

SECURITY – What’s in a Word?

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Words are a funny thing. And, words matter. We use them to define things, communicate ideas, and describe thoughts and feelings. While there are some words that have a nearly universal meaning, the meaning of other words varies greatly depending on who you ask. For example, the words “police officer” conjures up a fairly common mental image of someone who is a carefully selected, professionally trained, operationally competent and conducts themselves on a solid moral platform of honesty and integrity. The collective impression is police officers can be depended upon by the public, seemingly without fail, to protect those who are in need or in trouble. The term police officer has a nearly universal meaning to all people irrespective of the agency type (city, county, state or federal) or the geographic location of the agency. The same is true of most other bona fide professions. However, the meaning of the word “security” does not, by any stretch of the imagination, have any type of universal meaning. In fact, there are few other words in the English language that have so many different meanings and interpretations as does the word security. This vast difference in connotations needs to change.

The diverse associations and understandings of the word security is confusing to the public as well as those who are public safety professionals such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, medics, emergency managers, et al. As an example, when a homeowner states they have “security” at their home, what they likely mean is they have installed a fire and burglary alarm system. However, the term security may just as well mean that the homeowner has installed high security locks on their doors and windows. Still to another homeowner, the installation of motion activated exterior lighting may mean that the homeowner has installed security at their residence. In the business world, the varied meanings of the word security become far more complicated. Security to one business may mean that they have conducted a thorough risk analysis that has resulted in the implementation of perimeter gates, adequate lighting, a CEPTED-devised environment, a card access system, alarm systems, high-security locks, a video camera system, layered internal physical barriers, professional on-site security officers, an excellent visitor control system, a tested business continuity plan, AEDs, robust IT security and an on-site emergency response team. Yet, the term security to another business may mean that they have passwords assigned for their desktop computers but have no other security measures, controls or systems in place. It is almost as though the term security is a large bucket, and all things security or security-related get dumped in this large bucket. Physical security can and does also mean concierge, greeter, valet, ambassador, courtesy patrol, reception, janitor, facility specialists, watchman and many more duties that have little to do with security. Things have become even more confusing with the

convergence of virtual and physical security. When comparing the term security where anything and everything security related gets tossed into the bucket when compared to the earlier example of the universal meaning of police officers, it is no wonder there is so much confusion about security. The problem is this confusion is not only perplexing, but it can be dangerous because of the plethora of consequences of a security failure up to and including the death of people.

The bit of good news is there are at least fairly solid industry and manufacturing standards, as well as some laws, covering devices and systems such as locks, lights, fencing, alarm systems, video systems, physical barriers, fire extinguishers, emergency medical tools, and defensive tactics devices. These industry and manufacturing standards create a sense of trustworthiness for the capabilities and dependability of most security hardware devices and components. While security devices and systems need to be installed based on the results of a security and risk management survey, the fact is they will likely work effectively and as designed. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about physical security personnel in terms of the widest of variance that exists between the selection, training, supervision, and operational capabilities from one security organization to another. It is when the term security is used to describe private security personnel the trouble often begins with the public as well as the law enforcement community.

While proprietary security programs are certainly not immune from being incompetent, it is in the contract security area where malignant ineptitude is most pervasive and problematic. The public's general assumption that a person who is wearing a police-like uniform knows what to do in case of an emergency is understandable. After all, the public has rightly become accustomed to the uniforms that are worn by public safety professionals such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and medics, as being an outward representation of the skills and capabilities those professionals possess. The sad reality is that the security uniform is not, in most cases, an outward representation of ANY essential skills or capabilities. One of the reasons security personnel are the brunt of jokes and movies such as "Armed and Dangerous" and "Paul Blart: Mall Cop" is because of the public's overwhelming perception of security personnel as being untrained and incapable. The lack of meaningful standards and laws for security personnel has resulted in the public having no way of knowing if the person who they see wearing a security uniform is a highly-trained professional who can handle anything, from an armed attacker to an emergency medical situation, or if that person who they see was working at a fast-food restaurant the day before and has zero training and capabilities. As is often the case, the public thinks the worst. Many in organizations that purchase security services have much of the same concerns.

