

Terrorism And The Leadership Role Of HR

Terrorism is not new, so why are so many of us now talking about it? And how does this affect business and how your company operates? There are four reasons:

1. Firstly, terrorism is now 'on the doorstep' of many western countries, far more so than it has ever been. As well as making the subject more news-worthy to mainstream western press, this also has an effect on business travellers, who treat travel around mainland Europe (for example) as "routine". Historically, if an employee was travelling to Kenya, they would spend more time preparing than if they were travelling to France. This complacency is not changing at the same pace as the increase in terrorism, which brings us onto our next point
2. Terrorism is on the rise, according to specialist insurance providers. These companies offer payment after damage to property from a terrorist attack, and their own statistics show the increase in discrete terror attacks globally in the past two years
3. The targets of terror are changing from property to people, according to the insurer Allianz at the AIRMIC 2016 event. This has a particularly high impact on the results of terror, because different people require different methods of preparation. People are individuals, and as such need to be engaged and motivated, and also checked as to whether they are following good practice, which makes risk mitigation that much more complicated
4. Businesses are operating in more countries than ever before. The search for revenues from international markets has never been as compelling, and is set to increase. Global Mobility statistics will show you the sharp predicted rise in international assignments over the next five years. Yet have the practices for preparing these employees changed to match this increase in diverse locations and threats that your business will now operate within?

So it seems the effects of terrorism on employees is here to stay, and if anything will grow over the short to medium term. Why should a company worry about this, and what does it have to do with HR?

The effects upon the business world of this increase in terror have not yet been recognised or felt by the majority of Global PLC. We haven't seen a sharp decline in business travel as a result of the recent,

horrific news stories, nor a sea-change in sign-off for travel and assignment. The Global Assistance providers – those companies who offer 24/7/365 emergency assistance for medical and security crises - have not doubled their client-base overnight after pictures of a truck driving through Nice dominated our news-feeds, and we have not yet seen Global Assistance become an employee benefit.

In speaking to many Director-level contacts across multiple sectors, I can surmise that most businesses simply don't have anyone focussed on this topic. In opening discussions about Employee Safety Overseas, everyone agrees that it is an important area, though perhaps not of the highest priority. When challenged on which of the current projects are of higher priority than the safety of travelling and assigned employees, the response is often an attempt to implicate another department. "I think our Travel Management provider deal with that" is a common response. This is understandable, as the question is provocative and no company wishes to be viewed in a negative fashion, but after speaking to many Travel Management providers I can confirm that they typically have specific terms within their contracts that state that they are not responsible for the overall safety and wellbeing of your employees overseas. That still lies with the Board of Directors.

So what must be done to improve on this situation? I strongly believe that HR and Global Mobility have a clear and present opportunity

to provide leadership to the business on the issue of employee safety overseas. This topic has a number of stakeholders: Security, Risk & Compliance, Travel Management, the PA community, Operations, but as a group this requires someone to step up and lead the team. For the reasons of the possible effect on the safety, health, and wellbeing of employees, HR seems a natural fit for such an important spearhead project.

The threat of terrorism should not stop business travel, but should bolster us into preparing our people better, to re-examine our travel sign-off processes, to measure the real risks of working in certain locations, and to hardwire all of this work into our employment contract and travel policies, so that the business as well as the employee is protected. Here is a list of questions for HR to take to the Board, to ascertain the business' appetite in responding to the terror threat:

- In the event of a terror attack, what percentage of employees can we track within the affected area? As an attack can be specific to a very particular area, for example to certain streets during the Charlie Hebdo crisis in Paris, simply knowing which airport your traveller has flown into isn't good enough. Is there a method for you to proactively check-in with travelling employees and assignees in that location, to ascertain their status? Thomson-Reuters recently stated that only a few years ago they had an approximately 20% certainty of who was in the area of a



crisis location. Nowadays, they are one of the best at employee tracking

- What is the real risk of the countries into which we send our people? Do you rely on a decades-old model of “high-risk versus low-risk” that was created by Oil & Gas exploratory work in the 1950s, or can you distinguish between the medical, security, and consular risks by each jurisdiction? Are you looking at the demographic of your employees? For example, a 25-year old female has a very different risk profile travelling to Nairobi than a 45-year old male. Are you using this model to alter our sign-off process for travel and assignment, linking this to training requirements?
- In a crisis, who do our people call? Many of you in HR will already know the answer to this, and perhaps you already make it a point to keep your mobile phones switched on over the weekend. In my experience, crises often selfishly occur during late evenings and weekends, with difficult time-zone differences, and often HR gets the first call for help. If this is the case, how confident do you feel in arranging a medical evacuation, or dealing with a detained employee? Are there better services you could be using to manage this process?
- What is our crisis management plan? This is a key component of your duty of care to

your employees overseas, and is something that could form the backbone of a legal challenge from a disgruntled employee who found themselves in difficulty and accuses the business of a lack of support. There are people and services that can help you to construct such a plan, and hardwire it into your travel policy.

The world has changed, and businesses must adapt. Who better to help them through this transition than HR?

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Griffin Birch helps organisations with their employee safety overseas, focusing on the medical, security, and consular risks for business travel and assignment. In this changing world, Griffin Birch can help your organisation to assess and quantify the risks you and your people face, strategically plan to mitigate them, evaluate how existing services and insurances can be used more effectively, and dovetail this into your existing contractual structure.



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