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Corporate Security: Beyond the Badges

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To the Editor:

"When the Sticky Fingers Are Attached to Hired Hands" (On the Job, Earning It, Dec. 8) cites an old problem -- theft by employees -- that continues to plague the business community. But the problem need not remain insoluble; business executives, and even some security directors, must first be willing to change their attitudes toward security in their companies.

Security must be recognized as a management function and responsibility. The old notion that security is a mere extension of policing into the private sector, and that security directors are only company police chiefs, denies employers the security benefits they need and deserve.

Equating security with crime prevention, and rationalizing that the detection and punishment of errant employees will prevent future losses, is more than shortsighted; it is also naive. The concept of security must be integrated into the total workplace environment.

Effective security programs are dedicated to protecting and conserving employers' assets with an emphasis on loss prevention, not just crime prevention. They focus on reducing risks and preventing as many losses as possible, regardless of their cause. Good security, for example, can prevent losses from conflicts of interest -- as when an employee uses company time for another business. It can also stop losses from safety lapses by noticing something as simple as a flaw in the carpeting that could cause injuries.

Security directors, given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with all facets of a company's operations, can help prevent any number of losses that otherwise might prove more costly to employers than those from criminal activity.

Here are ways to make security a more integral part of a company:

- * Security directors must be considered good managers to whom security responsibilities have been assigned, not just as security managers.

- * The security department should have a key place in the table of organization. Ideally, the director should report to someone at the vice presidential level -- perhaps the vice president and general counsel.

- * Companies should offer educational programs so all employees can learn not only what security contributes to the

employer, but also to their own safety and well-being. There must be good communication between department heads and security directors, and recognition that the latter are there to help, not hinder, the former.

* Executives must support security programs by example. It is not enough to provide the department with the financial, human and physical resources it needs to function.

The best security programs help employers save money, become more competitive and upgrade employee and public relations. Instead of being a drain on profits, security programs can contribute to them.

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Boston, Dec. 11

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