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John Kostanoski ^a

^a Farmingdale State College, Farmingdale, New York, USA

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Interview

An Interview with Bill Besse

JOHN KOSTANOSKI

Farmingdale State College, Farmingdale, New York, USA

Bill Besse is the Executive Director, Consulting & Investigations for Andrews International. Prior to joining the Andrews team Bill was the Director, Corporate Security of Belo Corp., where he was responsible for Corporate Security strategy, planning, and implementation on a global basis. Prior to joining Belo, Bill was Managing Director of Global Consulting Services of IPSA International Inc., working out of offices in Dallas, Texas. He was responsible for planning and conducting all IPSA consultative engagements on a global basis. Prior to joining IPSA International, Bill served ten years as the Global Director of Corporate Security for Mary Kay, Inc., with responsibility to provide security services to all worldwide operations, including coordination and management of all corporate security affairs, protection strategies, investigations, special events, and business intelligence. In addition, Bill was responsible for security, safety, and emergency planning for one of the nation's largest annual business meetings and has implemented proactive special event security plans at many of the nation's major convention venues and for groups up to 125,000 attendees. Prior to joining Mary Kay, Bill was the Manager of Security Services for the Motorola Corporation for several years where he developed security programs and investigated high-technology product diversions and intellectual property cases. Bill has extensive experience and expertise in executive protection, including the development of proactive strategies and global logistic support. Bill provided planning, logistical support, and recovery operations for Mary Kay sales associates in South Florida immediately after the Andrew Hurricane and emergency planning, support, and recovery operations in New Orleans for Belo's CBS affiliate WWL-TV. WWL was the only TV or Radio broadcast station in the region to remain operational 24/7 during and after the Katrina

Address correspondence to John Kostanoski, Editor, Chair, Department of Security Systems, Farmingdale State University of New York, 2350 Broadhollow Road, Farmingdale, NY 11735. E-mail: john.kostanoski@farmingdale.edu

Hurricane event. It won numerous honors for its commitment to the New Orleans community.

He has conducted, coordinated, and managed due diligence, background, internal control, and other sensitive corporate investigations pertaining to acquisitions, joint venture partnerships, start-up research, philanthropic investments, and senior manager/partner selection. Bill has designed and implemented nationwide integrated electronic security systems and communications systems incorporating millions of square feet of office, manufacturing, distribution/warehouse, research and development, and corporate flight operations space. Bill has provided needs assessments, surveys, program evaluations, threat assessments, investigative consulting, and risk analysis for numerous Fortune 500 clients.

Bill, as an authority on the subject of executive protection, what should a well-rounded executive protection program include?

John, providing protective services in the 21st-century global environment is a complex task within the private sector context. Doing business has in itself become more complex for the global enterprise and also the high net worth individual and his/her family. The competitive nature of today's business environment has pushed business into markets that are not as stable as many corporations are used to operating within. Supply chains extend around the globe, creating security, resiliency, business continuity, and international monetary exchange rate issues and other global economic challenges. At the same time, security issues continue to be more complex, with international terrorism, domestic instability/conflict, organized crime, cyber-crime challenges, hostile business intelligence efforts at gleaming personal and business information, online stalking aimed at children, and quickly changing geo-political situations continually and rapidly changing the global threat-scape. The effective, well-developed executive protection program must be adaptive to constant change. It must demonstrate value and be focused on "over the horizon" views of both local and international operating venues. It should present a diverse set of skills and backgrounds that reflect the environments it operates within. Certainly, the traditional protection skills must be of high quality. This is a given. This is the bottom line reason such a unit exists. But, tactical skills are no longer good enough. Emergency medical support skills, for example, are increasingly more important in my opinion. With more than 350,000 people just in the United States dying every year of sudden cardiac arrest, the odds are that the most common threat an EP Team/Program will face will be some type of medical emergency, not a physical assault on those being protected. The EP program should have an intelligence and counterintelligence capability both within its domestic area of operation as well as into and about any foreign venue in which it ventures or has an interest. The successful and effective 21st-century EP program will be threat based and consequently it should be capable of providing accurate,

realistic ongoing threat assessment, review, and the “over the horizon views” to its consumers I spoke of earlier, so the nature and levels of protective services being provided are commensurate with the real-world threats facing those at risk. And, perhaps more importantly, it must be perceived as providing value to the enterprise and those receiving the coverage. We have two fronts on which we have to work very hard to achieve. In today’s increasingly dangerous world, we have to engage strategies that make people safe AND we have to insure the PERCEPTION that they are is strong. The two are not the same and we fail in our mission if one or the other does not meet expectations. Those charged with protection duties will have to rely on strong communicative, relationship-building skills and business acumen, along with the tactical skills we have.

What do you see as the major challenges facing this security specialization?

