

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SECURITY

Education Based Discipline

For the Security Industry

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A new way of looking at disciplinary options within the private security industry, based on a concept developed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (*Leroy D. Baca, Sheriff*).

On Tuesday, 24 Feb 09, this writer had the opportunity to attend the Justice Institute of British Columbia to participate in a seminar on Education-Based Discipline (EBD) presented by Lt Mike PARKER, Unit Commander of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) EBD Unit. The concept of education based discipline challenged every notion of workplace discipline that had been ingrained in me during my twenty years of public safety and security experience. Although the seminar was targeted towards police departments, I found that it was also very applicable to private security environment. This paper will address the viability of EBD within the private security industry.

Typically, should there be a situation where a member of a security team requires some measure of discipline, and assuming that the established progressive discipline model has been followed, the officer will likely face one or more days of suspension without pay for his or her misdeed. Although the message that the officer did wrong will have been clearly sent, there are other resulting factors that I have long taken issue with:

1. Although the officer now faces punitive action in the form of loss of pay, his or her family is also affected through no fault of their own through the loss of income;
2. There is a stigma attached to that officer due to the disciplinary action, both from his or her peers and supervisors as well as embarrassment at home amongst his or her family and friends;
3. The personal morale of that officer will be negatively affected, perhaps for the long term which could ultimately affect the esprit de corps for the entire organization.

Therein lays the dilemma faced by security management: how does one apply discipline in a manner that will reinforce the good order and discipline of the team, yet have a positive outcome for all? LASD Sheriff Lee BACA and the LASD Unit have faced the same dilemma and have developed a positive and viable solution – Education-Based Discipline. Lt PARKER reports that the police culture in the United States historically disciplines police officers through suspensions without pay. This commonly results in the same negative factors outlined above. In an effort to eliminate the conception that discipline equals punishment, the LASD will establish, effective April 2009, a measure of discipline that will see “offending” officers undergoing training specific to the factors relating to their offence. For instance, an issue surrounding an Abuse of Authority could result in a five to fifteen day suspension without pay. However under the EBD initiative, that officer would be presented with the option of spending the suspension days undergoing remedial training specifically designed to address the root causes that led to the incident of Abuse of Authority. Such training would include ethics training, leadership and decision-making skills classes, professional development seminars, and the like. Training programs are based on credits, and some days of training are worth one credit, two credits, or even a half credit, based on the program. Interestingly, these training days would be covered on duty, where the officer would be fully paid while undergoing the remedial training. Should the officer choose to undergo EBD training, active participation is mandatory, and as a result the LASD has exercised due diligence in

ensuring that the factors causing the officer's infraction have been dealt with, efforts have been made to maintain a positive employee/manager relationship and the officer is now better equipped to deal with his or her professional shortcomings. Of course, any further infractions would be dealt with according to the progressive disciplinary model which could result in full-on suspensions. And, offences of a more serious nature where EBD is not deemed an appropriate measure would result in full suspensions or even a discharge from the Force. It is important to note that when the EBD program gets fully underway in April 2009, LASD officers facing suspension will be free to choose the suspension without pay over the EDB training if that is their personal preference.

The Education Based Discipline model may work for a highly professionalized and unionized culture such as the LASD or any other public law enforcement agency, but how can the security industry incorporate the EDB principles into its culture, and what would be the benefits? Private security companies are naturally interested in making a profit, and they must watch the bottom line, especially during these fiscally challenging times. Is there any real financial benefit for a private security company to send a security guard for remedial training instead of removing him or her from the payroll for a series of days for a work-related infraction? I would suggest that there is a very real benefit if the EBD concept is applied.

Let's examine a scenario similar to the one mentioned earlier, where a private security officer abuses his or her position for personal gain. In the private security world, once the incident was investigated according to labour code standards, this person would at least be suspended without pay or fired from the company, especially if the incident involved a breach of trust between the security company and its client. If this officer was otherwise a good employee who simply exercised one instance of poor judgment, are the needs of the company, the guard and the client really being met by suspending the security officer without pay or firing them? Is there a better way to bring this security officer back into line within the ethical expectations of the company, and indeed the security industry? This is where the EBD model should be considered as a viable alternative to a disposition of suspension.

