A Conversation with the Father of the Cognitive Interview; Dr. Edward Geiselman

Michael Reddington, CFI

Dr. Edward Geiselman has been a professor at UCLA since 1979 and has completed a significant amount of research relating to memory retrieval, detecting deception and investigative interviewing. In addition to his responsibilities for UCLA, Dr. Geiselman conducts training seminars for federal, local and international law enforcement agencies. Dr. Geiselman has published over 100 research articles and book chapters based on his work. Hopefully his name sounds familiar to you. His book, Memory Enhancing Techniques for Investigative Interviewing: The Cognitive Interview, which he co-authored with Dr. Ron Fisher, was one of the books used to create the CFI exam.

Dr. Geiselman is a true pioneer in the field of investigative interviewing and his research and subsequent publications have provided tools that have enhanced investigator skills around the globe. He is passionate about his work and eager to share what he has discovered. Dr. Geiselman was generous enough to share some time with me and to share his expertise with IAI. Here are the highlights of that conversation:

Reddington: Dr. Geiselman, the interviewing world knows you as half of the team that created the cognitive interview, however your background is in experimental psychology and I believe your initial focus was on memory issues, is that correct?

Geiselman: That is correct.

Reddington: When people forget pieces of memories or fragments of memories what are some of the most common areas that are lost?

Geiselman: Basically over time, unless there's an organic memory issue the loss is retrievable. That is we lose access to the memories rather than having the memories disappear entirely, so the key is to interrogate the memories so that we can find them and that has a lot of nuances to it. Part of it is understanding how the memories are stored and otherwise it is creating access routes to the memories once they are already laid down.

Reddington: Are there common challenges to retaining and actually recalling the memories, and are there common factors that cause these routes to be lost?

Geiselman: Yeah, some of it is just a simple passage of time, regardless of how exciting or traumatic an event can be, we still lose access to elements of those memories over time. Another major problem is often people think they shouldn't remember or they can't remember given the circumstances, so they don't engage in the work that is necessary to access the memories. They don't put out the level of concentration because they think it's going to fail anyway. Another key is to try as many different access routes to the memories as we can and what that involves is asking for the information in a variety of ways rather than simply asking for the information in the same way every time. In that way, memories are kind of seen like cities on a map and if one road is blocked, we simply go down another road.

Reddington: Do you have a couple quick tips or pointers for interviewers in regards to helping people retrieve memories?

Geiselman: A major key is to avoid the Q&A type of approach at all costs. The interview should be witness-centered instead of interviewer-centered. In other words, I don't ask the questions the way I conceptualize the event, but rather I try to follow how the witness conceptualized the event and go with that. I ask open-ended questions trying to fulfill the 80/20 rule, which means that the witness should be doing 80% of the talking I should be doing only about 20%. Information generated by the witness tends to be more highly accurate than information generated with multiple-choice type questions.

Reddington: I'm sure that is a very complicated process, but is it possible to briefly help us understand how people store memories in order to increase our effectiveness at retrieving them?

Geiselman: Yeah, the common misconception among lay people is that memory works like a camcorder. I'm sure every interviewer has heard of that and virtually no cognitive psychologist believes our human information processing system works that way. Rather we have memories for events stored away as different pieces of what happened and at the time of retrieval we pretty much literally reassemble the different pieces and see the creation in our minds eye and we tell somebody what we see. In that sense memory recall is reconstructive instead of reproductive and this becomes very, very important. They are essentially collections of features that include signs, sights, sounds, smells, all the sensory different elements.

Reddington: So during an interview it could help an interviewer to start a little bit before the incident in question and then move their way towards it?

Geiselman: I would definitely; one of the main elements of our system is that the experience of the event automatically is associated with the context in which it occurs. So if we can have the witness think about the context in which the event happened, before they try to remember the event, it will increase the amount of information they are able to recall.

Reddington: With your research into eye movements, as they relate into recalling memories, did you find anything reliable or anything that interviewers can use for leverage, or does everybody have their own recall behavioral norm?

Geiselman: Eye movements often are seen as the window into the souls, etc, etc, and so on. NLP has been out there for a long time. There's been a spattering of research all along and the data just doesn't show any reliability in it. Where somebody looks isn't correlated with honesty or deception. Now in our research, what we found was what really matters was the nature of the gaze aversion. If someone looks away and they fix it, what we found is that was a signal of concentration and searching memories. You have to ask yourself, "What was the question? Why are they looking away? Is it something this witness would need to be searching memory about?" If it is, it's likely to be a perfectly honest person just concentrating on searching memories and the gaze aversion doesn't mean dishonesty at all. However, when our subjects would look away and they would look around the room, like they were searching for something, that was an indication that they didn't know what to say and quite often they were looking for a story to come up with and that was an indication of deception.

