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You get what you pay for

It never ceases to amaze me that some companies pay more for their janitorial services than they do for their private security, or that they're willing to shell out \$25 - 30 an hour for an off duty police officer (overkill, in most cases) but not \$15-20 per hour for a trained security officer. It's also amazing to me that many clients want a college educated, military trained security officer while offering wages comparable to what the local fast food places are offering. "But police officers go through a six month (or more) training program," you might say, "and what do security officers get?" More than you might think.

In the early 1990s, NYS passed legislation requiring (aka the Mega bill, so named for the legislator who introduced the bill) requiring all security guards, whether contract or proprietary, to be licensed. The law also required formal training requirements—a new development. At the time, each security services company decided whether they would provide training and, if so, what kind. Many firms, in fact, provided no training at all: once someone was hired, the company put in him (or her) uniform and sent the person out on a post. The potential liability was staggering.

The requirement now in NYS is that every security officer or security officer candidate go through an initial eight-hour classroom training session and must complete an additional 16 hours of either classroom or on-the-job (OTJ) training within 90 days, in order to get licensure. In N.J., which passed the Security Office Registration Act (SORA) which went into effect in Jan. 2007, candidates for security officer certification must complete an approved 24 course of classroom instruction within 30 days of applying for certification.

Note, these are minimum requirements. Any company which wants to provide additional training for its' employees is certainly free to do so, and some of the better companies do.

Although candidates for licensing/certification must be fingerprinted to make sure they haven't been convicted of any disqualifying felonies, each employer must still conduct a background and reference check (due diligence) - the provisions of the Mega Bill (NY) or SORA (NJ) do not provide this service, or relieve the employer of that responsibility.



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Since the implementation of these laws, executives of security services companies (particularly in N.J., since the changes are much more recent), have seen a reduction in the number and types of complaints they get, and in some cases, reduction of turnover - which equates to lower overhead. But a problem they still face is the client who wants to pay as little as possible while expecting the very best. Let's face it: you get what you pay for. Hiring a company based solely on its' bill rate may wind up costing you far more in the end in any number of ways: legal fees, civil litigation, high turnover and loss of customers/clients due to perceived poor customer service, lack or service when that agency can't keep you properly staffed, etc.

When you negotiate with a security services company, think about what you're asking for - someone to protect your physical property, your company's personal property, and -most importantly- your employees. Think about this also - if a security officer assigned to your location does something (or neglects to do something) that causes harm to someone, you - as the client of (or the employer of) that security services company- also face civil liability. Why would you want to risk that by not making sure that your agents (for that's what your security officers are) are as well trained and compensated as possible? John Q. Citizen normally doesn't know, or care, whether a security officer is proprietary or contract. What he does know is that that security officer represents your company, is acting on your orders, carrying out your instructions. And a jury will see it that way as well.

Rather than seeing training costs as an expense, perhaps you should be looking at it as something that could reduce potential liability. And rather than going with a company that charges you - and pays 25¢, 50¢ or 75¢ less per hour than the next guy, remember that the two main reasons why people change jobs are job satisfaction and money. Remember, these people are charged with protecting your assets - how much is that worth to you?

Keep in mind that that even a 50¢ an hour difference could keep a better qualified person on the job and reduce turnover at your location.

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