Why Security Professionals Need Executive Leadership Skills

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There are six different areas of knowledge that successful security programs of the future must incorporate, either in the knowledge base of their leaders or in the collective knowledge of the leading staff. They are* **government elements, security organization, emerging issue awareness, IT security, business elements** *and* **executive leadership***. This is one in a series of articles covering each knowledge area. For security professionals, success in the future will be gained only through a blended skill-set — a culmination of all the streams. To read other articles in the series – and to view a self-assessment tool – visit securitysolutions. com/corporate/next-generation-leader.*

BY BOB HAYES, KATHLEEN KOTWICA AND MARLEAH BLADES

So far we have examined the knowledge areas for security leaders in chronological order. However, this month we will backtrack a little. The executive leadership skill-set began seeing business support at the same time the knowledge area topics of our last two columns—organizational knowledge and IT security knowledge—were gaining steam.

In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began encouraging or requiring their employees and managers in all sectors, including security, to bone up on executive leadership skills, such as the ability to manage large budgets, negotiate, influence peers, coordinate external initiatives, lead staff and communicate and present effectively. Corporations held internal training courses and seminars and incorporated the use of leadership skills more tightly into many of their internal functions.

Three main factors contributed to increased interest in these skills among companies: international competition, quality initiatives and technology.

In the 1980s, it became clear that foreign competitors were outperforming U.S. companies in several big markets, including auto manufacturing and technology. Imports from Japan and Germany were taking domestic business from U.S. corporations, and business leaders wanted to know why.

Their answer was quality. U.S. products and customer service were simply below par. Foreign competitors had espoused widespread use of management philosophies such as statistical process control to ensure that defects rarely reached their customers, while U.S. companies continued to rely on more traditional methods.

In response to this finding, U.S. corporations launched into a frenzy of quality initiatives. Corporations pushed teachings such as Six Sigma, Total Quality Management and Tom Peters' "In Search of Excellence" to every staffer in every function. Their impact was inescapable.

At the same time, organizations were prepping their employees to deal with international business in order to better compete overseas. Companies wanted to drastically improve their standing in international sales, yet stories abounded of executives going to China and Japan and "committing cultural suicide"—insulting their hosts or potential customers because they knew nothing about the customs and traditions of the countries. Organizations began to train employees on cultural issues and public speaking so they could present a better face for the company internationally.

Technology also played a role in the focus on executive leadership skills. For one thing, technology was, in part, responsible for the increase in international competition and the growth of the global marketplace. But it also required employees to learn new skills. When e-mail became widespread in the workplace, corporations often held classes on how to communicate appropriately in this new medium and how to avoid abusing this tool in their management activities.

As the millennium neared, companies cut down or eliminated their internal training for executive leadership skills due to cost.

Most transferrable skills

All of the skills in the executive leadership skill-set—presentation skills, strong communication, building peer influence, managing large budgets—are immediately valuable to the security professional hoping to excel or to reach a C-level seat, and they are also valuable once that goal is attained. Internal training for these skills was not eliminated because they had declined in importance, but because they had become an expectation rather than a post-hiring issue. These skills are now routinely included in job descriptions and hiring requirements, so security professionals who do not have them may not be able to compete as well in the job market. Many security professionals already have several skills in this set, such as negotiation skills, team building, decision-making skills and relationship management.

Transitioning challenges

One of the most difficult aspects of gaining executive leadership skills, particularly for those new to the workforce or the field, is finding a training program. When these skills were being taught inside the organization, security got to participate in in-house training with everybody else. Now, professionals have to bear the cost burden on their own by enrolling in training courses offered by specialty organizations or colleges. Some external training courses that claim to be tailored to security actually provide little useful knowledge specifically for the security professional.

This problem also exists within organizations where security professionals were trained with the rest of the staff. The in-house training provided by companies in the 1980s and 1990s was not customized for security, and often, the security department did not do enough to update the training for their own purposes. Because security has a unique perspective and unique responsibilities within the organization, it was difficult for the security department to customize the messages of executive leadership to their own environment.

Where do I get these skills?

There are numerous sources of training for executive leadership skills, if the security professional can bear the cost of enrollment. The government has actually maintained more of a continuing focus on this area than has the private sector, and for those in government service, training options still exist and continue to expand.

Security professionals should begin by checking whether their company does offer any internal training. This would be a great place to start. If there are no options there, they should look online and in their local libraries for useful resources. Vocational technology schools often offer courses in executive leadership, as do many product vendors. And colleges and universities, as well as custom courses and high-end specialty courses, are also available, though they tend to have the highest price tags. It's a good idea to check local universities that have criminal justice programs to see if they offer continuing education leadership courses.

The Security Executive Council is in the process of identifying the companies and organizations that provide the best train-

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ing available for each of the six knowledge areas we'll discuss in this series. In a future issue you will find an article on how to acquire the skills needed to become the "next-generation security leader."

We'd love to hear from you regarding your positive experiences with training programs and courses. Please send your reviews to us at contact@secleader.com.

This article is presented in conjunction with the Security Executive Council (www.SecurityExecutiveCouncil.com), an international professional membership organization for leading senior security executives spanning all industries, both the public and private sectors, and the globe. Its members seek innovative issue solutions and documentation of model core security programs. For more information about the council, visit www.SecurityExecutiveCouncil.com/?sourceCode=access. ∎

Bob Hayes is the managing director and Kathleen Kotwica is vice president, research development of the Security Executive Council, a cross-industry professional organization of security executives devoted to advancing strategic security practices. Marleah Blades is senior editor for the Council.