Building and Sustaining a Strong Security Culture Through Airport Community Security Awareness and Employee Recognition Programs: A Case Study from the United States

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Security Culture is composed of specific norms, practices, beliefs, values, and attitudes that are embedded in the fabric of the organization's overall culture and reflected by the actions and behaviors of the people within the organization. A strong Security Culture is observed, felt, and integrated with day-to-day operations and procedures; it informs the actions of the workforce and reduces the potential risks to life as well as property from various threats.

Building and sustaining a strong Security Culture are dependent on many factors, including organizational practices. Engaging the aviation community is a key component of creating and sustaining a

security conscious, proactive, and healthy culture of an organization. Drivers of security stakeholder/community engagement in the workplace may utilize a variety of methods, such as: security awareness programs, employee recognition programs, strategic communications and collaboration, stakeholder security information sharing forums and mechanisms, security remediation meetings, and training on the evolving and persistent threats to the aviation ecosystem. All of these methods foster connection and trust, which are fundamental to achieving buy-in to and enhanced evolution of the Security Culture of an organization.

Security Awareness and Recognition Programs – A Case Study

Security awareness and recognition programs can become integral parts of the fabric of the aviation community and vital elements of its cultural framework. Front-line employees who intimately know the airport environment are often best situated to recognize and report unusual or suspicious activity. Their awareness, alertness, and commitment are instrumental to keeping the airport safe and secure. Engaging these workers is paramount – by empowering them to recognize and report suspicious activities, they can serve as a force multiplier for the aviation security and law enforcement agencies, whose resources are more so

constrained given the persistent and evolving threat and the pandemic impacted environment. Furthermore, by recognizing these employees' security-conscious actions and their exemplary commitment to security, the process of culture building and transformation is set in motion.

One such example is a program that was developed at a large U.S. airport to identify, acknowledge and reward front-line employees who demonstrate exemplary security awareness while carrying out their daily responsibilities at the airport. The goal of the program is to instill individual ownership of security and to positively affect employee behavior in support of the security mission. The program objectives are to:

- Reduce complacency

- Increase compliance with security regulations

- Increase reporting of suspicious activity and security risks

- Utilize a proactive workforce to defend against a wide spectrum of security threats

The program targets front-line employees to help keep the airport safe every day, to include: gate agents, ticket counter personnel, cleaners, ramp agents, baggage handlers, sky caps, mechanics, maintenance/facilities workers, passenger service personnel, security and operations personnel, delivery personnel, concessions personnel, contract security personnel, wheel chair pushers/mobility assistants, contractors, and ground service coordinators.

Nomination Process

Nominations are accepted throughout the year and awardees are recognized annually at a formal awards ceremony, to which the airport community is invited. A "Call for Nominations" is disseminated to the airport community via email twice a year and is announced at airport stakeholder forums.

Employees are nominated based on their exemplary security ownership. Program criteria include the following:

- Reporting a potential or actual security incident

- Preventing or detecting a potential or actual security incident

- Performing an action resulting in improved response and resolution by public safety officials

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- Demonstrating exceptional support of security initiatives
- Other action(s) demonstrating exemplary security awareness or constituting instructional value

Over the years, nominations have been wide-ranging and representative of the diverse airport workforce. Examples of individuals who have been nominated and recognized for their exemplary security awareness and actions include:

- A mobility assistant employee who keenly observed a passenger's suspicious behavior leading to the discovery of narcotics secreted in a custom-made leg cast and wheel chair
- Maintenance technicians who volunteered to move an aircraft to a remote location on the airfield during a bomb threat onboard the aircraft
- Skycaps who assisted airport law enforcement in apprehending a violent subject
- A contracted Exit Lane Guard who stopped an individual from accessing the security restricted area

Selection Process

Nominations are reviewed by a multidisciplinary selection committee made up of representatives from various members of the airport community. The selection is based on how closely the nominated individual's contribution meets the program criteria, as well as additional information that is researched or known about the security event/incident. Nominations that are not selected for the security program award are eligible for honorary mention.

Recognition

An awards ceremony is held once a year to honor the recipients, which is officiated by airport executives and includes a prominent guest speaker(s). Award recipients, their families and the entire airport community are invited to the awards ceremony. Employees who are recognized for their outstanding actions and/ or contributions to the airport's Security Culture are recognized with a poster that includes their photograph in their company uniform along with a story featuring their accomplishment. The posters are then displayed throughout the airport's security restricted areas as a way to further recognize the employee as well as

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promote security awareness among the workforce. One awardee, a contract cleaner at the airport, related that her gravely ill father asked, prior to his passing, to be buried with the security poster featuring her security story/contribution. This story exemplifies the pride that is generated by personally recognizing front-line workers, which is an integral component of an airport community that embraces a strong Security Culture.

