

Corporate Reception Area

Possible Safety and Security Criteria V#6

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Overview: At most companies the first person encountered by all incoming visitors, sales persons, job applicants, former employees, delivery personnel, solicitors, thieves, etcetera is the reception person. He or she in most cases works alone in a relatively isolated location. This manual includes *possible* reception area safety & security design criteria and some safety training suggestions.

1. Lobby Desk Design Criteria:

- (i) **Desk Design: (a) Shape:** If the desk is located in the lobby it should NOT be L shaped, U shaped or any other configuration that would allow a criminal, or mentally ill person to trap the reception person behind the desk. Ideally any desk located in the lobby will be open at both ends.



(ii)

- (b) **Height:** Some architects prefer a high counter (40 inches\ 1metre or taller) believing that it protects the reception person better than a low counter. However armed robbery research clearly indicates that criminals and other abnormal users feel less secure and more at risk when standing in front of a low counter e.g. (36 inches tall or less) .

- (iii) **Built in Reception Room :** The reception person may work from behind a counter in a room adjacent to the lobby. A significant amount of

shelving is required in this room for storage of delivered items. After business hours the counter opening should be secured by a roll down metal shutter secured with two robust steel shackles and high security padlocks such as ABUS granite at either end. Ideally there will also be a metal pedestrian, door secured by a Medico or preferably a Multi-Lock dead bolt. This door will allow him\her to quickly enter the lobby to examine and sign for large packages.

(iv) This door also requires an apartment style optical .

(v) **Orientation:** Ideally the lobby desk should face the lobby entrance doors and ideally the elevators and any stairwell doors. This may or may not be possible depending on your lobby's physical aspects. Where \when an entry point cannot be easily observed from the desk consider a chime that sounds every time the door is opened and an overhead mount convex mirror to allow her\him to easily observe it

(vi) **Colours:** Ideally only soothing & relaxing colors should be used in the reception area. Use of a certified color consultant is recommended. Note: The book Environmental Psychology by Francis T. McAndrew PhD refers to the color "orange as distressing & upsetting". In his book Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design the late CPTED Guru Timothy Crowe PhD states " Bright orange and lime green should be avoided because they have negative connotations." They are not recommended for use in any reception area where persons attending are likely to be dealing with a stressful topic such as child custody, eviction from a residence, termination of social assistance benefits, loss of employment etcetera. Blue and yellow are considered to be more cheerful and soothing.

(vii) **Control of the Door or Doors to the Inner Office:** Ideally these doors will be equipped with magnetic locks or the less secure and less expensive electric strikes and in readers. Since electric strikes are easier to compromise they should be equipped with steel strike cover plates. The reception person needs to be able to admit authorized persons\visitors with no access cards. This is normally done via over ride buttons located under the reception area desk or counter. If these buttons are located in an accessible area, they each require a key

operated switch that can be used to turn them on in the morning and off at the end of the business day.

2. **Coat Cupboard:** A coat rack visible from the reception desk is preferable as items can be easily hidden behind the closed doors of a coat cupboard.
3. **Plants:** They should all be large enough and so heavy that an adult cannot pick them up and throw them. Note; Ideally there should be no items in the lobby that are light enough that they can be picked up and throw
4. **Plaques:** They should be securely bolted to a wall so they cannot be used as improvised weapons of opportunity. Other awards and trophies should be secured in a display case with either glass treated with Mylar or Profalon security film or more expensive but very effective Riot Shield glass which consists of 2 layers of glass with a layer of clear burglar resistant clear fiber glass between them. It is available from Defense Lite 888 689 5502.
5. **Furniture:** Light weight chairs that can be picked up and thrown are not recommended. "Living room" style soft and heavy arm chairs are recommended because occupants may have difficulty standing up quickly. Depending on the usual clientele at this office, furniture fabrics may also have to be resistant to water and bodily fluids.
6. **Company Annual Report:** This is recommended because most normal users will read it. Persons who do not read it maybe anxious, or they may not be here on company business. In general lack of interest in the company annual report may indicate that they are not here on company business.
7. **Reception Person Safety Equipment:** She or he will occasionally be confronted by former suppliers, ex-employees, former spouses of employees, and thieves attempting to gain unsupervised access so they can steal items such as purses, wallets, laptops etcetera. In addition to the above the reception person requires some or most of the following safety equipment.
8. **(a) A Duress Button:** It is to be located in a discreet location so he or she can use to summon assistance without attracting attention. Typically this button will be located under the desk . A floor mounted foot activated treadle is another option. The button or treadle maybe monitored in an onsite security office or at an onsite security desk and site security will respond to all alarms. On site monitoring is much less expensive than off site monitoring at a central station. Off site monitoring will require

