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Starting Your Own Paranormal Investigation/Research Group

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First Note –

Allow me to start off this booklet in an odd way... I'd like to list for you what this booklet is *not*.

#1: This booklet is not a list of rules, regulations, or orders. It's honestly nothing more than suggestions that seem to work for folks that we've gleaned over the last dozen years. No one is forcing this on anyone else, and what we're really hoping for from whoever reads this, is that they find what works for them... "Adopt, adapt, and improve".

#2: This booklet will not tell you how to experience paranormal phenomena. Nothing really can. Either you do, or you don't. I've often likened investigative aspects of this field to heading out to see a wild bear. You probably will want to start "in the woods", as that's where wild bears mostly are as a rule... and you have to understand, even in the right place in the right environment, you may see that wild bear... or you may not. Since "we" (PSICAN and it's groups) have not (as of this date) explained the causation of most paranormal events, it's impossible to tell you how to predict them and be in the "right place at the right time"... so if you're reading this to only have an elusive experience, you may be out of luck.

#3: This book will not show you how to make a living in the paranormal field. Sorry, to date, we all still have "day jobs"... our field of study is a hobby. We have watched time and time again as people have tried to wring money out of this work in some fashion or another, but realistically, unless you're going to sell some form of "paranormal services" (not many that have tried this managed to even get the business off the ground,) or find a television program to hire you as an on-air talent or consultant (and these gigs are very far and few between,) then you have to realise, it's going to be (fiscally) an uphill battle.

#4: This book will not tell you how to garner praise, make the local papers, or be respected in this field with little or no work or effort. In fact, much of what's in here *is* effort. It can be fun... it can be a social outlet... it can be intriguing... and if you do good work, you will get noticed... but if you're hoping a wee booklet like this has "all the answers", you're wrong.

There, now that the unpleasantness is out of the way, this is what this booklet is hoping to help readers with...

#1: Setting up and maintaining a paranormal investigative/research team.

#2: Making that team viable on all levels to as many people as possible,

#3: Getting that team active in the field and staying active.

That's what this is here for... so let's get started!

I'm Interested But Alone –

Sounds like a tragic kind of beginning, but this is one of the reasons people tend to come to our group... they feel alone or that there's no handy local support or team to get working with... or what is available doesn't meet their desires. So, what to do?

Well, if you're very interested, there are only two options.

The first is simply work on your own as an independent investigator and researcher. This has many benefits such as scheduling things (you only have to worry about your calendar and the witnesses/site administrators if applicable,) and in terms of expense, it's only you you're looking after which is a big savings.

The only problem is that it can be a lonely struggle, you have no one to bounce thoughts and ideas off of, and it's always good to have a second set of eyes in anything you do was well as a safety factor... It is safer "in numbers".

Now, don't get this wrong... I'm not an advocate of joining a "big group" or organisation... but perhaps connecting (if possible) with like-minded people through message boards or Facebook/MySpace type social networking groups... converse with them and see if you can find a "partner" in your activities.

If this is a no-go, then try to convince a friend or family member to help out... even if it is simply that "second set of eyes" only, that can be an invaluable tool in your efforts.

So, again, although you can go it "alone", we do recommend at least one person to work with you... if for no other reason, safety.

Okay, I've Got Some Help, So When Do People Start Sending Me Reports? –

This is the classic mistake made by many people who try to initiate a group... they feel that now that they "exist", people will be banging down their doors to hand them reports, ask for help, of the like... and no, no they won't.

You do have to have a public face... which means some sort of online offering.

This way, people can search for you and find you... but even then, they will probably still not be sending you reports and requests in big quantities.

So, how do you get them to communicate with you?

Starting The Online Presence –

Before getting started here, I should acknowledge that your “presence” doesn’t have to be “online”... it could be offline with a home office and some flyers or ads placed in a local paper to get people to come and see you... but I actually do not like giving out my exact address and phone number... which I’ll go into later.

Online, for us, is best as many witnesses are a bit sheepish about coming forward, and through a web presence, it is a little easier for them to share a touch more “anonymously” (the safety being behind a monitor,) and with the World Wide Web, you have a much broader reach than you would with sporadic local advertising.

So, how to create this presence?

Well, if you’re unfamiliar with HTML, CSS, or any other “site building” tools, there is Facebook and MySpace that you can tailor to your new team... just set up an account and start learning what’s available and what modifications you need.

