

Originally receiving the majority of my training in the military, I have been in the security and close protection industry for well over 15 years and, over the years, have taught literally hundreds of trained professionals – law enforcement, military, security professionals, intelligence agents – as well as a great many untrained personnel entering the industry for the first time.

Having met a vast range of people and been in many situations I believe there are many things still substandard, missing or lacking in the profession including effective communication, professionalism, a definite lack of leadership skills and professional courtesy, and a comprehensive knowledge of the profession. There is also a distinct lack of specific industry skills and knowledge and basic education, and a definite need for psychological trainings and evaluations, conflict resolution and management, thorough risk assessment ability and general man management skills. Although this is changing slowly, close protection training in Canada is still significantly behind the training offered in many other countries including the UK. I also believe that good training should also feature a detailed understanding of the liabilities of the close protection agents, a detailed analysis of body language, detailed profiling of possible aggressors as well as the all important capacity to deal with stress and operating in demanding and hostile environments.

Bodyguard

There is support for soldiers working in Iraq or Afghanistan, but very little support for the private contractor.

There are various reasons behind assignments in the private industry and most security companies run background checks on their client as a matter of course. But if you are tasked as an individual to provide personal protection to someone you should always request a criminal background check on the client and, if neces-

Key Points to Being a Good

By
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“Close protection is a great industry, enjoy it!”

sary, also check with the credit reporting agencies – the last thing you want as a professional close protection officer is to find yourself hired by someone involved in the criminal world.

A decade or so after the Second World War, the close protection profession underwent an evolution of a kind and celebrities, pop stars, artists and actors all employed an entourage of beefy, mean looking security guards. Bodyguards to the celebrity sector were (and still are) built like brick walls, which are certainly great to hide behind, but with many, intellect was definitely missing. Most people in the protection industry will end up protecting a celebrity at some point, even for just a short period of time, and it can be quickly realised that for many celebrities it is cool to have bodyguards and a trend they feel they have to follow rather than because of any specific threat against them.

A very important factor in an executive protection assignment is the legal contract between the protection company and the executive or his corporation. This aspect is often missed. No matter if the contract is a one-day assignment or for six months or more, a contract is a very important aspect of an operation as subjects, issues and protocol have to be clearly stated in the contract between you and your client, which could ultimately keep you safe if anything goes wrong. Remember, no one will remember the thousand things over the years

in your profession which you have done right, the only thing people will remember is your one and only screw-up.

Another very important and often neglected aspect of a protection assignment is that if you need to use aeroplanes, limousines or any other method of transportation you need to assign a liaison officer between contractors, client and yourself. If possible the protection company should organise this, but try not to let the client arrange it as you personally want to make sure there

are no last minute delays or fuck-ups and have very little control over things if they are managed by the client.

Approximately sixteen months ago I accompanied a client to Mexico for an eight-day assignment. Contracts were all signed and sealed six weeks before the assignment commenced; all necessary details were arranged, the retainer cleared and we completed our reconnaissance efficiently and effectively. Everything went to plan until the chartered plane was delayed; the airline overlooked notifying the Chief of Security who handled those matters. If a specific liaison officer had been assigned this would not have happened.

As all of in the industry know, fuck-ups never come alone and on this assignment we started with one, what else was going to go wrong?

We arrived in Mexico at a private airport and initially all went well, the transport was smoothly organised and the local traffic into town was not too much of a killer; however the client suddenly decided to make changes in his travel arrangements again without notifying his Chief of Security. Clients can sometimes be very difficult people to work with! So last minute arrangements had to hastily be made without compromising the executive's safety and comfort.

Since the assignment was in Mexico City, where I had an office, we could facilitate this change and all our local drivers were trained to the same high standards like our other Canadian, US and European counterparts. However the armoured vehicle we were using came with its own driver - which happens from time to time, as transportation companies, for insurance purposes, occasionally require their own driver.

