

portation and ask for specific information concerning signal repair records.

• **Checking out a government-inspected organization.** Suppose

SAMPLE FOIA LETTER

You aren't required to explain why you need the information that you're requesting. So justify your need only if that will help you accomplish your objective.

Dear Ms. So-and-So:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, I request access to copies of all bus repair records for the period May 1 to December 1, 1986, or if specifically available, signal repair records for all buses, or if specifically available, signal repair records for bus #456, which travels east on Avenue A intersecting Gotham Place.

In the event of litigation, you will be able to present either the department of transportation's record that the bus had a defective signal or their written statement that the record is unavailable—which in court won't look good for the city's case.

If there are any fees for searching or copying records and these exceed \$30, please inform me before filing the request. If fees are \$30 or less, I agree to remit.

I request this information because of my claim #345 against the city.

Mentioning your case is optional but it may help. *How:* The city will realize that you probably have a strong litigating position, and it may prefer to settle quickly rather than go to all the trouble of filing your FOIA request.

If you are unable to fill this request within the prescribed time provided by statute, notify me of the reasons and advise me when I may expect the information.

Statutes usually require prompt FOIA responses, so this paragraph will create a sense of urgency on the city's part.

If you deny this request, please cite the specific exemption and notify me of the appeals procedure, including time limitations.

This ought to prevent cavalier treatment of your request.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at [your phone number].

Sincerely,

With your telephone number, they'll never be able to claim that they didn't understand your request and couldn't reach you.

your parents are considering a particular nursing home for residence. Quoting FOIA, write to the appro-

appropriate health department agency requesting a list of deficiencies found in that nursing home during the previous two years.

It's important that you contact the correct agency and that you be as specific as possible about the records you need.

The FOIA does not apply to courts, Congress, state or local legislatures or private organizations. *Exception:* If a private organization is involved with the government, it may be subject to the FOIA.

Limitation: Certain kinds of information are unavailable even under the FOIA—information protected by privacy statutes such as medical and personnel records, trade secrets, internal personnel practices and recommendations, records of criminal investigations, certain geological information and documents regarding the supervision of financial institutions.

To get a copy of the federal FOIA: Write to your local Federal Information Center (listed in the US Government Offices section of the telephone book). Federal Information Centers can also help you find the correct US government agency to write to. *For a copy of a state FOIA:* Write to your state's attorney general.

Privileged information from George Alberts, a former IRS District Director who is now a consultant to Alberts Investigative Services, Box 402, Commack, NY 11725.

ONESTEPAHEAD

Dr. Gerald Epstein

RE-VIEWING DEATH

Unlike several non-Western cultures, Western culture takes a morbid and depressing view of death. *Result:* The dying are made more anxious.

Three wonderful, healthy exceptions: The Irish wake (filled with drinking, eating and singing), Southern blacks' dirge (a march from the cemetery to lively Dixieland music) and the Jewish *shivah*, a post-funeral week-long period for relatives and friends where food and drink are plentiful and attendees are expected to talk about the deceased in positive terms, recalling only happy memories.

Key to a good death: A more positive view of the event. Terminally ill people shouldn't be told that they are "dying," but that

their disease is *life-threatening*. The immediate reaction to the knowledge that one is dying is usually depression, and looking at the situation in a different light can alleviate that depression.

Example: One of my patients, a psychiatrist, was dying. He knew that the end was near and his anxiety was making his last days very unpleasant for him. I told him that this was the time to make preparations for death, that he needed peace of mind to settle his emotional affairs, so to speak. To help him ease the fear, I taught him to *image* his death in a positive way. I asked him to imagine climbing a mountain and then flying off to a higher realm. It worked. His anxiety faded, and he began to look forward to the relief from his illness.

Other images that work to relieve the fear of death:

- Imagining moving into the center of a flower and then becoming part of it.

- Seeing yourself backing through a window and taking a journey beyond.

- Seeing yourself rising out of the sickbed and moving up into the sun or into the stars beyond.

- Moving backward through time . . . seeing your life beginning in the womb, then your birth, childhood, adulthood, old age, the grave and your passing to the world beyond the grave.

Objects can help the imagination. For example, a woman on her deathbed, though unaware of the techniques of imaging, asked her family to bring her flowers while she was still alive, not after her death. *Result:* A more peaceful period up to her death.

It's possible to do the exercises listed above alone, but it's more intimate to ask a loved one to take you through them. The imaging takes only five to ten minutes, and it's best to revive the imagery six to ten times every day. Relatives of the dying person should perform such imaging themselves—imaging the loved one going through the various scenarios.

Why does Western culture see death in such a morbid way? The morbid interpretation has much to do with our sensory attachment to material things. Death in our culture means the loss of sensory attachment. The more we're wed to material things, the harder sensory *detachment* becomes.

Privileged Information interviewed psychiatrist Dr. Gerald Epstein, 23 E. 93 St., New York 10028. His latest book is *Waking Dream Therapy: Dream Process as Imagination*, Human Sciences Press, 72 Fifth Ave., New York 10011, \$29.95.