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Safe Environments

Performance is foremost when choosing security guard services, but a focus on several key factors also maximizes value.

By Greg Twardowski

Facility managers (fms) are under more pressure than ever to cut costs. And when it comes to spending on guard services, there is a temptation to choose the lowest price. Yet, opting for the rock bottom bid comes with its own set of expenses: high employee turnover, poorly trained security officers, impersonal service from middle management, and increased risk of liability. In contrast, fms who focus on obtaining the best value for their service dollars can expect personalized, quality service at a fair price, excellent performance from guards, and, most importantly, a safe environment.

Top Firms Provide Top Guards

Guard services are first and foremost about people. Security firms that offer above level wages, a strong benefits package, and superior training programs will attract and retain top guards. When searching for a potential service provider, fms should look for those firms with employees who have undergone a rigorous screening process that goes beyond initial aptitude testing and verification of technical requirements, employment history, a clear criminal record, and a successful drug-free test. Security firms should be conducting face to face interviews along with personality, honesty, and psychological assessments to shed light on a potential guard's attributes, traits, talents, and values.

Training is fundamental to the performance of professional security officers. Guard services providers who are committed and dedicated to the training process should have a comprehensive orientation and training program, professional certification programs, and continuing education for employees.

Fms should consider certifications



PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

In evaluating potential, and even current, security guard providers, it is important for facility managers to look at the specific skills and training such personnel will offer the site being protected.

essential when qualifying a company for contract guard services. A Certified Protection Officer (CPO), for instance, has undergone a voluntary certification process established by the International Foundation for Protection Officers. Such certification (and subsequent recertification every two years) ensures the individual is competent in the practice of private security.

Meanwhile, an officer who holds Certified Protection Professional (CPP) status has been certified through the American Society for Industrial Security International (ASIS). To qualify for CPP certification, an individual must have nine years of security experience (at least three of those years in responsible charge of a security function) or hold a bachelor's degree or higher (plus seven years of security experience and at least three of those years in responsible charge of a security function).

Guard services firms committed to ensuring every guard is prepared to protect lives and assets should make professional development available to all of their employees. These practices, as well as an internal program that plots potential job paths and tracks training progression, enable guards to build real careers in the security industry and prevent the firm from joining the ranks of those plagued by unimpressive turnover rates. In evaluating security providers, fms can research the actions a particular firm takes in these areas.

Crafting A Guard Services Program

Real communication between an fm and the contracted security firm cannot be overstressed. Both parties play an important role in crafting a solid guard services program for a site. The assessment process completed by a security

firm should include a security survey, an essential functions profile for each post, and an explicit understanding of the client's other specific requirements.

This is important not just for creating a security plan but also so the security contractor can properly match its guards to specific roles, responsibilities, and environments. A guard who is better disposed to a graveyard patrol shift will not perform well if assigned to a post that requires concierge level skills.

Communication between the provider and the client should not end once the assessment is completed and the guard services program becomes operational. Ongoing, regular meetings ensure that strategies are identified and implemented to increase efficiencies and reduce risk.

Technology is another resource that supports the effectiveness of security operations. There are a multitude of technologies available today that are designed to make security personnel more efficient and proactive. The trend in this area is mobile productivity technology. This enables security personnel to be mobile, vigilant, and productive. It benefits the facility when security officers are connected, and fms can know what guards are seeing and doing at any given moment.

State of the art technology tools available in the manned security industry include:

- Interactive guard post management systems that allow for information sharing and communication between security officers, supervisors, managers, customers, and any third party stakeholders;
- Real-time, multifunction tour verification systems that transmit guard tour location data wirelessly and instantly via the Internet; and
- Handheld field inspection and quality assurance systems designed to assess and improve the effectiveness of security operations. Information vital to the efficiency of operations, personnel, sites, and/or equipment, can be easily

captured with a smartphone and relayed via the Internet for further analysis.

In addition, there are handheld portable platforms that combine all of the aforementioned capabilities. This enables fms to use one device to monitor security guard operations effectively, including post order delivery, incident reporting, guard tour verifications, quality of service verifications, voice communications, and GPS tracking.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that while handheld technology can improve efficiency and eliminate redundant posts, advanced electronics and telecommunications are a support, not a total replacement, for people. Thus, a security firm should never advocate that fms reduce manpower to the point of risking the integrity of the security program.

Tracking Performance, Measuring Value

The adage "no news is good news" is not the level of performance metrics an fm should accept from a guard services company. Providers should offer a performance management tool to assess key areas of service delivery. Fms should focus on key categories, and some may be very specific to their organization's security needs. However, categories that apply to virtually all facility security programs include: employee retention, frequency of supervisory inspections, payroll and billing accuracy, training frequency, and report accuracy.

Other critical service areas are those that grade both the performance of the

security officers as well as the management support of those officers.

In this way performance scorecards are objective, whereas scoring systems that focus on subjectivity and opinion allow for negative results to be concealed. Areas important to rate in this manner include: loss prevention, risk analysis, shrinkage and internal theft, and these can be supported by real quantifiable data.

Besides submitting a monthly performance report, a security firm should present fms with a quarterly summary and hold review meetings during which both parties discuss performance, identify areas for improvement, and create an action plan for improvement.

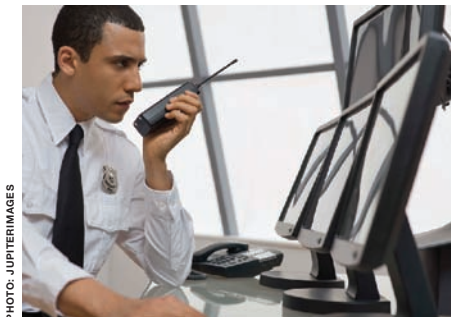
A well designed performance measurement tool is ideal for use with performance based contracts. If the guard services company fails to reach threshold scores, the company returns the profit to the customer. If service exceeds goals, the company splits a negotiated bonus with security personnel, thus ensuring ownership and buy-in to the process from all parties involved. This risk/reward mechanism assures customers they are receiving proper return on their security investment, which is a major justification against pressure to pay the lowest price.

Great Service, Good Value

Fms need a quantifiable return on their guard services investments. Security firms should be able to demonstrate the value of their performance by using quality performance management tools, hiring and retaining skilled guards, and supporting them on the job with the latest technological tools. Those who seek a security solution from these types of guard services companies can rest assured that they are not overspending on this crucial aspect of facility management. **TFM**

Twardowski is CEO of St. Louis, MO-based private security firm Whelan Security (www.whelansecurity.com). Founded in 1949, the family owned business has become one of the national leaders in security services.

What factors do you take into account when evaluating guard services? Share your experience by writing to avazquez@groupc.com.



Technology plays a major part in most guard services programs. Handheld equipment enables guards to report on their findings while patrolling a facility.