That said, allow me to give you one more fantastic piece of advice... make sure the name of your outfit is something people might search for. Naming your group, you should sound secure, reliable, and most importantly, the name should contain something about where you are and what you’re doing.

Think of it this way...

If you wanted to find a paranormal team in your area, what would you type into a search engine?

Next, when people find you, make sure that the first thing they can read is what you’re about... or...

The Mission Statement/The Plan –

Look around... How many paranormal teams have taken the time to actually include a statement of what they’re up to, what they do, and what they are hoping to achieve? The answer is precious few have bothered... of that precious few, many simply state things like, “We want to prove the existence of the paranormal” or “We’re looking for evidence of the paranormal”.

Okay. What does that mean?

In my eyes... and the eyes of many others... you’re not defining what it is you’re up to.

Realistically, do you need to prove that people perceive weird things that fall into the category of “Paranormal”? What evidence do you consider valid as proof? How will you be collecting it?

You really absolutely need to figure these things out first.

Now, there's no harm in being an "enthusiast" and strictly wanting to "see" what's out there... but again, make that clear to the people that find you. It will save a lot of headaches and issues later on.

PSICAN's mission statement is...

PSICAN supplies information free of charge and to the best of our abilities to witnesses and the general public interested in all areas of the paranormal from a neutral perspective with respect and dignity to all beliefs and faiths.

In a nutshell, we're looking into everything from an absolutely neutral position... neither believers nor non-believers and we're doing this to the best of our abilities respecting philosophies and beliefs of those around us.

Heck, if that wasn't enough, we even have a "Code of Presentation" on our site...

<http://www.psican.org/alpha/index.php?/2008063045/About-Us/Code-Of-Study-And-Presentation.html>

Basically, long ago, we realised that it's for the best that people know exactly what they're in for when they deal with us... and if you're interested in getting into this field, make sure that if/when people find you, they know what you're offering them for visiting the site and if they contact you to look into things.

Content *IS* King –

Why do you go to a website about the paranormal?

Is it to check out when the folks on the site were on TV last? Maybe see pictures of them? Perhaps it's to find out how to contact them if you work for the media?

...you starting to see the trend here?

Normally, most people go to a paranormal group or site to read or look into the paranormal. Most people, unless they are impressed with the content, don't care about media appearances, what everyone looks like, and the egos of those involved should be very low in terms of what's presented on the site.

Also, again, think about whacking things into the search engine... What key words would you be looking for? Once the search results came up, what's the description after the site listings that would make you visit a group or site?

Realistically, you need to get some stuff under your belt... but how? No one's contacted you yet, you're only just starting out, how to get people coming to you?

It's easier than you think...

Start Here –

Okay, you have a name, you have a course of action... a “mission statement” or “plan”... now, let’s get you out and doing.

Firstly, find some cases of paranormal activity that have interested you. It helps if they are “local”, but this is oddly enough not a necessity. Now, start reading... websites, library books, watch video documentaries if you can find them... and write it up for your site.

Now, when I’ve suggested this before to some people, they’ve said, “But those are old cases! They’ve been done before! I want something new!”

If you read the bit above and feel that this fits how you look at old cases... remember... people need to find you to send you new reports... they will use a search engine... and what will they type?

Here’s an example...

A person sees an odd light over a lake that doesn’t move like an aircraft and seems to slam into the water. They search for UFO crashes in water and find the “Shag Harbour” case... and, if you’re in their area, they probably searched the words “UFO crash water (my area)” meaning they’ll find your write up on Shag Harbour and because you’re local, they’ll send you the report!

Another example...

You write up a haunted hotel near your home. You even visit, get some photos, and talk to the staff and perhaps add more data to the story than was previously known. Someone also living near the hotel searches for reports on it because they’ve experienced a ghost there... or something similar nearby... and they find you and voila! They send the report to you!

Dusty Old Philosophers –

Reading, reading, and more reading is essential. This is not to say that you’ll be nose-deep in books twenty-four-seven... but you should be aware of what has come before you.

I’m more a “ghost” person than anything else, so for this example, I am using my strongest area of knowledge...

Many ghost hunters believe it’s not important to know what’s happened before because, they say, there’s been nothing but failure. Since the ghost hunters of old have failed, their work is silly and “new blood” and ideas are needed.

Nine-times out of ten, what this statement honestly translates into is, “I don’t want to read anything. I don’t want to do anything that may not be cool and jive with my personal hypothesis and philosophies... so I’ll say it’s all rubbish.”

