

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Security for Artisans: A Reflective Practitioner's View of Today's Security Professional and the Protection Business

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Security is receptive to scientific advance, but is no field for scientists to dominate. The exigencies of protection are too fluid and the stakes too high for submitting one's livelihood, assets, or life to rigid metrics and laboratory-grade theories that fall apart on first contact with mortal hazard. On the other hand, security is no long-term home for artists, either. Not that the protective world need be inhospitable to creativity or innovation – particularly if these produce desired protection on time and within ambient resource constraints. However, the artist's highest aspiration to be and do something unique will find a better home elsewhere. In the protection business, it is not only useful but necessary to be able to replicate and commoditize one's highest achievement, to spread it widely and often without taking credit for it. In this context, die-hard artists will surely look to greener pastures more befitting their egos and temperaments. Where does that leave us, then, if security is neither art nor science and if security welcomes visitors from both camps but offers a home to neither?

Security at its best is a home for artisans. It is one of those hybrid disciplines whose highest expressions derive from synthesis, from blending theory and innovation together and then applying the mixture with gusto and finesse to situations where success may occasionally surface but where failure is unmistakable and fatal to people, institutions, or careers. Security is no place for the faint of heart, for the indecisive, for the chronically risk averse. It can be a natural fit, however, for defenders, pragmatic idealists, and masters of the calculated risk.

A first-rate security practitioner takes the pains of a fine craftsman – without giving the pains of a technical expert or temperamental artist – and applies skills that require not only knowledge but some level of apprenticeship. This practitioner takes enough pride in mastery of the discipline to keep honing skills that improve the way he or she practices the craft. Security professionals at the top of their game do for colleagues and neophytes what others did for them: teach, share, question, explain, and improve. They resist the temptation to hoard knowledge or mask ignorance. Some are blunt. Others are tactful. Some are didactic and prolix. Others are laconic, only answering questions rather than volunteering information. All the pros have successes under their belt, as well as misfires it pains them to remember. The good ones will tell you about both. The great ones will have one or more whoppers in the failure column. When they talk about those, they remember what they learned from their mistakes, how they did better next time.

Security professionals are as frustrated or stymied as anyone else. They learn to make peace with an imperfect world and navigate the uncertain waters that raise them high

one day, only to submerge them the next day. Over time, security professionals learn to take vicissitudes in graceful stride. They learn to anticipate adverse consequences, and this knowledge carries over into organizational life. They see it coming. Ideally, they dodge the blow. When dodging is no option, at least they brace for the punch.

Security professionals put some distance between themselves and others. It keeps them objective and creates more room for maneuver, more reaction time. Most of the time, Security (as a function or department) is no one's best friend. Often, though, Security is their only friend. Security people know they get paid to try where others run or hide. Part of their job is not just what they do under routine conditions, but what they are prepared to do when things go bad.

Security people may have ambitions, but they must learn to keep them in check. Crime pays better. So do the kinds of jobs that require more ethical flexibility. Organizational dynamics often put security practitioners at odds with some employee populations more than others. Fortunately, the world keeps serving up just enough danger to remind most organizations why they have, and keep, security on the payroll.

Security at its best keeps spectacular losses from happening. This makes its work unspectacular and its consummate practitioners relatively unheralded. Only the professionals know among their ranks or just between themselves. And when they craft a worthy defense or foil an otherwise devastating attack, they know. They look up. They smile. And maybe that's enough.

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