Case Management
by
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Case management is what separates the paranormal investigators from the whackos and thrill seekers. Because there is no actual "science" going on anyway, case management and investigation protocols are the only means by which results can possibly be interpreted. Even then, sometimes you have to throw up your hands and admit that you have no idea what is really going on. At least, case management gives you a chance.

One begins by taking a good education, which is discussed in greater detail in another essay on certification. I find that extensive skills in psychology, program management, and historical research are useful to the case manager. You will notice that case management was not even mentioned in the Syfy series *Ghost Hunters Academy*. That is because that is a reality game show and not a vehicle for teaching investigative techniques.

Big Muddy Ghost Hunters Association is a small, low profile group. That, combined with our location in a heavily orthodox Roman Catholic community where people are reluctant to talk about or to admit having paranormal experiences, leaves us with a fairly light load of inquiries. One or two of us can easily handle all cases. We accept cases if they fit into our mission and schedule. Our particular approach discourages the frauds and the crazies.

However, because I am an (educated) self-important egomaniac, I can offer advice for large, high profile groups. Case management for all groups should incorporate the following elements:

1. It begins with a sense of mission that must remain consistent within the group. A mission is a purpose; without a purpose, all you have is a bunch of disjointed activities. Making money is not a mission. Having fun is not a mission. A mission is what establishes social legitimacy for your group. Legitimacy is bestowed in two ways: It is bestowed by those who patronize your group by using your services and providing resources. And, legitimacy is bestowed by those who would choose to be members of your group. Your mission should indicate who in your group may communicate with clients and to what extent. It should also indicate what sorts of information investigators should have before and during an investigation. We share all information with investigators for two reasons: we trust them to act consistently with the mission, and our certification process helps to minimize the Rosenthal Effect. Your mission should also indicate to what extent clients should be involved with the investigation. Take some serious time and discuss your mission in group meetings; it is not as easy as you think.

2. Using the mission as a guideline, establish priorities by categorizing cases. What categories you use and how you place inquiries into categories is up to you, but prioritizing should guide you to the cases you accept because they are consistent with your mission. Cases that are not consistent with your mission you should reject.

3. Screen applicants for inconsistencies and for chicanery. Every introductory text book in psychology will tell you that one of us in ten will spend time in an institution for mental problems. There are those who intend to mess with your mind, there are those whose minds are

messed up (normal people with problems or on drugs), there are those who are not all there (in the sixes and sevens in mental capacity), and there are those who are just plain crazy.  I would recommend spending time as an intern or a volunteer in locked wards, as I have, but I realize that that is impractical for most.  I would not recommend reading psychology textbooks unless you are taking a class or already have some background.  It is easy for people who do that to come away thinking that they are crazy because they have symptoms of schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, paranoia, etc.  A crazy person is like a normal person, only more so.

4.  Create a master schedule.  Begin with a basic schedule (prototype) for a typical case.  This should define a hypothetical timeline and resources requirements for preliminary and followup interviews, investigation visits, and analysis.  There might be multiple schedule prototypes for different types of cases--residences, churches, large buildings, graveyards, etc.  Work in the availability of investigators on a large calendar or chart, and plot out what you have time to do over a specific time frame.  If you do this, you will be able to match requests to available resources, and you will not have to scramble around looking for people or equipment to fill in. You will also have some idea about what to do with emergency requests.

5.  During the preliminary interview, I recommend getting a contract signed.  A contract can solve a lot of problems.  Our contract is illustrated below.

Big Muddy Ghost Hunters Association
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**AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE SERVICES**

Whereas Big Muddy Ghost Hunters Association (hereinafter known as "BMGHA") is a not-for-profit association devoted to the study of paranormal phenomena, this agreement is made with

______________________________________________________________

of ____________________________________________________________
(hereinafter known as "the client") to provide investigative services at the following premises:

______________________________________________________________

**Conditions:**

1.  BMGHA will determine which services will be provided and to what extent.
2.  There will be no charges or fees for any services provided by BMGHA under terms of this agreement.
3.  BMGHA cannot guarantee any specific result or outcome, and may not be held liable for failure to meet the client's expectations.
4.  Qualified investigators of BMGHA will conduct respectful, professional, and discrete investigations on the premises specified with full access as determined by agreement with the client.
5.  BMGHA may not be held liable for any damages or losses unless they are the result of negligence on the part of investigators.
6.  BMGHA may not be held liable for any unforeseen consequences that might result from investigations.
7.  BMGHA reserves the right to use the results of the investigations for any and all activities that are pursuant to BMGHA's mission to study, understand, and disseminate information about the paranormal.
8.  The client's name or identity will not be released to any media without the written consent of the client.

(signatures)

The contract covers all situations where the investigator can choose to break off the investigation using breach of contract as the reason.  If you have established the above parameters, then deciding what to do if a client breaks the rules, or if investigators are not performing, or if conditions change significantly, should be easy.  As with anything, the more thought you put into it, the more you will get out of it.