



CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE PROTECTION

According to the FBI, there is an average of 6.7 kidnappings and 5.5 murders for every 100,000 people in the United States. Although these statistics refer to the general population, executives and high profile individuals, as well as their families, are included in this figure. In a continuous effort to curb these numbers, many organizations seek out executive protection services, which are typically performed by high-end security companies. As part of their initial process a security guard company usually begins its executive protection plan by performing a comprehensive risk assessment. It is here that the risks against the executive are identified, measured and are implemented to prevent these risks from materializing. Many considerations are factored into this process, which can vary depending on the client and circumstances. For instance, the client may be a political figure with a controversial stance, or the child of a prominent business tycoon. The former might run a higher assassination risk, whereas the latter might have a higher risk for kidnapping. Each scenario poses a completely different set of challenges.

Risk Assessment Does Not Fit Into a Perfect Mold

As those who have been in the executive protection business for any length of time will tell you, in many cases, risk assessment for executive protection—in practice—is not always that straightforward. There are instances where one is assigned to a principal against whom there is really no obvious threat. With a case of this type, many security professionals working alone—and even some working in a group—run the risk of falling into complacency, which can result in grave mistakes and security holes if a situation were to arise.

For instance, take a situation where you are assigned to protect a much-loved philanthropic business executive. A background check on the principal may show that this is a person who has worked his way up using the straight and narrow path, making no enemies in the process—or so it seems. The problem with most of the methods used for checking these kinds of facts is that they tend to take note of only

the major incidents in a person's history; therefore, no mention is made of things like the insubordinate employee that the executive might have had to fire. The affected individual might still be holding a grudge—perhaps feeling that his/her life was ruined by, what they consider to have been, an 'unfair dismissal.' As surprising as it might seem, there have been cases of people killing others over matters of even less significance. Moreover, some methods used to establish the kinds of risks facing an executive tend not to mention some of what might be considered significant happenings in his/her personal life, which could also turn out to have major security implications. Take for instance love triangles, which may have left behind a partner who felt that their 'lover was stolen' and still yearns for any opportunity to exact revenge. As improbable as it may sound, this experience may be of enough concern to pose a security threat, and as such, should be considered as part of the risk assessment.

The Low-Risk Case

What emerges from all of these scenarios is that while there are indeed some executive who might be considered relatively 'low risk' cases, there is clearly no executive who can be considered a 'zero risk' case. A security professional's perspective on this matter should be that 'if there was no risk against the executive, then there clearly would be no need for me to be here.' Security professionals are hired to guard against certain risks, so it is their duty to accurately identify such risks and implement measures to guard against them. This is a fact that security professionals might lose sight of if they think that their hiring is due to a matter of procedure, rather than due to actual need or risk. For instance, if a given organization's top executives are always assigned bodyguards, there is a risk of a newcomer feeling that they are there because having a bodyguard is one of the 'perks' of being a top executive for the organization and that there is no actual risk. This would be a huge departure from the proper perspective on this matter. The assignment of bodyguards, or security staff, to these top executives is necessary because there is always a risk when you are in any high-profile role, whether it be business, political, religious or social. There might be 'low risk' cases, but there is never a 'zero risk' case, as far as executive protection assignments go.



Equating 'Low Risk' with 'No Risk'

The ramifications of equating 'low risk' with 'no risk' can be grave. This is a business where mistakes can result in death, either of the executive or of the guard. The first and foremost danger of equating 'low risk' with 'no risk' is, as previously mentioned, that the security professional charged with overseeing the wellbeing of an executive may fall into complacency, thereby making serious blunders with regard to security arrangements. It is due to these lapses that we hear about cases of executives, or their families, being kidnapped in spite of having bodyguards, or security staff, by their side.

Another danger of inaccurately gauging risk becomes apparent when you consider that the perpetrators will be looking out for behaviors and telling signs that depict this type of scenario by simply reading the guards and the supposedly protected environment. Criminals can read a secured environment and spot weaknesses and mood. They can be spurred into action, or completely diffused, simply by what they see. They may also make adjustments their plans. Rather than assassinate an executive, perpetrators might decide to instead kidnap him. For instance, if the security environment is close to an open body of water, and the guards are not in possession of fast nautical transportation, the perpetrators can easily take advantage of this clear security weakness. They have, essentially, been provided with an easy method of escape, which can be identified by a simple visual inspection. Hence, if the guards charged with the client's safety only implemented safeguards against assassination, and absolutely no measures to counter the risk of abduction, there is no telling what harm can be done.

Yet another danger of equating 'low risk' with 'no risk' is that it can lead to loss of professional credibility, even where the potential risk is caught before fully manifesting. Your role as a security professional is to ensure the well being of the executive in question; therefore, should you let the executive fall into harm's way, it would reflect poorly on your professional capabilities. In the aftermath of such an incident, it should be of no surprise if you end up losing your executive protection role.

Executive protection is a specialized security service and customers expect all bases to be covered. Therefore, it reflects very badly on the executive protection professional charged with ensuring the wellbeing of the principal in question (and, consequently, the company they work for) when it emerges that some potential risks were left unidentified during risk assessment. Granted, bad things do happen in spite of best efforts; but should that fate befall an executive in your care, it should be clear in the inevitable investigation that follows that you—as an executive protection professional—had at the very least anticipated the event in your risk assessment. This means that it would be a case of protective measures failing, rather than a case of failing to anticipate risks.

How Preparedness Can Affect the Outcome

There are many instances of executives falling into grave danger because of what appears to be security detail neglect (typically not deliberate) that one can learn from. Perhaps one of the most famous cases is the death of Princess Diana of Wales. On the 31st of August 1997, Princess Diana died in a car accident in the Pont de l'Alma road tunnel in Paris, France. She was accompanied by her companion and guards assigned to protect the couple during their evening out on the town. After an eighteen-month French judicial investigation, they concluded that the crash was caused by the security team driver, whose errant driving had been incited by paparazzi photographers, and impaired by the influence of drugs and alcohol. A subsequent inquest conducted at the Royal Courts of Justice in London concluded that the accident was the result of the negligent driving of both the security team driver, as well as the paparazzi photographers, whom they had sought to evade. Either way, proper planning and an accurate assessment of the security risk, should have been effected. In this case, the security team driver decided to solve the security challenge at hand by placing the individuals, which he had been assigned to protect, in unnecessary levels of danger.

Sometimes security threats aren't caused by the actions of others. As a security professional assigned to ensure the health and safety of your customers, you must be ready to confront and solve every security challenge that arises, even if it comes from the cust-

omer himself. As an example of executive protection done right, take the case of popular Australian musician and reality TV executive Ozzie Osbourne. Osbourne found himself facing danger not from a human saboteur, but from his own bike, and were it not for his bodyguard's quick action (and knowledge of CPR), Osbourne would have, in his own words, "lost his own life." These examples underscore the need to ensure that proper security assessments of every risk are considered and conducted when it comes to executive protection.

Whether you operate a security company in New York or in California, the rules are the same. Assessment skills can be just as effective and useful as any other skill that a guard may have. It may even be the most important when it comes to preventing security situations. These skills need to be honed even in a low-risk environment, and no risk should be left unplanned for simply because it is unlikely to happen. Security guards and officers tasked with providing executive protection must cover all the bases if they expect to keep their client's free from danger. It should be every protection professional's basic view that anyone they are assigned to is at every imaginable risk (albeit in varying degrees.) By executing proper assessments and assigning appropriate risk levels, security professionals can more effectively and accurately safeguard their clients against all types of security threats.

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