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THESIS

**INSPIRED INTERVIEWING: LEVERAGING
MINDFULNESS PRACTICE TO IMPROVE SECRET
SERVICE INTERVIEW SKILLS IN PROTECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATIONS**

by

Kimberly A. Lokhard

March 2023

Co-Advisors:

Paul J. Smith (contractor)
Mollie R. McGuire

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IMPROVE SECRET SERVICE INTERVIEW SKILLS IN PROTECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATIONS**

Kimberly A. Lokhard
Supervisory Criminal Investigator—US Secret Service,
Department of Homeland Security
BA, Marymount University, 1993

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March 2023**

Approved by: Paul J. Smith
Co-Advisor

Mollie R. McGuire
Co-Advisor

Erik J. Dahl
Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The Secret Service conducts Protective Intelligence (PI) investigations as part of its integrated mission of investigating financial crimes and protecting certain elected federal government officials. An integral part of the PI investigation is the PI interview. Although Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers receive PI interview training, they still struggle with four key components of the interview: rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. As a result, they may not conduct thorough PI interviews, thus negatively impacting the PI investigation. Faulty PI investigations may result in unwanted outcomes for Secret Service protective interests. These outcomes may include death or injury to protectees, Secret Service employees, or the public. A potential solution is the mPEAK mindfulness program that the Secret Service already uses to improve employee wellness. This thesis reviews literature on mindfulness training and its utility in performance enhancement to determine to what extent the Secret Service should leverage mPEAK to improve PI interviewing and to offer recommendations for the inclusion of mPEAK in the current PI training curriculum. It finds that elements of mindfulness—presence, nonjudgment, enhanced listening skills, and increased attention—can improve investigators’ PI interview skills. Finally, this thesis gives recommendations for a working group to adapt mPEAK for improved PI interviewing.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HIG	High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group
MBAT	Mindfulness Based Attention Training
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
PI	Protective Intelligence
UCSD	UC San Diego

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Secret Service conducts Protective Intelligence (PI) investigations as part of its integrated mission of investigating financial crimes and protecting certain elected federal government officials. An integral part of the PI investigation is the PI interview. Although Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers receive PI interview training, they still struggle with four key components of the interview: rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. As a result, they may not conduct thorough PI interviews, thus negatively impacting the PI investigation. Faulty PI investigations may result in unwanted outcomes for Secret Service protective interests. These outcomes may include death or injury to protectees, Secret Service employees, or the public.

A potential solution is the mPEAK mindfulness program that the Secret Service already uses to improve employee wellness. This thesis reviews literature on mindfulness training and its utility in performance enhancement to determine to what extent the Secret Service should leverage mPEAK to improve PI interviewing and to offer recommendations for the inclusion of mPEAK in the current PI training curriculum. It finds that elements of mindfulness—presence, nonjudgment, enhanced listening skills, and increased attention—can improve investigators’ PI interview skills.

In his book *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment—and Your Life*, Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as: “paying attention on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally...as if your life depended on it.”¹ Scientists have studied mindfulness practices to determine if they can improve a person’s physical and mental capacities. These studies have shown that mindfulness training can help protect the brain against the effects of stress and aging.² Furthermore, studies show that mindfulness practice positively affects various behavioral outcomes, such as preventing

¹ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment--and Your Life* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2012), 17.

² Christina Congleton, Britta K. Hölzel, and Sara W. Lazar, “Mindfulness Can Literally Change Your Brain,” *Harvard Business Review*, January 8, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/01/mindfulness-can-literally-change-your-brain>.

burnout, facilitating teamwork, mitigating biases, and improving feelings of wellness.³ There is also a robust body of academic research on the effects of mindfulness practice on the human brain and body. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness practices improve academic, work, and physical performance. For some time now, law enforcement and the military have utilized mindfulness practice for performance enhancement. Mindfulness practice is an effective technique in operational circumstances similar to those experienced by the Secret Service.

As a result of these and similar studies, agencies like the Secret Service are leveraging mindfulness training for employee wellness and performance enhancement. Currently, the Secret Service uses the mPEAK mindfulness program for employee wellness but has not yet applied the program to performance enhancement in any arena, including the PI interview skill set.

The PI interview is a significant means of information collection in the PI investigation. A Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer may interview many people during a PI investigation. Each interview brings unique challenges and issues for the investigator; understanding the basic nature of the PI interview and preparing appropriately for each interview is critical in a successful PI investigation. The ability to conduct successful interviews is not innate; it can be honed via education and practice.⁴ A successful interviewer seeks to continuously develop a better understanding of human behavior and how that behavior manifests; the interviewer seeks to understand themselves and the person they are interviewing.⁵

Though there are many different methods of conducting PI interviews, certain concepts transcend and connect the methods at their core. These concepts—rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making—are critical in the PI interview and, therefore, in the development of a thorough threat assessment.

³ “The Science of Mindfulness,” *Mindful* (blog), September 7, 2020, <https://www.mindful.org/the-science-of-mindfulness/>.

⁴ John E. Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Pub. Co, 1997), 4.

⁵ Nathan J. Gordon, William L. Fleisher, and C. Donald Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 35.

Again, these concepts are not necessarily innate to the investigator; a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer can develop these skills by learning them and practicing them throughout their interactions with people. Though they may receive training in the four critical elements of the PI interview, some investigators still struggle as they conduct interviews in the PI investigation. One potential solution for those struggles is the application of mindfulness practices to the PI interview process.

Just as each element of a PI interview is intrinsically intertwined, so are the basic elements of mindfulness that can have a positive impact on those PI interview elements. Scientific studies have shown that mindfulness can enhance work performance. Therefore, a mindfulness practice focused on performance enhancement can help Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers improve their PI interviewing skills. A strong sense of presence, approached from a nonjudgmental attitude, combined with a focus on listening and attention, will serve the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer well as they engage in a PI interview. An investigator who engages in a mindfulness practice that encourages these basic tenets will be more effective as they engage in rapport and relationship building; their ability to elicit information and detect deception during the interview will improve their decision-making skills.

The Secret Service has the opportunity to join other law enforcement and military entities on the cutting edge of performance improvement if it implements mindfulness practice in its PI interviewing training curricula. While other law enforcement agencies have begun to embrace mindfulness training, they are still generally invested in the wellness attributes of mindfulness rather than its performance-enhancement attributes. By integrating mindfulness training into the PI training program, the Secret Service can realize the benefit of mindfulness training in a uniquely operational capacity.

The first recommendation for implementing mPEAK into the PI curriculum is to convene a working group to validate these findings and explore avenues for implementing the program in the PI training curriculum. Once the working group establishes the appropriate implementation process, the group should brief the plan to Secret Service management. This briefing will ensure that senior management has the opportunity to learn about the program and sign off on its details. The next essential step

is to train a cadre of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who also teach PI interviewing as mindfulness coaches. Finally, the Secret Service should consider partnering with an educational institution that is conducting research into mindfulness practices and performance enhancement. A partnership of this type would allow the Secret Service to affect the future of the application of mindfulness practice in law enforcement and the federal government.

Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who participate in a mindfulness program designed to improve employee wellness, resiliency, and enhance their job performance are better equipped to respond quickly to the job's challenges and successfully fulfill the integrated mission of the Secret Service.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Secret Service fulfills an integrated mission of investigating crimes affecting the U.S. financial infrastructure and protecting certain elected federal government officials. The Secret Service’s protective mission includes protecting the President and Vice President and their families, major presidential and vice presidential candidates and their families, former presidents and their spouses, visiting foreign heads of state or government and their spouses, and other persons as covered under Presidential Executive Orders.¹ Additionally, the Secret Service provides protection for National Special Security Events as designated by the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).² Today, the Secret Service has 41 permanent protectees, the highest number of permanent protectees in Secret Service history.³

The Secret Service’s protective mission used to be threat-based, operating on the assumption that would-be attackers would make a threat. This assumption guided its protective activities until the mid-1980s, when a series of incidents challenged the ideas held by the Secret Service about attackers and their motivations.⁴ As a result, the Secret Service conducted a study examining the thinking and behaviors of “83 persons known to have attacked or come close to attacking prominent public officials and figures in the United States during the past 50 years.”⁵

This study, the Exceptional Case Study Project, laid the foundation for modern threat assessment in the Secret Service.⁶ It was also the basis for the seminal writing in

¹ U.S. Secret Service, “United States Secret Service,” U.S. Secret Service, accessed July 17, 2020, <https://www.secretservice.gov/>.

² U.S. Secret Service.

³ U.S. Secret Service.

⁴ Many of these false ideas about assassins are detailed in the *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials*, and several of the study participants were persons whose actions cause the Secret Service to undertake the Exceptional Case Study Project.

⁵ Robert A Fein and Bryan Vossekuil, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998), iii.

⁶ Fein and Vossekuil, 4.

behavioral threat assessment, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement* (also known as *The Yellow Book*).⁷

This guide set the course of threat assessment for agencies engaged in a protective mission and provided a universal definition of threat assessment for law enforcement and protection. *The Yellow Book* defines threat assessment this way: “Threat assessment or Protective Intelligence is the process of gathering and assessing information about persons who may have interest, motive, intention, and capability of mounting attacks against public officials and figures...the primary goal of every Protective Intelligence investigation is to prevent an attack on a potential target.”⁸ Each Protective Intelligence (PI) investigation is unique because the circumstances and history of each subject in the investigation are different. However, the desired outcome is always the same: mitigation of the risk of an unwanted outcome for Secret Service protectees, employees, facilities, and the public.

In preparation for PI investigations and other protective and investigative activities, Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers undergo rigorous training programs at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and the Secret Service James J. Rowley Training Center. Recruits spend between 28 and 36 weeks in classroom, hands-on, and physical training. The curriculum includes education in criminal and constitutional law, police procedures, international law and diplomatic protocols, counterfeiting and financial crimes investigations, cybercrime investigations, physical protection methodologies, and PI investigations.⁹ In addition, all recruits undergo extensive training in firearms, control tactics, physical fitness, and water safety.¹⁰ Therefore, PI is only a fraction of the curriculum in both training programs.

⁷ Fein and Vossekui, 14.

⁸ Fein and Vossekui, 7.

⁹ U.S. Secret Service, “United States Secret Service.”

¹⁰ U.S. Secret Service.

One of the best ways of gathering information in a PI investigation is through the interview. Interviews are supported by other investigative techniques such as records reviews, searches, surveillance, and other activities designed to corroborate or refute the information developed during the investigation.¹¹ Interviews are a means of identifying further avenues of investigation, corroborating information developed during the investigation, and cultivating support sources for the subject being investigated. Despite the significance of interviews in a PI investigation, PI interview training continues to be a small portion of the training a recruit receives in the academy. Because of this, new Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers often struggle in the field with several essential elements of PI interviewing, including rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making.¹² Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who successfully master these elements are better prepared to identify and mitigate any threat against a protectee. Conversely, those who struggle will risk incomplete or faulty threat assessment investigations.¹³

The consequences of a faulty threat assessment can be dire: Secret Service protectees can be injured or killed. Moreover, even the implication that a protectee was injured can significantly impact society and the economy. For example, in 2013, the Associated Press Twitter feed was hacked, and a tweet was issued stating that President Obama was injured in a White House explosion. Though the Associated Press removed the tweet within minutes and issued statements reporting the tweet as a hoax, the U.S.

¹¹ Renate Geurts et al., “Interviewing to Manage Threats: Exploring the Effects of Interview Style on Information Gain and Threateners’ Counter-Interview Strategies.,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 5, no. 4 (December 2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000107>; Fein and Vossekuil, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

¹² This thesis uses the terms “rapport” and “relationship building,” “elicitation,” “deception detection,” and “decision-making.” Literature on threat assessment interviewing often discusses these general topic areas utilizing various terms. For consistency, this thesis uses these terms to describe each of the problem areas encountered by Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers as they conduct PI interviews.

¹³ J. Reid Meloy, “Threat Assessment: Scholars, Operators, Our Past, Our Future,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 2, no. 3–4 (September 2015): 233, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000054>.

Stock Market plummeted and lost nearly \$200 billion.¹⁴ In addition to the potential harm that can come to a protectee from a faulty threat assessment, Secret Service employees and the general public can be at risk for injury or death. It can also cause the Secret Service to waste resources on subjects who do not pose a risk of an unwanted outcome. The Secret Service may also misalign resources from subjects who need them, therefore not mitigating the potential threat effectively.

Despite the time constraints for training in PI, the program is robust with classroom instruction, practical hands-on training, and role-playing for interviews. Additionally, the potentially catastrophic outcomes of a poorly executed threat assessment make continuous review and revision of the training process necessary. Therefore, instructors are constantly seeking ways to improve the training process.

One potential avenue for improvement in the PI training program is incorporating mindfulness practice for the investigators. Through a DHS initiative on employee wellness, recruits receive an introduction to mindfulness practice during their training.¹⁵ As part of this initiative, the Secret Service participates in the mPEAK program.

The mPEAK program, which aims to increase mental performance and resilience and takes a proactive approach to employee wellness, was developed by the UC San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine and the USA Olympic Cycling Team.¹⁶ Currently, the Secret Service introduction to mindfulness practice is a single class, delivered in less than eight hours and administered by the Secret Service Employee Assistance Program. In addition, the course is presented solely from an employee-wellness perspective alongside suicide prevention. While employee wellness is critical, the potential work

¹⁴ “‘White House Attacked, Obama Injured’ AP Tweet Hoax Crashes U.S. Stock Market,” 21st Century Wire, April 24, 2013, <https://21stcenturywire.com/2013/04/24/white-house-attacked-obama-injured-ap-tweet-hoax-crashes-us-stock-market/>.

¹⁵ Department of Homeland Security, “Mental Well-Being,” Employee Resources, accessed August 8, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/employee-resources/mental-fitness>.

¹⁶ “mPEAK Coaching Mindfulness for Performance Enhancement, Resilience, Focus and Flow,” mPEAK Coaching, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.mpeakcoaching.com>.

performance enhancement attributes of the mPEAK program are only given superficial attention in the class. Despite robust scientific research on the link between mindfulness and performance enhancement, they are not presented from a work performance angle. Finally, there are very few opportunities for a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer to further their experience with mindfulness training, as the mPEAK courses are only offered once or twice per year. The potential application of mPEAK to improve performance in the PI interviewing process gives rise to this thesis's research questions.

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent should the Secret Service leverage the mPEAK mindfulness training program that it currently uses for employee wellness to improve the PI interview skills of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers? If the Secret Service leverages the program, what are some recommendations for its incorporation into the training paradigm for Protective Intelligence?

B. BACKGROUND

As this thesis examines an avenue for improving investigators' skills in the PI interview, it is helpful for the reader to understand the PI investigative process in the Secret Service. Therefore, this section provides an overview of the PI process, model, and framework, emphasizing the PI interview.

1. Secret Service Protective Intelligence Investigations

The primary goal of the Secret Service PI investigation is to determine if a subject has an "interest, motive, and capacity to mount an attack on a target."¹⁷ *The Yellow Book* recommends using the PI investigation to determine who may be a risk for an unwanted outcome concerning Secret Service protective interests.¹⁸ These protective interests include protectees, Secret Service employees, and facilities. As stated earlier, unwanted

¹⁷ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 37.

¹⁸ Fein and Vossekui, 3.

outcomes include injuries or death to persons, security breaches, and destruction of property.

As detailed in *The Yellow Book*, the Secret Service developed a new model and framework for threat assessment. The new model and framework moved the Secret Service away from a threat-based system and into one that examines the thinking and behavior of a would-be perpetrator of targeted violence.¹⁹ In fact, *The Yellow Book* found that “persons who pose an actual threat often do not make threats, especially direct threats.”²⁰ As a result, the Secret Service began to focus on understanding the subject’s motivations to act rather than relying on articulated threats.²¹

The model and framework assist the investigator in making an assessment and also help them identify ways to leverage the subject’s support systems to mitigate the risk to Secret Service protective interests.²² The Secret Service states, “Although every act of targeted violence may not be prevented, the risk of future tragedies can be reduced if the appropriate systems are in place to identify the warning signs, gather information to assess the risk of violence, and apply the appropriate community resources.”²³ This model and framework for threat assessment rely heavily on the investigator’s ability to conduct a productive PI interview.

a. Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

The Secret Service threat assessment model is basic by definition but complex in operation. The three-step model is: identify the risk, assess the risk, and manage the

¹⁹ Fein and Vossekuil, 3.

