

Is security seen as a profession?

Despite much greater recognition of the importance of effective security in the wake of recent world events, it's debatable whether the discipline is widely seen as a profession in the same way that accountancy or the law is recognised. **Ian Johnson** reviews some of the obstacles that have traditionally stood in security's way, and outlines several positive developments for the future.

Not many days pass by without our television screens being graced by an expert giving their views on current security threats. Undoubtedly, this helps to raise awareness among the general public

of security's pivotal role in protecting people and property. That said, does this higher profile in the media indicate a general view that security personnel going about their daily work are – or should be – of a high professional standing?

There's probably some way to go before we can say that is indeed the case and harbour any real conviction about the statement.

People's experience of security in their own workplace has a significant impact on its image. If the role is routinely low profile, it's unlikely to be awarded high status. It's not uncommon for employees to have a little idea of – or indeed interest in – who's in charge of security for their organisation, or what the function entails.

Sometimes, this state of affairs can arise from the approach of security managers themselves. They need to ensure that non-security employees are aware of what actions are being taken, why these are important in terms of protecting them, their property and the future of stability of the organisation for which they work and their role in ensuring that the company security policy succeeds.

All of this education should be an ongoing process, and not just a part of any induction training. Allowing an aura of mystique to surround the security role can only be counterproductive. Of course, security managers cannot shoulder all the responsibility for raising the profile of their role. The prevailing culture within an organisation can also undermine its status.

In the course of my own consultancy work, I've often observed a lack of commitment to security policy by the most senior personnel which results in the erosion of carefully developed plans. If a chief executive is refusing to use his ID card, or insists upon hoarding several of them, what impact will this have on other staff? The answer is only too obvious.

In addition, increasing litigation and the responsibilities of organisations in relation to corporate governance mean that there's a very pressing need for serious discussions to take place routinely at a high level. For all these reasons, I'd like to see security issues regularly appearing on the agenda at Board meetings.

CLIENTS CAN LOSE CONTROL

A growing trend – one which I believe shows a lack of acknowledgement of the importance and complexity of the security role – is that of putting all non-core functions out to a supplier who then hives off the security provision to yet another company. This often leads to a worrying loss of control by the client. A situation whereby performance is only measured when things start to go wrong. Make no mistake...there are significant difficulties involved in analysing and resolving problems speedily when they arise.

Being realistic about the current situation doesn't mean that we should underplay the very considerable strides that have been made. The Government and the police have been showing increasing recognition of the important role of security practitioners in preserving the community safety and Homeland security. This will continue to enhance our professional standing.

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By enabling greater participation from private sector organisations in community crime prevention initiatives, the Crime and Disorder Act and the

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Police Reform Act will help in raising the sector's profile and in increasing awareness of the scope of its activities.

Of course, the sector must also have a quality image if its practitioners are to be recognised as professionals in their field. Regulation of the security industry will play an important part in setting baselines requirements, but realistically legislation cannot be expected to assume total responsibility for setting professional standards in the private sector. In addition, as it stands, the legislation only applies to particular categories of personnel employed by security suppliers.

ATTAINING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Those of us at The Security Institute (TSI) believe it's an important part of our role to set the levels of attainment required in order to be fully-qualified security professional, and to award Institute membership accordingly. The flip side of this coin is TSI's work to ensure that employees, employers and those coming into contact with the sector recognise the value of achieving these professional standards.

I believe that difficulties in making an objective assessment about potential employees' attainments have led to rather too much focus on celebrity status (i.e. whether or not the employer has heard of them on the grapevine). This limits the pool somewhat, disadvantages worthy candidates and doesn't necessarily lead to finding the best person for the job. Institute validation provides employers with the same kind of evidence of achievement that has benefited those individuals and teams recruiting for accountancy, legal and personnel posts for a number of years.

For those just embarking on a career in the security sector or needing to enhance their skills, the Institute provides a mentoring role. Institute meetings, guidance on Best Practice and educational issues and discussion with highly experienced members from a wide range of backgrounds all help them to continue to acquire skills and qualifications. In turn, this enables the transition from associate and student categories to full membership.

OUR STATUS IS CHANGING

Sir John Stevens' appointment as Patron heralded a landmark for the Institute, illustrating the now closer relationship of the police with the private security sector. Also apparent from the fact that we know have a number of police personnel who are members.

While there'll still be bumps on the road ahead, I believe that the changing expectations of Government and the public at large, as well as new and challenging crime trends – coupled with the growing pride of security practitioners in their work – are already beginning to make a very significant changes to the perceived status of our profession in the wider society.

Ian Johnson is group managing director at IJA, the independent security and risk management consultancy - www.ija.co.uk and a Council member of The Security Institute (TSI), - www.securityinstitute.org.

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