The driver was checked out and seemed fine and upon arrival at the hotel and the VIP was settled in his secured suite, I returned to the driver who was stationed at his vehicle and made sure the vehicle would not be compromised in any way. I spoke to him briefly and, as I checked over the vehicle, I immediately noticed that the fuel gauge was well below half-way, which could be a major security risk, especially with the additional weight of an armoured vehicle plus driving in a possible hostile environment. The thought of running out of petrol with a client sent shivers down my spine. When I asked, he answered that his boss did not give him the money to fuel up before departure! They were now in breach of security protocol which they had signed off six weeks before the assignment.

Now every protection office will ask himself; what else has happened? Has the driver's integrity been compromised? Will the VIP and protection team be compromised? Since the local security company was already in breach of contract, we solved the matter by demanding we immediately relieve the driver of his duties and place our driver into the task. Our driver was a native Mexican and knew the streets and routes.

However, not knowing whether we had been compromised, we changed all the prearranged routes, the times for departure and arrival; in fact everything the previous driver was aware of and was able to securely complete the assignment without any further problems. Fuck-ups never come alone.

Assignments are never the same no matter how many times similar procedures are being implemented, and each time we prepare for an assignment, all through the assignment, and at debriefing afterwards, lessons will always be learnt. It is a never ending process.

One of the main skills a protection agent should possess is communications and conflict resolution. Communication is one of the most important aspects in any security and protection detail. NATO uses the English language in all their operations worldwide. No matter which country they originate from NATO soldiers across the world use English for all their radio communications because language and communication must be consistent and standard for effective multi-cultural cultural, multi-national security operations. If you are tasked to provide international security to a company that does not use English as a standard form of communication, think twice about joining them, misunderstanding can lead to injury and death.

Working close to your client you may not always be recognised as a close protection specialist, you might be introduced as a business associate, business partner or colleague, personal or public relations assistant, which then enables you to conduct covert protection as you will be able to stay close to the VIP, without too much attention. Covert / undercover approach to personal protection can be a very effective form of security.

Some protection assignments are a lot less interesting than others, especially low profile or long-term assignments that require a certain daily routine in functions and duties. However never try to create patterns in your assignment; modify your patrol times,

change directions of departure, switch vehicles and how the VIP travels, change your pattern randomly and seconds before departure, and also advise the VIP / Client to do the same if his schedule and arrangements allow him to do so.

For long-term assignments it is very important to build up a rapport with your client / VIP and anyone else associated with the operation. Effective and good communications will not only assist you with having an easier and less stressful assignment, but also keeps you up-to-date on the client's day to day activities, especially private and social engagements. Etiquette in social situations with your client is a very important tool in the industry; no one will ever be retained if they embarrass the client in any way or at any time. A good protection agent should feel comfortable on the streets of Iraq or at an exclusive event at a foreign Embassy.

The most important aspect of any protection assignment is keep your VIP safe and secure at all times. Remember the VIP's reputation is also his life and you are hired to protect his life. Don't ever forget; dead VIP's will never pay their bills. Each day you and your client returns home without incident or injury is a great day and it means you have conducted yourself in a professional manner. Keep a professional image at all times and try to be extremely diplomatic and tactful in situations involving the VIP, as well diplomatic towards your teammates, no matter if they work for the same company or contracted out. There are too many cowboys out there already and you don't ever want to be known as one. Keep in mind that a good reputation is hard to build, whereas a bad reputation dead easy to achieve.

Close protection is a great industry, enjoy it!

Marc is currently Managing Director of VIP Protection based in Canada and has offices in Mexico, China and France. He studied personal protection, weapons, explosives, law and security and the handling and defusing of high sensitive explosives at the Military Academy. He is a Certified Executive Protection Specialist (CEPS), Certified Anti Terrorism Specialist, (CAS) and an instructor at the Military Academy for close combat, anti-terrorism, close protection and weapons. He also instructs in hostage negotiations. You can contact Marc at: marc@vip-protection.ca