There are both traditional contract security guard providers as well as some professional contract security services companies that provide security personnel to their clients. The problem is both traditional contract security

guards and professional contract security officers wear uniforms with the moniker "security" plainly showing. However, the core competencies between a traditional contract security guard and a professional security officer are most often cavernous. The sad reality is the widespread incompetence of most traditional security guards is the "dirty little secret" of the security industry and one that comprises the lion's share of the traditional contract security services community. This faulty process begins with traditional contract security companies hiring whomever they can get right off the street and then placing them in a uniform that is likely still warm from the guard who just turned it in. Then, the new guard is immediately shipped off to a post for "training" and 16-hour shift. When the new guard arrives on post, another senior guard (who was likely hired the week before) points to an outdated and incomplete post instruction manual and tells the new guard, "Read that." And, the cycle of incompetence continues. This is made possible in the name of money while ignoring integrity. Sadly, it is not at all unusual for sales people who represent traditional guard companies to intentionally lie to prospective clients by telling them that the guards the client will be getting are all carefully selected and highly trained professionals when they know that not to be true. Since the individual who actually purchases the guard services for the organization does not really have anything personally to lose if security fails, they go ahead and buy the cheap guard service. After all, the purchaser looks like a hero to his or her manager because of all the money they saved the organization by going with cut-rate security. All is good – that is right up until the time that someone gets hurt or dies because of the choice to purchase substandard guard service.

Under the supply and demand concept, those who purchase security services absolutely share the blame and liability for incompetent security. After all, unless there was a market demand for traditional warm body security, there would be no supply of the same. In fairness to many who purchase security services, they have the best of intentions and want to do a good job for their employer. As a result, they end up unknowingly hiring inept contract security services company through no fault of their own. However, they should learn after being fooled once. Sadly, many more purchasers of guard services know full well they are placing their organization and its people at great risk by the decision to buy the cheap guard service and forging ahead while hoping nothing will happen. And, if an adverse event does occur, the purchaser of the guard services can hide behind what they know are the misrepresentations they were told by the traditional guard company representative. The purchaser of the security services therefore believes they have plausible deniability in case an adverse event occurs. There are some purchasers of security services who are actually trusting enough to believe they can get a highly trained, professional security officer for nearly nothing, quickly find out what they have really purchased is a warm body in a uniform and their traditional contract security company is, in reality, nothing more than an employment agency for people that wear a security uniform.

Those who purchase security services need to know exactly what they are and are not getting from their security services provider. And, they need to insist on quality security and be willing to pay fairly for those services. Purchasers of contract security services also need to be candid with their organizations. No more accepting outlandish "we'll give you everything for nothing" assertions from the sales people of traditional guard companies and thinking that doing so is somehow okay. Doing so is not only unacceptable from an ethical standpoint, but can place the lives of their co-workers and their very organization in danger. Those who purchase traditional guard services to perform concierge, greeter, valet, ambassador, janitor, reception, facility specialist, watchman and other types of non-security work, should hire or contract to perform those functions but should call the jobs what they are, and not call them security. In short, security needs to mean security only. If anyone who purchases security services lacks the integrity and courage to do the right thing for their organization, then that individual needs to find another job with a far less level of responsibility thus clearing the way for someone to take the job that will properly look out for the organization's people, property, information and profits.

For their personal safety if nothing else, the public also has a right to know what capabilities, or the lack thereof, that the security personnel possess where they work, shop and live. Law enforcement as well as other public safety service entities also have a need to know what the competency level and the operational capabilities are of security personnel at all sites within their jurisdiction. For example, if there is a scenario where law enforcement agency receives a call for service about an active shooter at a site, the competency and operational capabilities of the security personnel who are on scene at that site is highly relevant. If law enforcement knows that the site has highly-trained and certified security professionals who are armed and are trusted by the jurisdiction's law enforcement personnel, then the response will be far different than if the site has a traditional contract security guards that are untrained, have no operational capabilities, and are directed to "observe and report" only. Law enforcement's response gets complicated very quickly if a situation exists wherein law enforcement is responding to an active shooter call at the site knowing there is armed security on-site, but the jurisdiction's law enforcement personnel either do not trust the security personnel at that site or if they simply do not know if the security personnel are or are not competent. One of the great benefits of strong public / private partnerships is law enforcement knowing what type of security is on-site before a major call for service comes in to law enforcement from a particular location.

The foundation of strong and vibrant public / private partnerships is forged out of mutual trust, respect, and is based on a platform of competency at all levels within the respective organizations. Due to nationwide law enforcement standards and core competencies, private security partners need not be concerned about the professional competency level of their law enforcement partners. However, since there are no bona fide nationwide standards and core competencies for private security personnel, competency concerns about

private security personnel exist within the law enforcement community. These concerns are not without merit and they highlight the need for meaningful, bona fide standards and core competencies for private security personnel at all levels. The standards and core competencies also need to be codified through legislation so they have the force of law. From the private security side, it is not enough for security managers only to be competent. Rather, all security personnel at all levels must be professionally competent in order for public / private partnerships to be built and sustained. This is because law enforcement cannot wonder about the competency of their private sector partners. If the public sector has any doubt whatsoever about the private sector's level of competency, a partnership will not work.

