



STUDENT CORNER

Courtroom Testimony and Public Speaking

By: Ron Smith



Fear is a natural feeling, but what is it about testifying in court that makes it a natural source of concern for us? Why is giving testimony in court under oath considered a difficult thing to do and something that most people in their right mind try to avoid?

Well, I have asked that question hundreds of times to testimony students around the country and regardless of where I am, the answers seem to be very similar. The most common answer is not the fear of testimony but the fear of public speaking in general. The fear of public speaking is ranked in the top three fears each year when polls are taken to determine the greatest fears of the population. It ranks right next, and sometimes ahead of, death by fire. That's right, I said Death By Fire! How can that be? It may not seem possible but it is true. For many people, public speaking carries with it a fear so great that they will do almost anything to avoid it. You know what I mean. You see it in the criminal justice system everywhere. I've had the opportunity to go along with narcotic investigators on raids on a few occasions and when they are looking for volunteers to knock the door down and take down the violators, you have a list of volunteers as long as your arm but when you look for a volunteer to seize and log in the evidence collected during the raid, you can't find one with both arms, a metal detector and a psychic. Why? Because that part is not exciting and that person is going to get called to court and get badgered by some defense counsel for sure, and hey, what fun is that? Who wants to undergo that kind of treatment?

When asked the question about why is giving testimony considered a difficult thing to do, there are other common answers to the question as well. One of the most common answers is "I feel fear of the unknown when I'm on the witness stand". I can understand that. We don't know what the defense attorney, (and sometimes the prosecutor) is going to ask and really it is not the fear of the question that bothers us, it is the fear of not knowing the answer and the fear of being made to look stupid or nonprofessional in front of the jury that really gets to us.

Others respond to the original question by saying that they feel fear because of the pressure of the case and the fact that they don't want the case to go sour while they are on the witness stand. I can relate to that and we can deal with that natural fear as well once we learn to understand the courtroom procedures better and the entire judicial process a little more completely.

As you can see from just these few points, there some very natural feelings of fear associated with the courtroom testimony environment and I look forward to continuing this discussion and getting to some topics on how to help you deal with these natural fears.

(Ron Smith is the Associate Director of the Mississippi Crime Laboratory in Meridian, Mississippi and is world renowned in palm print orientation and teaches worldwide in courtroom testimony. This informational piece was found in The Detail at www.CLPEX.com. This piece was edited for length.)



If you have questions about a certain field of Forensic Science, how to answer an interview question, or concerns that you would like addressed in the Student Corner, please forward them to the editor at editor@fdiai.org.