

Legal Factors

You're doing a great job, but you're doing it ALL WRONG!

Mr. Robert Blackledge, Forensic Chemist Consultant, United States

Abstract: On November 22, 2005 Congress authorized the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study on forensic science. A Forensic Science Committee was created and given a list of eight areas to look into. The efforts of the Forensic Science Committee culminated in a report published in 2009, "Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward."

So that's what we have; not much point in going back and saying, 'would have, could have, should have.' This presentation will consider how well the forensic science community, and especially two large US Government organizations, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), have done in advancing the recommendations contained in that report.

NIST has done well as far as the efforts of their own scientists. However, NIST (this Symposium is an example) and especially the NIJ have failed woefully as far as inducing greater proactive involvement by the extended forensic science community and concerned citizens in general. Just as so often in the past, committees have been formed, blue ribbon panels named, and meetings and symposia hosted. Despite advances in technology and in our knowledge of human behavior, the approach so far is little different than in the past millennium.

It is now well known (as shown in the recent book, *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki) that the wisdom of crowds is not only superior to that of any individual no matter how well-qualified, but the wisdom of a large, diverse group is better than that of a panel of experts. In the past there were many technical and financial difficulties in getting a large crowd of people to look into a problem, but not today. A title for Surowiecki's book might well have been, *The Wisdom of the Cloud!* Today on the Internet there are an endless variety of interactive webinars. Research scientists are posing problems to the Cloud and anyone (whether a Nobel laureate or a child in the slums of Calcutta) with access to a smart phone may collect and transmit data or suggest solutions. Why are the NIJ, NIST, ASCLD, and AAFS not taking advantage of the wisdom of crowds and the cloud? Could it be that the Old Boy/Old Girl Forensic Establishment (the usual suspects) has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, or is their thinking just "boxed" in?