

HOPE FOR THE BEST?

Thinking about recent events we all hope 'she'll be right', but when people are depending on you, security is an issue. "It's a far, far better thing to be safe than sorry".

Adapted from an article originally written by John Dallimore in Employment Today".

It is history now but following the attacks of 911, international security and safety plummeted to levels unseen since the end of the Second World War nearly 70 years ago.

The more or less benign international environment, the platform on which global prosperity and travel has been built, was savagely attacked and severely damaged, perhaps never to fully recover.

Although international commerce in its myriad forms staggered and faltered under these catastrophic events, it did not stop. It was checked but adapted and recovered.

Every Action

Human history is the story of cause and effect, of action and reaction. Every weapon produced has spawned its counter:

- Longbow and chain mail;
- Tank and anti-tank gun;
- Radar and stealth bomber;
- Terrorist and counter terrorist.

We have survived this assault; we learnt to adapt, to live with it, and to combat the present discomfort, and the even more difficult conditions that may develop in the ensuing years.

The international war against terrorism may last a very long time. The reality is that the difficulties we dealt with in the past decade will certainly last for our working lifetimes and 'hoping for the best' is not an option.

On Guard

Whatever form the war against terrorism takes, the reality is that each and every commercial enterprise must:

- Develop its own defence;
- Guard against the likelihood of increased terrorist activity and threats to its own operations.

Some will dispute the need for action claiming their scale is too small, or that their area of operations will never be affected. Such an attitude is naïve and dangerous, it is 'hoping for the best'. It is probable that, as the counter-terrorist campaign continues and gathers strength, the terrorists will be forced to identify and attack is less likely and ever softer targets.

Defenceless Dividends

Quite simply we do not know how widespread the effects of this war will be, or the form they may take. Current military operations will certainly provoke reaction from terrorist elements. These may be opportunistic, or they may be carefully considered attacks from terrorist cells deeply embedded within their host society.

The present alarm surrounding the diagnosis of anthrax in the US and Kenya demonstrates the reach and the versatility of international terrorist organisations. We must also be aware of the imitators, the copy-cats - deluded or deranged, but no less dangerous.

Terrorists, by their nature and definition, do not seek to fight or to attack a defended target. Like the burglar or mugger they seek the easy hit. The careless, the weak, or the unprotected:

- Factory workers mutilated by bombing;
- An expatriate family murdered;
- A business traveller killed in an aircraft hijacking.

These are the return the terrorist seeks. This is the dividend on their investment.

Survival Instincts

Business must adapt to survive. As management adapts to changing market conditions, it must now learn to conduct its affairs to:

- Allow its enterprise to continue to prosper;
- Provide maximum protection for its human and capital assets.

It must critically examine and audit its procedures, personnel, and the places from which it conducts its business, and make each as safe as possible.

Corporate Liability

An increasing area of concern, and one which is yet to be tested, is the extent of corporate liability. Is an employee or an employee's family, able to make a legal claim that the employer did not take all reasonable precautions?

- Was security slack?
- Was the journey unnecessarily dangerous?
- Should families have been evacuated earlier?

"We were hoping for the best, your Honour" is unlikely to impress a judge.

Failsafe Specialists

While business managers are experts in their own field, they are not security specialists. Security, in its broadest and most complete definition, is a particular field requiring:

- Detailed knowledge;
- Experience;
- A robust sense of independent scepticism.

The scepticism is the failsafe, the 'what if?' approach, the correct and inescapable counter to 'hoping for the best'. For this reason a security audit and threat assessment should not be conducted by an organisation's own staff.

For the same reasons that financial audits are conducted externally, a security audit must also be confidential and external. Ideally the auditor reports directly to the CEO. In this way people, plans, places and procedures can be tested and refined, with sensitive information secure and restricted to a 'need to know' basis.

Available Advice

Discretion, confidentiality and integrity are essential in this conduct of this type of review or audit. The broad range of advice available includes:

- Threat analysis;
- Strategic analysis;
- Travel and regional security advice;
- Personnel security;
- Risk protection;
- Executive screening;
- Background checks;



- Vendor screening;
- Expatriate insurance and emergency assistance service

International connections enable us to present a wide ranging scenario of the security issues that impinge upon all aspects of doing business both internationally and nationally. The breadth of experience and expertise available should not be ignored by New Zealand firms practising in the international environment.

Remember...

For too long many New Zealand firms have naively got by on the old adage of 'she'll be right - lets hope for the best'. In reality this maxim will ultimately fail both you and your personnel. Inevitably, that failure will occur at the worst possible time. Instead, remember: 'You are only entitled to hope for the best if you have planned for the worst'.

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