

# RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT

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Asia's financial crisis, which erupted in 1997, has led companies to trim all the fat and restructure to weather this financial storm. Like many others, security services did not escape the scrutiny of this rightsizing exercise. The economic downturn had, to a certain degree shape-up the individual life-styles of the security officers. Management's emphasis to manage differently, cost reduction and waste elimination has further impacted the change. The once 'stable-income' security officers are feeling increasingly insecure in their jobs and have to work harder or do part time jobs elsewhere to survive. However, in this difficult situation, we must not lose sight of our direction, which is renewal of our commitment to our purpose in order to continue being the valued service provider.

Undoubtedly, the good times has brought about some degree of complacency. Things had been going on so well that overtime allowance became a fixed income. The 'moment of truth' has come -- cutting back on spending and seeking more balance in their lives is mandatory. In spite of this dilemma, we need to be innovative to increase our productivity, develop new skills,

improve work processes and focus on the quality of service. It is actually to do more and better with less or same resources. Obviously, the quality of the security personnel becomes an important consideration in this survival mode.

In attempts to retain the best, what distinguishes the top performer with an average performer is an important question. What makes the distinguished security officer different from the colleagues, given the equal opportunities? What drives them whilst others are struggling for improvement? Why are they so committed to performance and achievement? A simple explanation would be, these aspiring personnel know what they want. They see opportunities and choose to make the difference.

These officers know their purpose; they possess judgmental skills and are able to give meaning to their jobs. A well-known story makes this distinction clear. Two security officers were at work when the Corporate Auditor came upon them. Curious, the Auditor asked the first security officer what he was doing. He replied that he was guarding the post. Then the Auditor moved on to the second security officer and asked the same question. His reply was, "I'm protecting company property from being taken out without proper authorization." This second security officer had given meaning to his work.

What if his reply was "I am protecting my customers' profitability and interest." Obviously, the security officer was seeing the bigger picture. That is a clear demonstration of purpose in action. Purpose comes from within. What would be your thoughts if his reply were "I am just trying to earn my living".

The 'professional' officers know exactly why they are there and fully understood what they have to do. They are proud of their work. It stimulates and excites them to be accorded the 'business partner' status in the business community. They are genuine with the people they serve or work with. They value the paramount importance of giving freely unconditional quality and quantity of services to others, which they seek themselves.

In contrast, a security officer who lacks a clear purpose will soon discover that he has everything negative about his job and his associates. Invariably, he would even have difficulty to get up to work in the morning. He will treat his peers and friends with suspicion. He's always stressful, maintains a 'cannot' attitude and easily gets burned out. He finds no meaning or value in his work and certainly this behavior will limit his success.

Most frequently asked question would be what is the purpose of a security department in any business organization? In difficult times, security department is a potential prospect for headcount reduction program. Would the answers meet your expectation if you choose to find out what they think is the purpose? If they are unable to readily state the purpose, then we have a leadership problem.

A clear sense of purpose starts with the mission. By knowing what we are able to do determines not only how to accomplish our purpose but what our purpose should be. Our mission should reflect the customer's needs and security services should not only seek to satisfy it but to exceed expectations.

The employees are our internal customers and the external customers are those who come to do business or provide services to the organization. What do they want is very important information. The serious mistake is, when we begin to describe our goals according to our needs not to the customers. We have the tendency to focus on our priority thus neglecting the customers' need. In other words, we want the customer to fit into our security program.

What can we do? Simply, ask and listen attentively to their need. Sharing ideas with the customers and having good product knowledge are added advantages. It is a fact that our business is essentially service oriented in nature. Through the normal interaction, I have made two important discoveries that can be shared with the readers.

First, the internal customer has worked so hard to bring revenue to the organization and they expect their profitability together with their personal well being must be adequately protected. However, this intent is not openly expressed but it only becomes noticeable when the products are lost during transit. Second, the external customers wish to operate in a facility, which is conducive for business transactions with minimum interruption.

