

PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILLS OF PRIVATE SECURITY STAFF/PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract: Rapid social and economic changes are accompanied by a number of risks that adversely affect the psychological state of people. People's psycho-social problems are one of the most complex issues, since various factors influence their occurrence and maintenance. The "cause" of a problem arises not only in one single person, or in a single characteristic of the environment.

The need to acquire psychosocial skills in the work of professionals is necessary to strengthen their individual capacities and to adequately address emerging professional challenges with individuals. Therefore, professionals should permanently complement and strengthen their knowledge, abilities and skills to work with people if they want to be successful in their profession.

In the curriculum for acquiring the necessary qualifications for obtaining a private security license, there is a theoretical preparation of candidates for basic psychological processes, related to life cycles, individual development, motivation and emotions. Professional security agents during work are increasingly exposed to stressful situations. Hence the need for developing skills for dealing with stress related to the profession, strengthening their psychosocial skills for adequate communication (verbal and nonverbal). It is also important to develop communication skills, active listening, effective speaking, solving communication problems, frustration, conflict management and their dismissal.

The acquisition of psychosocial skills among professionals is more than necessary for both the professionals themselves and the community where the services of professional providers are implemented.

Keywords: psychosocial skills, private security professional, conflicts, stress.

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Introduction

Rapid social and economic changes are accompanied by a number of risks that adversely affect the psychological state of people. People's psycho-social problems are one of the most complex issues, since various factors influence their occurrence and maintenance. The "cause" of a problem arises not only in one single person, or in a single characteristic of the environment.

The need to acquire psychosocial skills in the work of professionals is necessary to strengthen their individual capacities and to adequately address emerging professional challenges with individuals. Therefore, professionals should permanently complement and strengthen their knowledge, abilities and skills to work with people if they want to be successful in their profession.

As a beginning we will emphasize several general factors connected with good professional psycho-social skills. Such factors help identify something we should or shouldn't expect in the relation to others. They help us be realistic and maybe modify some of the demands we put on ourselves and some of the demands impose to others.

Can psycho-social skills be learned?

Sometimes the question is asked if qualities we talked about above can be learned. If the answer is positive, the surveyor is usually reserved regarding such learning, because it looks like a bit of premeditated, manipulative approach to human relations. In this case it would suggest that we learn social skills to gain power over others and to get what we want from them. The answer is that of course it's possible to learn to be socially manipulative, but that is not the subject of our education. To acquire adequate psycho-social skills doesn't represent a cynical social manipulation, but a sincere care for the well-being of people in the moment and for their future achievements.

The base pointer for the competency of any profession, are skills. To be competent in communication means to have good developed communicational skills. The competency can be determined as a set of knowledge, skills and values. Competency in itself also contains evaluation element for the quality of use, so basic are the following criteria:

- Appropriation, as a degree to which some behavior is acceptable and justifiable, i.e. the skills are used in the real moment.
- Success and efficiency, as a degree to which an expected results is achieved, i.e. the skills are used with a certain goal achieved with their adequate application (Spitzber, 2003, according to Hargie, 2006).

The professional competency includes the efficient usage of three types of skills:

- Cognitive – the professional knowledge which also gives a mark to the profession and differs it from others;
- Practical – special practical skills crucial for the profession and
- Communicational – with their help the professionals have the ability for effective interaction with users and other experts.

It is interesting that education in different professional areas traditionally was directed toward the first two types of skills which goes in addition to recent convictions that communication, although marked as essential for success in many professions, by itself is inborn and unchangeable.

The communicational skills are also practical skills who are the base for cognitive skills, because different shapes of communication are based on each intervention regardless of the theoretical and practical approach.

Robbins and Hunsaker (1996, according to Hargie and Dickson, 2004), imply that in order to become competent in any skill it is necessary for the person to understand such skills conceptually and behavioristically, to have the opportunity to exercise it, to gain feedback about how well to apply it, to use it often enough so it becomes an integral part of its behavior repertoire.

