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Qubein, Ziglar and the Art of Motivation

by Philip Baum

'If what you're working for really matters, you'll give it all you've got.' Nido Qubein

Nido Qubein, an American business consultant, once said, "If what you're working for really matters, you'll give it all you've got." That quotation, should be emblazoned on every security checkpoint.

An attack against aviation can, as we have seen in recent years, change the very world we live in. No longer is it only a matter of preventing a criminal act that will have little impact on anybody not directly involved with any given flight. The failure of one security guard's actions can result in all out war that may result in tens, or even hundreds, of thousands of deaths. So what we are working for *really does matter...*

The question is, do those whom we entrust with the defence of our nations actually appreciate the weighty responsibility that rests upon their shoulders? The answer is, in all but a few cases, "no".

Last week I flew from a provincial UK airport (nameless in keeping with our policy of no exposés) on an Air Wales (Awyr Cymru) flight. As I arrived at the checkpoint, I noted the sign that spelled out the fact that no jokes about acts of terrorism or bombs in baggage would be tolerated. Once both my baggage and I had been screened, I handed the X-ray operator a copy of *Aviation Security International*. It is something I do at most airports and, even though some screeners suddenly get it into their heads that I am testing their security system and subject me to further search, this minor act of charity has one intent - motivation. I know we are not going to sell more copies as a result, but it

may just give them some useful information to which they are not already privy.

The response, on this occasion, was somewhat worrying. "Are you going to do an article about security at this airport", the screener asked. I assured him that I was not. He then said, whilst laughing, "Well, I guess it would be a pretty short article. In one word it can be summed up as being s##t". He may well have been right, but his expressing the fact to a quasi-journalist who'd just read a warning about making inappropriate comments, was unacceptable. But it was his next comment that really shocked me. "Then again, it's not as if we are going to have Osama Bin Laden coming through here", he said.

What our screener demonstrated in a few sentences was that he, and he may well be representative of the wider population of airport screeners, believed that our efforts are primarily to stop another 11 September-style incident occurring and that other threats were almost an irrelevance. I suggested he read the interview with the Captain of the Kato Airline flight hijacked on a domestic route from Narvik to Bodø that was in the issue of *Aviation Security International* I gave him.

Osama may not have designs on Air Wales, but that does not mean that the airline is threat-free. Furthermore, I'm sure Air Wales (who was not the screener's employer) would be less than happy to know the airport security provider's personnel were talking in such terms.

Ignorance is one thing, the lack of belief another. Describing the security system as

a joke made me question how we can instil confidence in our front line.

It is a huge challenge. There can be few other careers that battle some hidden enemy where the expectation is that one will never actually encounter the focus of our attention. A doctor will learn of strange diseases...and encounter them. A soldier will train for war... and fight in them. A policeman will practice restraint techniques...and will utilise them. The fact is the airport screener is highly unlikely ever to identify anybody that intends to hijack or bomb a civilian airliner. Of course it is easy to argue that the absence of incidents demonstrates success and achievement. That may work for senior management, but not for the person on the ground.

We have tried to incorporate motivational tools into technology, Threat Image Projection (TIP) being the classic example. We have introduced procedures, such as the banning of penknives and knitting needles, which have made it possible for us to identify far more people doing something "wrong". Yet the fact remains that identifying a threat image or confiscating a child's paper scissors is a far cry from preventing a criminal act that compromises the safety and security of a flight.

There has been a considerable amount of welcome research into the area of human factors in aviation security. As a result ergonomically improved checkpoints exist, time on task has been reduced and hopefully detection capability has increased. Few countries can rival the United Kingdom's efforts in this regard. Yet, despite this, are

‘People often say that motivation doesn’t last. Well, neither does bathing – that’s why we recommend it daily.’ Zig Ziglar

we really addressing the core factors that motivate a workforce?

Income, whatever the business consultants of this world may argue, is a prime motivator. If one struggles to pay the bills, yet told that “you are the difference between life and death”, then small wonder that a real desire to excel is absent. In almost every country, screeners are both underpaid and undervalued when compared with employees of other security services. I fear it will be some time before the industry “gets real” about its expectations of screeners. It has to recognise that those attracted to the profession through genuine interest, with a few exceptions, will be dissuaded from joining if the pecuniary benefits are lacking.

