

THE BODYGUARD

Just under a year ago I graduated from a recognized Executive Protection Training Course, and after doing some pretty consistent work for the sponsor company; I am now presented with an opportunity to join an existing team escorting a very prominent VIP for a week in Miami, which would include a major performance centered around an event filled weekend. I was absolutely floored. While not my first detail, this was the first with a celebrity, let alone one of this stature.

REWIND.....

The boss calls me in his office and explains; “If the budget will allow for us to bring you in, would you like the opportunity to act as a security driver for six days on Miami’s South Beach for a high-profile client?” I instantly answered “Absolutely!” This was my chance to show everyone my value. I didn’t even ask what the rate was, for the experience I was going to get, I would have paid my employer to go. I instantly went to work as I left the boss’s office. It wasn’t even a sure thing that I would be joining the team for what I’ve dubbed Mission Miami, but I wanted to stack the deck in my favor as much as I could—just in case.

While waiting for the green light, I started watching the daily weather forecast to get an idea of how to pack. I was amazed to see the temperature in South Beach in January got down to 30 degrees Fahrenheit. I put together a go-bag, planning for the worst and hoping for the best. I also downloaded a map of the area. As I studied Google Earth, I knew the key to my success would come from a portable GPS; an invaluable tool. My mindset was to travel as light as I could with no checked baggage at the airport to slow me down. For this trip, I purchased a Wagner Laptop Backpack that would fit all the basics I would normally have in my go-bag such as: chargers, batteries, passport, business cards, energy drinks, maps, flashlight, day planner, camera, pens and so on.

Next, I was going to pack my luggage carry-on bag tightly, hoping I would be able to fit everything I needed in it. I had packed all the clothes I needed with one mistake; I only brought one suit. My first lesson: On any job more than two days, bring at least one other distinct suit. I learned from the team leader to bring along a portable steamer for your dress shirts and suits. This allows you to pack them tightly in a regular bag, yet easily get the creases out once they’re unpacked. To minimize the chance of being slowed down through security checkpoints at the airport, I decided to purchase travel size toiletries such as

deodorant, toothpaste, hair gel, and razors at the local pharmacy when I reached my destination.

For phase two of my planning, I researched local car rental places to check the prices and availability on the desired vehicle for this trip. The key when renting cars is establishing a personal relationship with the rental agent. No one wants to guarantee models, let alone colors, but for this trip my intentions were to secure a black XL Cadillac Escalade, so that’s what I made happen. A key point: try and establish a rapport with every resource you may need during your assignment. People will think outside the box for you if they like or respect you. All my ducks are in a row, so now I’m on standby.

A few days later I get the call, “MISSION MIAMI IS A GO.” Understandably, I experience some anxiety, so to regain focus, I study my maps closer, unpack my bags, take inventory, and repack them again. I reach out to the car company and verify nothing has changed, confirm my flights, and call the Agent In Charge for a briefing on what is expected of me when I am on the ground. This is my shot. It’s my opportunity to show both the team and the Principal the value I bring to the big picture, that I’m the guy to call on for future assignments. The next few nights lying in bed are filled with anticipation, and some anxiety. What could go wrong? Everything could go wrong. Then I snap out of it, I wanted it, now I have it, time to focus on the job.

Day One

I get on my plane with my backpack and carry-on. We are now just sitting at the end of the tarmac waiting for our turn to take off. We end up sitting for an hour as the airlines de-ice the plane. Thoughts go through my head of missing my connecting flight. Before much longer, we are taking off heading to a connecting city for a short layover. I make my connection, and within a few hours I am landing in Miami.

DIARY

by MIKE BRIGGS



AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NEW GUY

Entry 67# Mission Miami

On the ground, and it’s go time, essentially a stranger in a strange land with a lot of advance work to do. I secure the vehicle and start my advance to the hotel on South Beach. I meet up with the AIC and go over the week’s itinerary, taking special note of each destination we may visit. Our team lead and I drive the routes together discussing construction, traffic, parking, and other various scenarios. Advance and route cards completed, we are ready for our principal who arrives tomorrow. After a long day of advance work, the lead and I decide to get some rest. We pick up our principal at the airport in the morning.

Day Two

I depart from the hotel to the airport for our pickup, along with our team lead. On the way, we are discussing the itinerary, at which point I notice a police officer on the side of the road pointing at us and motioning to pull over. I am thinking to myself, I must have been speeding, but I haven’t noticed any speed limit signs, and it is a three-lane highway? The limit must be 55mph, right? Wrong. It is a poorly marked area that quickly goes from 55mph to 40mph. I’m busted and given a \$295.00 speeding ticket. Can you believe this? I am in Miami for less than a day, and I already have to spend \$295.00 on my driving—thank God the client wasn’t in the car.