Communication skills

The world is full of good speaks men. But it isn't that full of good interlocutors. Most often problems in communication appear when two individuals speak at the same time, there is an inadequate listening of the interlocutor, understanding of the interlocutor is missing and contains only speaking between two individuals competing who will say something first – egocentrically talk. In professional life it is sometimes necessary to speak formally and to keep to the subject. In other cases it is enough to be free with others regardless if they are users, heads, colleagues, subordinates, guests or any other people.

To be a good interlocutor it also means to speak on the real level adequate to our listeners. In professional life we are often in a situation where we speak to people who have lesser quantum of knowledge about things we already know through the offered content in communication or have much lower level of understanding or verbal fluency. Without communicating with them by a higher ground or patronize, we must formulate our sentences so they can follow us. While doing this we should be aware that regardless how much the problem we speak about is important to them and how well we have explained it, they can have a limited range of attention. After a used a sentence of two their attention weakens, and after that all of our eloquence is wasted. In such cases it is vital we often pause and check if the listeners follow us.

Another characteristic of a good interlocutor is the non-presence of irritating characteristics which are connected with the usage of speech or gestures. The constant repeating of some unnecessary expressions such as: **you know, so on, I think and like that**, can irritate even the most patient listeners. As much as irritating is the constant play with your glasses or phone in your hands.

To be a good listener

The ability to hear is also an important part of an effective communication as much as the ability to say what you want. Good listening supposes showing equal interest for what you tell as to what others have to say.

Why are communication skills important?

Recognizing the interlocutor's signals is important so we could know which communication skills to use in a certain moment to establish good communication.

Learning to effectively communicate can help in daily personal and professional relations with rest of the people we're in contact with. Communication is a transfer of information from one subject to another with the help of symbols. Good communication skills can help us develop satisfying and healthy relations with people. On the other hand poor communication skills can hinder the path of forming and keeping of such and can bring to misunderstanding, bad feelings and conflicts.

Types of communication

According to the form there are two types of interpersonal communication:

VERBAL - it relates to specific words we can use as much good as the tone and strength of our voice.

According to Argyle (1983), non-verbal communication functions in 4 different ways:

1. Communicational interpersonal behaviors and emotions;
2. Self-presentation;
3. Rituals and
4. Support of verbal communication.

NON-VERBAL - it relates to the body speech, own face expression and gesticulation.

Professional relations mainly, but not singular, express themselves through spoken language. Professional private security personnel should have basic knowledge of non-verbal communication.

There is a comprehensive literature about non-verbal communication which covers different aspects of analysis of non-verbal signals and body speech where are included (eye contact, face expression, head movement, gestures and movements, body attitude and movement and distance and orientation). The joint theme in this literature is that many things, from friendship to animosity to deepest intimacy can be expressed through these signals and our social skills would be handicapped if we ignore their importance.

The punctuality of the marking of non-verbal signals is influenced by: the intensity of emotions, the sensibility of the interlocutor, the expressing of emotions, the interest and attention of the interlocutor.

The establishing of successful communication influences the relation to others, the image of yourself, self-respect and work success.

There is a number of specific problems we must face when communicating with people on a professional level. How do we communicate with shy and socially inconvenient people to work with? How do we tell bad news perceptively and yet sensitively, how to manage confrontations, and critic others? Certain difficulties appear while communicating with people of other ethnicities.

Skills for managing conflict situations

And now a quite different problem – the conflict. Some people find pleasure in conflicts. They often choose sensations, excitement and challenge in conflicts. Typical for them is that they maybe really feel little antipathy for people they are in conflict with. They mostly forget their anger in the moment when the conflict is over, so for them it isn't more than a recreational game. There are other people who like the conflict because it allows them to impose their view; they don't see a great pleasure in conflict as much as they want to dominate over others. While for other people conflict is important only as a remedy for fulfilling of their needs, interests and plans. They really care about the problem and how to impose their own will while solving it.