equipment installation charges, monitoring charges, telephone line charges and a service agreement.

(b) Green Button Software. This very low cost solution (Approximately \$200.00 US) results in the installation of a green “icon” on the reception person’s laptop or PC . When he or she double clicks on the green “icon” a message is sent to up to 5 on site persons – “ Assistance is needed in the lobby” and these 5 people immediately respond to the lobby . Note: Where\when there are onsite security guards the same message should be sent to their control room and\or their security office.

(c) Discreet VS Camera Located in the Reception Area: It will be interfaced to monitors for this camera’s image beside each door from the office or factory to lobby side. Persons responding to the “Assistance is needed in the lobby” message should use the image on the monitors to review the situation in the lobby before entering into it . Ideally this cursory threat risk assessment should be done safely before first responders enter the lobby. For example if a firearm or knife is present, the situation should only be handled by the local Police. Also if the person in the lobby is a former employee who is known to be violent or a violent ex- partner of a current employee only the Police should handle it.

(d) A Subtle Code Word or Phrase: When it is heard over the PA by any co-workers or managers who have volunteered to respond to the lobby they **immediately proceed in the lobby !!!**

(e) Hand Written Notes: The reception person can give one of these notes to any employee walking through the lobby to give to her/his supervisor. Since the person in the lobby may present a threat the note should be cryptic so as not to alarm or anger the suspicious person in the lobby if he/she grabs and it should read something like e.g. “ Elevator #2 is fixed” , which means **“Assistance is Needed in the Lobby Immediately !!!”**.

(f) Weapons of Opportunity: Use of scissors and a letter opener at any lobby desk are not recommended. However if they are required at your lobby desk they should be kept in a locked metal drawer or box to deny a very angry visitor easy access to them. Also any lobby sculptures should

either be too heavy for most people to pick up and throw or be securely bolted to a counter, table or preferably a concrete base or large rock.

(g) Switch for the Inner Door to the Office, Warehouse, Factory etcetera:

At most locations the lobby desk reception person will have easy access to a button or treadle that allows him or her to remotely unlock a pedestrian door to the inner office. This button or treadle should be de-activated via computer command, key switch or timer at the end of the business day and re-activated in the morning of the next business day. We are aware of at least two office burglaries where\when the burglars followed the cleaners in from the building corridor and used the inner door switch (which was not de-activated after hours) to gain access to the inner office and steal laptops etcetera.

(h) Fire Alarm Pull Stations: If your office is the routinely the scene of controversial activities such as child custody hearings, insurance claims where\when the deceased remains were never found, etcetera the fire alarm pull stations in the office lobby and in the building corridor immediately outside your office door should be equipped with pull station covers to prevent\discourage vengeful false fire alarms. Pulling or lifting the clear Lexan pull station cover results in a loud local alarm and discourages the abnormal user from actually activating the building fire alarm system. Please note that Edwards and





(i) Tactics for Reception Areas Prone to Confrontations: At locations where\when there are confrontations in the inner or outer lobby on a regular basis 2 basic options are:

(a) Install a safe room in the lobby directly behind the lobby desk. It will have a set of double metal doors. One will have dead bolt lock that can be locked and unlocked via an internal thumb turn or external high security key such as Medico and an optical viewer. The other will have a robust upper pin which can be secured by sliding it up into metal receiving bracket mounted on the door frame and another lower robust pin which can be secured by sliding it into a metal receiving bracket mounted in the floor. The door that opens must be equipped with alarm contacts monitored by site security and/or a local central station. The central station will dispatch police immediately when this door is opened. If this door is to be opened during a response to a non-emergency situation the central monitoring station must be advised advance. If they are NOT ADVISED IN ADVANCE LOCAL POLICE WILL LIKELY BE DISPATCHED AND OUR COMPANY WILL BE FINED.