Precisely, both needs are related to customer's interest. The internal customers insist upon a secure and safe business environment. Products not reaching their customers, for whatever the reason, are not acceptable. To meet this expectation, I have recommended to

many practitioners to use the following examples as a guide in developing their mission statements. In these particular examples, I feel that the essences are essentially covered within the security and business perspectives.

“Our mission is to create a safe and secured business environment for our customers by rendering professional services and expertise towards achieving zero loss or zero disruption at the workplace.”

or

“Our mission is to create a conducive business environment in making the company a leader in enabling our customers to enjoy the benefit of the professional security service and expertise.”

Having being able to state the mission statement convincingly, the purpose becomes clear. The purpose in this context is of course to protect business profitability of the customer. This is essentially true. Every organization focuses on productivity and profitability as the bottom line. It is in this premise that security department justifies its existence.

When the purpose has been made clear, it has to be shared across the board by all security officers. It is a must that every security officer believes and subscribes to the determined purpose. Their hearts and minds need to embrace it so as to give life to it. The importance of purpose is strongly demonstrated recently by our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in his speech when describing the six vital traits Asia needs to recover from the economic crisis; “The entire nation must be united, mobilized and working as one behind a single purpose”.

From purpose, goals are created and statement of values is developed. Goals are the milestone along the path to fulfillment of the mission. In simple terms, it is a dream with deadlines. Individual goals are developed and aligned to the department goals. In the present environment, a security department without goal will be neglected and perceived insignificant to the business community. Good goals will go through the acid test - S.M.A.R.T goals i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Goals will provide the guidelines and the indices as a measurement of what has been achieved. It gives a real sense of accomplishment and contribution to see what we have achieved.

As a general rule, statement of values is usually developed and influenced by the leader's personal value system. The outcome will invariably be the guiding principles in many future strategic decisions or the guidepost for the officer's day-to-day decision making. The shared core values will help develop the officers for durable and stronger commitment to the department. It also helps to link individual interest towards building unity and es'pirit de corp amongst members.

The vision statement pulls the organization into the future. Security officers would prefer to serve a leader with a vision. The leader owes his officers clarity of purpose and direction. They want to know how and where they fit into the vision; otherwise it is meaningless to them. What they are and where they are going to be, down the road, is important. These officers cannot put their future at stake on vague promises made by their leader. They don't care how much the leader knows until they know how much he really cares. Providing the tools and opportunities for their personal growth to greater heights, which they do not realize they can attain; is what the leader must do.

My deepest conviction is to promote the climate of honesty i.e. an organizational climate where peace and harmony is transparent within the workplace. With total trust, security will be institutionalized and recognized as everyone's responsibility. A good analogy is the sense of security which can be experienced in your own home i.e. with self-assurance to leave your

valuables on the TV set without slightest doubt or fear of losing. This program can only be achieved through consistent effort and support of a fully committed, knowledgeable and multi-skilled security work force. A situation, which is supported by a continuous improvement culture.

With a clear purpose, the security officers have the capability to impact on the lives of others. They will be enthusiastic, inspiring and full of energy. They will find their job exciting, challenging and meaningful. They feel proud of their organization and will readily demonstrate the unit's pride without hesitation. As a team, they would pursue to become recognized as the leader in the industry. Team effort will continue to become transparent, empowerment practices will be adopted with confidence and effective communication will help to project their competency and professionalism.

Security services of the future will be lean, cost effective, technology based, possess generalist capability and most importantly with capacity to provide prompt customer service in the true sense of a business partnership. Security thinking is gradually shifting from local to regional towards global framework. Shared services security model will have to be introduced to meet the demand of the borderless world. Security department will focus to provide optimum security whilst creating a one-stop center concept, which can be an interesting and exciting scenario in the next millennium.

Amidst the financial turmoil and uncertainties, I still have a great deal of optimism -- favorable future ahead. The fact remains that undergoing constant change is something that we have to learn to live with. The extent depends on the multitude and the severity of the economic woes or crisis, which will continue to cause significant financial impact on our livelihood - a situation that generally requires us to re-examine and remind us of our purpose. It is only with the clear sense of purpose we can propel ourselves into the challenging and dynamic future of the 21st Century