BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING AN EXECUTIVE PROTECTION PROGRAM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE PROTECTION?

Many executives have bought into common misperceptions about executive protection. As the threat landscape has changed, so has the executive protection agent. The role of an executive protection professional encompasses far more than just a physical presence. Today’s protection professional is less physically imposing than those from another era but is far better prepared to identify threats before they materialize.

The commonly accepted image of a muscular bodyguard manhandling an executive and physically intimidating anyone in proximity is no longer the reality. Threats do not always appear in the form of an assassin or a kidnapper, and protecting a principal and their family members often requires brains instead of brawn. In contrast to the mythical muscle-bound bodyguard, protecting a principal also requires softer skills such as the ability to exercise diplomacy and tact.

Today’s executive security professional understands that companies expect much more than just brute force. Modern-day executive security professionals must possess many skills, including emergency medical training and counter-surveillance expertise. They may also have investigative training, be computer literate, and speak one or more languages.

In addition to protecting the principal, today’s high-caliber agent is capable of delivering far more benefits than those provided by the stereotypical bodyguard. As an example, in an era when social media can transmit embarrassing information around the globe in seconds, protecting the principal’s reputation and shielding them from potentially compromising situations is critical. Due to the advanced planning and attention to detail necessary to deliver executive protection, an agent can also help ensure that a principal uses their time efficiently.
DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS REQUIRE A BROAD RANGE OF SKILLS

Today’s agents must protect an executive in all aspects of their life – in their office, in their home, while traveling, and at special events such as shareholder meetings. Providing executive protection requires differing approaches based on the environment.

• **In the office:** Agents who work in the conservative atmosphere of a corporate environment must be part of a proven team of mature, discreet personal security professionals. Their role is to supplement Corporate Security by quietly providing responsive and dependable yet resourceful security risk management while remaining inconspicuous and sensitive to the culture of the C-Level.

• **While traveling:** Busy travel schedules require that agents provide a consistent level of service in the United States and overseas. To sustain this standard of service, agents must receive the same training and corporate support regardless of the country in which they are located.

• **Protecting a principal and their family members in the home environment:** Nowhere is the trust and confidence clients place in their personal security professional more critical or appreciated than in estate security. Using a range of tools and techniques, including vulnerability assessments, client training and awareness, and access control and monitoring, agents must collaborate as a team and with the principals to ensure a safe environment for the executive and their family.

• **Protecting principals, executives, VIPs, and the boards of directors, etc., at high-profile events:** When assigning security teams to meetings of stockholders and executive boards, agents must understand and be sensitive to business etiquette and corporate culture. This level of support requires a professional, experienced security staff that excels at facilitation, interaction, taking direction from superiors, and in maintaining a discrete but vigilant security presence.
IMPLEMENTING AN EXECUTIVE SECURITY PLAN

Whether a company seeks to outsource its executive protection program or adjust an existing one, the following steps typically apply.

• **Assessment**: The initial assessment of the threats facing an executive.

• **Developing recommendations**: Risk ranking the threats and their likelihood.

• **Securing approval**: Communicating a range of options to address risks uncovered during the assessment and securing the executive’s approval to implement.

• **Implementing a program**: Approved recommendations become the executive’s security plan.

• **Adopting a continuous improvement mindset**: Evolution of the security plan to reflect material changes in the threat landscape.

**ASSESSMENT**

The first step is to conduct a thorough risk analysis that includes identifying the individuals who are critical to the organization, assessing the impact to the corporation if they were lost, and examining the risks that each of those individuals faces. To create an in-depth analysis of an executive’s security risk and options, security professionals must have good listening skills. Only after carefully listening to the client’s explanation of their security and business needs can an agent develop a risk mitigation plan.

Once the company has determined the individuals who need protection, the next step is to gather intelligence regarding their public and private lifestyles.

Creating a “principal profile” requires the executive’s full cooperation. It includes gathering information regarding the individual’s work and home life — everything from detailed information about their house, their family’s habits, and any organizations and clubs they frequent. While some executives keep a very low profile, others aggressively court media attention and risk attracting the attention of undesirables. Is there a history of threats against the executive? Do they travel regularly to dangerous places? What kinds of crimes or dangerous situations present the greatest vulnerability for them? Does the principal have medical conditions such as hypertension, a history of seizures, or severe allergies? Are they unfamiliar with security procedures and appear unaware of the risks they face?

A principal profile also captures information regarding how the executive and his or her family travels, the residential properties they own, the guests they entertain, their alarm systems, the cars they drive, their hobbies, and their children’s hobbies. It is also important to investigate how easily outsiders can get information about the principal and his or her family.

The information gathered via the principal profile is used to create a list that details the threats the executive and his or her family faces, including the most dangerous as well as the most likely.
Do Not Overlook the Principal’s Executive Assistant

If an executive protection agent is to succeed, he or she must establish and maintain a relationship with the principal’s executive assistant. By virtue of their role, an executive assistant can exercise considerable control and influence over the principal. In fact, the executive assistant often serves as the primary point of contact for the principal’s security needs.

In addition to influencing the principal, the executive assistant often serves as the liaison with the company’s Corporate Security function.

If an agent fails to establish a working relationship with the principal’s executive assistant, or that relationship deteriorates over time, the agent may soon learn that their services are no longer in demand.

DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS

With a rank-ordered list of all of the threats a client may face, it is possible to develop recommendations to mitigate those threats. For each threat, there should be two to three recommendations that will effectively lessen or eliminate the threat. Too often, inexperienced or incompetent executive security firms with limited solutions to offer will avoid compiling a principal profile and default to recommending a course of action that matches the firm’s capabilities. The program they recommend may actually worsen the situation by introducing additional types of risk that the executive did not face prior to the implementation.

SECURING APPROVAL

Securing approval to implement an executive security plan involves meeting with the client and having them review and select from the list of recommendations. The plan should contain a customized set of solutions that addresses the threats previously identified using the principal profile. It should also include costing information and other data such as the impact of implementing the recommendation on the principal’s lifestyle, which consequently allows the decision makers to make informed decisions.

The recommendations approved by the executive and/or the Corporate Security Department become the executive’s security plan.

Of course, executive protection programs do come with a cost. Large companies accept that executive security expenditures are a necessary cost of doing business in an increasingly dangerous world. They justify the investment in executive protection by recognizing that top executives are some of the company’s most valuable assets – and they want to treat them that way.

Sometimes, stakeholders seek to put up roadblocks by objecting to the program. To manage stakeholder objections about perceptions and costs, companies can take a number of steps. These include educating stakeholders on the business advantages of executive security, debunking misperceptions, and phasing in the program.
Companies also sometimes sidestep the issue of costs by folding executive security expenses into expenses that are not listed in SEC filings or even under-reporting them. In managing public perception, corporations may receive unexpected help from the public. It is worth noting that Americans spend more than $25 billion a year on professional security products.

As a final defense of the program, corporations can always point to the bottom line. Companies that engage security professionals receive quantitative benefits in the form of reduced security and reputational risk, as well as increased C-Level executive productivity.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Mature and insightful agents are trained to recognize when an executive might be reluctant or even want to refuse to participate in a protection program. In these cases, agents must work with that executive to gain his or her confidence and demonstrate that the program is worth the company's investment. The agents assigned to the executive’s detail will be articulate, well organized, and capable of discreetly addressing all aspects of the social, business, and personal security needs of their principal and his or her family.

The final plan may include 24/7 support through centralized and staffed operation centers that allow agents to respond quickly to emergencies around the world. By closely aligning their operation to match the way that clients run their businesses, operations centers play a crucial role in the successes of their clients.

The advisory staff at operations centers should be trained to use the latest technology to track the status of ongoing engagements and urgent service requests minute-by-minute as well as to coordinate emergency response requests received from around the world.

**ADOPTING A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MINDSET**

The threat landscape constantly evolves, and an executive protection program that exists today may not meet the challenges of tomorrow. Periodically, companies and their executive protection professionals should assess the effectiveness of the program in ensuring the safety of the principal and their family. As an example, as the principal’s family ages, the threats they face will change. The threats facing the principal’s parents will also evolve as those individuals age.

In addition, the principal’s business dealings may also help shape changes in the threat landscape. Entering a new market, launching a new product, or receiving increased media exposure can raise a principal’s public profile and change the type and severity of threats they face.

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**One Size Does Not Fit All**

Companies should be wary of consultants who offer standard “off-the-shelf” plans. Truly effective plans will offer a methodical approach that will fully examine every critical area of an executive’s security environment: the office, the residence, and local and out-of-town travel.

The most effective agents will develop a fully-customized solution to address the principal’s circumstances, ranging from the routine to the unusual to the highly complex.
BEST PRACTICES THAT ADDRESS COMMON CHALLENGES

Companies that implement executive protection programs should follow a set of generally accepted best practices. These include asking risk analysis questions early and often in the process of establishing the program; basing the program on research and preparation; making protection feel like a perk by, for example, helping an executive head off the headaches often associated with travel; educating executives who want to resist protection about the potential but very real dangers to themselves and their families because of the executive’s importance to the company and its brand; building a network of contacts throughout the company and the executive’s travel destinations; and ensuring protection for an executive’s spouse and children, who may well be more vulnerable than the executive.

It is also important to help executives realize that while a specific threat associated with travel may go away, executive protection has more to do with personal safety and logistics than it does with handling assassination or kidnap attempts.

The executive protection program exists largely to preserve the medical health and safety of executives. Every executive can relate to people who have had heart attacks or other medical issues while at work. Educating them about the benefits provided while traveling and the opportunity for increased productivity so they can have more family time at home will go a long way to convincing them of the ongoing need for the program.

STEELE CSS’S APPROACH TO EXECUTIVE PROTECTION

With 18 offices on four continents, STEELE has 20-plus years of experience in solving corporate and government security challenges. Clients have included the Office of the President in multiple countries, as well as religious leaders, dignitaries, royalty, and heads of private industry.

In addition to executive protection, STEELE provides other critical services that include: Workplace Stability Services to resolve labor disputes and other disruptive events; Incident Management And Crisis Response, which gained STEELE the honor of becoming the first private security company to mount a response effort to support companies and their employees stricken by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; and Consulting Services that provide customized solutions, which include personal as well as physical security-related assessments, the deployment of technical security counter measures, and the administration of special investigations regarding allegations of fraud or asset theft.

To find out why more than 800 companies and half of the Fortune 100 trust STEELE’s experienced security professionals to help ensure confidence and peace of mind for their C-Level team, visit www.steelecss.com.