I know, sounds harsh... but here's where I usually catch these people...

They say things like, "Y'know, I've been thinking that ghosts might actually come from us. Y'know, like some kind of psychic projection."

I reply, "So, PSI or RSPK? Similar to what was found during The Philip Experiments and The Scole Experiments?"

Sadly, more often than not, the person talking with me at this point is not familiar with these cases... and although there's nothing wrong with that and anyone can learn, if they did know about the work that was done before, maybe they really do have something new to add to it instead of simply attempting to re-invent the wheel.

The study of the paranormal is nothing new... but new things can be brought to it... and those that wish to do so would be a little silly to ignore the past.

Also, keeping "up to date" on what's happening in the study is essential... the late Dr. J. Allen Hynek once told a story about dealing with "UFO sceptic" Dr. Carl Sagan...

Sagan and I were at Harvard together, and we were talking about UFOs and he of course, poo-pooed it, and I said, "Well, what do you think about the Homer, New York case?" – "Never heard of it." – "What do you think about the Monticello, Wisconsin case?" – "Never heard of it." – and I went down the line, case after case after case and he never heard of them, never studied them... and I said, "Carl, darnit, you know as well as I do, for a scientist to speak on something, he should be familiar with the literature, he should have studied it." He said, "Yeah, but I don't have time for that stuff."

Basically, if you want to speak with authority on a subject, you must do your homework.

There's nothing wrong with "learning on the fly" or working from a new play book, but if you don't want to look as silly as the late Dr. Sagan did above, you should be aware to a degree of that which has come before you.

Ufologists should be familiar with J. Allen Hynek, Stanton Friedman, Ted Phillips, Walt Andrus, Bruce Maccabee, Jacques Vallée just for starters...

Cryptozoologists should be familiar with Karl Shuker, Loren Coleman, Ivan Sanderson, Bernard Heuvelmans again, just for a beginning...

Ghosts and hauntings people should be familiar with Harry Price, Peter Underwood, Scott Rogo, William Roll, George and Iris Owen, and this is also just the starting point.

Psychical investigators/researchers should know the work of The Society for Psychical Research in Britain, The Koestler Parapsychology Unit at The University of Edinburgh, The Rhine Institute (though I'd recommend only things from The Rhine pre-dating 2007...) and again, know the work from these people is a great grounding in the study.

If you need another reason to know what's happened before you came into the field and by whom, one of the best arguments you can shoot at "so-called sceptics" (non-

believers) when they say the paranormal is all bunk is, “What study and investigation have you done in the field to support that claim?”

...but remember, that argument is easily turned around... so be prepared.

Hey, while we're here, let's talk about...

Safety First –

Do we really need to point out certain obvious things? We might have to... so let's get them over with... plus a few you may not have thought of...

Right off the bat, I would like to STRONGLY SUGGEST that anyone and everyone PLEASE take these first “rules” to heart and adopt them... I'm hoping you'll understand why...

#1: The safety, security, and privacy of a witness or site owner/manager must always be your first concern.

Basically, if someone invites you someplace or shares a story or report, they should be your biggest concern and you should never make them feel insecure, unsafe, or in any way worried about coming to you.

#2: No data is worth injuring yourself or others for.

With organ transplants, there's a credo amongst surgeons... “When in doubt, don't.” If you are investigating and something seems dangerous or unsafe, back off.

#3: No data is worth a criminal record.

Breaking and entering, trespassing, or worse is sometimes done in the name of paranormal studies... and realistically, that's nonsense. There's plenty of places to go and information readily obtainable that do not require someone to break or bend the law. The other thing people neglect when doing this is, what they do reflects on us all. Sadly, you can be miles away and very different from ‘X’ investigator, but if they do something very stupid, people you deal with aren't going to say, “Well, that was ‘X’ and you are different so it's okay!”, they are FAR more likely to say, “Paranormal investigators! I've heard of your type! Bug off!”

#4: Stealing from one person's work is plagiarism... unlike the rest of this old joke, no, stealing from many people's works is still plagiarism... Always give credit where it's due.

No one will think you're bad, unoriginal, or awful if you actually cite other people's work in your own efforts. It adds to your integrity and shows that you are studying.

You Don't Have To But... –

Now, these are some rudimentary PSICAN “rules”... and why they are there... You do NOT need to follow them and we would never force people to, but they may be of some use and we'd certainly love it if you considered them...