Reddington: Can you just briefly explain to us what the cognitive interview is? I know it's a very involved process, but just give kind of an overview of how you discovered the process and how it works?

Geiselman: It's a general protocol for conducting an investigative interview that can be used in virtually any circumstance, with any kind of interviewee. It can be a witness, victim, suspect or fellow police officer. It's a basic protocol that applies to all those situations. It's also a toolbox of techniques and I think it's very, very important to view it that way because what most detectives do when they learn the protocol is they cherry pick different pieces from it to include in their own style of interviewing and they see improvements as a result. Of course

we believe that if the detective converted over to the full protocol it would maximize the amount of information they get and preserve the accuracy of the information. Just taking parts of it as needed in any given situation will be better than doing a Q&A type approach. A cognitive interview includes memory enhancing techniques or memory jogging techniques. It also includes communications techniques to improve the flow of information between two people. Much of that work came from schools of communication, journalism schools as well as social psychology and cognitive psychology. So it's not just about enhancing memory retrieval, it's also about improving the flow of communication. It's a dyadic exchange. There's some basic memory jogging tools a couple of which I already mentioned reconstructing the circumstances before the narrative, asking for the narrative in reverse. There's a technique called changing perspectives where we ask the witness to try out a variety of physical and conceptual perspectives that they might have on the event that they are trying to describe and so on. If it is specific kinds of information that they are trying to remember, like a name, there are techniques for that. So it is a toolbox. And these memory jogging components are imbedded within a protocol that promotes, as I said, effective communication beginning with rapport development and all the way through to closing the interview in a manner that would preserve the life of interview.

Reddington: I know that there are 5 phases to the cognitive interview. Can you give an overview of how the 5 phases support each other and speak to the benefit of following the whole protocol?

Geiselman: The protocol has been tweaked for different special populations. We do a few things different or emphasize certain things here and there if it's a child or if somebody has experienced a traumatic event. There are the 5 basic steps that are common to all of it. The first one we call the Introduction and that consists of several parts. Basically, in the beginning we put the person at ease and put them in the right frame of mind for carrying out the rest of the interviewing protocol. We develop rapport, then we explain the rules of the interview situation with them. As it turns out most witnesses are apprehensive about what's going to be going on here… and all of that takes away cognitive resources that we would like them to be focused on retrieving the memories. So we explain to them explicitly "You were there; I was not, so I am going to have to rely on you quite a bit here during the course of this interview. Is that OK?" That little suggestion goes a long way. Then we also acknowledge that "retrieving memories can be difficult work and I just want

to thank you in advance for the level of effort that I know you are going to put out to do that." That gets around those people who just think they can't remember or think they shouldn't be able to remember given the circumstances. It puts them in a frame of mind that it's expected that they concentrate on retrieving the memories. Basically we're asking them to reconstruct the circumstances that existed in the environment and also their own emotional or internal environment leading up to the event. Then, and only then, do we ask for the narrative. "Tell me in your own words from beginning to the end." We try not to interrupt the whole time and we take cursory notes about places would like to come back to later on when they are finished. When they are finished, we start with the part of that story that we would like to know more about the most and ask follow-up, open ended questions about that part of the story. At that point you want to ask a series of open-ended questions until we've gotten pretty much all of the information they can remember. Then we will move on to a different part of the story and ask as many questions as we can. Then we have the last two memory docking techniques recounting the narrative again, but this time backwards; starting at the end and working systematically and with as much detail as you can all the way back o the beginning. That is one of the more powerful elements of the protocol. The odds are pretty good that most witnesses are going to remember significantly more details when they go backwards, as compared to going forward another time. Next we do the Change Perspectives Technique at the very end before we close it off. We ask them to think about the different locations that they had throughout the incident. Were they always in the same spot? Or had they moved around? So when all that's finished we review the whole thing with the witness. We tell them what we think they told us and that gives them an opportunity to correct anything or to add anything. Finally, the fifth stage is to close the interview in a positive way leaving the door open so that they can contact us or we'll contact them if they have any of these delayed memories which often happens following a traumatic event. So it's: (1) introduction, (2) narrative, (3) Follow-up questioning, where we pick apart the narrative, and that also includes reverse order and change perspective elements, (4) review, (5) close.

Reddington: You mentioned briefly that there might be a couple of things you emphasize or deemphasize if you are talking to children, or someone who was involved in a traumatic event or maybe someone with developmental disabilities. Are there one or two things that you might emphasize or deemphasize in some of those scenarios?