- During the professional work there are users of services who create conflicts regardless the prescribed procedure employees apply during their work. Mostly their demands and needs don't correspond with the real situation and principles used in the work. Managing such users demands input of great energy by the employees in solving of conflicts.

General directions for managing of conflicts;

- Don't take verbal attacks too personal, because the personal attacking you probably behaves so with most people;
- Have a constant attitude and show understanding to people prone to conflicts so at least they know their place when it's about you;
- Don't be surprised by the conflict, find out who potentially could face you and when and be prepared;
- Don't instantly allow to be pushed in defense. People finding pleasure in conflicts know how to put you in a position where you will have to justify and apologize yourselves for your behavior; all they need to do is to still find mistakes in your apologies;
- Instead going in defense mode, identify an area of behavior of the other person and find information about him or her and
- Limit the time of discussion since the start.

Steps in resolving of a conflict

There are six basic steps in resolving of conflicts:

- Creating of effective atmosphere;
- Clearing of perceptions;
- Focus on needs;
- Building of positive power;
- Look in the future and
- Generating of possibilities.

The *first* step that must be done is to create an effective atmosphere which will enable the approach to resolving of the conflict.

The *second* step is clearing of perceptions – they are lenses for us to perceive ourselves, others, our relations and situations we face. It must be known that perceptions are formed under the influence of many factors (learning, family, the education system of a society).

The *third* step – functioning based on individual needs, has several key aspects:

- The needs are of the basic parts of a relationship;
- Often needs and wishes are mixed and
- The personal needs of individuals should also include the needs of the relationship.

The *fourth* step is building of positive power. Every relationship also includes power. Because people often limit the way it is perceived and use it as a remedy to control or manipulate someone else, the power is perceived as a dirty choice. People choose a way they use power and if they will allow to be used. The power can be used positively and negatively.

The *fifth* step – look in the future, in the learning of past is contained the idea for effective disappointment of conflicts, starting from the fact each relationship and every conflict have their past, present and future. The past, present and future are connected and their merging in the dynamic process of improving gives the basis of existence.

The *sixth* step – where possibilities are generated, is our ability to discover new possibilities in relationships and to resolve conflicts using packed truths and limited ideas we rely on during time of stress and insecurity. It is known that each journey starts with the first step, but each guide should know that the first step is uncertain and it's not good for him to follow a large one meaning the inability to approach specific solutions. For this purpose a plan for action and establishing of the necessary activities contained in the seventh step is needed, called development of a ladder for action.

The resolving of conflicts has the following advantages:

- Clearing of situations;
- Implementing of new rules;
- Modifying of goals;
- Appearance of competitive spirit and
- Understanding of the need to respect hierarchy.

The deficiencies of conflict resolving are:

- Loss of energy and time;
- Emotional stress;
- Organizational shakes and risks and
- Worsened communications.

For resolving of conflict the following strategies are applied:

- Avoiding or ignoring of conflicts – in the beginning it looks like the problem is solved, but the hidden problem that is a potential danger for a new conflict remains. It is a strategy for creating of feelings for non-existence of conflict;

- Mitigation of conflict – it is a situation of finding a solution to a conflict through nice words with discussion, respectively it represents an open, decent attempt to make differences in opinions past. It usually is temporary and unhappy solution, because the true problem is ignored;
- Coercion – it is a manifestation of aggressiveness because of dissent in opinions and attitudes. The compromise is a known strategy of bargaining and
- Opposing – it appears regarding a problem where the parties have a different opinion or interest.

Managing confrontations

In the work (professional) engagement of the private security employee there is an integrated part for managing formal confrontations. There are three simple manuals: Predict – Avoid – Answer

Predicting means to think in front and to identify the types of confrontations which are possible to appear.

To avoid confrontations doesn't mean run away from them; it means to identify ways to deactivate if they don't have a useful goal.

