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Steve's Legacy: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COMMUNICATION

by Philip Baum

I was appointed editor of this journal in June 1997 and in my first Lead Editorial, entitled New Labour, I used the phrase, "Good security, it is said, depends to a significant extent upon good communication". Not exactly ground-breaking stuff, but a statement as true today as it was then.

Frustratingly, however, it's a phrase, or variation thereof, one repeatedly hears uttered from conference podiums and at meetings deliberating new approaches. I say frustrating because 'communication' to the security industry should be a concept that is as much part of the process as it is for a doctor to take a patient's temperature, a musician to tune their instrument or author to proof their manuscript. Communication should be so entrenched in our daily operations that we need not continually remind ourselves of the need to do it.

I guess the positive is that we know we have a problem. It's not as if, in the words of George Bernard Shaw, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place". If that were true, we wouldn't keep harping on about it. The challenge seems to be getting those tasked with security functions to ensure that any concerns they might witness are addressed and resolved. We need the screener who observes unusual behaviour to report it, the flight attendant who identifies a passenger's behaviour deviating from the baseline to take action, the staff member who sees an unattended bag to assume responsibility.

We need to create a climate where staff do not hold back sounding the alarm because they are concerned about checkpoint throughput rates, a passenger taking legal action or delays caused by the evacuation of an aircraft or terminal. And there can be no excuse for management chastising an employee for taking action that they believed was a necessity just because no prohibited item or explosive device was subsequently found. When it comes to behavioural analysis, there is no false positive. We know that many terrorist or criminal actions were preceded by surveillance missions and test runs.

Most security staff know how to perform the various tasks that are required of them, but too often there remains a knowledge gap – and more disturbingly a protocol gap – when it comes to their acting outside the box. To be able to truly respond to today's threats, there are times when they need to be able to tear up the script and improvise. They are often frightened or impotent to do so. We need to communicate the message that they can.

And, as the industry grieves the loss of Steve Jackson, we can take heart from the fact that he was one of those few who really could communicate at all levels, who had time for all people and who, as we know from his TEDx talk, wished his legacy to be one of empowerment...achievable through communication. Let's continue the struggle to do so in his memory. ■

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