We arrive at the airport and our team lead heads into the baggage claim area to meet our Principal as I am staging the vehicle. Moments later, he arrives with the principal, and we are off to the hotel to drop bags and get some rest before heading over to a rehearsal studio. A few hours later, I drop off the principal at his appointment. It’s quite a bumpy ride but everything goes well. According to the itinerary, this gives me several hours of down time knowing they will not be leaving. I take this opportunity to wash the car and fuel it up. I also got the chance to re-run some routes. A few hours later, I return and meet the AIC outside the studio bringing him up to speed on my advance work. After many hours of rehearsal, we are on our way back to the hotel, and down for the night.

Day Three

We are our way to a large convention center for a live radio interview. I make a wrong turn twice while driving, but was lucky that the principal did not notice. We finally get to our destination and due to the massive crowd, the AIC asked me to exit the vehicle and become the front escort, essentially leading the formation into the venue. I notice myself making rookie mistakes like allowing too much

exposure by getting too far in front of the principal while walking. Another challenge came during the live radio interview. Our VIP was being interviewed by a famous comedian and I caught myself, more than once, getting pulled into the humorous conversation. It took a team member to point out to me through my earpiece, and I kicked myself for losing focus. After the interview, we worked our way back to the hotel for a bit, with plans to shortly move to the concert venue for a sound check and rehearsal. Not long after we get back to the hotel, we are notified of a tropical storm moving into the area which will directly affect the concert. After a flurry of activity, the resolution is moving the show to the following night. The team gets an early night off, but of course, still on standby.

Day Four

Up early and getting to feel much more comfortable with the routes. With each passing hour I notice the traffic starting to build at a ridiculous rate. We have another appointment to attend; a radio interview, and with all the festivities associated with the event growing, it’s a madhouse outside. I start to identify alternative routes to avoid as much of the congestion as I can. As a matter of fact my plan worked so well, we almost arrive early, so I shaved some time in traffic intentionally so that the client wouldn’t be sitting around waiting. Interview complete and now some shopping.

Later in the afternoon we make our way to the show site. The band gets ready and the security team gets to work as our principal starts rehearsing. Our secondary objective, other than the safety of our principal, is recording devices. Our principal will be performing songs from an album that will not be released for several weeks yet, so I am tasked with politely working the crowd, requesting no recording devices. This was an excellent opportunity, as I also became responsible for VIP entry into the show, meeting many contacts from corporate execs to rock stars. I also learned something valuable: you never know who you may be talking to. I couldn’t believe the influential people I was meeting, some recognizable, some not so much. Just by focusing on my task, I believe my agency is going to see some future jobs from the connections I made.

The show ends in success and our principal wants to visit with another high profile individual in a VIP area on the other side of the venue, at the client’s request, we take the most direct route, through the crowd. You can try and teach the skill of moving a principal through a crowd in the classroom, but you can’t even come close to the real world

experience. Imagine a swarm of people all wanting to touch or talk to one of the biggest stars in the world. Your head is on a swivel, and your senses are wired. All goes well, and after getting the client back to the vehicle, its back to the hotel for the night. Tomorrow is Super Bowl Sunday and we expect to be busy.

Day Five

Super Bowl Sunday and I've received word that the Principal plans on attending. I make a run to the stadium to research if the route I previously planned is still my best plan of attack. I also intend to meet a representative from the NFL to find out where the celebrity entrance is and what special arrangements

can be made for my VIP, such as a police escort. Advance complete and now back to the hotel to report my findings to our team lead. With everything set, I spend the next couple of hours waiting for the client to exit. Then at the last minute our VIP decides to avoid the mayhem of the Super Bowl and just catch the game on television! Work for us was much easier than we obviously had anticipated—or at least I thought.

After the game, the strip on South Beach is crazy with fans and every hotel and bar is packed. Our Principal decides to celebrate with associates at a few hot spots, so we are on the go from nightclub to nightclub until

the early hours of the morning. Thank you Five Hour Energy Drinks for the boost! Just before we are to head back to the hotel, a large fight breaks out just in front of the car as our VIP is ready to leave. I alerted the AIC by radio that we need a minute or two for club security and the authorities to get this handled. We ended up keeping our principal from walking into a mess by moving to an alternate exit. Back to the hotel, just as the sun is rising and the birds start singing.

Day Six

I get up very early and prepare for several trips to the airport. Everyone is flying out today, with the first, and most important, our Principal. He is ready to go, and enters the car. Just before I pull away our team lead discovers his plane is delayed for two hours. The principal goes back to his hotel and the decision is made to send me off, so as not to miss my flight before I depart, I hear him mention to the AIC, the "new guy is pretty good". With a hidden smile, I get to the airport, board the plane, and head home from Miami – just in time to shovel out the driveway from the snowstorm that welcomed me home.

While I may be the "FNG" on the detail, I believe I served the client and my team well. What an experience... getting paid for doing something you love in a competitive industry like this has cemented the fact that this is exactly the right career for me.

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