Well, competing for budget is an important factor when we’re speaking of a Corporate Executive Protection (EP) Program. Even within programs that have been basically mandated by a Corporate Board of Directors, budgets have and are being scrutinized like every other corporate function. At the same time, media and shareholder activists have been critical of so-called lavish spending on Chairmen and CEOs, those most likely to receive these kinds of services. Many times without the benefit of a full understanding of the nature of the new 21st-century Threats we spoke of earlier. Unless those who lead security programs have a “seat at the table” to brief and describe the need for EP programs, we’re likely to see further erosion in budgets being allocated to this function. This is where the communications and business acumen I mentioned plays a significant role. The new leaders will have to process many of the same skills other business managers within major organizations have in order to make a strong business case for protective services and to compete on equal terms for budget dollars. That leads me to the next challenge, which I mentioned earlier. Although we have seen tremendous progress in the Executive Protection discipline, once thought of as “body guard work,” there remains a lingering perception in many places that dark glasses, automatic weapons, high-speed evasive driving, and little plastic ear pieces is what the discipline is all about. I think I have made it clear that this may not be the case, and certainly individual circumstances might require them. However, we need to convince people coming into the field that a more holistic set of skills and approach is best suited for today’s environment. Here is a classic example of these lingering misconceptions and damaging perceptions about this discipline:

“The Cost of Protecting the CEO,” *Forbes* (August 21, 2008); Kirdahy, Matthew.

American corporations spend millions of dollars annually on security for their executives, especially CEOs. Oracle CEO Larry Ellison has the

highest personal security costs, with the company spending \$1.7 million in 2007. That does not include the money Ellison spent to install advance security systems at his two California estates. In addition to home-security systems, many CEOs are protected by a 24-hour security team, typically made up of former police officers or retired military. Globalization is forcing executives to travel more, which means that companies need to spend money on protection during international business trips. Some public companies require that executives use private airplanes for all business trips and some private travel. Ford Motor CEO Alan Mullaly spent \$752,000 in 2007 while traveling on the corporate jet. Most attacks on public figures occur when victims are in or near their cars, so drivers are also important members of the security team.

If one were to ask you to name your most important security accomplishment what would it be?

That's an easy question, John. I have been very fortunate and honored to be associated with some very fine organizations and people that have placed me in progressively more responsible positions of trust and responsibility. I have had opportunities to travel the world, fly on the Concorde Jet, hike up and down the Great Wall, walk the halls of Lubyanka, and have dinner overlooking the lights of Paris while performing what some might call work. Extraordinary experiences to say the least. Having had the opportunity to serve my nation in important and sensitive work has to be a highlight along with having had the opportunity to create what some might call very good Global Corporate Security Programs. But, at this point of my career I consider having had the opportunity and privilege to have several professionals who at one time or another caught my attention as high potential and excellent people and having had them work for me (more appropriately with me) now take their place as the heads of their respective security organizations and others who continue to contact me for advice and counsel. That is a very rewarding feeling and I cherish it every day. Having the ability to influence in some way the professional path forward for someone who gets it, is by far the very best accomplishment.

Bill, as a former director of global protective services at Mary Kay Cosmetics, Inc. what kinds of issues can one expect to encounter when working in a global security environment?

Balancing the needs of doing business with the security needs of the enterprise is a significant issue that has to be addressed thoughtfully and comprehensively. Today's global business environment means "the sun is always coming up somewhere." The speed of telecommunications and the media has transformed decision making into a demanding 24-hour, 7-day-a-week mandate, in many cases. Cultural awareness and issues involving "what is acceptable or not" is critical. International travel is demanding and gruel-

ing, frankly. Managing an international security or protective detail from afar offers some unique challenges that demand stamina, persistence, and leadership. Planning and managing effectively across multiple time zones, and having a network of reliable and vetted contacts you can call on is a challenge to any good business manager. Both are necessities in the 21st-century protective services function. Letting go and empowering distant multicultural business units to take responsibility for their own security, generally speaking, may come as a shock to some, but I have found that efforts to have “the foreign office comply with mandated directives” can become counterproductive and actually lead to a less secure environment locally. It may in fact be far more critical that those leading security efforts in the 21st-century Corporate Security Department or Protective Unit have as their goal a stable and sustainable operating environment for all international business units, than to practice enforcement-style mandated security, utilizing old-style command and control methods.

Are there special competencies or skills required in order to function successfully in the international arena?

There are a number of reasons why greater diversity, as I mentioned previously, is essential. Most importantly, there is a growing recognition of the strategic importance of security and as a result security and protective units need to operate at a much more senior level. That requires a whole new set of skills, which emphasize leadership, communications, presentation skills, and networking above content or tactical knowledge. The modern Corporate Security and or Protective Unit needs people who are happy breaking rules, innovating, and thinking outside the traditional security box. I would rate skills such as independent thinking, willingness to challenge assumptions and behaviors, and innovation as being skills I value most and strive for myself and for my teams. We need people who push the boundaries and constantly challenge the way we solve problems. Next, there is a growing recognition of the value of “the human element.” Some experts say that many security professionals are typically trained to address security incidents and emergencies in ways that fail to factor in the human dynamics of such incidents and situations, including the impact of emotions, perceptions, and fear on people’s behavior. Emotional intelligence is critical in my opinion to effective alignment, but the human element of security and risk management is routinely overshadowed by the emphasis on technical security skills. In my work with stalkers and persistent followers, the mentally unstable fan or worker who threatens and disrupts, those so-called soft skills involving behavior come directly into play in providing long-term safety solutions. These “people skills” insights and instincts play well internationally as well as domestically. I think I may have discussed other important skills previously as well.

