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Question: I've been required to downsize my property protection staff. What can I do to maintain my current level of protection with a smaller force?

It is important to begin by identifying all fixed posts and prioritizing their need. You will probably find several posts you can eliminate altogether. You may be able to replace several manned posts with electronics and positive access control (turnstiles). Some staff may be limited to day shifts to address essential access/egress management duties in sensitive areas. For higher-priority posts where human interface is deemed a desired element of risk management, consider negotiating with business units to replace security officers with redeployed receptionists trained to become security-aware gatekeepers. This strategy should result in a reduction in contracted hours and may even improve levels of protection at key locations.

Last, consider re-evaluating your service-level agreements with vendors and focusing on targeted improvements, proactive risk identification activities and first-response capabilities. These steps will more than compensate for potential impacts on risk management objectives and will improve service to your internal customers.

When change is forced on the organization, it can either create a liability or an opportunity. We would work to ensure that security approached this as an organizational opportunity to evaluate new human resource approaches, new processes and new technology to underline its strategic value to the organization. To help find the best solution for our client, we would work with the executive team using an Opportunity Assessment to turn a potential negative into an opportunity; a Value Assessment to understand the specific tangible and intangible returns on those opportunities; and a Measurement Framework to track security's key performance indicators over time.

Our economic environment demands that security executives measure their value. Now, more than ever, security professionals must face their constraints with a new perspective toward their partners, their processes, their people and their tools. A technology/product solution, without this framework, may create new liabilities over time.

When business conditions force downsizing, a security leader has two immediate challenges: support overall company reductions, and reduce security spending. During downsizing, it is vital to understand what changes will be made to your company and to establish two plans: a security plan to support the immediate transition, and a plan that establishes the protection strategies and security staff assignments going forward. Both require dialog and integration within your company. Prepare questions ahead of time, such as "Will the company eliminate some locations?" or "Will overall company changes reduce some protective staffing needs?"

The responses you receive may show you a direct path to reduce the security force while maintaining your company's protection levels. For example, if a company location is operating seven days a week around the clock on a three-shift basis, expense cuts may force the location to only operate on one or two shifts in the future. Security can then consider reducing its staffing based on the new, leaner activity at this location.

IP network and wireless security products, such as video analytics and access control/intrusion detection, combined with next-generation behavioral modeling database technologies, are one option for decreasing headcount while maintaining protection. The days of security guards watching tons of video screens are drawing to a close. Manpower alone cannot cost-effectively scale to match the continuous flow of information being generated from network-attached devices. Information technology must be deployed to complement physical guarding by automating the process of distinguishing actionable information from "noise."

Physical Security Information Management (PSIM) solutions are gaining acceptance; they are helping reduce false alarms while managing actionable intelligence in real-time through pre-set processes. The requirement to make sense out of the "data tonnage" situation and determine what to respond to and what to ignore will automate a reduced security staff while increasing effectiveness levels and streamlining reporting.

Next month's question will be: "What are three ways I can move security projects forward while cutting costs?"