

Training Training Training

Author: Larry Flaxman

Last month I talked about the necessity of professionalism within the paranormal field. One facet of professionalism that is often overlooked is the importance of training – both on technical equipment, as well as scientific methodology and current research.

Several days ago I was watching a “famous” paranormal show on television, and noticed something interesting. The host was waving an AlphaLabs TriField meter around the room while saying, “look at the activity!”

Those who have simply taken the time to read the manual (RTFM!) know how sensitive this piece of equipment is. Not only will it detect the micro voltage present in the human body, but also, moving around the room with it is a “bad idea” due to needle deflection.

Honestly, I was not surprised as it seems that an alarming number of those involved in paranormal research appear to have absolutely no idea how to properly utilize (let alone correctly interpret) their equipment and data. This appears to be an increasingly alarming trend, and one that continues to propagate due to the surge in paranormal programming.

So what is training and why is it important? According to Wikipedia, “Training refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and knowledge that relates to specific useful skills.”

Almost without exception, professional disciplines require some level of training accreditation. When was the last time you went to a doctor, lawyer or other professional individual and did not see their degrees or certificates on the wall?

With the convenience of the Internet you may easily purchase just about anything you could possibly want. However... keep in mind that just because you may purchase a Gigli Saw does not automatically make you a neurosurgeon.

Unfortunately, as we are all painfully aware, the paranormal field is rife with crackpots, flakes, and charlatans. The only solid chance we have to gain credibility in the scientific community is by following strict scientific methodologies, logging and presenting “clean,” accurate data, and controlling as many variables as possible. The lack of proper understanding and knowledge contributes to bad data. By understanding how to correctly utilize and interpret our equipment we increase the viability and accuracy of our data, as well as enhance the overall perceived professionalism of our field.

I am reminded of another example highlighting a blatant lack of training. This instance involves yet another popular television show which shall also remain nameless. In this episode our intrepid hosts are investigating a supposedly haunted hotel (which happens to be in my home state of Arkansas). During the course of their investigation they allegedly

discover the “Holy Grail of ghost hunting – the full body apparition” using their FLIR thermal imager.

While I will not go into the specifics of their “evidence,” those of us who have received formal FLIR training are quite familiar with the concepts of thermal reflectivity and emissivity. Without proper training, the image that was captured could certainly seem anomalous if one did not understand how to accurately interpret the display. For an excellent, in-depth analysis of the incident be sure and check out <http://www.ultimatetechlinks.com/CrescentHotelAnalysis.html>

Training and education within ARPAST is a continual process and one that we consider vital to our overall mission and long-term goals. To this end, we conduct dedicated monthly training sessions that usually last between four to six hours. In addition to the aforementioned training, we also provide extended training at our monthly meetings and investigations. As an adjunct to our “live” training, we are currently investigating the viability of providing distance learning utilizing the Internet as the distribution channel. This would allow our members (many of which are located in geographically disparate areas) access to the same materials.

Training and the furtherance of knowledge should be an intrinsic part of your organization’s mission. By investing in the knowledge of your members, you are not only increasing their overall value to the organization, but also helping to maximize the legitimacy of our field.

About the author:

Larry Flaxman is the founder and President of **ARPAST** – the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, which is a member of the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) family. He has been actively involved in paranormal research and investigation for over ten years, and melds his technical, scientific, and investigatory backgrounds together for no-nonsense, scientifically objective explanations regarding a variety of anomalous phenomena.

Larry has appeared in numerous newspaper, magazine, radio, and television interviews, and has authored several published articles regarding science and the paranormal. In addition to involvement with **ARPAST**, he serves as technical advisor to several paranormal investigation groups throughout the country.