²⁰ Fein and Vossekuil, 14.

²¹ Fein and Vossekuil, 17.

²² Randy Borum et al., “Threat Assessment: Defining an Approach for Evaluating Risk of Targeted Violence,” *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 17, no. 3 (1999): 335, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0798\(199907/09\)17:3<323::AID-BSL349>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0798(199907/09)17:3<323::AID-BSL349>3.0.CO;2-G).

²³ U.S. Secret Service, *NTAC Case Study – Hot Yoga Tallahassee* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2022), 22, https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2022-03/NTAC%20Case%20Study%20-%20Hot%20Yoga%20Tallahassee_0.pdf.

risk.²⁴ It is important to note that each element focuses on risk. This focus aligns with the Secret Service’s protective mission; the Secret Service is dedicated to removing or mitigating risks faced by Secret Service protectees.²⁵

Persons who may pose a risk are identified in two ways: self-identifiers and second-party identifiers.²⁶ Self-identifiers somehow bring themselves to Secret Service attention.²⁷ For example, they may show up at a protected site, post concerning or threatening comments on social media, write letters, call, or attempt to contact the protectee in some other way.²⁸ Generally, persons who self-identify want to tell their story and seek an audience.²⁹ Often, they believe that they have a special relationship with the protectee, are seeking or offering help, or are expressing frustration or anger over grievances.³⁰

The other method of identifying subjects is second-party identification.³¹ These are friends and families of subjects, concerned citizens reporting online posts or interactions, strangers who have seen the subject behaving oddly, or other similar reporters.³² Law enforcement and medical personnel may also identify persons of interest for PI investigations.³³ However, anytime a subject is identified via second-party identification, the threat assessment process may be more complicated because the subject may have been attempting to hide their activities.³⁴

²⁴ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 25.

²⁵ Fein and Vossekui, iii.

²⁶ Fein and Vossekui, 25–26.

²⁷ Fein and Vossekui, 25.

²⁸ Fein and Vossekui, 25.

²⁹ Fein and Vossekui, 25.

³⁰ Fein and Vossekui, 13.

³¹ Fein and Vossekui, 26.

³² Fein and Vossekui, 26.

³³ Fein and Vossekui, 26.

³⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2017), 13–14, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view>.

The second part of the identify, assess, and manage model is the assessment phase, which constitutes the bulk of the PI investigation. An immediate goal of the PI investigation is for the investigator to gather enough information to create a “global picture” of the subject. This global picture is everything that constitutes the subject: their history, interests, motivations, stresses, legal and medical issues, work/school/home environment, and everything else that impacts the subject. The investigator’s interview and decision-making skills are critical in this phase of the threat assessment model. Here, the investigator must utilize many interview-related skills such as rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. For a comprehensive threat assessment, the information gathered by the investigator in the Assessment phase must be sound, reliable, and thorough.³⁵

While the third component of the threat assessment model is risk management, the investigator is continuously managing risk from the onset of the PI investigation.³⁶ Secret Service protective techniques begin managing risks and subjects even before they have been specifically identified. Throughout the threat assessment investigation, the investigator is always somehow managing the risk posed by the subject; the management portion is not reserved for the end of the investigation.³⁷ For example, if an investigator identifies an imminent risk during the identification or assessment phase, they will immediately move to address and mitigate that risk before continuing with the other threat assessment tasks.³⁸

b. Secret Service Threat Assessment Framework and Themes

To help the investigator navigate the complexities of the global picture of a subject, the Secret Service has developed the Systems Approach for framing a PI

³⁵ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 27.

³⁶ Fein and Vossekui, 28.

³⁷ Meloy, “Threat Assessment,” 233.

³⁸ Meloy, 233.

investigation. In this approach, the investigator identifies the “Systems—people, institutions, and community resources, with whom the subject has had contact.”³⁹ These systems can be formal or informal.⁴⁰ Formal systems include employment, judicial, medical, law enforcement, and educational systems. These systems likely have documents and records of contact with the subject.⁴¹ Informal systems are family, friends, social circles, social media, and other similar groups.⁴² Though they may not possess documents and records, the informal systems can be a significant source of information for the investigator.

Initially, *The Yellow Book* identified 10 key questions for the investigator to ask as they engage each system in a PI investigation.⁴³ These questions were designed to inform the risk assessment, and their purpose was to give the PI investigative process direction by focusing it on critical elements in the threat assessment paradigm. *The Yellow Book* directed the investigator to ask the key questions throughout the investigation and seek answers through interviews, record reviews, and other investigative tactics. As Secret Service experience in PI investigations evolved, the 10 questions developed into the themes, detailed in Figure 1, which have expanded and continue to inform the threat assessment process.⁴⁴

³⁹ U.S. Secret Service, *Attacks on U.S. Federal Government 2001–2013: Threat Assessment Considerations* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2015), 48, <https://www.secretservice.gov/node/2538>.

⁴⁰ U.S. Secret Service, *Using a Systems Approach for Threat Assessment Investigations: A Case Study on Jared Lee Loughner* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2015), 1, https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Jared_Loughner_Using_Systems.pdf.

⁴¹ U.S. Secret Service, 1.

⁴² U.S. Secret Service, 1.

⁴³ Fein and Vossekuil, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 50–51.

⁴⁴ U.S. Secret Service, *Attacks on U.S. Federal Government 2001–2013: Threat Assessment Considerations*, 1.

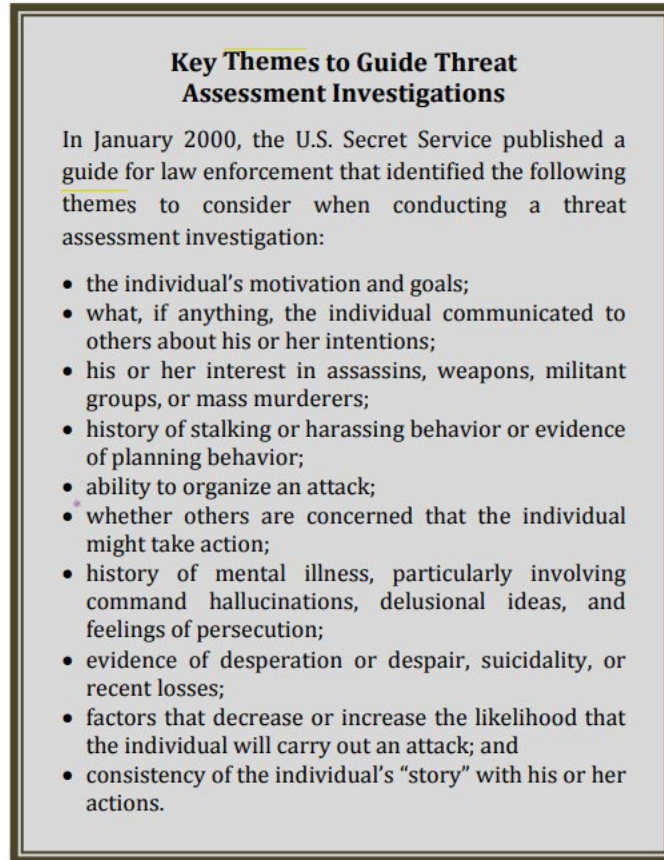


Figure 1. Key Themes for Threat Assessment⁴⁵

Like the 10 key questions, the themes are designed to lead the investigator to a deeper understanding of the subject's motivations and ability to act against a protectee. They also encourage the investigator to seek out a variety of sources for information and not to accept information received in interviews as fact without corroboration.

The themes have continued to appear in Secret Service studies released in 2019 and 2022. For example, in one case study, the Secret Service notes, "These behavioral themes are frequently seen in the backgrounds of other attackers and, as such, should be the focus of community-level violence prevention efforts to identify and intervene with those who pose a risk of engaging in targeted violence."⁴⁶ The themes, however, are not

⁴⁵ Source: U.S. Secret Service, 1.

⁴⁶ U.S. Secret Service, NTAC Case Study – Hot Yoga Tallahassee, 4.

definitive predictors of violence and should be considered only part of the global picture of the subject in the threat assessment.⁴⁷ In addition, these themes are no longer unique to Secret Service threat assessment processes as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offers similar themes, focusing on threat enhancers and threat mitigators. The FBI also encourages the investigator to seek information on the themes through various investigative activities, including subject and corroborative interviews.⁴⁸

2. Introduction to PI interviews

Early in the development of threat assessment research, experts appreciated the importance of the interview in the assessment process. According to *The Yellow Book*, interviews are a “key (if not the key) source of information.”⁴⁹ The ability of the investigator to effectively communicate with subjects and conduct meaningful and thorough interviews in the PI investigative process cannot be overstated. Although the Secret Service does not disclose the exact number of threats received by individual protectees, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and United States Secret Service’s *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019* reports that the Secret Service initiated more than 2,200 PI cases during the fiscal year.⁵⁰ Every one of these PI cases required an investigator to conduct at least one interview when the case was initiated. Most cases required more than one interview.

The Yellow Book advocates that the investigator adopt a “clear and nonjudgmental” approach to interviewing. The investigator must also approach the entire PI investigative process from a position of “inquisitiveness and skepticism that are hallmarks of other investigations.”⁵¹ The FBI notes that a successful and accurate threat

⁴⁷ U.S. Secret Service, 5.

⁴⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality*, 29–32, 37–39.

⁴⁹ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 37.

⁵⁰ Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Secret Service, “Annual Report FY 2019,” U.S. Secret Service, 1, accessed September 21, 2020, <https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2021-03/FY-2019-Annual-Report.pdf>.

⁵¹ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 38, 29.

assessment is predicated upon the amount of information the investigator gathers and the value that information brings to assessing the risk of the subject acting against a target (in this case, a protectee).⁵²

Unfortunately, there has been little research on how investigators should conduct threat assessment interviews.⁵³ Investigators cannot wholly rely on the traditional law enforcement interview because it may not discern the information necessary for a thorough PI investigation. Furthermore, the significance of the information received in the PI interview may be different from that of a criminal interview because of the nature of the investigation.⁵⁴ For example, if during an interview, a person discusses how black vehicles send messages to them, a PI interviewer should take note, as motorcades are traditionally composed of black vehicles. However, the same information might not be important to a criminal investigator. The Secret Service’s work in threat assessment has significantly informed what information is pertinent to the PI investigation and, therefore, what topics should be explored in the interview.

However, in practice, the PI interview is not without problems. Investigators who are not adept at PI interviewing can make faulty assessments and undermine the whole PI investigative process. This thesis focuses on identifying such potential issues and offering a solution to improve the PI interview skills of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

Following the framework presented in *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, this thesis reviews scholarly articles, studies, and operational processes to examine the current practices in mindfulness training and PI interviewing. It then conducts a comprehensive review of best practices

⁵² Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality*, 23.

⁵³ Renate Geurts, “Interviewing to Assess and Manage Threats of Violence” (PhD. Dissertation University of Gothenburg, 2017), 2.

⁵⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality*, 48.

for threat assessment and interviewing. Through this review, this thesis locates and defines problems intrinsic to threat assessment interviewing. This review constitutes the first step in the policy analysis methodology.⁵⁵ The thesis then progresses into the evidence-gathering and selection of alternatives phases of policy analysis, identifying shortfalls or gaps in the threat assessment interview process and identifying instances in which mindfulness training can have a significant positive impact.⁵⁶ Because mindfulness training has not been explicitly studied in the Secret Service, this thesis reviews its use in allied fields such as the military, first responders, and other law enforcement agencies to determine if potential policy options for inclusion in the Secret Service training paradigm hold merit. Finally, this thesis concludes by detailing potential policy options and implementation strategies for including mindfulness training in the curricula and the practice of Secret Service threat assessment interviewing.⁵⁷

D. THESIS OUTLINE

This chapter introduces Secret Service protection and the proactive concept of PI. In addition to the current use of mindfulness practice for wellness purposes, this chapter introduces the idea of using the same mindfulness techniques to improve Special Agent and Uniformed Division Officer performance in the PI interviewing process. Chapter II discusses mindfulness practice and scientific research on the utility of mindfulness practice in cohorts similar to Secret Service Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. It also distinguishes between mindfulness for relaxation and performance-based mindfulness, focusing on performance-based mindfulness and the mPEAK program currently used in the Secret Service. Chapter III then returns the discussion to rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, decision-making, and their importance in the PI interview. It also discusses the challenges and obstacles presented by these concepts in the interview process. Chapter IV discusses how mindfulness practices

⁵⁵ Eugene Bardach and Eric M. Patashnik, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2020), 1.

⁵⁶ Bardach and Patashnik, 14.

⁵⁷ Bardach and Patashnik, 21.

can be leveraged to mitigate the issues investigators face in the PI interview. Finally, Chapter V utilizes the analysis in the preceding chapters to answer the research questions and closes by offering recommendations for implementing mindfulness in the current Secret Service PI training program.

II. MINDFULNESS

Chapter I introduces the Secret Service PI program and identifies potential shortcomings in the interviewing skills of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. Chapter I also proposes that mindfulness training focused on performance enhancement may be a solution to these problems. This chapter discusses the evolution of mindfulness practice, the physical effects of mindfulness practice, and how science demonstrates how mindfulness can be applied to improve work performance. Finally, this chapter examines key elements of mPEAK, the mindfulness program used by the Secret Service. Mindfulness is being leveraged by business, sports teams, and the government to improve work performance. The mPEAK program engages the tenets of mindfulness practice and combines them with scientifically proven methods of performance enhancement to create a program that could improve wellness and performance under the same umbrella.

A. THE HISTORY OF MINDFULNESS

The origins of mindfulness practice lie in Eastern medicine and religious traditions. However, as practiced today in Western culture, mindfulness has become a secular activity focused on brain training, awareness, and attention. In his groundbreaking book, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment—and Your Life*, Jon Kabat-Zinn provided a technical definition of mindfulness: “paying attention on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally...as if your life depended on it.”⁵⁸ The scientific community has refined this definition using two constituent concepts in Kabat-Zinn’s definition. The first concept is “self-regulation of attention,” which allows the practitioner to remain focused on the present.⁵⁹ The second concept speaks to Kabat-Zinn’s notion of nonjudgment, entreating the practitioner to be “curious, open, and

⁵⁸ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment—and Your Life* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2012), 17.

⁵⁹ Scott R. Bishop et al., “Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2004): 232, <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>.

accepting.”⁶⁰ Kabat-Zinn’s definition with the enhancement of these two concepts is the operational definition of mindfulness used in this thesis.

Kabat-Zinn noted that “the cultivation of mindfulness may just be the hardest thing in the world.”⁶¹ If mindfulness is a condition of being, getting to that condition is accomplished through a variety of practices. Meditation and functional, or mindful, movement are most pertinent to this thesis. Meditation is the practice of focusing one’s mind, usually through a concentration on breathing and relaxation, to accomplish a focused mental state.⁶² Functional movement combines physical training and meditation to improve the movements necessary for the execution of a specific job and incorporates a mindful approach to those body movements. An example of functional movement is FireFlex, a mindfulness-based yoga program used by firefighters across the United States.⁶³ FireFlex uses the fundamental physical attributes of yoga and the benefits of mindful meditation to support mental resilience, stress relief, and physical training.⁶⁴ The program is specifically designed to attend to firefighters’ mental and physical needs.⁶⁵

B. MINDFULNESS PRACTICE AND POSITIVE PHYSICAL EFFECTS

As its origins lie in Eastern medicine traditions, it is unsurprising that scientists have been interested in determining if mindfulness practice can effect physical change in the human body. Studies have shown that mindfulness practice positively impacts blood pressure, heart rates, cardiovascular capacity, and sleep patterns.⁶⁶ In addition to these transient changes, studies demonstrate that mindfulness could create permanent positive changes to the physical structure of the brain and body.

