, (who shall remain nameless) was seated at a table rocking back and forth on the back legs of his chair, fanning himself with five \$100 dollar bills. He called me over to his table and I sat down. Unbeknownst to me, I had won 1st place.

Over the past 43 years I have spoken with many investigators about membership in CALI. I rarely accepted work from anyone who wasn't affiliated with CALI or a similar professional organization in their state. I expanded my network again and by word of mouth started working for former Chiefs of Police. They were a delightful group to work for.

I am grateful for all of the loyalty and business relationships developed over the last 45 years in business. CALI has always been a steadying force for me as a business person and I appreciate the vast wealth of information I learned from so many of the members. I remain member in good standing with CALI.

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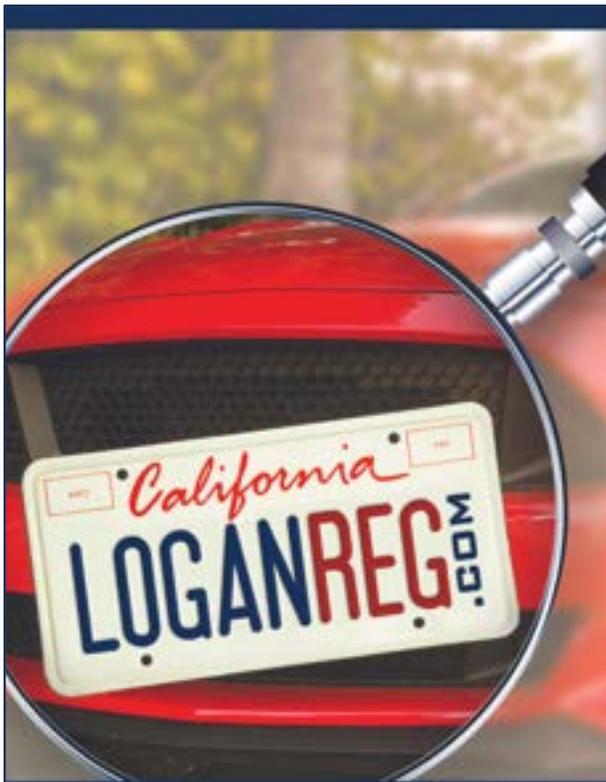
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# THE PI'S PRODUCTIVITY PLAYBOOK: MAXIMIZING RESULTS AS A SOLOPRENEUR

By Lita Abella, PI, JD, Board Certified Coach



In the fast-paced world of private investigation, running a solo practice can feel overwhelming when you are juggling surveillance, witness interviews, and client meetings – all while trying to grow your business. As both a licensed private investigator and executive leadership coach, I've witnessed firsthand how mastering the art of productivity can transform a chaotic workload into efficient investigative practice. These strategies have helped solo investigators optimize their time, maximize their results, and build thriving practices without burning out.

## Leveraging Peak Performance Hours

Understanding your peak energy periods is essential for investigative work. As investigators, we need sharp cognitive function for surveillance, interviewing witnesses, and analyzing complex data. I encourage my executive leadership clients to identify their most alert hours and schedule demanding tasks accordingly. If you're most focused in the early morning, use this time for detailed background investigations or report writing, saving routine tasks for lower-energy periods.

## Prioritization in Practice

Our profession often presents competing priorities – from urgent client requests to court deadlines. I recommend categorizing tasks based on both urgency and importance. For example, a time-sensitive surveillance operation takes precedence over routine background checks, but both need to be accommodated in your schedule.

## Smart Delegation

Even as independent investigators, we can benefit from strategic delegation. Consider outsourcing tasks like:

- Administrative paperwork
- Initial client intake processing
- Transcription services
- Social media monitoring and marketing

This allows you to focus on core investigative work that requires your expertise and licensed status.

## Embracing Automation and Artificial Intelligence

Today's investigators have access to powerful technology tools. Invest in:

- Case management software
- Automated report templates
- Digital evidence management systems
- Scheduling applications
- Client communication platforms
- Digital note-taking tools

- AI-driven software and algorithms
- Data analysis and pattern recognition
- And many other automation and AI tools, programs, platforms, etc.

These tools can significantly reduce time spent on routine tasks while improving accuracy and professionalism.

## Minimize Distractions During Critical Tasks

Our work requires intense focus, whether conducting surveillance or analyzing evidence. Establish a distraction-free environment by:

- Designating specific hours for deep work
- Creating a dedicated workspace for report writing
- Using technology to manage communications
- Setting clear boundaries with clients about availability

## Time Blocking for Different Types of Work

I advise investigators to block their time according to task types:

- Field operations and surveillance
- Client meetings and interviews
- Report writing and documentation
- Administrative tasks
- Professional development

This approach helps maintain focus and reduces the mental energy lost to constant task-switching.

## Balancing Reactivity with Proactivity

Our profession often requires immediate response to developing situations. Building buffer time into your schedule for unexpected developments is crucial. I recommend allocating 60 percent to 70 percent of your time to scheduled tasks, leaving the remainder for urgent matters and following up on promising leads.

As private investigators, our success depends not just on our investigative skills but on our ability to manage time effectively. By implementing these strategies, you can enhance your productivity while maintaining the high standards our profession demands. Remember, effective time management isn't about working more hours – it's about maximizing the value of the time you spend on each case.

The investment in developing strong time management skills pays dividends in both professional success and personal satisfaction. As you apply these techniques, you'll find yourself better equipped to handle complex cases while maintaining the work-life balance essential for long-term success in our demanding field.



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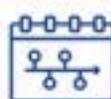
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- FREE access to past recorded Webinars
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- Members receive FREE registration to CALI's Legislative Day
- Members receive special member discounts on products and services
- CALI offers a FREE quarterly electronic newsletter - CALI Journal
- Licensed members are listed in the CALI Find An Investigator Online Directory
- Members receive discounted rate for the Online PI Exam Preparation Course
- Big 3 Program: CALI members could join FALI or TALI or both organizations, as out-of-state licensed members, for half of their regular dues
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# *In Memoriam*



## *Michael P. Morarity, Sr.*

**October 19, 1945 – August 7, 2025**

Michael P. Morarity, Sr., a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and retired law enforcement professional passed away peacefully on August 7, 2025. He was 79 years old. In the days leading to his passing, he was surrounded by his loving family and closest friends — a sacred time filled with shared memories, heartfelt goodbyes, and the unmistakable warmth of a life well lived.

Professionally, Michael built a meaningful and accomplished career in law enforcement — a path he was deeply passionate about and took immense pride in. In 1988, he established “Morarity & Associates,” a private investigations firm specializing in corporate cases, internal theft, embezzlement, workplace misconduct, background investigations, and support for criminal prosecutions. He also provided personal and corporate security, including executive protection services.

Michael was a proud member of the California Association of Licensed Investigators, where he shared his expertise, mentored others, and built enduring relationships within the investigative community. He remained deeply connected to his profession, employing and supporting other retired law enforcement professionals who were grateful for his guidance and the opportunities he provided. He will be deeply missed by his family, friends, and many colleagues.

# *In Memoriam*



## *Clayton E. Steacker*

June 21, 1966 – October 30, 2024

It is with great sadness to share the news of Clayton Steacker's passing. He dedicated 20 plus years to law enforcement and several years to managing Steacker Investigations and Associates. Clayton enjoyed working with many members of the CALI community and appreciated the group's integrity and knowledge. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, and many colleagues.