Reading the stories of these employees' actions during the awards ceremony and memorializing their contributions on posters displayed throughout the airport educates the entire community about the real impact and contributions of the front-line aviation workers. Recognizing and honoring their commitment to security at the airport are the most important facets of this particular program and are essential to building a security conscious culture overall. Such a program does not require a large budget, policy change, or significant resources. It is all about capturing the hearts of an organization's important front-line workforce and instilling pride as important and valued members of the airport community. Once this happens, the motivation and spirit to be a security contributor happen instantaneously. It is also an eye-opening education to learn what others "see" with respect to security risks throughout the airport operating environment. Implementing this simple but effective program has created norms and a value system across the organization, and has embedded security awareness as a fundamental component of the airport community's culture.

How The Program Was Created

The security awareness and recognition program was created by engaging the airport community in focus groups to discover what motivates people to be vigilant, what type of a recognition program would work in the airport community, and key strategies to implement the program. Eight focus group sessions with over 125 participants were conducted. Participants from airlines, federal agency partners, airport tenants and contractors were involved. The feedback derived from the focus groups was used to design a communication strategy that captured an employee's intrinsic motivation.

It is worth noting that an important decision point in implementing a security awareness and recognition program to influence behavior is whether to use an

extrinsic motivation (e.g., monetary incentives) or intrinsic motivation (e.g., forms of praise that address more emotional components of an individual, such as self-actualization).[1] Research by psychologist Frederick Herzberg, who is highly regarded for his work on management and motivational theory, demonstrates that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic motivators. Incentivizing an employee to do the right thing by financially rewarding proper behavior can devalue intrinsic motivation and raises the question how much money is the right amount for reporting or preventing a security incident?

Marketing Media

Branding a security awareness campaign by creating a logo and a variety of marketing media to promote the program's mission is essential to introduce and reinforce the existence and implementation of this program. It also shows the airport community the importance of security ownership as part of the airport's culture. Examples of the security awareness marketing media that this airport used have included pins, campaign posters, badge lanyards and reels, and instructional door alarm signage.

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1 These concepts are derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, and which is used to study how humans intrinsically partake in behavioral motivation.

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As noted before, campaign posters are produced by the airport and provided to the awardees and their respective organizations to display in and around the airport. Some of the tenants display the posters in common areas, such as their employee break rooms, while the airport authority prominently displays the posters throughout the security restricted area and in the Security Badging/Credentialing Office.

Best Practice

It is a valuable practice to embed the security awareness program into the culture of the airport. For example, the airport's Security Badging/Credentialing Office is often the face of the airport and the first introduction to the airport for most employees. This venue can be utilized to introduce and reinforce the airport's Security Culture, and promote the security awareness and recognition program in conjunction with the branding initiative. To capitalize on this opportunity, a wall can be designated to promote the airport's program by displaying the program logo, branding, and posters of award recipients. The "Wall of Recognition" generates excitement and interest – the community often recognizes their colleagues, which generates discussions and further heightens security awareness amongst all security badge holders. Featuring the program in mandatory security training that all badge holders are required to complete, such as Secure

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Identification Display Areas (SIDA) training, provides a valuable opportunity to introduce and reinforce security awareness and recognition as integral components of the airport's culture.

Conclusion

Inculcating a proactive security mindset into an organization's culture requires capturing the hearts and minds of the workers who comprise that community. Recognizing and honoring an organization's front-line workforce are some of the most impactful practices that resonate on an emotional level with each individual, their colleagues, families and friends, while also instilling a sense of pride in the organization and affirming the organization's commitment to its community and workers. Despite the "noise" and competing priorities in the workplace, organizations with a strong Security Culture place security as a top priority – and so do their workers. Moreover, establishing a Security Culture directly translates into key tangible outcomes – saving lives and protecting our collective transportation ecosystem.

Security awareness and recognition programs that align with each organization's unique mission, values, and norms can instill a "security first" mindset, serve as a call to action, and strengthen each individual's commitment to the organization's Security Culture. These programs can mobilize entire airport communities to protect against dynamic and evolving security threats. By instilling individual ownership of security, organizations within an airport community can proactively leverage their workforce as a force multiplier to detect and report threats and vulnerabilities in the system.

Recognizing employees who actually take action to strengthen security is integral to weaving the fabric of the airport community and a key component of its culture. Engaging our aviation community is a critical protective security layer to detect threats and mitigate risks, and is a foundational pillar of the airport's comprehensive security program.

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