⁶⁰ Bishop et al., 232.

⁶¹ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 14.

⁶² Dan Harris, *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics: A 10% Happier How-to Book* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2017), 6.

⁶³ “FireFlex Yoga,” Active Wellness, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.activewellness.com/fireflexyoga>.

⁶⁴ Active Wellness.

⁶⁵ Active Wellness.

⁶⁶ “The Science of Mindfulness,” *Mindful* (blog), September 7, 2020, <https://www.mindful.org/the-science-of-mindfulness/>.

Kabat-Zinn advocated for mindfulness training, which he called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), to treat chronic pain.⁶⁷ His interpretation of MBSR made the person an active participant in their health and well-being instead of solely being subject to doctors' treatment protocols.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Kabat-Zinn expanded the use of MBSR to include anyone wanting to improve their health, not just those suffering from chronic pain and illness.⁶⁹ A key element of MBSR is interoception: "the sense of knowing how your body is feeling from the inside."⁷⁰

A 2011 study that followed participants who completed an eight-week mindfulness course showed "significant increases in the density of their gray matter," demonstrating that mindfulness practice changes the makeup of the human brain.⁷¹ The study observed increased gray matter in the brain's hippocampus region, a region often damaged by chronic stress. Therefore, mindfulness practice can increase physical resilience by repairing the brain from stress damage.⁷² Another study found that mindfulness practice helped protect the brain from age-related declines.⁷³ Yet another study found that people who engaged in meditation had fewer signs of cellular aging in other areas of the body.⁷⁴ Together, these studies show a positive correlation between mindfulness practice and positive physical effects on the human brain and body.

C. OPTIMIZING PERFORMANCE THROUGH MINDFULNESS

In addition to these physical changes, scientists have been examining mindfulness practice for its ability to improve mood, perception, and performance. A wide array of

⁶⁷ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 49.

⁶⁸ Kabat-Zinn, 50.

⁶⁹ Kabat-Zinn, 51.

⁷⁰ Kabat-Zinn, 56.

⁷¹ Christina Congleton, Britta K. Hölzel, and Sara W. Lazar, "Mindfulness Can Literally Change Your Brain," *Harvard Business Review*, January 8, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/01/mindfulness-can-literally-change-your-brain>.

⁷² Congleton, Hölzel, and Lazar.

⁷³ *Mindful*, "The Science of Mindfulness."

⁷⁴ *Mindful*.

studies show that meditation and mindfulness practice impact various behavioral elements, such as preventing burnout, facilitating teamwork, mitigating biases, and improving feelings of wellness.⁷⁵ This performance element of mindfulness practice is the focus of this thesis. For many years, people have embraced mindfulness to achieve holistic wellness. Anecdotal reports from persons who practice mindfulness have touted the benefits of mindfulness for stress reduction, tension relief, and mental focus. In addition, some supporters call mindfulness training nothing short of life-changing, declaring that mindfulness practice affected every aspect of everyday life.

The successful use of mindfulness practice in stress reduction helped move it into resiliency applications. For example, a 2015 study focused on the usefulness of mindfulness training for police and other first responders because their everyday exposure to repeated traumatic incidents led to a higher incidence of adverse physical and mental health outcomes.⁷⁶ Study participants reported “significant increases” in resilience, mental and physical health, and executive function after engaging in an eight-week mindfulness training program.⁷⁷ The mindfulness practice reviewed in this study was Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training, an extension of MBSR.

Another study demonstrated that mindfulness training reduces post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in law enforcement officers.⁷⁸ It also revealed that those positive effects last for a significant amount of time after the officer begins

⁷⁵ Mindful.

⁷⁶ Michael S. Christopher et al., “A Pilot Study Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Cortisol Awakening Response and Health Outcomes among Law Enforcement Officers,” *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-015-9161-x>.

⁷⁷ Christopher et al., 24.

⁷⁸ Daniel W. Grupe et al., “Mindfulness Training Reduces PTSD Symptoms and Improves Stress-Related Health Outcomes in Police Officers,” *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, November 29, 2019, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-019-09351-4>.

practicing meditation.⁷⁹ In one study, participants reported positive results five months after participating in mindfulness training.⁸⁰ An example of the successful use of mindfulness in law enforcement is the Hillsboro, OR, Police Department. The agency has significantly improved officer wellness, reduced citizen complaints, and lowered job turnover since it began deploying a robust mindfulness practice among its officers.⁸¹ These studies demonstrate the effect of mindfulness practice on work performance, resiliency, and overall well-being of law enforcement officers.

Thus, mindfulness training goes beyond stress relief and addressing chronic health conditions; it can affect resiliency and work performance. Patricia Deuster and Eric Schoomaker examined mindfulness training and its impact on resiliency and benefits to a person’s attentiveness. Figure 2 details how mindfulness affects different aspects of wellness and resiliency in everyday life. Each of the cogs affected by mindfulness training—healthy sleep, improved working memory capacity, stress response attenuation, and improved attention (reduced mind wandering)—has been shown to positively affect work performance. Deuster and Schoomaker posit that the positive benefits of mindfulness in everyday life and the resulting resiliency easily lent themselves to improved performance.⁸² For example, their study found that persons who engaged in a mindfulness practice were more easily able to access their working memory for creative and immediate responses, even when they were faced with a sustained stressful situation.

⁷⁹ Grupe et al., 1.

⁸⁰ Grupe et al., 10.

⁸¹ “Hillsboro P.D. on the Mindfulness Beat,” *Mindful* (blog), April 8, 2014, <https://www.mindful.org/hillsboro-p-d-on-the-mindfulness-beat/>.

⁸² Patricia A Deuster and Eric Schoomaker, “Mindfulness: A Fundamental Skill for Performance Sustainment and Enhancement,” *Journal of Special Operations Medicine* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 94–95.



Figure 2. Interaction between Mindfulness and Resiliency⁸³

In accordance with this research, sports, business, and government entities are beginning to embrace and operationalize mindfulness. As science shows that mindfulness and meditation can positively affect pre-competition physical stress responses, amateur and professional sports teams are turning to mindfulness and meditation to improve player performance.⁸⁴ Athletes and coaches are using mindfulness and meditation as confidence builders and anxiety reducers before and during games.⁸⁵ Professional sports teams like the Seattle Seahawks find that mindfulness and meditation, grounded in sports psychology, are helping players understand themselves, which adds to their

⁸³Source: Deuster and Schoomaker, 96.

⁸⁴ "Mindfulness: Improving Sports Performance & Reducing Sport Anxiety," BelievePerform, November 7, 2016, <https://believeperform.com/mindfulness-improving-sports-performance-reducing-sport-anxiety/>.

⁸⁵ BelievePerform.

understanding of their role on the team. This understanding results in stronger team cohesion and better play outcomes.⁸⁶

Similarly, businesses are looking to leverage mindfulness training to improve worker performance and productivity. Initial scientific studies show promising reductions in stress-based physical responses among employees in businesses that have introduced mindfulness practices into the workplace.⁸⁷ This reduction in stressors can lead to improved performance. For example, Dr. Amishi Jha from the University of Miami studies mindfulness practices in high-stress professions such as accountants during tax season.⁸⁸ Her studies found that consistent meditation and mindfulness training positively affect one's ability to pay attention and maintain executive control.⁸⁹ Executive control includes decision-making, working memory, and problem-solving skills, all critical elements of higher thinking and improved performance.

Federal, state, and local governments are also interested in examining mindfulness training and its impact on the performance and wellness of workers in high-stress positions. In addition to studying mindfulness in business, Dr. Jha has looked at the utility of mindfulness for military members on deployments in combat zones.⁹⁰ In this case, her work on the impact of mindfulness on a soldier's ability to pay attention and maintain executive function in high-stress environments is critical and potentially lifesaving.⁹¹

Another study on mindfulness in Navy SEALs noted that SEALs who practiced mindfulness could engage more readily in chaotic situations. Specifically, they were able to pay attention to detail, remain engaged in the present, operate with a flexible and open

⁸⁶ Mindful, "Seahawks in #SuperBowl149: What's Their Edge?," *Mindful* (blog), January 30, 2015, <https://www.mindful.org/seahawks-in-superbowl149-whats-their-edge/>.

⁸⁷ Rachael A. Heckenberg et al., "Do Workplace-Based Mindfulness Meditation Programs Improve Physiological Indices of Stress? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 114 (November 1, 2018): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2018.09.010>.

⁸⁸ National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, "What Is Mindfulness? Q and A with Dr. Amishi Jha," March 18, 2015, video, 3:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FccK9UjuF0>.

⁸⁹ National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

⁹⁰ National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

⁹¹ National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

mind, and engage in the creation of new categories of meaning.⁹² These mindful attributes allowed the SEALs to thrive in the chaotic situation rather than being paralyzed by it. In fact, some of the study participants reported feeling a sense of comfort in the chaotic situation; they could engage their mindfulness practices readily to adapt to the situation.⁹³ Finally, the participants could focus on the goals and successful outcomes of the mission because they were less focused on the potential for mission failure.⁹⁴

Law enforcement has also used mindfulness and meditation to counter work's effects in a stressful, often traumatic environment.⁹⁵ This environment can have detrimental effects on the individual officer and negatively affect the agency's teamwork and group cohesion culture.⁹⁶ In a study of mindfulness practice in today's law enforcement, these negative impacts are abated through consistent mindfulness training because it allows the officers to operate in the present without focusing on past experiences and traumas.⁹⁷ In addition, increased cohesion and teamwork elements of the mindfulness practice improve the work performance of the individual officers and the team as a whole.

Mindfulness is often incorporated into performance programs. For example, programs like O2X Human Performance include mindfulness with nutrition, exercise, sleep, and mental performance. These programs are geared toward the military, law enforcement, or, as O2X puts it, "tactical athletes."⁹⁸ Tactical athletes, according to O2X, are those persons whose lives might depend on their physical and mental abilities.⁹⁹

⁹² Amy L. Fraher, Layla Jane Branicki, and Keith Grint, "Mindfulness in Action: Discovering How U.S. Navy SEALs Build Capacity for Mindfulness in High-Reliability Organizations (HROS)," *Academy of Management Discoveries* 3, no. 3 (December 29, 2016): 245.

⁹³ Fraher, Branicki, and Grint, 245.

⁹⁴ Fraher, Branicki, and Grint, 245.

⁹⁵ Olivia Johnson, Chuck Russo, and Konstantinos Papazoglou, "Job Exposure & Occupational Challenges: The Importance of Mindfulness for Today's Law Enforcement Professional" *Crisis, Stress, and Human Resilience: An International Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 19, 2019): 189.

⁹⁶ Johnson, Russo, and Papazoglou, 189.

⁹⁷ Johnson, Russo, and Papazoglou, 189.

⁹⁸ O2X Human Performance, ed., *Human Performance for Tactical Athletes* (Tulsa, OK: PennWell Corporation, 2019), xvi.

⁹⁹ O2X Human Performance, xvi.

In summary, law enforcement, firefighters, other first responders, and military members are embracing mindfulness training as a valuable tool for personnel wellness and performance improvement. The mPEAK program answers the needs for personal wellness and performance improvement concerning mindfulness training.

D. mPEAK

DHS has also recognized the value of mindfulness practice in personnel wellness. In 2018, DHS engaged a pilot program to increase resilience among DHS employees and advocated for components to participate in mPEAK mindfulness training as part of this initiative. The Secret Service joined the pilot program and still uses the mPEAK system for mindfulness and meditation as part of an employee wellness program. This program is based on Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR training and takes the concept further by adding a performance element.¹⁰⁰ In fact, mPEAK means “Mindfulness, Performance Enhancement, Awareness and Knowledge.”¹⁰¹

mPEAK was born out of a collaboration between neuroscientists and athletes. In 2014, researchers at UCSD conducted a pilot study with the U.S. Olympic BMX (bicycle motocross) team.¹⁰² The study sought to ascertain if mindfulness practices like MBSR could affect significant neuro changes in elite athletes. Specifically, the researchers were interested in finding evidence that MBSR had a measurable impact on interoception.¹⁰³ The researchers called the mindfulness program they utilized in the study “mPEAK.” There were significant measurable changes in the athlete’s brains as they participated in the study.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ mPeak Coaching, “MPEAK Coaching Mindfulness for Performance Enhancement, Resilience, Focus and Flow.”

¹⁰¹ mPeak Coaching.

¹⁰² Lori Haase et al., “A Pilot Study Investigating Changes in Neural Processing after Mindfulness Training in Elite Athletes,” *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9 (2015): 1, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2015.00229>.

¹⁰³ Haase et al., 1.

¹⁰⁴ Haase et al., 8.

Additional findings of the study determined that athletes participating in mPEAK were more focused on their activities and performed better.¹⁰⁵ They reported feeling as though they spent more time in “intentional mode” and had fewer distractions and instances of mind wandering.¹⁰⁶ The BMX riders also stated that they felt more in tune with their bodily sensations; they were in a state of interoception and could quickly note and respond to sensations such as pain, discomfort, and physical exertion in different body parts.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the athletes reported feeling more equipped to face stressful and challenging situations. This finding is significant because scientists believe that people who feel empowered in stressful situations are less likely to suffer stress’s adverse long-term health effects.¹⁰⁸

Given these results, mPEAK soon became a mindfulness coaching program, focusing on meditation, the application of sports and positive psychology, neuroscience, and group coaching elements.¹⁰⁹ According to the mPEAK website, “As with physical training, this brain training program is based upon the understanding that optimal outcomes occur most often when participants continue to engage in the practices and exercises on a daily basis as a part of their training regimen.”¹¹⁰ The website also lists eight objectives of the program, with a target audience of athletes, first responders, business leaders, and persons in the arts:¹¹¹

- Develop greater focus and concentration
- Tap into the power “flow states” during performance events and everyday life
- Learn to be present to the process and let go of attachment to outcome
- Practice responding wisely to stress rather than reacting out of fear

¹⁰⁵ Christina Johnson, “Mindfulness Training Program May Help Olympic Athletes Reach Peak Performance,” U.C. San Diego Today, June 5, 2014, https://today.ucsd.edu/story/mindfulness_training_program_may_help_olympic_athletes_reach_peak.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson.

¹⁰⁹ mPeak Coaching, “MPEAK Coaching Mindfulness for Performance Enhancement, Resilience, Focus and Flow.”

¹¹⁰ mPeak Coaching.

¹¹¹ mPeak Coaching.

- Develop resilience by learning how to be with emotionally difficult or physically painful experiences
- Leverage personal strengths and stretching your personal edges without giving up or burning out
- Recognize and shift from critical to compassionate inner self talk
- Process and learn from inevitable mistakes and failures¹¹²

These objectives cover a wide swath of athletic, business, and personal spheres; this makes mPEAK a truly holistic mindfulness program. To date, though, the Secret Service has only leveraged the wellness attributes of the program rather than incorporating the whole spectrum of benefits that mPEAK offers.

E. CONCLUSION

The Secret Service has been using mPEAK since the inception of the DHS pilot program in 2018 to improve employee wellness and resilience. However, this application taps into only a tiny portion of what mPEAK can offer Secret Service employees. In the following chapters, this thesis examines how the Secret Service can leverage mPEAK to improve the work performance of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers, specifically in PI interviewing. The next chapter describes the critical elements of PI interviewing where Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers struggle.

¹¹² mPeak Coaching.

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III. PROTECTIVE INTELLIGENCE INTERVIEWING

As detailed in Chapter I, the Secret Service is responsible for protecting the most influential people in the world. Because of that responsibility, the Secret Service has a vested interest in studying targeted violence and determining how such acts can be prevented. As a result, the Secret Service is a leader in targeted violence research and threat assessment research and practice. The Secret Service combines investigative techniques commonly found in criminal investigations with the behavioral considerations of a threat assessment in the PI investigation. PI includes conducting investigations into persons who may pose a risk of an unwanted outcome for Secret Service protective interests.