Of course, if people are determined to create a conflict it isn't always possible to be avoided. But, most effective strategy to do this is to emphasize positive things (as things we can do, not those we can't, areas we can agree on instead those for which an agreement is impossible). Positive things have a unifying and disarming effect. This strategy by itself doesn't necessarily give solutions, but it changes the atmosphere where these solutions are to be made and makes them more probable. It isn't a surprise that positive commentaries from one person often lead to positive commentaries from someone else.

The third direction for managing formal confrontations, responding, means to have a proper answer if and when a confrontation appears.

While working with "inconvenient" users the HEARD technique can be used.

Hear – meaning hear out the user – what he has to say, while not interrupting him while talking because it's very wrong.

Empathies – to show empathy and understanding to the user's needs.

Ask – to ask the user what to be done to solve his problem.

Respond – Reacting by giving solutions. At the same time we should know what are our solutions and how far can we go in offering solutions for the problem.

Deliver – to inform the user what is agreed upon and the time frame for achieving of the agreed upon.

If the profession private security professional stressful?

Professional stress and professional combusting have become often used terms especially in the period of the nineties of last century in industry and especially in human resources sectors. According to the reports of the National institute for professional safety and health (NIOSH),

one quarter of employees see their work places as number one stress in their life and three quarters believe the worker today is at much higher work stress than in previous times. Work stress research initiate that work stresses have many sources, and the professional stress has many reasons. So some stresses appear while routinely working, some are connected with the role of the worker in the organization, some with inter-personal relations, some with improving of career, others are connected with the stressors in the work environment, or climate and organization in the work place etc. In interaction with all these causes for stress also connected are individual characteristics - the features of the worker's personality. These characteristics include level of susceptibility/resilience to stress, emotional stability, anxiety, tolerance, perfectionism, and the need of self-showing, too great expectations from actions, social support present in its family or the community.

Professional stress isn't only the employee's problem he must face alone. It is also a problem of the organization which feels the negative effects of the worker's stress. For the employee the negative effects are: increased problems with the physical health, psychological pain and changes in behavior. For the organization the negative effects are: decreased productivity, increased number of missing work days from employees, ill period, decreased profit. That is why this should be treated as a joint problem and to look for ways to control the sources.

To adequately handle professional stress, the private security professionals gain skills to handle stress, with the only goal to decrease the reasons and consequences which bring to serious health disruptions. There are two types of strategies:

Strategies for prevention of professional stress

Strategies mostly mentioned in the literature are grouped as:

- Institutional/organizational strategies to prevent and manage work stress and
- Personal, individual strategies to handle stress.

Institutional strategies

These strategies encompass development of programs for prevention and managing of work stress and inclusion of the employees in such programs. The development of programs for institutional prevention and managing of professional stress includes for phases: identification, intervention, evaluation, supervision.

Individual strategies for prevention and managing of professional stress

There are several group strategies for individual managing of stress: Strategies focused on the problem, Strategies focused on emotions/feelings; Strategies focused on social support, Strategies focused on self-helping and Strategies focused on physical and mental relaxation.

The goal of these strategies is to stop the appearance of stress or to control the level of stress.

Conclusion

Private security professionals should constantly upgrade and strengthen their knowledge, capabilities and skills for work with people if they want to be successful in their profession. The need of acquiring psycho-social skills in the work of the private security professionals is necessary for strengthening of their individual capacities and adequate handling of newly occurred professional challenges with individuals. Psycho-social skills enable us to work with other people professionally but also to find ourselves. Many people who accept themselves as they are mostly try also accept and understand others. A great psychologist once said "to love our neighbors as we do ourselves", not more than us but as much as. The background of these words is that love creates no limits between us and others. If we are capable to have understanding for what is humane than we will be able to understand our neighbors. They have similar hopes, dreams and fears as we do. Although they have a different way of healing their wounds, they also feel pain as we do.

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