Safety Challenges in the Private Security Industry in SA

BACKGROUND

As the "first line of defence" and exposed to various functions, the safe conduct by security personnel will always be an uphill challenge. The emphasis placed on safety has a direct impact on the way in which security functions are carried out, compared to years ago. Compounded by the emphasis which security end users place on safety, security business leaders face major challenges.

In SA there are more than 8,000 registered security businesses with in excess of 400,000 active Security Officers.

Our industry deploys 40,000 vehicles (driving 120mil km's); consumes 24mil litres of fuel; uses 40,000 boxes of paper; 30,000 pens; pays R140mil in wages and contributes more than R5,6mil (all monthly) to the Workmen's Compensation Fund. Add to this 400,000 potential safety risks. Conversely that means 400,000 people that could potentially save businesses from 400,000 potential safety incidents by hazard identification each month.

The safety leader in the Private Security Industry, who is passionate about his people, will wake up in the morning to foster a work environment that will save lives and drives his company or his contract that he manages, to safety excellence. The safety leader that encourages staff engagement and thereby creates stronger employee participation in safety, is the leader of the future.

MOST COMMON RISKS THE INDUSTRY FACES:

- Vehicle accidents
- Attacks on security personnel
- Slip/slide injuries during patrols
- Finger pinching in doors/gates
- Being driven over (vehicle access points)
- Falling gates in motion
- Trips/falls

COMMON ROOT CAUSES IMPACTING ON SAFETY IN SECURITY OPERATIONS

- The industry operates in a cut-throat market and safety/PPE related

expenses are driven by client contract revenue and revenue provisions. There are no increased commodity prices that enhance cash for expanded Security Officer PPE. Rarely are security users willing to adjust their security spend for additional PPE.

- Inexperienced vehicle drivers have difficulty adapting from driving small passenger vehicles to driving LDV/4x4's. More than 60% of security vehicle drivers don't own their own vehicles, adding to lack of driving experience when on leave, and to general negligence and neglect in observing obvious hazards. The absence of effective and specialised driver training programs in many companies, route risk assessments and night driving skills, enhances the risks of accidents. The impact of fatigue, especially on night driving, is immense.
- In terms of infrastructure, most security users generally invest minimally in the protection of Security Officers. Contrary to this, certain mining companies invest in bulletproof guardhouses, and in remote rural areas guardhouses have air-conditioners, and some are equipped with running water/toilets. However, plastic 1mx1m guard-huts or dilapidated wooden structures without drinking water and electricity still exist, with the onus on the security contractor to provide electricity, water, and cleaning materials – none of which are included in revenue received from clients. It is not an uncommon request to deploy personnel where none of the above exists. A responsible company will say "No".
- Security users often insist that bullet-proof vests form part of PPE, claiming financial provision is made during the tender process – however, on contract award and risk changes, it becomes difficult to get financial compensation for additional expensive items.
- Despite attacks on security personnel by armed criminals seeking copper cable, there are still those that declare their facilities "gun-free", expecting unarmed Officers to protect their assets from armed groups.
- Negligence in performance of duties and lack of focus on the impact of employee actions is a major contributor to negative safety incidents.
- Fatigue is one of the biggest contributors to negligence and is *"enemy no.1"* to safety. Shift work, living conditions, diet and sleeping patterns negatively impact on security personnel and the impact is more visible than ever before.
- Untrained Managers neglect to either conduct baseline risk assessments, or render incomplete assessments. A culture could develop whereby once the baseline risk assessment is conducted, the task is deemed to be complete, neglecting to do task-based and follow-up risk assessments. Private security companies not large enough to employ dedicated Safety Officers, often fall short in this regard.
- The drive to impress the client can sometimes outweigh the impact of negative actions – as service providers we are too scared to say "No, it is unsafe", for fear of harming the relationship.
- Poor or substandard engineering works sometimes result in sliding gates derailing, falling on Officers manually operating gates.
- A company culture not supporting a safety mind set of participative engagement of staff on all levels, is a safety hampering factor.

SAFETY LEADERSHIP IN THE SECURITY INDUSTRY

Traditionally Security Managers were not safety conscious, paying mere lip-service to the concept and sending staff on OHS representative courses. New generation leaders put safety first, encourage safe practices, enforce the reduction of risk and come down sternly on unsafe practices. Leaders who care for their people make sure that they are safe at all times. Safety Leaders operate within a company culture that refers to values,

believes, norms, standards and priorities that are shared by employees and leadership teams across the company – creating happier employees and more engaged workers. ENCOURAGING SAFETY IS A MORAL SKILL.

