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Unique Hiring Demands

Some corporate boards mandate executive protection to safeguard shareholder interests

By Brian Jantzen

Mitigating risks and threats along with extensive intelligence analysis are at the core of comprehensive and effective customized executive protection programs. Providing close protection, secure travel logistics and related security services for the well-being and productivity of the executive protection client, whenever and wherever necessary, demands executive protection specialists who can build trust, adapt to a wide range of situations and implement human skills and hard skills at the appropriate times and places.

BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY

Executive protection is a service that boosts productivity and mitigates the elevated and ever-changing personal risk of individuals due to their prominence, wealth, occupation, reputation, travel destinations, or other factors. Services include secure travel logistics, close personal protection, intelligence analysis and related measures to ensure the productivity and safety of the principal.

In addition to providing peace of mind for prominent individuals and their families, some corporate boards mandate executive protection for CEOs and other principals both because

of duty of care and to safeguard shareholder interests which are contingent on the wellbeing and performance of those principals.

Enhanced productivity for the principal is more than a by-product of executive protection – it is a goal in itself – and often is the most tangible near and long-term benefit of best-in-class corporate executive protection programs.

While executive protection professionals cannot eliminate risk, they are tasked to do everything possible to mitigate it. Risk mitigation begins with understanding the situations that expose principals to danger and then systematically reducing the extent of the principal's exposure to these situations, and developing contingency procedures for dealing with the effects of breached safety to reduce its impact.

FINDING HUMAN SKILLS

Who is the ideal executive protection specialist? The stereotypical assumption is that people who work in the executive protection sector must have law enforcement or military background. While those backgrounds are certainly embraced, what is harder to find are the 'human skills' needed to excel in this sector which include refined social skills, adaptability and creativity.

The 'hard skills' of the job such as driving, firearms proficiency,

defensive tactics and medical skills can be taught, but having the adaptability and social capability to be doing an outstanding job whether in New Delhi on Monday or in New York City on Friday is not something all Executive Protection Agents can deftly manage. There is the challenge – find people that have the hard skills but also possess the human skills. A program can't just choose one over the other as it leaves too much of a gap for a program that needs to start getting early success delivering their services.

Executive protection specialists have diverse backgrounds including private sector security, military and local/federal law enforcement. Key characteristics of outstanding EP staff include:

Resourcefulness. Even the best procedures are tested by non-standard situations. If there is confusion, the executive protection agent is the one everyone looks to, to make it all good again.

Resilience. Resilient agents are the ones who cope with adversity and change and make it look effortless. Helplessness is never an option for EP pros.

Professional commitment. Great executive protection agents realize that the security, privacy and productivity of the principal comes first and supersedes their own needs.

Discretion. Complete confidentiality is demanded in all matters – personal and professional.

Service minded. Executive protection is a service industry. It is about helping other people to meet their goals and objectives.

Flexible. Outstanding agents anticipate the volatility of transitioning schedules and evolving tasks. The urgency of availability and mission readiness is paramount to consistently reliable operations.

Self-aware. Agents must understand their own strengths and weaknesses and not overcompensate for either of them.

Self-regulating. Good self-regulation helps an agent choose their words carefully and gives the option of thinking before reacting.

Socially skilled. The best agents are born networkers who lay the groundwork of solid connections everywhere from the C-Suite to the hotel kitchen.

Empathic. Empathic agents pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues that express an individual personality and a corporate culture. Controlled empathy is crucial.

Self-motivated. Successful agents are driven, have initiative, perseverance and proactivity. With non-centralized, global activities, most times the agent must work and train alone.

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SECURE TRAVEL LOGISTICS

Simply helping principals get from A to B is something that may require a lot of effort and planning.

Keeping principals safe as they move around the country and the world is the first priority but smooth travel logistics do more than that. It allows principals to make the most of their time wherever they go. By keeping their focus on running their business rather than running around looking for taxis, hotels and the next meeting, they get more done even when they are on the road.

Consider the high-profile chief executive at a Fortune 500 company, who was planning a major trip that would take him to five countries spread throughout Asia. In addition to a wide variety of meetings with subsidiaries and customers, the principal has also been invited to a number of meetings with the highest level of government in the capitals he planned to visit. More than 25 company executives were also included in the itinerary, as they would be participating in key meetings and a number of offsite events. Finally, the CEO wanted to take a short personal vacation while in the region.

Drawing on a number of internal and external resources, the team integrated their own EP agents with in-country security and logistics providers.

The itinerary was complex. The first two countries each required support in two separate cities; in the final three countries, the entourage increased by up to 25 additional high-level travelers.

In order to provide the client with a consistent and familiar travel experience, agents had to “leap-frog” between destinations. Staff did advance work at all stops to make sure that local assets were vetted and in place, and ready to deliver according to objectives.

A support matrix was created across the entire team so that everyone involved could easily understand the plan and their roles, ensuring reliable and efficient delivery.

All travelers accomplished their planned goals, and the ambitious itinerary went well despite a few unforeseen incidents. The team easily handled the few minor illnesses that slowed down several company travelers and quickly resolved a

customs issue that interrupted the journey for one of the participants.

Even though the itinerary was complex and complicated by the large entourage and the multiple agendas and destinations, the trip went off without a hitch.

THE MOVING PARTS

Think about all the moving parts involved in an operation like that and then add in all the personalities and agendas that also have to be managed. That takes people with all of the characteristics identified earlier in this article along with the ability to keep focus on risks, threats and vulnerabilities. Maintaining awareness and a cool head under high-pressure situations is key to gaining the confidence and trust of the people in the organization.

The next challenge that the emerging and rapidly growing industry is facing is the hiring of executive protection directors and managers. The stakes and complexity are higher to find people with human skills, hard skills and can now lead and run a service business that delivers protection and productivity support in the private sector.

The key is to find people that can lead and manage the operations, finance and administration and ensure that people are aware of the features, benefits and value-add of the organization. Be strategic and pay attention to the details. Remain focused but be able to multi-task.

Have effective conversations/collaborations with the principal, the executive administrative assistants, the security organization, human resources and recruiting as well as legal, procurement and finance.

There is a lot more to this profession than meets the eye. When it is done right, the EP agent blends into the environment and makes everything that they do look effortless, practiced and planned – even when it is not. They are in the right place at the right time – all the time. 📍

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