The interview is a significant part of the PI investigation, but, as noted in Chapter I, some investigators struggle with conducting the interview. Indeed, the interview can be the most challenging part of the PI investigation.¹¹³ At its root, the purpose of an interview is to find the truth about a situation or person.¹¹⁴ Interviews should be a consensual process. Furthermore, successful interviews constitute an exchange of information between the interviewer and the subject rather than simply being a question-and-answer session.¹¹⁵ Therefore, not only must the interviewer genuinely care about seeking the truth about the subject in the PI investigation, but they must also be able to convey this interest to the person during the interview.¹¹⁶ The investigator must also try to understand what factors might deter a person from participating fully in a PI interview and determine which rapport building and elicitation methods to employ in response to

¹¹³ Lynsey Gozna and Miranda A. H. Horvath, “Investigative Interviewing,” in *Understanding Criminal Investigation*, 1st ed., vol. 49, Wiley Series in Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law Series (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 115.

¹¹⁴ Nathan J. Gordon, William L. Fleisher, and C. Donald Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 1.

¹¹⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality*, 44, 59.

¹¹⁶ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques*, 35.

those factors.¹¹⁷ The High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG), a three-agency entity composed of the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Department of Defense calls this understanding of the subject and quest for the truth “sensemaking.” The HIG asserts that “sensemaking” can help the interviewer successfully navigate interviewing situations that they have not previously encountered.¹¹⁸

This chapter discusses the role of the interview in the PI investigation and examines four significant elements of the interview that are important to a PI investigation’s successful conclusion. This chapter defines the elements and examines their optimal application in the PI interview. The chapter also discusses the challenges investigators face as they apply the elements. Finally, the chapter examines the potential consequences if an investigator fails to leverage the critical elements appropriately during a PI interview.

A. PI INTERVIEW OVERVIEW

The PI interview is a significant means of information collection in the PI investigation. A Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer may interview a wide array of people as they work through an investigation. Each interview will bring unique challenges and issues for the investigator; understanding the basic nature of the PI interview and preparing appropriately for each interview is critical in a successful PI investigation.

1. Interview Not Interrogation

In a PI investigation, an interview is not an interrogation, as interviews and interrogations have different forms, functions, and goals.¹¹⁹ However, they are alike in that law enforcement principles such as officer safety and the use of Miranda warnings

¹¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation: A Review of the Science HIG Report* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016), 9, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/hig-report-interrogation-a-review-of-the-science-september-2016.pdf/view>.

¹¹⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 9.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques*, 25.

are considerations for the interview and the interrogation.¹²⁰ In addition, interviews and interrogations require the investigator to plan, to the degree possible, for the situation and engage in rapport building, elicitation, and deception detection techniques in the execution of the encounter.

That said, the difference between interrogation and interview goals creates markedly different dynamics between the investigator and the subject. As stated in Chapter I, a PI interview aims to gather information for the global picture of a subject. An interrogation, however, is less information-seeking and more accusatory in nature, and the purpose of an interrogation is to obtain a confession or to identify co-conspirators.¹²¹ Therefore, the flow of an interrogation is much more rigid than an interview's flow. In the interrogation, the investigator controls the direction of the discussion. The subject is not allowed to bring outside discussion into the interrogation.

By contrast, while the interviewer still needs to plan the interview, they can allow the freedom for the interviewee to discuss topics important to them. Accordingly, the time each participant speaks differs between an interview and an interrogation. In an interview, the subject usually speaks about 95% of the time, while the investigator only speaks 5% of the time, asking prompting and open-ended questions.¹²² Because the interviewer knows what topic areas need to be addressed in the interview, they can allow the subject to drive the conversation's direction to a degree, redirecting the conversation as necessary. The interviewer is a prompter, encouraging the subject to speak by being a good audience and active listener. During interviews, investigators seek evidence and avenues for future investigation. Therefore, the investigator's tone is often more friendly and inquiring.¹²³

On the other hand, the interrogation only allows the subject to provide short answers and explanations, giving them only about 5% of the speaking time.¹²⁴ Instead,

¹²⁰ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, 32–33.

¹²¹ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, 28.

¹²² Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, 34.

¹²³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 6–7.

¹²⁴ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques*, 34.

investigators in interrogations speak most of the time, using evidence they have collected in the investigation to bolster their arguments. The investigator, in the accuser's role, does more talking and persuades the subject to confess. As a result, the investigator often takes on a more accusatory tone during an interrogation.¹²⁵ Though an interrogator may adopt a friendly tone as they work to bring the subject to a confession, and an interviewer may be sterner when discussing the potential consequences of the subject's actions, the overall tone of the interview is less severe than that of an interrogation.

The distinction between interrogations and interviews in the context of a PI investigation is significant. Both require the investigator to leverage unique skills to accomplish each interaction's goals. This thesis focuses on the skills that are unique to the interview and how the investigator can maximize those skills to conduct a thorough and successful PI interview.

2. Planning in the Interview Process

Though planning is not addressed independently in this thesis as one of the four critical elements in a PI interview, it profoundly affects all of the critical elements. A successful investigator does not wander into a PI interview; the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer understands the purpose of the PI investigation, the information required for a thorough investigation, and how the interview will bring that information to light. Two components of planning, planning for the unknown and planning the end of the interview, are sometimes particularly challenging. When Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers have difficulty with interview planning, it affects the critical elements of rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. Therefore, before the interview even starts, the investigator needs to have a plan of action.

Scholars posit that most failed interviews are the result of poor planning on the part of the interviewer.¹²⁶ While a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer might

¹²⁵ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, 28.

¹²⁶ John E. Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Pub. Co, 1997), 9.

not be able to plan specific details of the PI interview, such as its timing or location, they should not skip the planning phase of the interview process. When a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer reports for an assignment that may result in a PI interview, they must mentally prepare themselves to conduct such an interview. They need to understand the purpose of the PI interview in general and the types of data they should be working to acquire.¹²⁷ In addition to biographical data on the subject, the investigator should seek PI-related information during the interview. PI-related information includes information on what brought the subject to Secret Service attention, potential evidence indicating that they have engaged in attack-related behaviors, and information on their motives and target selection.¹²⁸ These broad information categories are standard for every PI investigation.

An effective PI interview may have the outward appearance of a stream-of-consciousness process wherein the investigator and subject move easily from one topic to another. However, this process should be a planned flow created by the investigator.¹²⁹ By employing rapport-building methods and effective elicitation techniques, the investigator allows the subject to provide information at a comfortable pace, with the investigator gently redirecting and steering the conversation into areas pertinent to the investigation when necessary. If the investigator does not possess a deep understanding of the purpose of the PI interview, they risk engaging in a haphazard interview that is more a series of random questions than a structured inquiry process. Planning for PI interviews in advance can address this potential shortcoming.

a. Planning for the Unknown

Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers often encounter situations wherein they will not be afforded all of the advantages they might want in a PI interview. For example, they may conduct interviews under significant time constraints, or the physical environment might not be thoroughly conducive to a PI interview. Therefore, the

¹²⁷ Gozna and Horvath, “Investigative Interviewing,” 120.

¹²⁸ Fein and Vossekul, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 40–46.

¹²⁹ Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement*, 9.

investigator needs to plan and make the most of whatever situation they are in to conduct the interview. For example, the investigator may offer to walk with the subject to their vehicle as they talk. This may allow for a consensual vehicle search or, at the very least, allow the investigator to get a description or photograph of the vehicle. The investigator who considers the unknown in their interview planning and makes allowances to capitalize on their position is better prepared for a thorough interview than one who does not consider the unknown in their interview planning.

b. Planning for the End

Finally, the investigator must have a plan for the interview's end, even before it begins. This concept goes back to the idea that the interview is a directed flow of information with an attainable goal for the investigator. Will the subject be arrested at the conclusion of the interview? Will they be taken for psychiatric evaluation or allowed to leave? The investigator must be aware of the available resources and plan how the interview will likely end while being flexible enough to revise the plan as the subject provides information during the interview.

The investigator must also understand that their interactions with the interviewee in the interview will set the stage for future interactions and interviews.¹³⁰ This includes interactions and interviews with the subject and corroborative interviews with persons around the subject. Even if information relayed in the interview changes the plan for its conclusion, the investigator must lay the groundwork for additional interviews and investigation. Because of the unique nature of the PI investigation, some Secret Service relationships with subjects can last for years.

B. CRITICAL INTERVIEW ELEMENTS

The ability to conduct successful interviews is not innate; it can be honed via education and practice.¹³¹ A successful interviewer seeks to continuously develop a better understanding of human behavior and how that behavior manifests; the interviewer

¹³⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 8.

¹³¹ Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement*, 4.

seeks to understand themselves and the person they are interviewing.¹³² In addition, they must work to develop versatile communication skills. In their book *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques*, Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg posit that “the interviewer...must have the ability to communicate to a wide variety of people, to talk and deal with people from all walks of life, from the unskilled laborer to the upper echelon executive, from the illiterate street person to the college professor.”¹³³

Though there are many different methods of conducting PI interviews, certain concepts transcend and connect the methods at their core. These concepts—rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making—are critical in the PI interview and the development of a thorough threat assessment. Again, these concepts are not necessarily innate to the investigator; a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer can develop these skills by learning them and practicing them throughout their interactions with people. This skill development is vital because, as discussed in Chapter I, PI investigations and interviews are a cornerstone of proactive protection and preventing harm to Secret Service protective interests. Poorly executed interviews harm the PI investigative process by resulting in unreliable information, less cooperation by the subject, and destroying critical relationships in the PI process.¹³⁴

1. Rapport and Relationship Building

While the word “rapport” has numerous meanings, this thesis utilizes the following definition: “a working relationship in which there is willful communication by the subject, trust between the interviewer and the source, and mutual respect.”¹³⁵ This definition focuses on the cooperative quality of the interviewee and the relationship between the interviewer and the subject. Both elements are essential in a PI investigation.

¹³² Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, *Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques*, 35.

¹³³ Gordon, Fleisher, and Weinberg, 35.

¹³⁴ Aldert Vrij, Lorraine Hope, and Ronald P. Fisher, “Eliciting Reliable Information in Investigative Interviews,” ed. Susan T. Fiske, *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1, no. 1 (October 2014): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732214548592>.

¹³⁵ Laure Brimbal et al., “Enhancing Cooperation and Disclosure by Manipulating Affiliation and Developing Rapport in Investigative Interviews,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 25, no. 2 (April 8, 2019): 108.

Rapport in law enforcement interviewing has been studied extensively. Studies have determined that effective rapport and relationship building techniques are associated with improved subject cooperation and increased disclosure of meaningful information in investigations.¹³⁶

There are three components to rapport: attentiveness, positivity, and coordination between the participants.¹³⁷ Attentiveness is how the interviewer demonstrates to the interviewee that they are being heard as they tell their story. This means that the interviewer is actually listening to the interviewee with the intent of understanding and signaling to the interviewee that they are listening and understanding (or trying to). The PI interview relies heavily on attentiveness; however, positivity (mutual respect) and the creation of teamwork in reaching a shared goal, or coordination of effort, also play important roles in the PI interview.¹³⁸ Often, PI interviews delve into information that may be sensitive or private to a person. Therefore, the interviewer's effective development and continued cultivation of rapport may make it easier for the subject to discuss topics that they would otherwise avoid or be too shy or embarrassed to discuss. In addition, if the interviewee perceives that the interviewer is carefully listening during the interview, it creates a bond that encourages more information disclosure.¹³⁹

Rapport is not cultivated solely at the beginning of the PI interview. It begins in the first moments of interaction and continues across the course of the relationship between the person and the Secret Service. It is more than a box to be checked off on an investigative form; it requires attention and nurturing from the investigator.¹⁴⁰ Rapport can define a relationship that may last for decades. For example, the Secret Service has

¹³⁶ Brimbal et al., 108.

¹³⁷ Misty C. Duke et al., "Development of the Rapport Scales for Investigative Interviews and Interrogations (RS3i), Interviewee Version," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 24, no. 64 (October 16, 2017): 16.

¹³⁸ Allison Abbe and Susan E. Brandon, "Building and Maintaining Rapport in Investigative Interviews," *Police Practice and Research* 15, no. 3 (May 4, 2014): 209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2013.827835>.

¹³⁹ Brimbal et al., "Enhancing Cooperation and Disclosure by Manipulating Affiliation and Developing Rapport in Investigative Interviews," 112.

¹⁴⁰ Linda Tickle-Degnen and Robert Rosenthal, "The Nature of Rapport and Its Nonverbal Correlates," *Psychological Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (1990): 287, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1449345>.

maintained a relationship, albeit a tenuous one, for more than 50 years with Arthur Bremer, who shot presidential candidate George Wallace in May 1972.¹⁴¹ Until the Secret Service can determine that Mr. Bremer no longer poses a threat toward Secret Service protectees, or Mr. Bremer passes away, that relationship will continue. The Secret Service has maintained that relationship even though Mr. Bremer has served his sentence and been released from prison. Because Mr. Bremer has no legal obligation to cooperate with the Secret Service, the whole of his relationship with the Secret Service is based upon the rapport that the Secret Service has cultivated with him since 1972.

A skilled interviewer, therefore, understands the importance of rapport and relationship building in the context of the PI investigation. The investigator has developed rapport-building tools for different situations and can navigate smoothly between them during an interview. Effective rapport building requires the agent to plan and actively listen throughout the interview. If there is time to do so, an effective investigator researches their subject to develop avenues for rapport building. For example, one subject authored a fictionalized account of his interactions with the Secret Service. As part of assigning a new case agent, analysts read the book, an online author autobiography, and the biography on the back of the book itself. The analysts compiled a list of the subject's interests and other potential avenues for rapport-building for the new case agent. Even an agent encountering a subject for the first time can use clues from their environment (clothes, type of car, bumper stickers, books) to find openings for discussion.

The ability of the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer to perceive and note significant details in how the subject tells their story—and what they say and do not say—is also key to establishing and developing rapport. Finally, the investigator must be able to efficiently conduct PI interviews, including rapport-building, in a variety of dynamic situations.

¹⁴¹ Kevin Leonard, "Police Investigation Reveals Details of Wallace Assassination Attempt," *Baltimore Sun*, July 9, 2015, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/laurel/ph-ll-history-wallace-20150709-story.html>.

Rapport building brings with it some significant challenges. Some interviewers struggle with ensuring that their words and body language convey the same message.¹⁴² For instance, the investigator must not give positive verbal responses while exhibiting dismissive nonverbals such as eye-rolling or waving their hands. Many people are adept at interpreting nonverbal responses, so the investigator must police themselves to ensure that there is no disparity between their verbal and nonverbal presentations. Along the same lines, the investigator must be careful not to lie in their rapport-building efforts. If an investigator fabricates a shared experience or self-disclosure, they risk destroying the bond with the subject if the subject discovers the lie.

Two additional challenges in rapport building during PI interviews arise concerning the interviewee themselves. The first occurs when the subject is reluctant to engage with the interviewer. In this case, a skilled interviewer must try different rapport-building techniques, sometimes using several techniques simultaneously, to get the subject to open up. Often, engaging in immediacy behaviors—behaviors that signal that the interviewer is eager to listen to the interviewee; mimicry and mirroring—copying the interviewee’s mannerisms and speech patterns; and displaying empathy and concern for the subject are enough to get them to begin talking.¹⁴³ These scenarios require that the investigator have several rapport-building tools to use during the interview and that they prepare for the possibility that the subject is reluctant to talk.

Finally, there is potential in a PI interview for “over rapport” between the interviewer and the subject. In this situation, the relationship between the participants becomes the focus of the interview and investigation rather than the development of a thorough risk assessment.¹⁴⁴ To prevent over rapport from occurring, the investigator must always focus on the purpose of each interaction with the subject and connect these interactions with the investigation’s overarching goals.

¹⁴² Department of the Army, *Human Intelligence Collector Operations*, Field Manual 2-22.3 (Arlington, VA: Department of the Army, 2006), 143, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm2_22x3.pdf.