Geiselman: Children and mentally challenged people, as it turns out look a lot alike in terms of memory retrieval even though they are very different populations. Both of them have memory retrieval issues, not memory storage issues and that makes them ideal candidates for the cognitive. An example of something we would be sure to do with children is we would go over certain things in the interview preparation phase that we wouldn't normally do. For example, we will go over the concept of "I don't know" with them. "I don't know" in a child's world is a negative answer and so we have to discuss with them just briefly that "I don't know" is correct if you truly don't know. And also we have to go over with them what it means if I might ask the same question or similar question more than once. Keep in mind with the cognitive protocol we are essentially asking the same questions over and over again in different ways. When we ask a similar question multiple times with a child, they have the misconception that we didn't like the first answer and that's why we are asking it again. Also, in using some of the elements of the cognitive interview we have to do special things like "In Reverse Order Technique." Children can do it until they get down to the metal age of 7 and mentally challenged people can do it as well. However, what they'll do is they will make giant leaps backwards in time as they are going through the reverse order. If they, or if any witness does that, the likelihood of getting something new is remote. So we get them focused on the last thing that happened in the event and we say, "What happened right before that?" We literally have to step through it with them frame by frame using this.

Reddington: Is there anything that you do differently or any insights you may have on applying the cognitive interview to people who might be uncooperative?

Geiselman: We put together a collection of techniques that have been put forth by experienced detectives over the years. I don't have that in front of me right now, but basically, depending on how they are behaving, we certainly would want to let them vent, if that is what they are doing, and keep calm, never rise to their level. At some point I would say, "Hold on. Hold on. I want to understand what you are saying. I don't quite get it." That forces them to have to calm down a little from their tirade because I have indicated that I want to help them out and it's just the way they are behaving that I can't. So that will get them to at least listen to what I have to say. I'm going to want to try to keep them talking, if they aren't talking, to develop a little bit of rapport. Validating something they say also has been found to be quite useful to get them to cooperate a little bit.

Reddington: As we transition from the Cognitive Interview to the Cognitive Interview for Suspects. I was wondering if you could just take a second and let us know how you made the transition from the CI to the CIS and what are one or two of the main components that can be successful in order to get information that helps us prove that we have a guilty person in front of us?

Geiselman: First off was we did a massive review of the literature on detecting deception. We tried to identify a short list of the most reliable indicators of deception in terms of the content of what a person says, the voice characteristics and body language behaviors that showed up across all these studies most frequently. Then we tried to develop a verbal exchange protocol, a quick and dirty one, where you can try to draw out these more reliable signs of deception. So that was the task and that's what we addressed. One of the findings from the research literature is that deceptive people don't like to talk very much; most of them. They like to be evasive rather than to sell the story. So the cognitive interview is perfect. We set the situation where we are curious about what they know and what they were doing that day. With the cognitive interview approach it's expected that they say a lot, which is the opposite of what they want to do. So they wind up, often in these interviews, saying too much. One major usefulness with the Cognitive Interview with Suspects is that it causes them to say more than they want to say, otherwise they look like they are deceptive, so you've got them either way. If that wasn't enough, after the narrative, we always do with suspect something that we sometimes do with witnesses. We give them a sheet of paper and we say, "Now I want to make sure that I understand exactly what you said. So for clarity would you draw out this whole thing? Draw out the area and take me through it from beginning to end. Where were you throughout the whole thing?" The basic research shows that deceptive people will leave out very important elements from the narrative they just told you. Then as we go through it, what deceptive people tend to do is give very little new in response to the follow-up questioning. In the Reverse Order Technique, I kind of mentioned this already, the deceptive people have a terrible time doing it. Try making up a story sometime about something and tell that story backwards. It is just impossible and all of these things are red flags. You ask them to give the story backwards and they are out of cognitive resources and it's beyond what they can do. So they start these grooming behaviors, stutters and coughs and stutters and so on. Changes in speech rate occur much more dramatically than you would see in truthful people.

Reddington: You studied and found common indicators of potential deception, were there any that were often paired together?

Geiselman: In terms of the body language, one pairing that we often found was the biting of the lips along with grooming behaviors and moving of the hands towards themselves as opposed to moving the hands away. All of this stuff, as you pretty much said, is very, very complicated. It interacts with their cultural background. Some people gesture with their hands toward themselves when they are telling the truth, you know. But overall we find that gesturing towards themselves was associated with being deceptive. You have to put it all in context too, what person under what circumstances and so on. I want to underscore that we found universally, in studies where people had to just look at a stranger telling a story and decide whether they were telling the truth or not based upon their expressions and mannerisms, most people and most of those methodologies are not very good at it at all. Even experienced individuals and people who think they are good at it. It is just very difficult. We have to get involved as interviewers to draw out and create situations where these indicators are going to mean something. In and of themselves, there are such individual differences that I think it is almost unreasonable to just look at somebody that you don't know and look at the way they're telling the story, their mannerisms, and be very accurate on whether they are telling the truth or not.

