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ALL-HANDS FAMILY OFFICE SECURITY

by Michael O'Rourke



Performing due diligence is the hallmark of your family office. You would not make an investment, purchase a significant asset, or hire a new advisor without a careful examination of the pertinent facts. Too many family offices, unfortunately, fail to apply the same level of scrutiny to their own security. Considering that a business has an affirmative Duty of Care obligation to provide a safe and secure working environment for employees, neglecting physical security may be fraught with legal peril. Fortunately, a roadmap exists to better secure not only the family office but any subordinate businesses as well. Better still, every step in the journey involves the very people you are charged with protecting.

All-hands security is a concept whereby everyone

within the family office receives a level of training that turns the individual into a player within an overall security game plan. Don't worry, training in hand-to-hand combat is not involved. Instead, the focus is on alertness, recognising when something or someone poses a threat and developing the wherewithal to confidently respond adequately.

Assessing your current risk exposure and prioritising its reduction is step one. Broadly speaking, assets are people, property and information. Threats are anything that would harm or deprive you of your assets. Vulnerabilities are gaps in security that threats may exploit to reach assets, and risk is the potential for loss. Consideration is given to not only the most dangerous threats but also the most likely for which vulnerability is often greater. If a terrorist is unlikely to bomb your office, but the recently sacked employee vowing revenge knows the front door is unlocked, where does the greatest risk lie? Priority for risk mitigation dictates locking the door before applying a blast-resistant film to windows.

Family offices can begin the risk assessment process internally through self-assessment. Are you ready, today, to stop workplace violence if it arrives at your door or starts from within? Do your staff know what to do in the event of a violent demonstration on the street outside? Who has unneeded access to your business secrets and other vital data? Can someone bent on mischief merely walk into the heart of your family office unhindered? If your offices became uninhabitable today, where would your staff assemble to conduct business tomorrow?

Unacceptable risk exposure is indicated by unsatisfactory answers to some or all these questions. Please understand this short list merely scratches the

surface. When you multiply the vulnerability across the breadth of your empire, to include your other businesses, residences, and other key sites, you begin to grasp the enormity of the situation. The remedy, however, begins with a single vital conversation with an elite security professional, one who understands listening carefully to you is as important as knowing the right questions to ask.

A security consultant comfortable working with clients of your calibre understands that only a bespoke solution, mindful of your unique circumstances will do. To that end, expect that you and key members of your staff will be interviewed. All this is part of a proper security risk assessment, as is a careful examination of your premises and the surrounding area.

Findings from the risk assessment will be presented, as will recommendations for mitigating the risks uncovered. One suggestion may be to enhance security by involving everyone in the family office, the all-hands approach.

Considering the wealth under management, many family offices are lightly staffed. Often few, or no security personnel are employed. While responsibility for providing a safe working environment rests most heavily upon your shoulders, everyone can actively take part with a bit of training and knowledge. The training is neither complicated, lengthy, nor tedious. In fact, my experience shows most employees are quite keen to dive in, and they feel empowered afterwards.

Training is first focused on subjects familiar to all employees in your family office. Situational awareness is a cornerstone. Staff must learn to not only notice when someone or something doesn't look or feel right, but they also practice the proper response. Are you being followed into a car park? Is that new vendor genuine, or a criminal using a pretext to reconnoitre the office for a later burglary? Necessary skills are taught, and scenarios are acted

out with employees playing different roles. Every situation reinforces the security plans created with your consultant's assistance. Now is the time to make the mistakes, and to do it again until actions become second nature. Proper training requires active participation. In an emergency, no one will remember the clever computer slide show, but everyone will recall the correct response because they have all done it before.

Think of training as the tactical employment of your strategic security plans. Those plans should be written down and signed off by the head of the family office. Under these plans are the procedures everyone in the office must follow to enact the plan. The procedures are learned and practised during training.

If one security plan is to Prevent Unauthorized Access to the Family Office, the procedures might include keeping doors secure, checking vendor identification, and questioning those in the office whom you do not know. Several skills and tasks may be trained to support these procedures. Among these are conducting door checks and reviewing access control logs, recognising social engineering attempts at obtaining information both telephonically and in person, and ensuring visitors are positively identified and recorded.

Unlike fine wine, security plans do not age well in the dark. Dust them off regularly, update frequently, and rehearse procedures consistently. Threats evolve continuously. Your risk assessment and mitigation efforts must also.

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