¹⁴³ Abbe and Brandon, “Building and Maintaining Rapport in Investigative Interviews,” 214.

¹⁴⁴ Abbe and Brandon, 214.

2. Elicitation in PI Interviews

Elicitation is the art and science of asking questions in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to provide answers and volunteer information about a topic of interest in an interview. However, elicitation is more than just asking questions. It is understanding the social dynamics of the PI interview and leveraging those dynamics to encourage discussion.¹⁴⁵ It capitalizes on rapport building and continues the rapport-building dynamic during the question-and-answer phase of the interview. Elicitation includes different approaches to questioning, which can lead to different levels of engagement by the subject. In the PI interview, the investigator uses the social capital they developed through rapport building to encourage the subject through elicitation to provide complete and accurate information.

Successful elicitation in a PI interview is a give-and-take of information rather than an interviewer's rapid-fire questioning.¹⁴⁶ Elicitation requires the interviewer to take the role of the respectful skeptic; that is, the interviewer can say, "I haven't had that experience, but I am interested in your experience."¹⁴⁷ As a rule of thumb, "any subject, including a mentally ill subject, will behave in accord with how he or she perceives reality."¹⁴⁸ The investigator who understands this concept will endeavor to discover how the subject perceives reality and will develop questions to explore this topic. The investigator should ask questions clearly, respectfully, and nonjudgmentally, understanding that this approach will likely lead the subject to disclose more useful information.¹⁴⁹ It also encourages the subject to invest in the interview as they provide information for the PI investigation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Vrij, Hope, and Fisher, "Eliciting Reliable Information in Investigative Interviews," 129.

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, *Eyewitness Evidence: A Trainer's Manual for Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2003), 18.

¹⁴⁷ Fein and Vossekul, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Fein and Vossekul, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Fein and Vossekul, 39.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, *Eyewitness Evidence*, 16.

An investigator's ability to effectively elicit information in an interview is critical for a comprehensive and accurate threat assessment. Effective elicitation can set the interview's tone, significantly impact rapport building and maintenance, and gather information and details that would have otherwise been missed in an investigation. In fact, many of the tools that are effective in rapport building are also effective in elicitation.¹⁵¹ As discussed in the rapport-building section, many subjects can discern when the investigator is being insincere or lying, so the investigator should avoid these behaviors during the interview.¹⁵² Finally, the interviewer should examine their biases regarding the subject; even having an awareness that they may be biased has been shown to mitigate the potential effects of bias on the interview.¹⁵³

As in other aspects of the PI investigation, the investigator should decide on elicitation methods as part of pre-interview planning. The investigator should also remember that the subject possesses the information that the investigator needs and, therefore, the investigator should be mentally engaged in the interview.¹⁵⁴ Mental engagement means that the investigator encourages the subject to talk and volunteer information rather than passively waiting for a question to be asked of them.¹⁵⁵ Allowing the subject to talk is critical in effective elicitation; the investigator should avoid interrupting and use questions to redirect only as necessary to keep the interview flowing.¹⁵⁶

One method of encouraging the subject to talk in a PI interview is to use a cognitive interviewing style. This method is particularly effective when the subject is

¹⁵¹ Dominic J. Shaw et al., "Mimicry and Investigative Interviewing: Using Deliberate Mimicry to Elicit Information and Cues to Deceit: Mimicry and Investigative Interviewing," *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* 12, no. 3 (October 2015): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jip.1438>.

¹⁵² Fein and Vossekul, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

¹⁵³ Fein and Vossekul, 39; Rhonda Magee, "How Mindfulness Can Defeat Racial Bias," *Greater Good Magazine: Science Based Insights for a Meaningful Life*, May 14, 2015, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_mindfulness_can_defeat_racial_bias.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, *Eyewitness Evidence*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, 16.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, 20.

trying to recall specific incidents or create a timeline of events.¹⁵⁷ Questions such as “and then what happened?” are particularly helpful in these scenarios. The interviewer can encourage the subject to mentally re-create the incident and describe what they see and feel.¹⁵⁸ In these cases, the interviewer must tailor their questions to the subject’s narrative rather than asking unrelated questions simply because they are next on the interview sheet or the investigator just thought of them.¹⁵⁹ If the subject’s narrative has gone significantly off-topic, the investigator can ask questions that are tangential to the topic to redirect the conversation. As the subject speaks, the investigator should note details and avenues for additional questions and investigation.

Another productive means of elicitation in PI interviews is using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions encourage the subject to engage in lengthy discourse and discussion.¹⁶⁰ The investigator who asks open-ended questions from a nonjudgmental perspective—for example, asking, “How did you feel about that?”—is more likely to solidify rapport and receive reliable information from the subject.¹⁶¹ In addition, as the subject provides information in the open-ended question format, the investigator may find other avenues for investigation and questioning; the subject may mention a name or refer to an experience that they may not have recalled in a closed-ended question interview. These details can become important as the investigator builds a global picture for their assessment.

Because closed-ended questions discourage discussion, they are not often used as a primary elicitation method in PI interviews.¹⁶² Closed-ended questions, however, have their place in a PI interview. Effective use of closed-ended questions clarifies responses and details provided by the subject.¹⁶³ They can also help move the subject from one

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, 17.

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, 17.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, 17.

¹⁶⁰ Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Hess, 18,39.

¹⁶² U.S. Department of Justice, *Eyewitness Evidence*, 7.

¹⁶³ U.S. Department of Justice, 11.

topic to another as they answer the question, then wait for a new question before talking. However, if an investigator overuses closed-ended questions rather than active listening skills, such as restating or summarizing, the subject may believe that the investigator is not invested in the interview and begin censoring their remarks.

Like closed-ended questions, investigators do not usually use leading questions as a primary elicitation method in a PI interview. Leading questions may distort a subject's perception of the situation they are describing. They may also cause the subject to skew their answers and narrative in the direction suggested by the interviewer.¹⁶⁴ However, leading questions still have a place in a PI interview. They may be particularly effective if the interviewer describes what could happen if the subject engages in undesirable activities. Questions like, "You understand that you could go to jail if you bring a gun to a presidential site, don't you?" can help highlight potential consequences. An effective PI interviewer reads the interview as it progresses and uses leading questions to make points at appropriate times.

Finally, silence has a special power in a PI interview. First, many people are uncomfortable when there is a pause or silence in a conversation and will often begin talking again to break the silence.¹⁶⁵ This desire to break the silence may lead them to disclose information that they otherwise would have kept to themselves. Silence can also give subjects a sense of comfort by allowing them to collect their thoughts before discussing a topic.¹⁶⁶ This pause is particularly helpful if the interview has been lengthy or if the interviewee has discussed emotional or complex thoughts and ideas. An effective PI interviewer should note the subject's mental and emotional state and quickly discern when to use silence as a tool to motivate or restore the subject in the interview.

Some investigators have difficulty creating a conversational flow of questions and end up missing essential areas of inquiry or unnecessarily repeating questions. If they repeat questions, they risk the interviewee believing that the investigator is not listening

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Hess, *Interviewing and Interrogation for Law Enforcement*, 41.

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, *Eyewitness Evidence*, 17.

to them and destroying rapport. Missing areas of inquiry can jeopardize the PI investigation. Investigators may also overwhelm the interviewee if they ask too many questions at once or ask them in a manner that indicates that they are in a hurry to end the interview. Both of these issues can cause the interviewee to edit their responses or to shut down entirely and end the interview.

The consequences of failed elicitation in a PI interview can be dire. Interviewees may not disclose important information about their plans to harm Secret Service protectees. Worse, they may give indications that they are planning an attack, but an interviewer may not pick up on those signals if they are not adept at elicitation. Poor elicitation may also affect the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, which can affect the course and outcome of the PI investigation.

3. Deception Detection

An interview technique that is closely related to elicitation is deception detection. Deception detection is the interviewer's ability to ascertain if an interviewee is lying, withholding information, fabricating details, or providing intentionally misleading information during an interview. An effective PI interviewer can discern if a subject is engaging in deceptive behaviors and leverage that knowledge throughout the interview and investigation. The crux of threat assessment is determining the risk of a person acting violently in the future; therefore, an investigator must work hard to hone their skills in detecting deception.

A 1991 study found that Secret Service agents were better at detecting deception than agents in other federal agencies, including the CIA and FBI.¹⁶⁷ Though the Secret Service scored better in the study than the other agencies, they still scored only a small percentage above what would be a chance outcome. Agents who were more adept at deception detection (regardless of their affiliation) scored better because they relied more heavily on small changes in the subject's demeanor and nonverbal indicators than on

¹⁶⁷ Paul Ekman and Maureen O'Sullivan, "Who Can Catch a Liar?" *American Psychologist* 46, no. 9 (September 1991): 913, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.9.913>.

verbal ones. In addition, the study opined that Secret Service agents' protective mission made them more likely to note those small changes.¹⁶⁸

While hundreds of studies have examined verbal and nonverbal behaviors of liars and truth-tellers, their findings are often conflicting and qualified with numerous caveats and conditions. One study even reported that “cues to deception are often faint and unreliable.”¹⁶⁹ Recent research into nonverbal and verbal indicators of deception has found that both liars and truth-tellers engaged in the same nonverbal cues when attempting to assert their truthfulness.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, it found that truth-tellers tend to talk more or “tell it all,” while liars tend to speak very little or “keep it simple.”¹⁷¹ To confuse the issue even more, prior academic thought was that liars would fidget, touch their face or nose, or wring their hands as they attempted to deceive during interviews. New thinking is that liars tend to be more still during interviews, while truth-tellers move about and fidget more as they tell their stories.¹⁷²

To further complicate the issue for PI investigators, though there has been significant research into deception about past events, there has been scant research on deception regarding a subject's intentions and plans.¹⁷³ Moreover, the studies that have been conducted in this area show that liars and truth-tellers appear to experience the same stresses as their cognitive loads increase during cognitive interviews.¹⁷⁴ This increase in stress makes it difficult for an investigator to determine who is telling the truth and who

¹⁶⁸ Ekman and O'Sullivan, 919–20.

¹⁶⁹ Nicola Palena, Letizia Caso, and Aldert Vrij, “Detecting Lies via a Theme-Selection Strategy,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (January 11, 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02775>.

¹⁷⁰ Aldert Vrij, “Deception and Truth Detection When Analyzing Nonverbal and Verbal Cues,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 33, no. 2 (March 2019): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3457>.

¹⁷¹ Vrij, 161.

¹⁷² Aldert Vrij, Samantha Mann, and Ronald P. Fisher, “An Empirical Test of the Behaviour Analysis Interview,” *Law and Human Behavior* 30, no. 3 (June 2006): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-006-9014-3>.

¹⁷³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 36.

¹⁷⁴ Elise Fenn et al., “A Reverse Order Interview Does Not Aid Deception Detection Regarding Intentions,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (August 31, 2015): 11, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01298>.

is lying.¹⁷⁵ A cognitive interview is a questioning technique often used by investigators to obtain detailed information from the subject they are interviewing.¹⁷⁶

Detecting deception in a PI interview can, therefore, be extraordinarily difficult, even for a seasoned interviewer.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, by leveraging some of the rapport-building and elicitation techniques discussed earlier in this chapter, the investigator can identify verbal and nonverbal changes in the subject. These subtle changes may indicate that the subject is being deceptive during the interview. While there is conflicting research on what specific nonverbal behaviors denote deception in an interview, most research agrees that nonverbal, and to some degree verbal, behaviors change when a subject engages in deception.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, most researchers recommend that the interviewer set the baseline for a subject's behavior at the beginning of the interview; this baseline is usually established as the interviewer develops rapport with the subject. During the rapport-building phase, the investigator should consider and explore the subject's cultural background as the investigator defines the baseline for response from the subject. Nonverbal cues are significantly tied to social customs and mores.¹⁷⁹ For example, lack of eye contact may be seen as deceptive in Western culture but would be considered respectful in Eastern cultures. The baseline of verbal and nonverbal behaviors illustrates the importance of rapport-building—not only from the standpoint that it encourages the subject to participate in the interview but also because it gives the interviewer a space to gauge the subject's usual personality and responsiveness.¹⁸⁰

The interviewer can then use open-ended questions to encourage the subject to talk freely.¹⁸¹ According to the HIG, a subject who talks more may reveal more details in

¹⁷⁵ Fenn et al., 11.

¹⁷⁶ Saul McLeod, "Cognitive Interview," *Simply Psychology* (blog), January 11, 2019, www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-interview.html.

¹⁷⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 33.

¹⁷⁸ Mark McClish, *I Know You Are Lying: Detecting Deception through Statement Analysis* (Winterville, NC: Marpa Group, Inc., 2012), 7.

¹⁷⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 33.

¹⁸⁰ McClish, *I Know You Are Lying*, 15.

¹⁸¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 34.

their story, giving the interviewer more opportunity to note details and discrepancies.¹⁸² If the subject is seeking to deceive the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer during the PI interview, they may change their story as they talk. Other strategic interviewing techniques, such as unexpected questions and implied knowledge, can also detect deception in a PI interview.¹⁸³ A deceptive subject may have planned responses to questions they anticipate that the interviewer will ask but will have more difficulty with those that they do not anticipate. For example, a subject who has anticipated that a PI interviewer might ask if they like the president may have difficulty if the interviewer asks how they feel about a particular political topic or platform the president advocates. In addition, removing the focus from a potential target to a potential motivation may get the subject to divulge information they might otherwise have concealed.

Another strategic interviewing tactic is for the interviewer to imply that they already know the information they are discussing with the subject.¹⁸⁴ Framing questions in this way can lead to revelations by the subject. An example of this type of question is, “What time were you going to go to the gala?” instead of, “Were you planning on going to the gala?”

Furthermore, the interviewer who observes and listens closely to the subject has more opportunity to observe subtle changes in their demeanor and manner of speaking as they tell their story. For example, suppose a subject has been answering questions during an interview politely and conversationally, then begins to become stiff and short in their responses. In that case, the investigator should consider what topic area has caused the subject to change how they communicate. Are they trying to move the investigator away from a specific topic? Are they embarrassed or afraid of talking about the issue? An investigator may display immediacy behaviors and ask questions in a nonjudgmental and empathic manner to encourage a subject to discuss topics they are hesitant to address.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Federal Bureau of Investigation, 37.

¹⁸³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 35.

¹⁸⁴ Geurts, “Interviewing to Assess and Manage Threats of Violence,” 14.

¹⁸⁵ Fein and Vossekuil, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39; Abbe and Brandon, “Building and Maintaining Rapport in Investigative Interviews,” 214.

In addition, noting what a subject fails to say in an interview is just as crucial for deception detection as observing and noting what they do discuss.¹⁸⁶ Deceptive subjects often answer questions that the interviewer did not ask or will cherry-pick questions if they are given multiple questions at once. They may do this to distract the interviewer from sensitive topics. An interviewer skilled at elicitation will not ask multiple questions at once and will listen carefully for evasion tactics such as answering unasked questions or only partially responding.

A skilled interviewer may also consider the interview from the subject's perspective, seeking to understand their goals and motivation.¹⁸⁷ This perspective-taking can allow the interviewer to anticipate places in the interview where the subject may attempt to engage in deception and allow the interviewer to formulate strategic interviewing tactics to defeat that deception.¹⁸⁸

An investigator who fails to detect deception during a PI interview accurately will, inevitably, fail to corroborate the information they received from a subject appropriately. Every text on threat assessment and PI cautions the investigator never to take any information received during an interview at face value and to corroborate all information, preferably from multiple sources, during a PI investigation.¹⁸⁹ The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer who fails to note the signs of deception and fails to follow up on potential lies or deceptiveness is more likely to create a flawed evaluation of a subject and risk an unwanted outcome to Secret Service protective interests.

4. Decision-Making

The Secret Service has a zero-fail protection mission. This means that every decision made in the protection of U.S. and world leaders must be sound and based upon solid judgment. The repercussions of every decision can change the course of history.

¹⁸⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Interrogation*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ Geurts, "Interviewing to Assess and Manage Threats of Violence," 14.