(b) Install a work station in the lobby directly behind the lobby desk . The door to this area should be metal and have a mortised dead bolt lockset with internal thumb turn, a wired glass window (which has a low security rating) or a window made from plate glass to which clear security film has been applied on both sides. Ideally the person working in this work station should be able to hear all verbal threats made against both the tenant company , its employees or one specific employee and be able to respond to the latest situation in the lobby in seconds.

Domestic Violence Against A Previous Intimate Partner : (i) Police

Involvement: In some cases a previous partner may arrive at the workplace of the former intimate partner and demand to see him or her. These are potentially dangerous situations and require police not security intervention. A concealed weapon maybe present. Do not confirm or deny that the former partner in question still works here. Discreetly send an internal email to a supervisor or site security supervisor to requesting her or

him to call the police if the previous partner does not leave after being advised that “I do not know if they still work here.”

(ii) Information Package for the Police: To save the victim the trauma of having to give the police all the information about the previous intimate partner again, have her or him prepare an information package for the police. It will include the aggressor’s name, gender, photograph, a statement as to how many firearms he or she may own or have access to, date of birth, current address if known, current vehicle make, model, color etcetera if known and license number, phone number, email address, copies of any restraining orders

Reception Person Safety Training:

Watch & listen for signals to your intuition and react to it quickly.

Stages of Anger: Depending on which psychiatrist’s books you read there are between 3 and 10 stages of anger. The 3 basic stages of anger are:-

Anxiety: Symptoms include: does not immediately approach the desk upon arriving in the lobby, looks around the lobby possibly for escape routes or weapons of opportunity, appears to be tense, does not make eye contact with the reception person, appears to be short of breathe & breathes rapidly, sweating on a cool or cold day, trembling, asks for water due to dry mouth brought on by anxiety, (only give them cold water in a plastic or paper cup) , trembles, shortness of breath, complains of chest pains and\or repeatedly clasps their chest and may complain of hot flashes or chills.

Verbal Aggression .e.g. loudly yelling verbal threats , knocking over flower pots, kicking waste baskets, knocking items off the reception persons desk & VERY LOUDLY demanding to see the owner, VP, CEO or other person in authority etcetera Note: NO ONE should interact with this person alone even if the now verbally aggressive person worked here for over 25 years, was a supplier for 10 + years etcetera.

Physical Aggression: VERY LOUD Verbal threats – LET ME IN NOW or ELSE!!!. He or she punches or attempts to grab or punch the reception person &/or knock over or throw nearby unsecured items at the reception person.

Safety Training: (i)Overview: All full or part time reception area staff need to be trained to recognize the above stages of anger , on use of all safety equipment and on the location of all places of safety & how to access them & lock them from inside . As soon as anxiety starts to escalate to verbal aggression, use any duress or hold up button, use a subtle code word or phrase to discreetly request a third party to call the police or on site security. Leave the lobby when safe to do so e.g. A contractor or courier arrives and you agree to escort them to their destination. If safe to do so de-activate the button that unlocks the door to the office interior and use your access card for access.

(ii) Seminar & Security Review: A security review of your reception area, a safety seminar for reception staff and a safe handling of suspicious mail seminar also for reception staff (& mail room staff if they have not previously had this training are available . To request a seminar please contact Mike Fenton at m.p.fenton@rogers.com for a quotation.

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Recommended Reading: The Gift of Fear by Gavin De Becker .