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Executives are targets of threats at home and abroad Careful planning and awareness can reduce vulnerability

Terrorists and other fundamentalists are constantly focused on disrupting the American way of life, often aiming their attacks at corporate America. At the same time, targeted violence by disgruntled employees, investors and consumers against corporate executives is more common than ever. In spite of this known activity, many executives have done little to protect themselves, placing their lives – and the companies they lead – at risk.

In addition to business connections, an individual may be targeted for his or her association with a political or social issue. Foreign visitors may be targeted by local rebel groups simply because of their nationality. Americans are particularly at risk for kidnappings and violent crimes in Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, the Philippines, Russia and many areas throughout Africa and the Middle East. Whether at home or abroad, executives without a security plan are at risk for kidnappings and targeted crimes.

What would happen to your business continuity if an executive were to be kidnapped? Executives must have a security plan for their daily lives as well as their travels. In addition, the company must have a plan for dealing with kidnapers and demands for ransom, as well as a temporary succession plan for an executive's unplanned absence.

Assets are protected, but people are not

The National Association of Business Economists recently released its semi-annual Economic Policy Survey. The survey suggests economists believe terrorism represents the greatest short-term threat to the U.S. economy. Kidnappings and hostage taking have been popular tactics employed by terrorists and organized crime groups for centuries. Although the vast majority of these events have been occurring in conflicted areas like the Middle East, we cannot afford to become complacent here in the U.S. Recent tapes from senior Al Qaeda figures continue to threaten the U.S. and its allies in the war on terror. At the same time violent crime in the U.S. continues

to raise its ugly head. FBI statistics reflect a recent resurgence in violent crime statistics. Recently a number of high profile individuals were reported to have narrowly escaped abduction attempts by individuals with extremist views or were temporarily held hostage by seemingly random criminals. Street level crime is far more prevalent than professional terrorists, and the consequences can be just as devastating. The most likely targets of kidnapping are wealthy individuals with high profile business connections and individuals advocating political and social issues. This is evidenced by the fact that all of the presidential candidates receive Secret Service protection during their campaigns, and foreign heads of state and other prominent foreigners receive government protection while visiting the U.S.

Although relatively safe, the U.S. has a rich history of kidnappings, from the infamous Lindbergh kidnapping to the abduction of Patty Hearst. In the past, children were the primary targets for criminals, but now any wealthy or prominent person is a potential target. Wealthy people and prominent business executives are often seen as local celebrities and naturally become a target of criminals because of their visibility. Crimes against these "celebrities," like kidnapping and extortion, can result in a large sum of money for the criminal, but of even greater concern is the impact the attack can have on a business organization associated with the victim. The abductors expect the employer of a kidnapped executive to pay large sums in ransom money. For the company, the impact of this crime is greater than the value of any ransom money. Aside from the obvious personal concerns for the safety of the executive, the kidnapping of an executive can disrupt business operations, decrease employee morale and generate unwanted publicity.

It is not uncommon for people with high profiles to adhere to the faulty presumption that they do not need extensive security systems because the majority of their fortunes are either safe in

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the bank or well insured. Often they underestimate their risks and believe their families and homes are sufficiently protected. In these cases, many basic precautions are underutilized or overlooked. For example, some households have state-of-the-art security alarm systems installed, yet the family members may find themselves deactivating the system when it becomes inconvenient or complicated to operate. Wealthy people often spend large sums of money on electronic home security systems, but many will admit that the systems are often too complicated to use, broken or too prone to false alarms. Common sense may be the most overlooked security precaution. A healthy dose of skepticism is needed when greeting unannounced guests or witnessing any suspicious activity.

Criminals will use force to get what they want, sometimes with tragic results that no amount of money can repair. Although kidnappings in the United States are rare and usually resolved, these crimes periodically result in tragic endings. Sometimes people leave their homes unsecured because they believe there is nothing of serious value there – the real fortune is in the bank or investments. The house, the car and the jewelry usually can be replaced quite easily. However, the fact that the “real fortune” is not in the home does not usually deter a criminal, who can still make a significant profit from the physical assets in the home, and this certainly does nothing to dissuade a kidnapper who is concerned with the liquid assets of a ransom.

The level of risk that executives face is determined by two general factors: the threats against their safety and their vulnerability to these threats. Threats range from small protest demonstrations to assassination attempts. These threats cannot be controlled. Vulnerability, on the other hand, can be reduced significantly through awareness and security planning.

Reducing vulnerability lowers the overall level of risk, no matter what kinds of threats an executive faces. The essence of executive protection and personal security is the avoidance of conflict through intelligent and proactive thinking. This is much more important than the physical strength of individual protectors. It is not necessary for wealthy Americans to surround themselves with bodyguards, automatic weapons and attack dogs as their counterparts in Latin America and Russia do. However, if they spend large sums of money on cars and homes, they should take the most basic steps to protect those things and of course, more importantly, themselves. Why do important businessmen, wealthy persons, celebrities and others with high profiles need to be especially concerned about their personal security? They face the same threats to their safety and well being that most people face, but their level of celebrity or wealth makes them proportionally more attractive targets for criminals. For many years, kidnappers, extortionists and extremists in Europe and Latin America have targeted corporate executives, bankers and the wealthy families of these individuals. These crimes are occurring more frequently in the United States and executive protection is a rapidly expanding segment of the security industry.

Executive protection specialists can operate in any environment to protect their client, whether the situation requires subtly placed protection specialists or highly visible bodyguards. The typical client of an executive protection firm is extremely wealthy or maintains a high profile. Normally these VIPs have their own private security teams, but when traveling in unfamiliar territory executive protection firms are added on a contract basis because of their specific knowledge of a particular area. This is especially important when executives travel abroad.