¹⁸⁸ Geurts, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 40; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Making Prevention a Reality*, 8.

Therefore, every decision made by every PI interviewer, every post stander, and every officer at a protective site must be beyond reproach. There is no room for attention lapses and mind-wandering in the Secret Service protective mission. Solid decision-making is especially critical in a PI interview, where the interviewer can identify and mitigate a threat before it becomes an issue for the protectee.

The PI interview can be framed as a series of decisions by both the investigator and the interviewee. The investigator decides which questions to ask, when and how to approach topics, if they want to address deception and incongruent information immediately, or if they want to wait. The interviewee decides how much information to provide and whether or not to be truthful, lie, or withhold information. Every decision has a cost and a benefit, and each decision in an interview must be made quickly. In *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, Gary Klein notes that successful decision-makers focus on their ability to act “rather than [being] paralyzed in evaluating.”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, they seek and act on the first workable option in a decision scenario rather than being caught up in determining which option is the best.¹⁹¹

Decision-making research in law enforcement cohorts has often focused on use-of-force scenarios where decisions can have immediate life-or-death repercussions. Numerous studies have examined how to improve this decision-making and determined that a critical element is “to improve an officer’s ability to maintain an optimal state of sensory awareness.”¹⁹² This element of decision-making is also critical in the interview process. For example, an interviewer may note a discrepancy between a subject’s stated answer to a question about a protectee and the interviewee’s nonverbal cues if the interviewer is aware enough to note that the subject clenched his fists as he stated that he liked the protectee. The inconsistency between the subject’s words and actions may

¹⁹⁰ Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 30.

¹⁹¹ Klein, 30.

¹⁹² Judith P. Andersen and Harri Gustafsberg, “A Training Method to Improve Police Use of Force Decision Making: A Randomized Controlled Trial,” *SAGE Open* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016638708>.

convince the interviewer to decide upon a new avenue of inquiry or give critical information about the subject's potential for deception.

While the interviewer cannot hope to force the interviewee to make good decisions, the application of effective interviewing tools can influence the interviewee to make choices that will serve the interest of the truth. As the interviewer decides which topics to discuss and how to approach them, they create opportunities for rapport and relationship building. To be sure, the investigator should address all areas of concern and take steps to address potential indicators of deceit. However, how the investigator chooses to do so is informed by their experience and expertise in PI interviewing.

Finally, the role of decision-making is particularly important during stressful times. The PI interview often occurs in a chaotic or changing situation. For example, a potential scenario for a PI interview is that it is hastily conducted in the back of a police car at a site where a protectee is due to arrive within hours or minutes. In this situation, the interviewer must quickly focus on determining if the subject was engaged in nefarious activity that could potentially cause harm to the protectee. The interviewer must also decide whether the protectee can be allowed to continue to the site or if contingency plans need to be implemented. The interviewer must determine if there is a potential threat to the citizens and law enforcement already on site. Furthermore, the interviewer must make these critical decisions while receiving and relaying critical information to persons on the scene and agents with the protectee.

C. CONCLUSION

The PI interview is an integral part of the PI investigation and of decisions regarding whether a person poses the risk of an unwanted outcome to Secret Service protective interests. However, Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers sometimes struggle with the interview in the areas of rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. These elements are critical to the PI investigation's successful conclusion. The next chapter discusses how mindfulness practice can benefit the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer as they address

these elements in the PI interview. This practice can improve the quality of the PI interview and, therefore, the outcome of the PI investigation.

IV. MINDFULNESS BENEFITS IN PI INTERVIEWING

Chapters I and III describe the importance of the interview to a successful PI investigation: the interview provides the investigator with the basic information necessary to evaluate the potential risk a subject may pose to Secret Service protective interests. Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers still struggle with the four crucial interview elements: rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making. Investigators who struggle in these areas risk conducting subpar PI interviews and making flawed threat assessments. These investigative errors can, at the least, cause the government to waste valuable resources on persons who do not pose a risk to Secret Service protective interests and, at worst, lead to loss of life.

A mindfulness practice is potentially helpful in addressing Special Agents' and Uniformed Division Officers' struggles. Mindfulness improves work performance by increasing a person's self-awareness and focus. Kabat-Zinn writes in *Mindfulness for Beginners* that "mindfulness shows you new ways to enhance and optimize both your effectiveness and your enthusiasm for your work."¹⁹³ Kabat-Zinn's idea that mindfulness practice can improve work performance has been the focus of scientific research over the past few decades. Chapter II details how some of these studies demonstrate that mindfulness practices can indeed improve work performance. It also examines how business, sports, and government entities have embraced mindfulness for performance enhancement.

While the Secret Service utilizes the mPEAK mindfulness program as part of an employee wellness and resiliency program, it does not currently use mPEAK as a tool for improving work performance. This chapter describes how several fundamental mindfulness canons can improve interviewer performance in the four crucial elements of PI interviews conducted by Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. These concepts—being present in the moment, nonjudgment, improved listening skills, and

¹⁹³ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 120.

enhanced attention and attention to detail—are central to any mindfulness practice. They are also essential to successfully performing all critical interview elements.

Just as the elements of the interview are interrelated, so are the elements of mindfulness. As a result, Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who work to understand and apply these mindfulness practices will be better equipped to conduct a successful PI interview.

A. BEING PRESENT

One of the most basic tenets of mindfulness is being fully “present” in the moment. “Presence” is being fully invested in the moment without allowing one’s mind to wander. It involves noticing information and details rather than allowing them to pass by.¹⁹⁴ Presence brings with it a perception of the environment in vivid detail.¹⁹⁵ This vivid focus on detail is a key component of presence and helps a person become aware of what led to the moment and where the moment is likely leading. Kabat-Zinn calls the process of becoming present “moving from a *doing* mode into a *being* mode.”¹⁹⁶ This change from doing to being is one of the first steps in a mindfulness program. Presence also cultivates a person’s ability to be aware of what is happening without being overwhelmed or overly reactive to the situation.¹⁹⁷ Because the concept of presence is at the heart of mindfulness, it is the foundation for all the other mindfulness concepts addressed in this chapter.

Being present significantly impacts every critical element of the PI interview and is the crux of a successful interview. *The Yellow Book*, the foundational text on PI interviews, enjoins the investigator to approach the PI interview from a perspective of inquisitiveness and skepticism, allowing the information to dictate the course of the

¹⁹⁴ Eric Langshur and Nate Klemp, “How Present-Moment Awareness Can Make Life More Meaningful,” *Mindful* (blog), December 22, 2021, <https://www.mindful.org/how-present-moment-awareness-can-make-life-more-meaningful/>.

¹⁹⁵ Langshur and Klemp.

¹⁹⁶ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 18.

¹⁹⁷ “What Is Mindfulness?,” *Mindful* (blog), July 8, 2020, <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>.

investigation.¹⁹⁸ The investigator must be present to suspend judgment, to listen skillfully, and to note details. Just as presence is critical for a successful mindfulness practice, it is critical for a successful PI interview.

A Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer's ability to plan a PI interview is improved when they become present in the moment. Chapter III discusses the necessity of planning before the PI interview even begins, as planning impacts every critical element of the PI interview. Because presence includes an understanding of what creates a moment, it can improve the general planning of a PI interview by creating a habit of noticing detail over time. Whenever a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer undertakes an assignment that could include a PI interview, they must move into the mindset of a PI investigation and PI interview. This means the investigator must understand the overarching goals of a PI investigation and what information is essential for a thorough risk assessment as they consider the PI interview. The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer must be present to understand how a subject behaves and how interactions between potential PI subjects and protectees could become important in a PI investigation.

A greater degree of presence can therefore help the investigator as they engage in high-level planning considerations. These high-level considerations include information critical for the PI investigation, the type of assignment the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer is working on, and the legal constraints under which they are operating. Considerations may also include what external resources they may access, such as law enforcement support, mental health resources, and other community services. Presence involves more than just knowing how to do the job; presence in the general planning of a PI interview is the internalization of the investigative requirements and resources so that they can be quickly accessed when the investigator is in the moment of an interview. Presence allows the investigator to focus on the role of each task in the larger context of the PI investigation before moving on to the next task in the PI interview planning process.

¹⁹⁸ Fein and Vossekuil, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 29.

As a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer on assignment determines that a PI interview is necessary, they move into the specific planning aspect of interviewing. The investigator who can become present in the moment will likewise be more capable of addressing specific planning elements of the PI interview. These elements include understanding the interview environment, time constraints, and the unique characteristics of the PI interview they are about to undertake. The aspect of presence that facilitates the specific planning for a PI interview is the ability to note the details of the situation and focus on them; the details of the moment will help direct how the investigator conducts the PI interview and what direction it takes as it develops. Presence in the moment in this element of planning also coincides with decision-making as the investigator makes planning decisions under significant constraints.

Presence is also critical in the development of all three components of rapport: as discussed in Chapter III, these components are attentiveness, positivity, and coordination between interview participants. The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer cannot feign interest and attentiveness, particularly as they attempt to build rapport with the interview subject. *The Yellow Book* reminds investigators that people will be more inclined to open up about sensitive or personal topics if they feel that the interviewer is interested in their story.¹⁹⁹ The investigator can demonstrate the traits associated with attentiveness, positivity, and coordination as they cultivate a sense of presence in the interview. The investigator who is truly present in the interview will be more genuine as they work to develop rapport with the interviewee. For example, the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer who is present and focused on the conversation at hand will display immediacy behaviors and signal to the interviewee that they are present and ready to hear their story; these behaviors are the basic tools of relationship-building.

An enhanced level of presence can also significantly improve elicitation and deception detection in a PI interview. The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer who works to be present in the interview will be more attuned to the interview's flow and can more readily engage in successful elicitation. An investigator who is fully engaged

¹⁹⁹ Fein and Vossekuil, 39.

and present in the interview will also be more able to detect deception and better equipped to make decisions about that deception during the PI interview. Presence will cue the investigator to small changes in the interviewee that may indicate that they are attempting to engage in deception. These minute changes might otherwise go undetected if the investigator is not fully present in the interview.

Presence will also enable the investigator to determine when and if they address evidence of deception during the PI interview. It will help the investigator be more aware of how the interviewee is likely to react to being confronted with evidence of deception, which will help the investigator determine if they should confront the interviewee at that time or if they should wait for a later moment. Finally, increased presence will also help the investigator better anticipate the value added to the investigation if they confront the interviewee. For example, the investigator may determine that a confrontation over deception could cause harm to the goals of the investigation or the relationship with the subject, or the investigator may decide to let the interviewee know that they are aware of the deception.

Examining the interview as a series of decisions similarly demonstrates the value of presence for the interviewer as they face split-second decisions that must be based on sound reasoning. The role of presence in decision-making has been studied from numerous angles, including ethical decision-making and decision-making in crisis situations. The outcomes of these studies are easily adapted to the PI interview process.

The link between ethical decision-making and presence has been recognized through numerous studies. For example, one study has found that “mindfulness promotes greater ethical intentions and lesser ethical infractions.”²⁰⁰ That study also determined that “many unethical decisions stem from a lack of awareness.”²⁰¹ Therefore, an interviewer who engages in a mindfulness practice that makes them more present and aware of ethical considerations will likely make more ethical decisions. Included in this

²⁰⁰ Nicole Ruedy and Maurice Schweitzer, “In the Moment: The Effect of Mindfulness on Ethical Decision Making,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 95 (August 2, 2010): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0796-y>.

²⁰¹ Ruedy and Schweitzer, 73.

mindfulness tenet is the investigator's awareness of critical ethical factors present in the situation and an awareness of the interviewee's goals and the goals of the interview.

Presence is also helpful for making sound decisions under pressure. Chapter II details a mindfulness study involving Navy SEALs who were more able to be present in chaotic moments and make better decisions in a rapidly changing environment after engaging in a mindfulness practice.²⁰² SEALs who were able to become present in the moment could focus on decisions that would further the mission's goals and success.²⁰³ Likewise, many PI interview scenarios are fluid and evolve quickly as the interview progresses. An investigator who remains present can similarly focus on the PI investigation's goals and work toward a successful outcome of the PI interview. The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer who actively seeks presence in their dynamic PI interview is better equipped to engage in workable and sound decision-making.

Another example of presence having a positive impact in stressful situations similar to those that a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer might face during an interview is the experience of the Tempe, AZ, Police Department. The department created a mindfulness program for police officers and found that the benefits went beyond officer wellness. The Tempe police chief learned that officers could be more present and, therefore, focus their attention correctly at incident scenes; they could take in more data and quickly discern what needed to be addressed immediately.²⁰⁴ This attentiveness led them to more accurately assess the situation in the moment, resulting in enhanced officer and citizen safety and a stronger likelihood of a successful outcome. In a PI interview, attention and sound decision-making can result in similar successful outcomes for the PI investigation.

²⁰² Fraher, Branicki, and Grint, "Mindfulness in Action," 245.

²⁰³ Fraher, Branicki, and Grint, 245.

²⁰⁴ TEDx Talks, "The Potential of Mindful Policing: Sylvia Moir," video, 17:58, January 31, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtnwYaNy5dU>.

B. NONJUDGMENT

In *The Yellow Book*, Fein and Vossekul note that even profoundly mentally ill persons can determine if the investigator interviewing them is being truthful.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, they advocate that an investigator approach a PI interview with “a style that is clear, direct, and non-judgmental.”²⁰⁶ This idea of nonjudgment is also central to mindfulness practice, as Kabat-Zinn advocates for the concept of discernment rather than judgment in every situation.²⁰⁷ Kabat-Zinn encourages the person practicing mindfulness to attempt to discern, or see what is actually happening, rather than falling into a pattern of judgment and reaction.²⁰⁸ In the PI interview, nonjudgment is accepting information as the interviewee presents it and not immediately seeking to create a narrative from the information. Instead, it is about letting the narrative develop as more information is presented. Nonjudgment also means taking care not to impose any moral standard on an interviewee’s comments during a PI interview; attaching moral judgment to the information provided in an interview can lead to unwanted bias during the evaluation phase of the PI investigation.

The purpose of a PI investigation is to gather information in support of a risk evaluation that a subject may pose to Secret Service protective interests. The evaluation is essentially a judgment by the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer. This judgment, however, is made at the conclusion of a thorough PI investigation and is supported by the information that the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer obtained throughout the investigation. Therefore, it is important not to introduce judgment too early in the PI investigative process, including during the PI interview.

The mindfulness practice of nonjudgment in a PI interview both extends to the person being interviewed and is internal to the investigator. In a PI interview, the skilled Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer does not immediately judge their own

²⁰⁵ Fein and Vossekul, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

²⁰⁶ Fein and Vossekul, 39.

²⁰⁷ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 85.

²⁰⁸ Kabat-Zinn, 86.

thoughts or information the interviewee gives. Instead, the investigator should pause when they have a thought or receive information.²⁰⁹ In that brief pause, the investigator tries to see the information for what it is rather than attaching a value judgment to the information.²¹⁰

A Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer's rapport and relationship building ability can be improved when they adopt the nonjudgmental attitude that mindfulness practices instill. A fundamental element of relationship building is the creation of empathy, or the ability to understand another person's feelings. In scientific studies, the nonjudgmental response has been directly related to greater empathy.²¹¹ Therefore, nonjudgment is a skill that is critical in rapport building.²¹² Moreover, as the interviewer offers nonjudgmental responses, they project a sense of empathy to the person being interviewed. Fein and Vossekui suggest "respectful skepticism" and statements such as, "I haven't had that experience, but I'm very interested in what you believe" to create empathy and rapport without the investigator signifying that they agree with or believe the subject's thoughts.²¹³ Finally, *The Yellow Book* note that people will respond better when they feel that they are being treated respectfully.²¹⁴ Nonjudgmental responses by the investigator bolster this sense of respect and help develop the rapport-building elements of acceptance and positivity, as discussed in Chapter III.