Key areas to confirm that your safety leadership is on the right track:

1. What company *critical safety controls* are in place? Would they prevent loss?
2. All employees have a *moral obligation* towards safety – is the MD's annual safety review enough to encourage moral obligation? What more can I do to encourage moral obligation in my company/department? On a recent flight to Cape Town the purser said: "*You are as responsible, as much as we are, for your own safety*." THAT resonates with me.
3. Am I *encouraging participation* in safety. When participation increases, incidents decrease. The Safety Leader acting as the change agent in his company encourages participation. **Participation based safety management** effectively creates engagement and measures participation in safety at all levels, from the Security Officer on the ground to the senior leadership, thereby driving continuous improvement.
4. Do we as leaders *know the OHS Act*? Study the Act! Refresh your knowledge.

Safety considerations leaders should take into account:

❖ Am I setting the tone? Do I do more than the minimum to encourage safety?
❖ Do I care for my people and remove obstacles? Leaders must check for barriers which could result in unsafe practices
❖ Am I in tune with my people? Do I know my people? If not, how do I go about getting to know them better?
❖ Leaders must not only be OHS Act compliant, they must ensure that

their personal values towards their staff and their safety, carries a higher priority than the Act. This is only achievable by being knowledgeable about the Act
❖ Leaders must realise that leadership is a privilege – their first priority is to be a **Safety Leader**
❖ Leaders know when to say "No!". Can YOU say "No"?
❖ Is management sufficiently involved? are frontline security personnel or other workers sufficiently involved and are we creating proper communication to create 100% participation?
❖ Leaders must practice "tough love", and have those courageous conversations (otherwise they are morally deficient), take serious action, make unpopular decisions and know when to say "No" to protect their staff
❖ Leaders understand their accountability in terms of safety and see it as their duty to hold other leaders accountable for safety too
❖ Leaders do not reward safety – the highest reward for safety is the value of life. A lost drum of copper cable can be replaced, but there is no replacing a life!
❖ I encourage my leaders to ensure that they spend time with their teams. I ask a lot of them. I ask them to conduct night shift patrols with an Officer, to drive with a Response Officer, to see how their personnel search vehicles and test people for alcohol. I ask this of my leaders because there is no other option for them but to care for and develop those under their watch

SAFETY ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

Below are a few aspects recently introduced in the private security industry, supporting the moral obligation that safety leaders portray:

▪ Formulate a company safety strategy, live by and enforce the strategy

- Appoint a Safety Officer, ensuring and maintaining compliance through auditing, training and mentorship
- Ensure that security personnel are trained as OHS Representatives, first aiders and firefighters, and Managers receive annual Act refresher training
- Selected Managers become SAMTRAC qualified
- Security Managers (highest level in the security structure) must ensure the visibility and dissemination (amongst security operations, guard houses and parades) of:
  - ✓ MD/GM's Annual Safety Review of events in the past year, trends, root-cause outcome analysis, corrective action - as guidance for baseline risk assessment reviews and audits
  - ✓ Quarterly MD's Safety Pledge focusing on an awareness topic and pledging staff support for the campaign
  - ✓ Structured/registered toolbox talks (parades and security manned posts)
  - ✓ Establishment of a *WhatsApp* group posting safety shares amongst Managers
  - ✓ "Safety Moment" meeting openers
  - ✓ Senior management walkabout inspections visiting posts, confirming staff familiarity with safety shares/toolbox topics/safety pledges
  - ✓ Declaring Safety "Time-out's" for serious safety incidents or identification of non-conformances, to discuss corrective/preventative actions
  - ✓ Overcoming the barriers pf paper based communication – create online, technology driven reporting mechanisms for staff

CONCLUSION

In a time when security businesses are under pressure from the economic downturn, above-inflation wage increases and high fuel prices, these expenses directly affect profitability but are necessities in our obligation towards employees and clients. We must portray our true **Safety leadership skills,** ensuring that the industry meets minimum requirements of a safe working environment. Soft skills approached by leaders, engaging with their employees and creating participation in the safety program, backed by a strong company culture will drive the private security industry to become an industry safety leader.

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