

WHEN DID ELITISM IN PROTECTION, BECOME A BAD THING?

“Each honest calling, each walk of life, has its own elite, its own aristocracy based on excellence of performance.”

James Bryant Conant

But that’s not really what elitism, when appropriately understood, is about. In our culture, “elitist” and “snobbish” have become largely synonymous.

When did elitism in protection, become a bad thing?
Is everyone equal in this industry? If so, do they deserve a seat at the table? If seated at the table do they deserve an equal say? More importantly, who should not be seated at table and who should not have a say, in the industry?

World English Dictionary
elitism

— n

1. a. the belief that society should be governed by a select group of gifted and highly educated individuals

- b. such government
2. pride in or awareness of being one of an elite group

It’s expected that, in our open and egalitarian culture, we would look with a quizzical eye on the notion that some people are better than other people. But that’s not really what elitism, when appropriately understood, is about. In our culture, “elitist” and “snobbish” have become largely synonymous. That’s an embarrassment, “Elite” derives from the Latin for “elect,” though not necessarily in the democratic “electoral” sense. It means those who, through efforts and talent, self-select themselves as qualified to lead, and teach, >

by example. Example, being related to past performance.

Elitism again, in the words of William Henry, means “some ideas are better than others, some values more enduring, some works of art more universal. Some cultures, though we dare not say it, are more accomplished than others and therefore more worthy of study.”

We talk of elite athletes, elite scientists, or elite soldiers, and everyone understands that these people are simply better, more expert at what they do than the rest of us. It is only when we get closer to those careers or subjects where experts have decided to bend every fact and twist every standard — in an effort to not bruise the delicate egos of those that are not as well qualified, that “elite” becomes derogatory in its meaning.

What if an elite soldier believed there was no need for weapons training, if an elite athlete argued that the couch was the best place for exercise, if an elite scientist argued that the world was flat, we would fire these people — we wouldn’t redefine what it means to be the best soldier, the best scientist, the best athlete. We most certainly wouldn’t decide that we don’t need elite soldiers or elite scientists, anymore.

What has brought me to writing this article was a discussion that I had with a security client

who I had provided consulting services to for seven years. During that time his business grew from a five figure income to several million dollars a year. In the early years in order for him to establish himself and get a footing in the industry. I had guided him, as I have for many others, to apply for the Small Business Administration’s(SBA), 8a set-aside program for minority and/or disadvantaged owned businesses. During the whole time. I have encouraged and advised him to continue to develop his personal knowledge and to get accredited and certified courses, degrees and certifications that are respected in the industry. But as with most business tragedies, he felt that he was doing well enough and did not need additional training or education. Some of you already know the ending to this story. But for the others, let me please explain it out.

He finally reached a stage where he was successful enough and large enough that he did not qualify as a “disadvantaged” business anymore. This happened about a year ago, so since then he has had to compete on his merits and his company’s merits alone and has suffered some harsh realities in competing on a fair and open market for contracts and clients. So “our” last conversation almost exclusively revolves around him wanting to get back into the “disadvantaged” status so that he could again receive preferential treatment on being awarded contracts. Obviously, this did not go well

between he and I and hence the reason he is no longer one of my clients. At what point do we degrade our services and the field in general, by allowing people that do not have the credentials, an alternate route to our clients and the general public?

I have heard it said many times, by people trying to get into the industry, that the “good old boys network” (insert any verbiage or term that may apply to your region), keeps them from getting into this career field or to the perceived “next” level. I have often countered this with, it is not the “good old boys network”, but in fact it is the “proven old boy network”, which by default I imagine lends itself to elitism, at some level. Which again I do not apologize for. I refuse to put my reputation, my company’s reputation or my clients safety on the shoulders of someone that simply is not proven. For example, I do not believe that the director of hospital security, should automatically assume that they now are a resident expert on executive protection. I also do not believe that a person that spends a one year contract in Iraq, automatically becomes a de facto expert on high threat protection(HTP), let alone opens a training company for HTP.

What I am seeing by agency/company owners and individuals across the board is a reluctance to admit, that they are not qualified in one aspect or the other. Instead, we have all seen it in various forms, where the person who does executive protection as a sideline income, still claims to be elite in protection operations. You will see their brochures and their websites that clearly indicate Monday through Friday. They are teaching concealed carry weapons courses to housewives, but then on Saturday, they claim to be the elite executive protection, for whichever band or act is in town, then Sunday they are an expert on fugitive recovery. Then of course, this confuses many of the clients

since they now believe that there is no clear demarcation between a conceal carry firearms instructor, a uniformed security guard service, a armed uniformed guard service, a plainclothes security service, a policeman, and then an actual executive protection service.

Surely what the profession and clients need is not a fusion of the aforementioned tracks but a sharper division between them coupled with a forceful program for diverting potential practitioners/recruits into a graduated and accepted apprenticeship that would clearly delineate the job descriptions and titles. If we have this much confusion amongst our own peers, how can we ever expect the clients to take us seriously or become educated in a scientific and evidence-based presentation of our skill sets and abilities? If clients are led to believe that all security is created equal, mostly because our own protection peers say it is, then how can we justify the differences in cost and experience levels that we bring to the table for various assignments and bespoke solutions?

During my audits of protection details both public and private, it is astounding to find the amount of convicted felons working for supposedly licensed security firms. It is amazing to me the amount of licensed security firms that will bend the rules in order to get somebody working in their programs that does not qualify, by simply changing their job title. Yet the same company owners request or rather demand that they have equal voice in the construction or formation of the standards for the industry. Yet they cannot follow the standards that are currently in place, even though, I believe we all agree that the current standards are pretty low in the majority of United States and Europe on what qualifies as an executive protection professional. No less frightening is the amount of people that apply every year demanding that they be treated as an >

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equal on a detail, even though this may serve as their first time on a full time detail. The same pattern demonstrates itself by some of so-called instructors and experts in the field, who seem to believe that by working in the protection industry for more than a year they are automatically qualified instructors. It never seems to bother them that they have yet to learn the industry themselves, but will now sell their services to others, claiming to be qualified to teach and mentor the next-generation. I have a habit of telling people “everybody wants to be a SWAT cop, but nobody wants to go through the basic police Academy”.

It is mystifying and ironic that I will have people criticize me for my belief in elitism amongst practitioners of the craft. While these same people in their pursuit to secure a position

such as team leader, shift leader, agent in charge et. al, will turn down a position for residents watch, security officer or driver, stating that they believe that those positions are below them. Thus exhibiting their reinforcement of the elitism that is needed in the industry, while verbally arguing that it should not exist.

In closing, it is my sincere hope that people and business entities will start to take self responsibility for their careers and their backgrounds, so that maybe instead of wasting so much time demanding that they be acknowledged as equals. They may take some of that energy, time, and fervor and actually apply it to becoming the actual “elite” in the field of their choosing and thus not requiring any special favoritism or coddling to win the open position, contract or client.



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