I noted in your background that you are a graduate of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School, and that you had served as a special agent in U.S. military intelligence. Would you comment on the value of this type of background to corporate and economic espionage and intellectual property protection?

During my service within the U.S. Intelligence Community as a Counterintelligence Agent we based our protective strategy and countermeasures on three basis principals:

1. Physical Security
2. Personnel Security
3. Information Security

There is a popular neuro management theory that converges virtual and physical security into one discipline. I have a hot flash for this “new epiphany.” Effective physical security goes hand and hand with both effective personnel and information security; always has, always will. The threats have grown more complex and will continue to do so, but those three basic pillars of our craft remain constants. The other constant is that at some point the human factor will enter into all security vulnerabilities and compromise. Understanding how even extremely loyal individuals are and will continue to be compromised allows those involved in the art of protective services to have an advantage over the dark side of betrayal. This deserves a much longer discourse and response. However, I realize space is limited here and leave my comments at that.

I noted, too, that you have had extensive experience in special and large event security. How do you maintain command and control of hundreds if not thousands of people at events and in locales that pose serious security and safety challenges? Would you share some of your experiences with our readers?

We learned that if security and protective services is bolted on to a plan for a special event, sort of as an afterthought rather than being a blended part of the plan from its inception, there is a very good chance the “security plan” will not work well. Again, security and protective services units should have a seat at the table along with other disciplines at the conceptual stages of any large special event. But that seat has to be earned. In order to be effective, security should be included in the plan and be appropriately budgeted. We have developed a replacement for the old “Security Command Center.” I much rather prefer the Event Information Fusion Center. Rapid, accurate, and comprehensive communications are an absolute must for all large special events. This is a single point where ALL information, including security and risk-related information, is received, processed, and acted upon by the TEAM

running the event. Security must have a seat at that table, a significant one with access to a great deal of the total picture, especially if multiple sites are involved. This is a more cost-effective use of the investment and produces a better return on the investment used to develop the Event Fusion Center. This becomes a single point where a 40,000-foot view of the event can be observed and where resources can be directed toward any anomaly that could disrupt or alter the playbook for the event. In the case of close escorting or personal security the key remains in the quality of the advance work and preparation that goes into the logistical moves necessary to expedite to movement of VIPs, guests, entertainment/talent, or sponsoring executives and family members. Also, the quality of the relationships developed with the public sector service providers, Law Enforcement, Fire Rescue, and EMS along with other municipal services, will determine the quality of the security plan's execution. This was always the case in the dozens of Mary Kay events we coordinated over the years in cities and venues all over the world. We developed a Special Event Template specially designed to serve and protect those large special events involving 50,000 attendees over 5 straight weeks of 20-hour days. Recently, I applied the same basic principals in Istanbul for a large multinational client who brought 1,400 of its very best global customers, clients, senior executives, and staff to Turkey, housed them in five major hotels and held meetings at various venues around Istanbul using 32 large tour buses to move the entire group from place to place. I am confident the same basic protective package, with some adjustments for scale, will serve us and our client well in South Africa, as another example, during one of the world's largest sporting events coming to the world stage again in 2010. Another basic principal that has served me well during large events and is part of any playbook I put in place has been that, "We cannot possibly anticipate every potential incident that could take place; we certainly could not hope to prevent and control every eventuality. What we can **absolutely control** and have 100% ability to do is **manage the quality of our response** to those events when they occur, regardless of how small or significant."

What kinds of capabilities do you expect students to have when they graduate from degree programs in security?

I would expect to see some significant level of commitment demonstrated by an excellent academic record. Certainly a high level of competence and working knowledge of technology productivity tools would be expected. I would welcome a broad perspective on International issues and competence in business-related topics such as Accounting, Law and Finance or Supply Chain/Operations studies. The higher level of expertise in those basic principals of Physical, Information, and Personnel Security, the better equipped the graduate will be. Those with some exposure to and certainly those with specialization in Forensic Accounting, Psychology, or Computer Forensics, will have a competitive advantage. Someone with language skills will also

have an advantage, especially if they have put them to use internationally in an actual work or travel environment.

What advice can you give to students who are pursuing degrees and ultimately careers in security?

There will be tremendous opportunities available for those who find that this is their passion. My number one piece of advice to students is just that—Find your passion, build on every experience you can, and find someone who can mentor and guide and advise you along the way. Develop your contacts within your chosen field and beyond it into other professions and fields of endeavor. Broaden your perspective on global issues and get out and see the World so you can draw your own perspectives and views about it. Take an internship to gain real-world experiences and meet professionals engaged in the craft and art of providing Protective Services.



FIGURE 1 Bill Besse, World Cup, Istanbul, January 2008