Security competency at all levels matters. It is both regretful and amazing that many security managers will earn the Certified Protection Professional (CPP) credential and other professional certifications, yet, those same managers will employ a traditional contract security guard company who then furnishes their organization with untrained guards who lack basic skills and capabilities. The highest trained and professionally certified security manager does not really matter if the line-level security personnel are not also fully competent. Unless everyone at every level within the security organization is trained and credentialed, the security organization is inadequate. Ron Minion, Dr. Norm Bottom and others who had the foresight to start the International Foundation for Protection Officers (IFPO) understood, and with great clarity, the problem posed with line level security officers and security supervisors not being trained. The IFPO's Certified Protection Officer (CPO) certification and their Certified in Security Supervisor and Management (CSSM) credential have provided security managers with a great tool to help everyone within a security organization, and at all levels, become certified professionals. Like it or not, the onus is on the private sector to prove their mettle to the public and to law enforcement because of the history of traditional contract security companies hiring people right off the street, placing them in a uniform and being directly sent to post for duty. This is one reason why the security industry needs to do the hard work and earn their way into becoming a profession.

The simple truth is there needs to be a new way of doing business with respect to how security personnel are classified and defined. The organizations that purchase security services and the array of public safety sector agencies all need a definitive and quantitative way to know which physical security personnel are highly-trained professionals and which ones are not. In fact, anything less than this "truth in advertising" is truly unconscionable. A good start would be for traditional contract security guard providers to start telling the truth about the operational capabilities (or the lack of) their guards possess and stop calling their guards security. As a part of the new way of doing business with respect to how security personnel are classified, the name "security guard" should be deleted and be replaced with a term that does not confuse a security guard with a professional security officer. Again, there are other names and terms that can be used to

substitute for security guard, such as, concierge, greeter, valet, ambassador, reception, janitor, facility specialist, watchman and many more types of services. This change is necessary because it is both intellectually dishonest and dangerous for any security services company to assert to anyone that their security personnel possess training and capabilities that they, in fact, do not possess. If those who represent traditional guard companies simply tell prospective clients the truth, then it is the prospective client who can then decide the type of services they want. If the prospective client chooses to purchase greeter and valet services, then at least that client understands and knows that their organization is not purchasing a security officer. By contrast, if the prospective client wants a professional security program wherein the security officers they will be getting have been carefully selected, highly trained, and are professionally-certified, then the prospective client can and should fully expect security officers to operate at a professional and competent level. Law enforcement personnel in all jurisdictions should also know exactly who in their community performs a valid security function.

It is the view of this author that the security industry can never transition to becoming a true profession unless the issue of bona fide standards and core competencies for private security personnel is definitively addressed and permanently resolved through both professional standards as well as legislative action that codifies those standards. Unless the right standards become law, then that will leave the door open for traditional guard companies to keep on telling prospective clients that the guards the client will be getting are all carefully selected and highly trained professionals when that is simply not factual. The door needs to be opened to the proverbial "crazy aunt in the closet" so there can be an open and honest dialogue about the best way to move the security industry forward so the security industry at all levels can become the security profession and competency concerns about private security personnel with the public and within the law enforcement community are no more.

What's in a word? When it comes to security, the large security bucket needs to be emptied out so the various parts can be properly categorized. The lack of a common classification method to describe security is a clear and serious barrier to public confidence as well as to improving public law enforcement and private security relations, and thus fostering effective public-private partnerships. Perhaps the security industry should define real, meaningful and adequate minimum training and certification standards so the word "security officer" can conjure up a fairly common mental image of someone who is carefully selected, professionally trained, operationally competent and conducts themselves on a solid moral platform of honesty and integrity. The word "security guard" can still conger up a common mental image of someone who is untrained, operationally incompetent and who cannot be relied upon. However, at least those who purchase security services and the law enforcement agencies who have to work with private security personnel would know exactly what the capabilities are (and are not) from a particular security services provider. The public as well as law enforcement in the community

has the right to know what the operational competency level of a particular security program is and is not.

As was previously stated, the collective public impression of police officers is they are trained professionals who can be depended upon to protect those who are in need or in trouble. The same needs to be true of those who wear the security uniform. Traditional guard services provide a negative value to organizations, are largely untrusted by the public, and are nearly always problematic to law enforcement. The traditional guard model truly needs to go the way of the dinosaurs. Actual security functions need to be completed with both electronic and other hardware security solutions, and/or professional security officers who have been carefully selected, highly trained, are professionally-certified, and who can operate at a professional and competent manner. This will drive the "security industry-to-security profession" transformation forward and will do so in a way that that adds real value to organizations as well as building public trust and creating strong and sustained public / private partnerships. At the same time, the non-security duties that traditional security guards now do can still be done. They will just need to be called something different and should not wear police-like uniforms or any moniker that states or infer they are security. Unless and until the time when this transition occurs in the area of physical security, the public and law enforcement will continue to have an overwhelmingly low opinion of security and widespread public / private partnerships will never be able to truly flourish. The time for this change is long past due.