

Smoke & Mirrors

“I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. ‘Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death”

Leonardo da Vinci

A recent post on the North American Bodyguard Association (NABA) Facebook page by Hans van Beuge, made me start thinking about how the industry and personalities have changed over the last 25 years and how in some aspects they have stayed the same.

The original post discussed the protection detail for

Elvis. While I cannot speak that far back, I do remember a time before cell phones, laptop computers and smart phones. Then the Internet came along to supposedly simplify our lives and make everything easier.

I will not pretend to glorify the days when most security details and personnel met trouble head on instead of making plans to avoid it. The science and the craft just were not as evolved or developed back then.

By: Raffaele Di Giorgio

However, just as Mr. da Vinci stated, “I love those who can smile in trouble, can gather strength from distress and grow brave by reflection”, before the advent of the modern technology era that is exactly what men and women in the profession did. And everyone around them knew this.

It was unheard of to have the abundance of self proclaimed experts in the industry that had the mass appeal and as readily available today. 20 years ago the reputation had to be “hard earned”. With the Internet and social media being the way it is now, the polished websites, the continuous photo ops (of the protector) and the Internet self-proclaimed SMEs was simply unheard of.

If you were fortunate enough to get “the call” that you were needed to perform on a protection or security detail, that call was not being placed to you by anyone that did not know you by no more than 1 degree of separation. The science to avoid the majority of confrontations that is afforded to us today, simply was not instituted >





help you. You knew the layout of the Heathrow airport, because you had been through the Heathrow airport. You were not able to pull up the layout of the airport online and then claim to know the airport (or insert any other venue for that matter).

Yes, it is absolutely true - back then the field was inundated with police, ex-military and boxers. This served a purpose much as it does still today. Inherently, these professions tested individuals on a physical and psychological level and, more importantly, repeatedly tested them.

Unfortunately in this day and age it is much easier for persons of questionable integrity, with the assistance of the Internet and computers, to present themselves to a vast audience in a manner that is not true or indicative of not just their moral fiber and true character, but of their skill sets, training and backgrounds. Where one would think that it would be easier and quicker to validate somebody's true background by the computer resources that are afforded us, at this date and time, it actually seems to work better for those that

want to perpetrate these frauds a whole lot easier. They are able to construct false public images of themselves in a faster and more streamlined process than ever before.

I recall a conversation I had with my wife (business partner). Back in 2004 when I decided to start training up and preparing myself for entering more of the non-permissive environment security contracting world. My wife had innocently asked how much more dangerous will that be, as oppose to working stateside? I specifically remember my response - I thought it would actually be safer since the vetting process for the contracts that I was looking to work on, had a much higher standard than the stateside vetting process. As you can imagine this caused quite a bit of confusion and I had to explain to her that the people I would be working with were people that had extensive backgrounds in military, law enforcement and overseas operations. While I have no love lost for the security clearance process, I do and always will have a great appreciation for the fact that it is thorough the majority of the time.

back then. So the only people you trusted on your details were people that were proven to be able to handle the stress and physicality that was necessary almost on a daily basis. The false bravado that has become the world of "tactical" selfie-photographs and Internet web postings simply was not around. The free exchange of techniques, tactics and procedures just was not there for you. Back then there were no 15 min. YouTube videos to teach people (supposedly) self-defense, advances, security driving, route selection et al.

You either knew a neighborhood or you did not. There was no GPS to

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But more so than even the clearance process is the fact that most of the programs I've been fortunate enough to work on are on a "personal reference" nomination system. A continuation of this is the reason that I don't really solicit resumes for my stateside or overseas assignments. I, like the majority of people that have been around for more than a few years, prefer to reach out to people that I have actually worked with.

Do I believe that just because you were a former police officer or military person or professional fighter that you will automatically make a great executive protection professional? Absolutely not, just like a great executive protection professional may not be a great police officer, military person or boxer. But they have the base core fundamentals. They have the ability to handle stress. Notice I did not say the potential to handle stress, but they have a proven ability to handle stress, repeatedly.

Which in turn means I can teach them to do the proper things, since they will not get stuck in a panic situation and forget to do the things that were taught to them. Whereas today's environment seems to put the education and access to knowledge ahead of the intestinal fortitude to do the job when technology fails.

Now before you decide to kill the messenger do not misinterpret this as me stating that technology, science, and evidence-based training is not important in the field. It is absolutely paramount if you want to stay at the cutting edge. What I am cautioning people on is, do not be so blinded by the razzle-dazzle of peoples resumes, websites and social media presence that you forget to look at their substance and background.

As I have often stated in training courses; I can teach skill sets. What I cannot teach is integrity, courage, or character. You have to

have those when you come through the door. I also caution people continuously that before they spend money to train or pursue a career in this profession, they should do a factual assessment and decide for themselves if they can truly handle the "bad days". You may be able to avoid those days for an indefinite period of time, but just like any other high risk profession, they will most certainly come for you and that is when you will be tested. Those types of tests came more frequently back then, so imposters were found out faster and sooner. If it is you, someone you hired or someone that is working with you; not only could that moment in time be a life-changing moment it can be a life ending one as well.

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