



Maneke law column

Think the best, but prepare your office for the worst

This is a time of year when we spend time with family and those we love. For many of us, those who are around us every day in our offices are almost like our family and we care about each other deeply. For that reason, I recently sat through a seminar on newsroom security and I want to take a few minutes of your time to tell you the things that were shared with me, in hopes it will make all of you think about how to keep others around you safe.

One of the first group of suggestions offered was in a category called “target hardening.” Are there a lot of glass walls in your offices? If so, you might look into either replacing those walls with solid walls, or with a transparent product that is shatter-proof. Nothing like that is bullet-proof, but every few additional seconds you can give your employees is beneficial. Similarly, if your parking lot is not secured, that is recommended, even if it is just a fence. The point is to slow down someone with evil intent.

In your newsroom, be sure you have a first-aid kit fully stocked. Actually, the speaker suggested there be multiple such kits in your room. Teach staff where they are located. If the building security is breached, staff needs to have planned places to hide or take shelter, and they should grab these kits to take with them, if they sit near the kits. And they need to know how to silence their cell phones, obviously. Lights need to be out. If you

don’t have door jams, buy some and put one by each door so the staff can use them to block access, even if the doors have locks.

Another suggestion was that these first-aid kits contain something that can be used as a strap. The point of the strap is that when law enforcement arrives to evacuate those on site, they need to be able to tie their personal possessions around their bodies and then exit with empty hands held above their heads.

In holding discussions with current employees, ask them to consider what security issues they see in your offices. Be sure your front-desk folks have an idea of the big stories you are working on (or even staff members’ personal family risk issues), so they will be alert if a person walks into the offices that might threaten harm to your employees.

If an employee is working outside the office on a story that could pose some potential risk of personal harm, you are encouraged to send out someone with that employee – just having a photographer present can help protect your reporters. Your staff also should know how to get a restraining order from the circuit court if they have concerns about their safety. They should limit giving out their personal phone numbers or their home addresses in cases where they aren’t commonly known.

Additionally, reporters should think about what is posted on personal

social media accounts, because that information can be used for intimidation of staff. And if possible, have your phone system provide call tracking and your computer system do ISP address tracking in regard to those who comment on stories.

Finally, don’t hesitate to invite local law enforcement into your offices to acquaint them with your setup and to offer suggestions. (PS: In cases of a crisis, NEVER announce that there are folks still sheltered within a building where a suspect is hiding.)

Some of you will think these suggestions are beyond the scope you’ll ever need. I truly hope that is true. But I encourage you all to spend a few minutes considering if your co-workers have thought about these issues. Years ago you just had to worry about mad citizens puncturing a tire or scratching your car. Times have changed. I want all of you to be safe! I think back to 2001 when the *Columbia Tribune* had a reporter murdered. Our lives haven’t gotten substantially safer in the last 17 years.

Wishing all of us a safe and happy 2019!



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