SECURING YOUR PLACE IN THE INDUSTRY

Sarah Hayward *reports on the increased recruitment opportunities for the right applicants*

We have reached an interesting juncture in the world of security. No longer is the industry purely seen as the preserve of former police and military professionals, it is now firmly (and rightly) recognised as a career in its own right. This is excellent news for organisations and their recruitment, as greater interest ensures a wider and richer pool of talent from which to recruit and develop. However, from a candidate's point of view, it means more competition and a greater need for the right attitude, training and experience to win the ideal role.

The shift in the way that security provision is viewed means that security personnel are no longer perceived as the 'guard' – an enforcer of rules – but now as an 'enabler'. Business needs have changed in recent years, recognising that to ensure a truly effective security culture is adopted, employees, contractors, business leaders and stakeholders must all be 'bought in' to the entire concept of security. The 'insider threat' is a good example of how viewing security as a business enabler, inclusive of all, can support early detection and prevention of issues.

CHANGING TIMES

It has always been inevitable that the security industry has seen a lot of recruitment from people transitioning from the police and military. Traditionally, these highly trained and skilled individuals were typically looking for a second career, often to supplement a pension. However, changes in retirement age for public sector workers are seeing more and more of these professionals looking to work in the commercial sector at the peak of their career, rather than towards the end.

This is evident when you look at the numbers of personnel leaving the armed forces to seek alternative careers. Between April 2016 and March 2017, MOD figures show that 8,194 soldiers joined the British Army, while 9,775 left during the same period. It was suggested that 'family life and opportunities outside the forces' were among the key reasons given for this.

Additionally, the security industry is increasingly being recognised as a fruitful potential choice for school-leavers and graduates looking for a solid future career path. This interest is also being fuelled by increasing numbers of young people entering the job market and realising that untrained roles are becoming over-subscribed and that a focused professional job is the ideal alternative.

Department for Education figures show that the number of students coming up through education is also steadily increasing (between 2016 and 2017 an additional 110,000 students entered the school system), so competition for school-leavers is becoming even more fierce.

STANDING OUT FROM THE PACK

Not only is this adding pressure to fellow school leavers, it is also additional competition for ex-police/military professionals, not to mention all the security professionals already working within the industry. Figures from a well-respected security recruiter suggest that, on average, 241 people apply for each advertised security post – so it is essential for candidates (whatever their professional or training background) to stand out from the competition. Qualifications are essential, in particular those which are security related.

I recently attended an event entitled 'Developing a Career in the Security Industry', which was held by the ASIS UK Young Professional committee. The message I took away from the speakers and other delegates that I spoke to was very clear – networking and people skills are key to building and developing your security career.

Networking is a key skill, whether you are taking your first steps in the security industry or reaching the zenith of your career. The connections you make in the industry (and also in the wider commercial world) will pay dividends as you career progresses.

Starting out, internships can be a very useful initial entry point, offering an opportunity to develop the right skills for career progression. However, even at this stage it is important to stand out from the competition and often university education will offer academic help, rather than industry contacts.

LinkedIn is an obvious networking portal, but equally, meeting professionals face to face at networking events is vital. Don't underestimate the humble business card either. A well-targeted business card (with not only contact details, but a brief professional background on the individual) can go a long way towards being noticed and remembered. It is also very important to remember that the world of business is a social one, so it is vital never to 'close a door', however far you have progressed. Even when you feel like you are moving onto bigger and better things, it always makes sense to do so on good terms, as this experience and these relationships will continue to build your professional network.

Whether you are a seasoned security professional, an ex-police/military professional, graduate or a school-leaver starting you career, it is always important to gain as much experience as possible, from as many people and organisations (and even industries/sectors) as you can. This gives a good view of the commercial and business sector as well as the specific security needs they require.

This doesn't stop when you progress further up your career ladder either. It is sensible to keep moving throughout your career – this can be a horizontal move to a completely different industry

NETWORKING AND PEOPLE SKILLS ARE KEY TO DEVELOPING YOUR SECURITY CAREER

or sector, just as much as a vertical move to a more senior role. As with most things in life, you can never stop learning in the world of security – there are always new skills to be learned and lessons in good (and bad) practice to be understood. Often there is far more to be learned from a mistake than a success!

With increased pressure on security role candidates, persistence is most definitely a virtue. Many lucrative and sought-after roles will see large numbers of applicants apply and it is important to keep pushing yourself forward for every opportunity. If you don't get the role, learn from the process, improve your skillset in the interim and ensure your next application improves on this.

One of the speakers at the 'Developing a Career in the Security Industry' event suggested that they only hear once from around 90 percent of their applicants. By being persistent it is possible to be part of the 10 percent of applicants that will become noticed over time and will stand out from their competition. This is obviously vital for young people starting their security career, but equally it should be at the front of your mind even if you are an experienced security or ex-police/military professional too. You may well be applying to an organisation in a completely different sector from your last role and it's important that these recruiters understand your skills and recognise the benefits you can offer them.

The need for security professionals to better understand the commercial sector and the pressures and drivers of the business world has been another

significant shift in the industry in recent times. This is particularly relevant to ex-police/military individuals and young security professionals who may well have less experience in the machinations of the private sector. For example, sometimes ex-services professionals can find it a challenge to 'sell' themselves to a commercial employer, having been trained to work as an expert cog in a much bigger machine. However, the considerable technical skills along with 'soft skills' (such as leadership, team, project and management) are highly valuable and need to be articulated well to any potential employer.

THE SECURITY INDUSTRY IS INCREASINGLY BEING RECOGNISED AS A CHOICE FOR SCHOOL-LEAVERS

Sometimes these considerable skills will require additional re-training to offer all the requirements for a commercial role. Happily, there are excellent security industry training providers on hand to help with this and many businesses run ex-forces programmes that can help too.

Fully understanding how the security industry can assist a commercial business is a skill which will elevate any security professional above your peers and will convince a potential employer that you understand the bigger picture.

Naturally, if you are competing against an average of 241 other applicants for a security role, it is important that your application stands out for all the right reasons. Ensure that rather than just sending a generic CV for every application, it is fully bespoke to the role you are applying for and addresses all the criteria the recruiter is looking for. Make it succinct (one page if possible) and push your greatest strengths to the fore.

SPREAD THE NET
Always ensure you network with relevant groups (such as ex-forces or women in security groups, for example – both online and in person) and look to join industry associations such as ASIS International and the Security Institute, which will help you meet other professionals in your chosen field of expertise.

Gain a broad level of experience, learn from those around you (both in security and in the wider commercial world) and train/re-train or study as required to ensure you have all the managerial (as well as technical) skills to stand above your competition.

While the competition for security roles has never been tougher, the rewards remain impressive. The commercial world has grown to understand the considerable benefits of professional security and engaged professionals will help this to flourish.

Whatever stage of your career you are at, by keeping a current view of the landscape of the industry, you will demonstrate your adaptability and genuine interest. Enthusiasm and curiosity are key attributes for the security professional, just as much as any other profession. This will drive your career forward to enjoy the satisfaction and rewards on offer from this exciting and rewarding profession ●

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Security roles are no longer exclusive to ex-police officers or those from the military

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