Reddington: From your research, if you had to quantify or put a value on somebody's ability to potentially detect these behaviors or for them to learn effective interviewing techniques, is there one that you would weigh more than the other?

Geiselman: Yes, the interview protocols are extremely important and that's most of the work right there. It's creating these situations and interview environments where the red flags of deception mean something. It doesn't take very long to go through the short list of indicators that crop up most reliably across studies.

Reddington: For those of us who are interested in learning more about your techniques and receiving training, are there resources that we can purchase or training courses that we can try to sign up for that you provide?

Geiselman: Sure. There is the Cognitive Interview Manual that's available through Charles Thomas Publishers. You also can get it on ebooks. That's the Memory Enhancement Techniques for Investigative Interviewing: the Cognitive Interview. You can find

it easily on the internet. That's a good way to start. I try to do two day classes, proficiency classes, as much as I am able. I am a full time professor at UCLA, where I'm teaching classes, so my time is limited. I don't have a company or a website where I do that, rather I respond to individual police departments who ask me to come out and teach a two day class for them, which I try to do as often as I can around the United States.

The International Association of Interviewers is currently working with Dr. Geiselman to schedule several seminars on the Cognitive Interview. Keep your eye on the website for upcoming announcements. If your organization may be interested in hosting one of these seminars please send an email to mreddington@w-z.com.

Would you like to hear much greater details about the cognitive interview, his work with government agencies, or why he was contracted by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department? How about what his next projects are, about the case of the woman in the blue Mustang, or why he references an interview with Charles Manson? To listen to the complete, hour long, interview with Dr. Geisleman and to hear more about his research, insights and ideas go to www.iaofi.org.

Chapter Updates

West Coast Chapter
    Coming Soon for Fall 2013- "The CFI West Coast Chapter"
Watch for the announcement of the Inaugural Meeting. Please contact Michael Loox, CFI (MLoox@coffeebean.com) for more information.

Thanks,
Michael Loox, CFI

Northeast Chapter
    Changes in the Chapter
Hello CFIs! Sadly this will be my last update as the Chairman for the CFI's Northeast Chapter. Over the past few years many of us have worked very hard to establish a Chapter in the Northeast where we can come together, network and further our professional growth. We've seen speakers from respected law enforcement to nationally renowned professors, WZ professionals and of course our own CFI's, each of which strengthened us as interviewers. Personally, I have learned a tremendous amount about the industry, definitely become a better interviewer, networked with great people, made many new friends and had a great time doing it. However, In the past year I have gone through a job change which has taken

me away from investigations into a more analytical role and unfortunately, it changed the industry in which I must invest my time. It would be unfair to the Northeast Chapter for me to continue as Chairman when I cannot invest the amount of time helping to establishing the Chapter as the members deserve. However, I could not be more thrilled that I was able to name my own replacement. As my last act as Chairman and with the blessing of IAI, I am pleased to announce that Steven Palumbo, CFI, of Tiffany & Co. will replace me.

I have known and worked with Steven for years and I could not imagine a better person to take over. Since day one (literally) Steven and Tiffany & Co. have played an integral part of this Chapter. They have hosted numerous meetings, provided quality speakers and have supported the Chapter in every single way. Steven has gone out of his way to help me with anything that I have needed and has been just as much a part of the growth of this Chapter as I have been. Within this industry, you will be hard pressed to find a more respected professional than Steven, and that is saying a lot as I hold this profession in the highest regard. Please join me in congratulating Steven as he takes the position of Chairman of the Northeast Chapter. Good luck Steve and thank you for all that you have done.

Chris Batson, CFI
IAI Note: Thanks to Chris for everything he has done to make the Chapter a success! Steven will be listing the meetings scheduled for the year shortly.

CFIs in the Media

Bill Pawlucy, the IAI Executive Director, as seen in the latest issue of Associations Now discussing Continuing Education.

Erik Stephens, CFI wrote a Thought Challenge in the D & D Daily on May 30, 2013 titled "'Memory is always the first thing to go' as they Say."

LP E-newsletter May 9, 2013
Brandon Brown, CFI wrote "How to Add Value by Not Doing Your Job"
Johnny Custer, CFI was in Eye On LP. Topic: Cops and LP in Harmony?