#1: If you're presenting data, evidence, or anything like that, be your own worst critic and if you know it's not perfect, you can still present it, but let people know that you're aware of the shortcomings and are working to make things better.

Basically, the real enemy of Paranormal Investigators/Researchers is not the “competition”, but the so-called sceptics and non-believers who will bully witnesses into believing they’re woo-woos for talking to you. They will go to public sites and resources and warn them of the dangers of your “disrespectful pseudo-science”. They will ensure that we are forever floundering in this study with the worst examples of our field “on top” so they can be publicly mocked. DON'T fall in to any traps... be honest, forthright, and look at things with a neutral eye. Don't label things based on a TV show or strictly because you have a “belief”... look at things like an investigator... and label it for what it is only.

#2: Investigation via proclamation is not good enough.

Simply saying something is because you feel it is probably isn't good enough for some people. You can speculate, but ensure that you let everyone know it is “speculation”. Also, avoid the word “theory” as it means that you have absolute observations or data to bring to bear... it's a mouthful, but “hypothesis” or “untested hypothesis” is usually more accurate. I know, this is semantics, but ask anyone who's run head-long into “so-called sceptics” (non-believers) and they will shred you if you don't understand the words you're using... Look 'em up if you're not sure...

#3: Constructive criticism should be welcome in both directions. Attacks and ad-hominem comments should not.

Colleagues disagree... and through discourse, might work out problems. Enemies disagree... but as a rule, they're so busy disliking each other that they never find common ground and often end up working against each other. Better to have “agree-to-disagree” with zero anger than constant battles for any reasons. One rule we have is “Fight the data, not the person.”

#4: Remember, we may all be different, but we're all in this together!

Even if methodologies, philosophies, or just the general tone of each group may be different, we do share a passion for the studies we're in... we should share and work together when possible... Laud our colleagues efforts if they yield something... Give constructive ideas if they're on the wrong track in our eyes. Mostly, however, there's no need to “one-up” the next group or person... again, then it comes down to you against them... not you and them against the mystery... and what use is that?

#4: Using scientific equipment does not make you a scientist in the same way that using a Ouija board does not make you a psychic.

If you're going to use scientific instruments... or any instrument and claim its use as “scientific”, learn all about it and make sure you understand what controls you may need in place and what would qualify with the equipment as a “finding” versus normal. Ask, learn, and know... You'll always be ahead of the game!

#5: Be careful with your own personal data!

Earlier, I mentioned how I don't like giving out my exact address or phone number... Well, in today's society, many people assume that they are entitled to 24x7 “service”... and long ago, I had everything from people trying to “drop in” to my home because they assumed it was an office, or calling me at 3am on weeknights to tell me their ghost was “active”. Realistically, if you don't have the money for a second phone line or an office, it's best to limit people to e-mail only.

Ready To Rock! –

So, you have some content, you have your web presence, you're building your team, and your ideas and plans are neatly laid out...

Once you have enough content to merit it, you might then try to find some interest with the media... only to get your name "out there" now.

You can showcase your efforts, tell them your plans, and hope for the best... Let them know in a "press release" (Google it to find out how to write one up then e-mail it to various local (always start locally!) broadcasters, newspapers, and whatnot...) what your group is, where it can be found, and most importantly, what you've already done. Potential is a great thing, but they will want to see something already there to take a big interest in you.

If I may, as a last note, share the BEST media advice I ever received which actually had to be modified to make it perfect... it was from a friend who warned me...

"They will ask you if you believe in the paranormal. Always say no, because they'll paint you like a crazy person if you say yes."

Of course, this COULD and CAN be correct... but I didn't want to come off as a non-believer scare off witnesses... so I modified it...

When asked, "Do you believe in the paranormal?"

I respond...

"I believe in paranormal phenomena. I believe that odd things happen and are experienced by people that are labelled paranormal... What really causes them? I honestly don't know... That's what I'm looking into. It's a mystery."

So, on that note, the only thing NOT covered here is "How To"... and I really can't do that. The "ghost course" I wrote is well over 100 pages long... if I did something similar for the other areas of the paranormal, this would become... encyclopaedic! (No thanks...) My best advice is this...

Read, watch, learn, and question... and set out your investigative techniques from there. You of course can incorporate other things, but make it your own... in your comfort zone...

On our sites, there are "How To" guides... and you can find others all over the web with a little Google searching... and to bring it all home, from there, "Adopt, adapt, improve!"

Here's hoping you can teach even this old dog some new tricks!