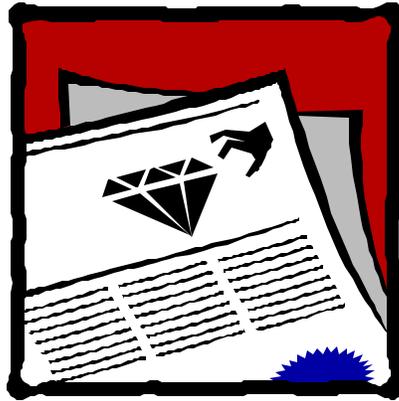




TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EVENTS

BY STEVEN R. KELLER, CPP



Ask any Security Director what most influences the level of security in his or her industry or institution and the answer is likely to be "events." The number of thefts or major single theft, the compromise of critical information, or assaults upon employees or visitors are the most likely events to affect the level of security awareness, the security department budget, or the level of cooperation from top management that the Security Director can count on.

In America, businesses are profit-oriented. Security costs are costs "off the top." Money spent on security and crime prevention is subtracted from profits and, it is often felt, detract from the overall profit picture of the company.

When a company makes its decision as to what security profile it shall undertake, that decision is often based upon current profit picture or economic health of the company, the perception of threat that the company may have to endure in the future, and, of course, the company's recent history of safety or security. Like American foreign policy, a comparison is made of cost and risk. "Cost-Risk Evaluation" has been a part of foreign policy for many years and remains an important consideration in security policy formulation for corporations. In making this assessment, the cost of security is weighed against the cost of potential and real losses. Most often, the decision of management is to maintain a level of security which is fundamentally at a level just above or below the anticipated cost of losses and lost-related expenses.

Too often, the level of security is established without adequately considering the true historical series of events, or without fully understanding the potential for loss in the future.

How many times have you heard a Security Director say, "Just because we haven't had a major loss in five years, they want to cut my budget." or a Safety Director say, "It's been three years since the fire, so now everyone has forgotten about the safety program."

Too often, security policy formulators and those who provide the budget to policy formulators fail to look at the true history of events

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which affect security for a company. They look at what they want to see. They say, "It's been ten years since we had a major loss." instead of saying, "We haven't had a loss in ten years. Our security program must be working." (Or if the program is inadequate, "We've been lucky.") They fail to say, "Our luck is running out after this long, so let's keep up our guard against loss. The odds are against us."

Because of this attitude, security policy and security awareness in private industry and public institutions change according to the history of security-related events or lack of them. After enjoying a period of reasonable security, security budgets and the degree of cooperation from top management are not always as good as they are after a serious loss or assault upon an employee or company executive. In this way, it can be said that "events" are the single most important factor in determining for a company what its security profile will be.

The skillful Security Director will be able to manipulate events to his own advantage. This is not to imply that the Security Director should cause events, but only use them to his best advantage. He will be able to document events so that he can present them to top management for their background as they formulate the security budget and profile.

A good Security Director will be able to manipulate events without expressing an "I-told-you-so" attitude. He will be able to convince top

management that, in order to avoid such events in the future, a certain security policy should be followed. He should be able to present events to top management without appearing to be paranoid or an alarmist.

Effective manipulation of events is a skill which is developed by the successful Security Director. It is a skill which must be practiced differently from company to company, but the basic elements are the same.

First, the Security Director must be able to document events which affect security or might affect security. A good, sound record-keeping or reporting system is essential. If you cannot account for all events which consume the time of your guards or other security personnel, develop such a system. Be able to show what unscheduled events cause a drain on your security profile on a routine or non-routine basis.

Second, compile the statistics from your reports and make them available in an annual or quarterly report to top management. Let them know that insignificant events such as minor thefts, false fire alarms, or other non-critical situations detract from your ability to respond to significant events.

Third, prepare detailed reports on all major events which affect your security. Major losses, fires, or serious close calls should be documented.

Don't forget events at other related institutions or corporations which signal a trend. If your institution is a

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bank, it is essential for you to know that other banks in the area are experiencing an increase in robberies. If your institution is an art museum, you should monitor the trends in art theft worldwide. If you protect a facility which houses company executives, you should be aware of recent criminal and terrorist crimes against corporate officials and prominent individuals. Just because it has been ten years since your institution had a major loss, there is no reason to believe that the potential for a major loss is not present.

Fourth, the successful Security Director will be able to convert an event which has pointed out a weakness in security profile into cash! That's right... cash! Don't be shy. After a major loss, company officials are often quite willing to repair the damage they have done to the security program by injecting new cash and support into the security department budget. After all, who, after a major loss, wants to tell the stockholders or the Chairman of the Board that he is against good security?

But you must be willing to act quickly, since security awareness in this profit-oriented society is not always long lived. Remember that security will always take a back seat to the real business of making money--as well it should. But an effective Security Director will be able to parlay a loss into a gain. He will be able to use that event in a subtle and diplomatic way to improve his program.

Remember that time is critical. You must get as much done after a serious event as you can. The failure to act quickly in using a serious event as leverage in improving your security profile will prove to be a major factor in not deriving the maximum benefit from that event.

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