A nonjudgmental attitude can also help the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer improve their elicitation ability in the PI interview. The investigator's ability to listen, pause, and critically evaluate the information they are given rather than listening to find points of moral judgment and disagreement are an essential element of neutrality and

²⁰⁹ Barry Boyce, "Why Nonjudgment Is Part of Mindfulness Practice," *Mindful* (blog), August 21, 2018, <https://www.mindful.org/a-nonjudgment-call/>.

²¹⁰ Boyce.

²¹¹ Susanne M. Jones, Graham D. Bodie, and Sam D. Hughes, "The Impact of Mindfulness on Empathy, Active Listening, and Perceived Provisions of Emotional Support," *Communication Research* 46, no. 6 (August 1, 2019): 853–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215626983>.

²¹² Jones, Bodie, and Hughes, 853–54.

²¹³ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

²¹⁴ Fein and Vossekui, 39.

nonjudgment. Nonjudgment, tied with active listening, can help the investigator craft appropriate questions that will allow the investigator to obtain critical information in the interview process. Additionally, an investigator who employs nonjudgmental responses as they elicit information during the PI interview will encourage the interviewee to provide more detailed information. The interviewee who feels heard will be more inclined to continue talking with the interviewer.²¹⁵ These neutral nonjudgmental responses are a pillar of mindfulness and successful interviewing.²¹⁶

Applying the concept of nonjudgment to the interview skill of deception detection is not to say that the investigator should accept all information from the interviewee as truthful, but rather that they should accept that the interviewee intends for them to hold the information as truthful. This position helps the interviewer predict how the interviewee may behave when they are attempting to be deceptive and allows the interviewer to decide when and if they should confront the interviewee with the truth. Furthermore, by not attaching judgment to the fact that the interviewee is attempting to lie, the investigator can move past the act of the lie and try to understand why the interviewee is lying in the first place. Understanding what would motivate a subject to lie in a PI interview can provide significant insight into their motives to act against a Secret Service protectee, their mental state, their ability to plan, and many other considerations in a PI investigation.

Finally, nonjudgment can significantly expand an investigator's decision-making ability in the PI interview. The PI interviewer who approaches the decisions in an interview from a nonjudgmental perspective is often better equipped to make those decisions from an ethical and goal-directed perspective rather than allowing emotion or ego to shape their responses. In addition, this nonjudgmental response can serve as a regulator for the interviewer, allowing them to focus on the goals of the interview in their responses and avenues of inquiry.

²¹⁵ Fein and Vossekui, 38.

²¹⁶ "Deep Listening," *Mindful* (blog), August 26, 2010, <https://www.mindful.org/deep-listening/>.

As discussed in Chapter III, Gary Klein posits that successful decision-makers act on the first workable option as they make decisions and do not get caught up in considering every option.²¹⁷ Nonjudgment enhances the decision-making ability of the Special Agent and Uniformed Division Officer as they internalize the concept that they are making the most workable decision based on the information they have at the time the decision is made. Nonjudgment allows the investigator to make decisions and move on, rather than getting caught in the fruitless decision consideration loop that Klein describes in *Sources of Power*.²¹⁸

C. LISTENING SKILLS

An effective PI interviewer can leverage mindfulness to significantly improve their active listening skills. Active listening in mindfulness is focusing on the conversation, listening to the other party, asking clarifying follow-up questions, and reflecting that information back to the other party to ensure one's understanding of what they were attempting to communicate.²¹⁹ Center for Mindfulness Studies faculty member and registered psychotherapist Elaine Smookler calls active listening the most important communication skill.²²⁰ This is especially true in the PI interview, as it affects all of the critical interview elements. Active listening during a PI interview means that the interviewer is solely focused on the individual providing information; the interviewer is not only looking for information but is also seeking the meaning behind the information that the interviewee is relaying.²²¹ Furthermore, the interviewer expresses a genuine interest in the interviewee, the information they are providing, and their motivations for action.²²² The appropriate engagement of active listening skills is the hallmark of a successful interviewer.

²¹⁷ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 30.

²¹⁸ Klein, 28.

²¹⁹ Elaine Smookler, "How to Practice Mindful Listening," *Mindful* (blog), March 15, 2017, <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-practice-mindful-listening/>.

²²⁰ Smookler.

²²¹ "Practicing Active Listening in Your Daily Conversations," Verywell Mind, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>.

²²² Verywell Mind.

The interviewer who employs mindful active listening in a PI interview can improve their rapport and relationship-building skills by making the interviewee feel that they are being heard as they share their story. As discussed in Chapter III, rapport can help a subject overcome their reluctance to talk and help them feel comfortable enough to open up about topics that may be sensitive. The *Yellow Book* states, “An interviewer needs to be an active listener and to communicate a genuine interest in hearing and understanding the subject’s story, no matter how outlandish it may seem.”²²³

The Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer who employs active listening skills will not only improve their rapport-building abilities but will also improve their elicitation skills in the PI interview. *The Yellow Book* asserts that an investigator who is an excellent active listener will obtain more information during the PI interview.²²⁴ This is because they will listen intently to the interviewee, be a good audience, and note areas where the subject is particularly focused in their attention. These areas will be where the interviewer may find common ground for rapport building or avenues for further exploration during the interview.

Successful elicitation is easier to accomplish in a naturally flowing conversation or interview. One essential tool of active listening in this regard is that the investigator restates the information given by the interviewee. This reflection ensures that the interviewer understands the information and demonstrates that they are listening to the subject. Coupled with clarifying questions, this aspect of active listening keeps the mindful interviewer in the present, as Kabat-Zinn advocates.²²⁵ The interviewer, grounded in the present moment, takes the time to hear and digest the information provided by the subject rather than focusing on the next question or area of inquiry on the interview paperwork. This application of active listening by the interviewer allows the interview to flow naturally from one topic to another and encourages the interviewee to continue sharing information.

²²³ Fein and Vossekui, *Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations*, 39.

²²⁴ Fein and Vossekui, 39.

²²⁵ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 17.

Self-regulation is also critical in active listening as the investigator elicits information during the PI interview. The self-regulated investigator will not allow their emotions or interpretations of the interviewee's emotions to color their responses. Active listening is closely associated with improved self-regulation, the focus of attention, and presence.²²⁶ One study found that mindfulness practice allowed a person to offer more support and supportive messaging by engaging their ability to self-regulate and exercise nonjudgment.²²⁷ As the subjects were more able to self-regulate, they could use their active listening skills to offer helpful suggestions and encouragements to others. Using supportive messaging to encourage a subject to talk during an interview is a significant benefit of active listening.

The mindful application of active listening has a similarly significant impact on deception detection in the PI interview. Active listening occurs when the interviewer takes time to consider what they are hearing and connects that information with what the interviewee is trying to communicate.²²⁸ Smookler calls the aspect of active listening that includes listening for information that the subject is not providing “moving deeper into the conversation.”²²⁹ In the PI interview, this mindfulness skill can improve the investigator's ability to detect deception as they listen for topics and information that the interviewee is avoiding or withholding.

Finally, mindful active listening can improve the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer's decision-making ability in the PI interview. The goal of active listening in a mindful context is to allow the listener to gain a complete understanding of the information that the speaker is providing. In a PI interview, this deeper understanding allows the investigator to make better, more informed decisions about the interview, PI investigation, and evaluation of the risk.

²²⁶ Amy Baltzell, ed., *Mindfulness and Performance*, Current Perspectives in Social and Behavioral Sciences (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 133.

²²⁷ Jones, Bodie, and Hughes, “The Impact of Mindfulness on Empathy, Active Listening, and Perceived Provisions of Emotional Support,” 851.

²²⁸ Smookler, “How to Practice Mindful Listening.”

²²⁹ Smookler.

D. ATTENTION AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Kabat-Zinn posits that “paying attention is a trainable skill capable of ongoing refinement.”²³⁰ The idea that attention is trainable means that it is not a state of being; it can be developed and honed just like any other skill. Mindful attention is a cognitive process involving the ability to focus in and concentrate on one thing while ignoring other stimuli.²³¹ Furthermore, attention incorporates the idea of preparedness to act on the stimuli in the environment as they become emergent or significant. Attention and attention to detail are intrinsically associated with presence—attention cannot exist without presence. In a PI interview, the immediate focus of the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer should be the interviewee, and the investigator must be prepared to act on other environmental factors as they arise.

Attention and attention to detail can save the life of the investigator. It can also save the life of the protectee, bystanders, and even the subject themselves. A successful PI interviewer must be adept at noting and interpreting critical details offered by the subject during the interview. Furthermore, they must discern when the subject is fabricating or withholding details. Mindfulness practice is, therefore, invaluable for honing rapport and relationship building, elicitation, deception detection, and decision-making interview skills.

The investigator who engages in mindful attention in the rapport- and relationship-building element of the PI interview will be more successful as they address all three components of rapport building—attentiveness, positivity, and coordination between participants—and will find more bases for building trust with the interviewee. Dr. Jha’s work on attention describes how mindfulness is critical in developing focus and maintaining attention during extended periods of concentration and stress.²³² This combination of focus and genuine interest fits particularly well in the rapport- and relationship-building phase of PI interviewing in that they bring the interviewer wholly

²³⁰ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 33.

²³¹ Kabat-Zinn, 33.

²³² Mindful, “What Is Mindfulness?”

into the present with the interviewee as the interviewer is listening to the words and meaning that the interviewee is imparting. Finally, by practicing mindful attentiveness, the investigator will be more successful in demonstrating immediacy behaviors that signal that they are present and invested in the interview. Chapter III discusses how these behaviors can help the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer build rapport with the interviewee. These bases of trust help facilitate rapport and relationship building.

Likewise, the interviewer who is attentive during the elicitation phase of the interview will discover new avenues of questioning and investigation and is better equipped to detect when the interviewee is attempting to be deceptive or withholding information. If a Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer is not attentive in their interviewing and allows their mind to wander, they could fail to detect nuances in the answers and information being offered by the subject. However, by practicing mindful attentiveness, coupled with active listening, the investigator will be more attuned to the answers that the interviewee is providing, how the interviewee is addressing sensitive topics, and what topics they are attempting to avoid in the interview. They will also be better prepared to engage in successful elicitation techniques and not allow themselves to engage in poor interviewing by asking multiple questions at once or failing to follow up on avenues of investigation. As a result, the investigator will pick up on the subtle changes in answers that could indicate deception and is much less likely to miss when the subject fails to provide complete answers or explanations.

Perhaps the most critical area for the investigator to engage in mindful attention is in their decision-making throughout the PI interview. Mindfulness as a cognitive training tool can help an investigator mitigate some of the deleterious aspects of stress and, thus, devote more attention to detail, leading to better decisions in a PI interview. Dr. Amishi Jha has studied how mindfulness can mitigate stress in different situations. In her studies, Dr. Jha describes attention as having three main qualities: orienting, alerting, and executive.²³³ She uses the analogy of a flashlight to describe the orienting quality of attention: whatever the flashlight is focused on is observed in sharp detail. The alerting

²³³ AmishiPJha, “Dr Amishi Jha Explores the Science of Mindfulness at Miami Law,” video, 45:36, May 18, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMw4YZKQT1g>.

quality of attention is described as a blinking yellow light alerting drivers to be attentive to their surroundings. Unlike with the flashlight, the whole environment comes into focus, and the person is on alert for potential problems or danger. Finally, the executive function of attention is like a juggler keeping balls circling in the air; it keeps the person making good high-level decisions that align with their goals. In this model, a person is stimulus driven (as with the flashlight or blinking warning light) or goal driven in their activities, with optimal functioning occurring in the goal-driven arena. While some degree of stress helps enhance performance, too much stress negatively impacts all of the qualities of attention.²³⁴ The flashlight fails to focus on important information, the alerting feature fails to shut down when caution is no longer necessary, and the juggler begins dropping balls.²³⁵ Too much stress can move a person away from goal-driven activities into a completely stimulus-driven state, causing them to be unable to notice or act on important peripheral information.

By contrast, the investigator who can focus their attention will be better equipped to handle the stress associated with the PI interview. While stress may result from many different factors, one significant source for Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers is the need for optimal performance under severe time constraints when success is critical.²³⁶ The PI interview often occurs under such conditions and, therefore, can be highly stressful, even for an experienced investigator.²³⁷ In a PI interview, stress may manifest as the investigator's awareness of the Secret Service's "zero fail" mission in protecting significant government officials. The protectee may be en route to the location where the interview is occurring, or the interview's outcome may affect whether a protectee is evacuated or sheltered in place. The internal makeup of the investigator is also a potential stressor. The investigator may have already worked a full day before conducting the PI interview. They may have competing work or family obligations, or

²³⁴ Cathy Degroote et al., "Acute Stress Improves Concentration Performance: Opposite Effects of Anxiety and Cortisol," *Experimental Psychology* 67, no. 2 (2020): 96, <https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1027/1618-3169/a000481>; *Dr Amishi Jha Explores the Science of Mindfulness at Miami Law*.

²³⁵ AmishiPJha, "Dr Amishi Jha Explores the Science of Mindfulness at Miami Law."

²³⁶ AmishiPJha.

²³⁷ AmishiPJha.

they may simply be overwhelmed with the investigative requirements of the case. *Sources of Power* posits that stress and its impact on the person is one of the most critical factors in decision-making.²³⁸

Another significant way that attention helps with decision-making is through improved working memory. Overall, an investigator who engages in a mindfulness program focusing on attention will have enhanced executive function and be a better decision-maker in the PI interview. Working memory is “a brain system that provides temporary storage and manipulation of the information necessary for such complex cognitive tasks as language comprehension, learning, and reasoning.”²³⁹ Working memory is critical in learning processes and the “attentional control of behavior.”²⁴⁰ The “attentional control of behavior” is accomplished by the “central executive” and focuses on coordinating and prioritizing information inputs from the various senses.²⁴¹ Sound decision-making is linked to enhanced executive functioning and increased working memory.²⁴²

Dr. Jha’s lab has revealed the impact of mindfulness practice on working memory and working memory capacity. According to Dr. Jha, working memory capacity “comprises: (1) attentional processes to select information and appropriate behavioral responses; and (2) memory-related processes to maintain information in an active, easily accessible form so that task-relevant information can be manipulated in the service of current goals.”²⁴³ Dr. Jha’s work has focused on the effects of mindfulness training on working memory and executive function in military and law enforcement cohorts. In these groups, she has found that mindfulness training has increased working memory and

²³⁸ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 28.

²³⁹ Alan Baddeley, “Working Memory,” *Science* 255, no. 5044 (January 31, 1992): 556, ProQuest.

²⁴⁰ Baddeley, 559.

²⁴¹ Baddeley, 557.

²⁴² Amishi P. Jha, Scott L. Rogers, and Alexandra B. Morrison, “Mindfulness Training in High Stress Professions: Strengthening Attention and Resilience,” in *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician’s Guide to Evidence Base and Applications*, ed. Ruth A. Baer (San Diego, CA: Elsevier Science & Technology, 2014), 350, ProQuest.

²⁴³ Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 348.

goal-directed decision-making.²⁴⁴ Mindful attention significantly positively impacts working memory and the ability to discern what items in the environment require significant attention over other items requiring less attention.²⁴⁵ In law enforcement cohorts, this attentional focus significantly improves officer safety; the same can be said for the investigator in a PI interview. In addition, the positive effects of mindfulness training on working memory can help the investigator prioritize the information they receive in the PI interview, giving them a better foundation for decision-making.

Attention can further help the investigator make better decisions in a PI interview in that it will help keep them wholly present in the interview. Performance lapses and lack of attention can have serious consequences for persons whose jobs require a higher degree of situational awareness.²⁴⁶ Dr. Jha's work in mindful attention has developed evidence to support the idea that engaging in a mindfulness practice can help the practitioner reduce the likelihood of mind wandering at critical times.²⁴⁷ Dr. Jha's lab has investigated this aspect of mindfulness and attention in military and firefighter cohorts.²⁴⁸ Using a program called Mindfulness Based Attention Training (MBAT) they have empirically shown that mindfulness practices produce measurable improvements in attention.²⁴⁹ The tenets of MBAT have been included in programs such as O2X and mPEAK.

