

Executive Protection Training for Law Enforcement and Security Professionals

During my 29 years of police work, I had numerous opportunities to provide close protection, or “bodyguard” services to groups or individuals. Most of us in law enforcement can say the same thing. It was (and is) as interchangeable as traffic control or report writing. I can’t remember ever wondering if I was qualified to provide this close protection, but I must have been, since I had a badge and gun, right? Like most crime prevention techniques, you figured that you must be doing something right if nothing bad happened.

Around 1990, I attended a seven (7) day course of training on providing protective services. Like most of the other police officers in my class (about one third of the group) I was interested in gaining some credentials for possibly changing careers or enhancing my knowledge of executive protection. Also, like most of the others, I didn’t think that there was much that I could learn from civilians, but maybe some corporate types would have a few tricks that I could pick up.

After all, shouldn’t the fact that I patrolled the mean streets and faced hardened criminals qualify me to babysit some politician or celebrity whose only real threat might be to trip and fall or possibly have their photo taken in an unflattering situation? The simple answer was...not even close!

Since those early days, I have had my eyes opened up by some of the best minds in the country. Not only have these folks written the book(s) on Executive Protection, they have established guidelines that I now follow and teach to my students. Just as it is in law enforcement, there have been so many misconceptions about the field of Executive Protection (EP), or Personal Protection Specialist (PPS), that the reality of the job is often overlooked by newcomers to the business.

Witness the proliferation of “Bodyguarding” schools that are popping up all over the world and especially the internet. Many of these schools offer training in the CDI programs that attract the young and adventurous. CDI, as we know, simply means “chicks dig it.” Unfortunately, corporate board members usually don’t dig it. In fact, the former special ops soldier who looks at most problems as if they are nails that require his hammer, often does not fit in well when outside of that comfort zone.

Let’s face it, soldiers and police officers do not get paid to avoid trouble. They are expected to confront it and neutralize it.

None of this means that military and LE backgrounds would, or should, disqualify someone from making the transition successfully. It does require learning new skill sets however. Killing or capturing a threat is moved to back burner, while avoiding and escaping trouble takes precedent.

That change in mindset is often the hardest transition in the new career choice. As much as a returning military veteran or career law enforcement officer may believe that they have the tools necessary to provide civilian protection, there are many differences in the mission. You can be a 250 pound bodybuilder/martial artist/IPSC champ and still not be good at what you were hired to do. If you need evidence of this, watch the news nearly any night and pick out the celebrity or VIP bodyguards. Watch how exposed their clients are to potential danger. Or better yet, look for the protectors who are actually bullying the public in order to “protect” their boss.

At the same time, watch a high profile figure who does not appear to have close protection (most usually do) and see how relaxed and comfortable they appear. If the protection detail is handled properly, it would be less obvious that security is within arm’s reach, but you can be sure that security is being handled by professionals who have pre-planned and choreographed the event or movements carefully. Unlike the PSD or Hostile Environment (HE) security that we often see on television, these professionals are not waving weapons at the crowd and forming human barriers. What VIP or Fortune 500 executive wants to have constituents or clients roughed up in a public setting?

When choosing a training course, you should perform the same due diligence that you would for any other assignment. Ask how long the company has been conducting the work that they are training you for. Who are the instructors? What is the course curriculum? How many course graduates actually get work upon completing the program? Is the material accredited or certified in order to get licensed by the state you wish to work in? Does that training company actually hire their own graduates?

The training must be designed to prepare the student for the real world of Executive Protection, not the fantasy world of body guarding.

Any firearms instructor can teach someone how to shoot, but few can perform a complete route survey and advance an entire day, week or longer of executive travel and meetings.

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