Executives and their families face attacks from multiple angles

Annually in the United States there are several hundred cases of kidnappings, many of which are domestic, but about 50 to 100 cases involve ransom and usually the victims are associated with a great deal of wealth. Some of the more recent highly publicized kidnapping victims have included various business leaders and their immediate family members. One abduction ended tragically for a kidnapped executive: a man who had previously worked in security at the executive's company, accidentally deviated from his original plan of holding the executive for ransom, allowing the man to die from wounds inflicted during the abduction.

We are all potential victims to terrorists and common criminals, but CEOs and others who maintain high profiles are especially prone to become targets. Family members are especially at risk because of their relatives' love for them and willingness to pay any price for their safe return. Other vulnerable travelers include dignitaries or wealthy individuals seeking medical treatment in foreign hospitals.

The range of threats confronting these individuals include: assassination, kidnapping, street violence, attacks by mentally ill people or zealots, workplace violence, embarrassment, injury, illness, medical emergency or other less expected incidents. Adversaries, whether armed criminals, protesters bent on causing embarrassment, former employees burning with revenge or simple fate, hold much of the control. These variables determine the time, place and method of attack.

Although the kidnapping of wealthy people in the United States is rare, kidnappings for ransom in certain parts of the world are quite lucrative and frequent, due to a lack of police power. Again we are usually referring to lawless areas in South America, Asia and Africa. One kid-

napping expert recently remarked, "They actually warehouse kidnap victims in Colombia." However there are many more street criminals to avoid than terrorists or professional kidnapers and proper precautions to avoid street violence will also provide preparation for more serious adversaries. Convenience and security must be applied intelligently and prudently. To reduce the principal's exposure, threat assessments and protective intelligence should be developed firsthand or by known and trusted associates who live and work in the area. Risk analysis involves maintaining a low profile, gathering information and developing complete answers to the "who, what, when, where, why and how" questions of investigative intelligence.

The following considerations should be factored into a risk assessment of a particular area when an executive travels outside the United States: physical characteristics, natural resources, relationship to the United States, activities of domestic police and intelligence agencies regarding Americans, history, religious practices, language, local customs and laws, women's concerns (modesty standards and restrictions on movements), political parties, major allies, sources of foreign aid, practice of spying on visitors, visa requirements, health and inoculation requirements, sanitation and hygiene, English speaking doctors, medical training standards, medications and controlled substances, medical evacuation arrangements, emergency contacts (embassy, consulate, hospitals), active terrorist groups and local crime trends.

Threats from within

Although travel always presents challenges, security at the executive's home and office is most important because he or she spends the majority of time in these places. Criminals can easily track the time and location of an executive's movement between home and office. Even

in places like Mexico, Colombia and Russia, the majority of kidnap victims are not tourists but people who are domiciled permanently in the country, because the abductors have been able to gather ample information about the daily routines of the victims. Through the Internet, anyone can use satellite images to scout the layout of a target's residence and identify potential points of entry. Several basic protective measures apply to both the home and the office: threat assessment, rings and layers of protection, intelligence and surveillance, basic life safety precautions (primarily fire and first aid considerations) and an explosives prevention and response plan.

Many of the crimes committed against wealthy individuals can be traced to the people who have some level of access to the residence or office. An extreme case that vividly illustrates this situation is the 1996 attack of a Peruvian terrorist group, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Army, on the Lima residence of the Japanese ambassador to Peru in 1997. The ambassador was hosting a large party and the terrorists entered the premises as caterers hired to work at the reception. Initially hundreds of people were held captive in Lima, until government forces were able to free all the hostages and kill the captors.

In another case, a successful Silicon Valley executive's computer data was downloaded by a personal chef employed at his residence while simultaneously working for the executive's competitor. The stolen data included intellectual property and sensitive information about the company. Aggressive intelligence gathering and due diligence investigations on all those with access to the home or office such as housecleaners, gardeners, secretaries, doormen, office staff, chefs and temporary help is highly recommended. An Arab proverb correctly states, "Better a thousand enemies outside the house than one inside."

The Time for Urgency is Now[®]

A responsible company considers contingency plans in the event of a kidnapping or other disappearance of its executives. This may seem unreasonable or paranoid, but pretending that this will not happen to your company is

much more unreasonable. Better to take the appropriate steps now than to struggle through a catastrophe, however unlikely one may be, and prevent any tragedies to the best of your ability. Any executive deserves a personal protection plan, not only for his or her benefit, but also for the security of the company, the employees and shareholders.

Identify the individuals who are critical to your organization. What are the risks that they face, and what would happen to business operations if they were kidnapped or otherwise unexpectedly absent? Analyze any past history of threats, travel destinations and personality. Does this person maintain a high profile? Are there any polarizing political or social causes for which he or she actively campaigns? A thorough risk assessment requires an executive to divulge as much of his or her personal life as possible so that executive protection personnel can anticipate problems most accurately. With this information, a baseline level of security can be established. This plan can then be increased or modified for special situations. Study the executive's travel logistics and develop a contingency plan for every conceivable possibility. Kidnapping must be addressed, but plans are also necessary for minor catastrophes like regular criminal activity, accidents and medical issues. Preventing these incidents can often prevent the development of major catastrophes. If traveling abroad, an executive protection specialist should have the name and contact information of a good local physician, in addition to any contacts at the embassy, consulate and local law enforcement organizations. This information should be obtained before the executive ever leaves home.

Gathering so much information may be time-consuming, especially if you feel the level of risk is low. But maintaining a secure environment for an executive at home, at work and while traveling is a wise investment for your company and the health and safety of the executive.



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