Finally, Dr. Jha's research has also revealed that one's ability to pay attention and attention to detail benefit from even a small dedication of time to a mindfulness practice. This research is significant because she has studied mindfulness, attention, and decision-making in cohorts such as military, law enforcement, and firefighters, which are similar to Secret Service Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. Participants in the

²⁴⁴ Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 348.

²⁴⁵ Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 348.

²⁴⁶ Amishi Jha, Amishi et al., "Minds 'At Attention': Mindfulness Training Curbs Attentional Lapses in Military Cohorts," *PLoS One* 10, no. 2 (2015): 3, ProQuest.

²⁴⁷ AmishiPJha, Dr Amishi Jha Explores the Science of Mindfulness at Miami Law.

²⁴⁸ AmishiPJha.

²⁴⁹ "Projects," *Jha Lab* (blog), accessed April 16, 2022, https://lab.amishi.com/mbat_project/.

studies demonstrated an improved attention response with a dedication of only 15 minutes or less per day to the mindfulness practice. In fact, in Tempe, AZ, the police department is training officers to take a mindful breath before entering a potentially volatile or traumatic situation. Though the data is anecdotal, the officers who chose to participate in the program reported that they felt more ready to handle the situation and more receptive to all the details and information they received when they arrived at the incident.²⁵⁰ A Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer could accomplish this quick meditation immediately before entering the interview room.

E. CONCLUSION

Just as each element of a PI interview is intrinsically intertwined, so are the basic elements of mindfulness that can have a positive impact on those PI interview elements. A strong sense of presence, approached from a nonjudgmental attitude, combined with a focus on listening and attention, will serve the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer well as they engage in a PI interview. An investigator who engages in a mindfulness practice that encourages these basic tenets will be more effective as they engage in rapport and relationship building; their ability to elicit information and detect deception during the interview will improve their decision-making skills. Scientific studies have shown that mindfulness can enhance work performance. Therefore, a mindfulness practice focused on performance enhancement can help Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers improve their PI interviewing skills.

Chapter V concludes with a discussion of the research questions from Chapter I and their answers as established throughout this thesis.

²⁵⁰ TedX, “The Potential of Mindful Policing: Sylvia Moir.”

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Secret Service is responsible for the safety of the President, Vice President, and other world leaders. While much of this protection involves physical security measures around the protectee, there is also a significant element of proactive protection in the form of the PI investigation. As Chapters I and III detail, the purpose of the PI investigation is to gather the information necessary to understand the global picture of a subject and make an informed evaluation of whether they pose a risk of an unwanted outcome toward Secret Service protective interests.

A substantial element of the PI investigation is the PI interview. Throughout the PI investigation, the Special Agent or Uniformed Division Officer interviews the subject and many other people associated with them. Because the interview is so important, the Secret Service offers PI interview training as part of the training curricula for both Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. However, despite this intense focus on the interview in the PI training block, many new Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers struggle with the interview. Often this struggle centers on the Special Agent's and Uniformed Division Officer's failure to grasp and successfully apply the critical elements of the interview.

Having described mindfulness in Chapter II, this thesis sought to answer to what extent the Secret Service should leverage the mPEAK mindfulness training program that it currently uses for employee wellness to improve the PI interview skills of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. Additionally, this thesis's second research question asked how the Secret Service should incorporate mPEAK into the current training paradigm for PI interviews.

This chapter summarizes the performance benefits of mindfulness training. It also provides recommendations for incorporating mindfulness training into the PI interview training paradigm, examining several possible mechanisms by which the Secret Service can implement the mPEAK program for performance enhancement. Finally, it provides considerations for future research into the operational application of mindfulness training

in the Secret Service. Overall, in light of the benefits that mindfulness practices bring to job performance, this thesis recommends that the Secret Service leverage the mPEAK mindfulness training program to improve Special Agent and Uniformed Division Officer PI interview skills.

A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chapter III describes how investigators struggle in four key areas of the PI interview. The first area of concern is rapport and relationship building. This is a critical element of the PI interview, as positive rapport leads the subject to be more forthcoming during the interview. Furthermore, relationship building is important because Secret Service relationships with persons of concern may last for years. Next, Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers also have difficulty with elicitation during the PI interview. Effective elicitation is more than simply asking questions; it engages the subject and encourages them to disclose more information during the interview. Third, investigators also struggle with deception detection during the PI interview. The ability to discern if a subject is lying or withholding information is critical for an effective PI investigation. Finally, as the PI interview is a series of decisions on the part of the interviewer and the subject, investigators who struggle with decision-making are less effective in their PI interviewing.

As described in Chapter III, investigators who struggle in these four key areas of interviewing are less likely to conduct thorough PI interviews. Poor interviews often lead to ineffective PI investigations and haphazard or incomplete evaluations of the subject's propensity to cause harm. Ineffective evaluations could leave the investigator, the protectee, and the public at risk. This is unacceptable given the Secret Service's zero-fail protective mission.

One potential solution for the struggles that Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers face in PI interviewing is the application of mindfulness practices to the PI interview process. There is a robust body of academic research on the effects of mindfulness practice on the human brain and body. Chapter II describes studies showing that mindfulness practice is useful for stress reduction, treatment of chronic pain, and

improved resiliency. Research has also demonstrated that mindfulness practices improve academic, work, and physical performance. For some time now, law enforcement and the military have utilized mindfulness practice for performance enhancement. Mindfulness practice is an effective technique in operational circumstances similar to those experienced by the Secret Service.

Therefore, Chapter II and Chapter IV reviews four mindfulness practice elements that can positively affect the PI interview. The first element, presence, is the most basic tenet of mindfulness. This element allows the investigator to focus entirely on the interview without distraction. Nonjudgment is also critical for the investigator to embrace as they obtain information from the subject during the PI interview: Nonjudgment keeps the investigator engaged with the subject rather than making assumptions or creating narratives from the partial information they receive. The next mindfulness concept that is helpful for the investigator in a PI interview is improved listening skills. Improve listening skills allow the investigator to engage in active listening, affecting all areas of the PI interview. Finally, attention to detail is a critical element of mindfulness practice. The investigator who works to improve their attention to detail through mindfulness is likelier to be successful in elicitation and deception detection during the PI interview.

This thesis has thus demonstrated that the application of mindfulness practice can positively impact the areas of the PI interview where Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers traditionally struggle. As the Secret Service already utilizes the mPEAK mindfulness training program for employee wellness, it would not be difficult to leverage the program and apply it across a broader range of training in the Secret Service.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The Secret Service has the opportunity to join other law enforcement and military entities on the cutting edge of performance improvement if it implements mindfulness practice in its PI interviewing training curricula. While other law enforcement agencies have begun to embrace mindfulness training, they are still generally invested in the wellness attributes of mindfulness rather than its performance-enhancement attributes. By

integrating mindfulness training into the PI training program, the Secret Service can realize the benefit of mindfulness training in a uniquely operational capacity.

Based on this thesis's findings, an initial recommendation is that the Secret Service convene a working group to validate these findings and explore avenues for implementing a mindfulness training program into the PI training curriculum. Ideally, this working group will be based at the Secret Service training facility with a management official from the Office of Training as a sponsor. The group would also include members from the Employee Assistance Program, which uses mPEAK as part of the Secret Service wellness program, current Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers from the field, and personnel associated with procurement and budget. This diverse group can decide on the best application for the mPEAK program, set benchmarks for implementation, and make the budgetary commitments necessary to set a mindfulness training program that speaks to employee wellness and improved PI interview performance on the path to success. Following are recommendations for actions that the working group can take as they execute an implementation plan. These recommendations include securing management support, creating a cadre of coaches, and maintaining a robust mindfulness program's ongoing care and upkeep.

1. Management Support

Once the working group establishes the appropriate course for implementing a mindfulness program into the PI training curriculum, the group should brief the implementation plan to Secret Service management. This briefing will ensure that senior management has the opportunity to learn about the program and sign off on its details. Once the program has received official approval, the focus should shift to incorporating the program into the training paradigm. The current PI interview training program consists of a combination of classroom instruction and practical exercises. Therefore, mindfulness practice could easily fit into this program with very few adjustments to the curriculum.

Visible management support is critical if the mPEAK program is to be used to its fullest potential. Secret Service management must therefore embrace the application of

mPEAK as a performance enhancement tool for PI interviewing skills. Leveraging mPEAK as a performance enhancement tool would require an investment of time as more Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers will be trained as mPEAK coaches. Additionally, the inclusion of mPEAK in the training program for recruits will require more time in the curriculum. However, the cumulative benefit of mPEAK would then go beyond what the Secret Service already receives from the program. New Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers will have the wellness and resilience attributes of mPEAK reinforced throughout their training. They will also be able to apply mindfulness practice for performance enhancement in PI interviews as they progress through training and into the field. A management team that recognizes the value of investing time to train coaches and accepts the additional time commitment to train recruits will demonstrate support for mindfulness training across the wellness and performance enhancement spectrum. This visible support will be evident through continuous funding of a mindfulness program and participation in the program by upper-echelon management members.

2. Train the Trainer Program for Mindfulness Coaches

Once the program has management support, the next essential step in incorporating mindfulness practice into the PI interview program is to train a cadre of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers as mindfulness coaches. These should be the same Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who teach PI interviewing. The Secret Service currently has a small number of Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who are trained as mPEAK coaches. However, none of those coaches are currently engaged in the PI training program—or any program at the Secret Service training facility. If the training staff in the PI training program were certified as mPEAK coaches, it would not be difficult for them to leverage this knowledge in the PI interview training setting. The value of having persons who perform PI investigations in the field also engage in mindfulness practice would be immense. These mindfulness coaches could utilize their experience in the field as examples of how mindfulness helps them—not only in the employee wellness and resilience arenas but also in the performance arena. Much of law enforcement training is facilitated through the trainer sharing their experiences;

this same paradigm will work particularly well in teaching mindfulness in the PI training program.

a. Continuing Education for Mindfulness Coaches

It is important to note that, just as training and interviewing methodologies evolve, so do mindfulness practice methodologies. Because mindfulness is a dynamic field, the investment in training a cadre of mindfulness coaches must include ongoing education and certification for those coaches. The mPEAK program offers ongoing continuing education for mindfulness coaches as part of the program. The costs associated with continuing education would be equivalent to the costs of training new coaches.

In addition, science is evolving in the field of mindfulness practice, with innovations and research being conducted all the time. Currently, the mPEAK program is associated with UCSD, which conducts ongoing research into mindfulness practices and performance enhancement. A continuing partnership between the Secret Service coaches and mPEAK could help ensure that the core scientific values and practical application of mPEAK are continuously updated within the context of the PI interview. Therefore, the Secret Service must have someone assigned to oversee the mPEAK program, ensure quality control as the program evolves, and be a liaison with Secret Service personnel in the field and mPEAK personnel. The Secret Service would need to consider the pros and cons of having an in-house mindfulness subject matter expert to train and guide Secret Service coaches compared to the value of contracting that job to another source. In either case, someone needs to focus on Secret Service interests in the mPEAK program.

3. Mindfulness Training for New Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers

Once the trainers are in place, including the mPEAK mindfulness training program as part of the PI interviewing training block would likely add about three hours to the time allotted for the training. This time would include a two-hour block of classroom instruction, bringing mPEAK from the wellness and resilience realm of training into the performance enhancement arena. Students would have already had an

introduction to mPEAK as part of their wellness and resilience briefs at the beginning of training. The rest of the time would include meditation periods before the practical PI interviewing exercises. In these sessions, the instructors would lead the meditation and assist the students in applying mindfulness in the PI interview process.

Finally, just as interview skills are perishable, so is mindfulness. Thus, the Secret Service should consider including ongoing meditation courses and practices as part of the in-service training requirements for Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers. This would allow the Secret Service to continue to capitalize on its investments in the mPEAK program and the PI interview training program.

4. Creating Coalitions

Finally, the Secret Service should consider partnering with an educational institution that is conducting research into mindfulness practices and performance improvement. This consideration is in addition to the partnership mPEAK shares with UCSD. The skills required of employees in the Secret Service are unique and varied. A partnership of this type would allow the Secret Service to affect the future of the application of mindfulness practice in law enforcement and the federal government. If the Secret Service creates such a partnership, it would be afforded the opportunity to help design studies relevant to the skills critical in fulfilling its integrated mission. As a result, the scientific basis for mindfulness as a wellness, resiliency, and performance enhancer will be expanded, and the Secret Service will be at the forefront of this progress.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

The potential applications for mindfulness training in law enforcement are extensive. Other organizations with zero-fail missions are embracing the value of mindfulness practices to improve work performance. As this thesis has noted, military special operations groups such as the Navy SEALs are applying mindfulness practices in their training scenarios with positive results. The FBI is also scrutinizing mindfulness as a training tool for performance enhancement. This thesis has only addressed a tiny aspect of performance in the Secret Service's mission where mindfulness practice can have a positive effect. There is ample room for future research in this area.

Research possibilities for the inclusion of mindfulness practice include many skill areas in the Secret Service. A first area for consideration is the utility of mindfulness in interviewing in situations other than PI investigations. The Secret Service also conducts criminal investigations, which require different interview techniques than a PI interview. Furthermore, Uniformed Division Officers engage with the citizenry regularly. Though these encounters may not be traditional interviews, they are important because they encapsulate many of the tenets of a successful interview and require the same skill sets as interviews. Research in this area may provide additional leverage for the Secret Service to expand its investment in a mindfulness training program.

In a broader sense, the Secret Service’s integrated mission creates numerous avenues for additional research into the application of mindfulness practices to improve work performance. For example, the hands-on protection activities that the Secret Service undertakes daily require an enhanced level of vigilance. These qualities are already inherent in a mindfulness program. In addition to protection activities, the Secret Service is responsible for protecting the nation’s financial infrastructure and investigating financial crimes. The Secret Service calls its protection and investigative missions “integrated” because the skills developed by employees in one mission often enhance the skills in the other mission. As a result, future research into the application of mindfulness practices in the protection and investigation mission areas is replete with possibilities.

Finally, as the Secret Service seeks to examine mindfulness practice as a wellness, resiliency, and performance enhancement instrument, it should determine the program most appropriate for its mission and culture. As mentioned in Chapter II, a program similar to mPEAK, the O2X Human Performance program, combines mindfulness with other elements such as nutrition, sleep, and physical movement in a resilience- and performance-enhancement program.²⁵¹ Like mPEAK, the O2X system has a strong basis in science as it guides performance improvement.²⁵² Finally, a program like FireFlex may be one the Secret Service chooses to incorporate into its physical training program.

²⁵¹ O2X Human Performance, *Human Performance for Tactical Athletes*, xvi.

²⁵² O2X Human Performance, xvi.

As detailed in Chapter II, FireFlex combines physical movement with mindfulness tenets to address the practitioner’s physical training and mental resiliency needs.²⁵³ Finding the proper program or combination of programs that best answer the Secret Service’s needs for employee wellness, resiliency, and performance improvement will eliminate redundancy in the program’s application. It will also allow for the program’s basic tenets to be reinforced across the spectrum of employees and throughout the life cycle of each employee’s career.

D. CONCLUSION

This thesis examines Special Agents’ and Uniformed Division Officers’ difficulties with PI interviewing and asks if applying a mindfulness training program such as mPEAK could positively affect those interviews. Through a review of the issues in PI interviewing and the benefits of mindfulness training, this thesis determines that it would be beneficial for the Secret Service to incorporate mindfulness practice into the PI interview training curriculum. Mindfulness practice has been shown to positively affect wellness, resiliency, and job performance, all areas where the Secret Service can advance. The Secret Service currently uses the mPEAK mindfulness training course as part of an employee wellness program. The mPEAK program can easily be introduced into the PI training courses for Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers to improve their PI interviewing skills. Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers who participate in a mindfulness program designed to improve employee wellness, resiliency, and to enhance their job performance are better equipped to respond quickly to the challenges of the job and successfully fulfill the integrated mission of the Secret Service.

²⁵³ Active Wellness, “FireFlex Yoga.”

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