Once the investigative process into the complaint against the security officer has concluded and disciplinary measures are levied, a risk analysis regarding the officer's professional future with the company should be conducted. If it is determined that the infraction was a "one off" with minimal risk of a reoccurrence, the officer should be provided the option of suspension without pay or participating in the EBD program. Like the LASD, the security officer should receive as many days of EBD training as they would have received by suspension. So, a security officer who received five days of suspension without pay would have the option of receiving EBD training equal to the five days of suspension, as determined by company management. Some options for remedial training could include, but are not limited to:

1. Remedial basic security standards training;
2. Remedial site training with a training officer or exemplary peer;
3. Customer service training;
4. Anger management training;
5. Driver training for incidents involving mobile patrol vehicles.

The options for remedial training are limited only by the scope of duties or service the security company expects its officers to provide.

Certainly, a major stumbling block preventing a private security company from adopting the EBD scheme is the cost incurred in developing EBD options, paying for a training facilitator, paying the officer to attend the training and paying another officer straight-time or even over-time to backfill the offending officer's position. Cost-wise, it's more convenient to simply erase that subject security officer's pay for the days of suspension and simply pay the wage for the back-filling officer. For non-union companies, sometimes it's even simpler to just fire the officer and recruit into the position. Many security companies do have the luxury of reducing the offending officer's pay to a "training" wage, which often translates to minimum wage. The bottom line for many companies may dictate that even a training wage is not a viable option and won't consider an EBD program. But as a result, what will the security company have lost? Lt PARKER advised that the LASD experience proved that punitive action such as suspension without pay in many cases resulted in the subject officer harbouring resentment towards the departmental management team, which could easily translate to poor morale, poor performance, a sliding level of professionalism and ultimately a poor reflection on the department. The same theory applies to the private security industry, with the added negativity of perception within the industry of a security company not having a good employee/employer relationship, which can affect recruiting and also affect the company's reputation amongst the client-base. As Lt PARKER pointed out, "The negative perception of action taken against the officer who erred is infectious. Other officers watch with frustration and thereafter justify negative attitudes towards management and their customers as well. The employee may be gone but the infection spreads".

Suspending security officers without remedial training does not address the factors that caused the misdeed. The private security industry struggles with a poor public perception of professionalism. Private security guards come from a very wide variety of backgrounds; ethnic, cultural, educational and financial diversity are well-represented within the industry. With this comes a very significant turn-over rate in staffing. A major role of the private security officer is to act as "eyes 'n ears" in an effort to deter and detect crime against the client. Some clients simply require a warm uniformed body to patrol the perimeter or stand guard at a static post; these types of duties do not require any real expertise. Other clients have much heavier demands, and security guards at these sites may see themselves conducting

mobile patrols of residential areas, emergency first response, conducting parallel investigations with local police authorities and acting in a quasi-policing role within the client's jurisdiction. These duties require a completely different type of officer. But regardless of what duty the security officer is conducting, it really is in the best interest of the company for all guards to be well trained professionals in the basic standards required for the security industry. An officer who commits an infraction of a nature that could be addressed through EBD should be afforded that option, as the training provided could very well result in improving that officer's performance. Subsequently, the officer going into the training will emerge with a better understanding of their misdeed and with a clearer understanding of their opportunities for improvement. The officer's morale will be better, as they have retained their job with minimal disruption in income, and they will carry a feeling that the company truly cares for them as a person by assisting them in overcoming their challenges and investing in them as a professional. With an effective mentoring and leadership program, that officer could easily progress from being that warm body languishing at a construction site to a primary responder at a major post-secondary institution. The company's reputation as a friend of the employee will improve, which could result in a more professional security guard applying for positions, which then results in staff retention and a higher level of consistency for the client. The ultimate benefit would be an excellent reputation amongst the client-base, who may be willing to pay a little extra to have a more professional and dedicated security officer working at their site.

There is a very real opportunity for the private security industry to benefit from the education-based discipline program established by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. To increase the level of professionalism industry wide and enhance client confidence, it's important for security companies to truly invest in the development of their employees, particularly in situations where a misguided employee can be steered down the right path through remedial training and counseling. Suspensions and firings don't always satisfy the needs of the client or the company. There are better ways, and an effective Education-Based Discipline model is a viable option for private security companies looking to become leaders in their industry.

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References:

www.lasd.org

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