Another American business consultant, Zig Ziglar (maybe it’s the names that get them the publicity!) is quoted as saying, “People often say that motivation doesn’t last. Well, neither does bathing - that’s why we recommend it daily.” Just what are we doing, on a daily basis, to maintain interest? This becomes all the more important when the number one motivator – money – is in short supply.

Briefings, so often abandoned due to overlapping shifts, insufficient time or lame excuses of there being “nothing to talk about”, are fundamental to creating a sense of value. Given that our screeners are part of the general war (as opposed to the American one) on terror, it is with a sense of incredulity that I find security supervisors and managers incapable of extracting pertinent information from the daily news broadcasts that they can share with their staff.

Employee of the month, or even week, schemes are in short supply in the industry. We all like a pat on the back and it costs little more than a certificate.

Continuous professional development, going beyond the traditional subjects taught on screener training courses, is a route rarely taken. How often do employers, be they government or private, invite speakers in to make presentations on security-related topics? It doesn’t always have to cost; customs, immigration and the police are usually only too willing to field a speaker if asked by their colleagues in the same airport. Furthermore (and easier to organise!), how often do screeners ever see this journal?

Motivation is a topic absent from most aviation security conference agendas, yet it is

one of the most important challenges facing our industry.

Regardless of the buzz words, quotations and techniques promulgated by the likes of Nido Qubein and Zig Ziglar, we need to find effective ways to motivate our front line to take pride in their work, have belief in their potential and be prepared to act upon their doubts.

To end with another quotation, this time

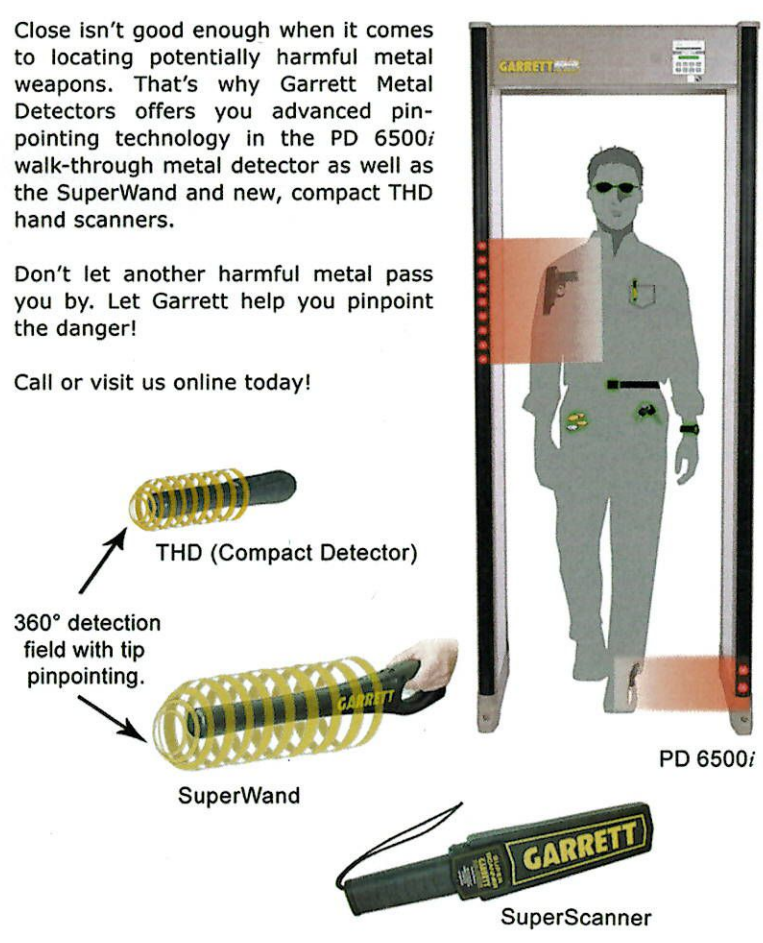
from the more renowned Abraham Lincoln, we need checkpoints where each and every screener is prepared to say, “I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better”. It is a quotation (albeit originally spoken in a very different context) that encapsulates security sense and desire to succeed. Once we have such personnel deployed, we will have started to master the art of motivation.

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