

One Master meets another

After interviewing Yasmeen Stratton of SSR Personnel last month. Una Riley, our American correspondent decided to catch up with Peter French one of the founders of the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals.

Although these days I am a columnist for *Professional Security*, in 1985 I started Euro Alarms Ltd, a systems company (that is what we called the electronic sector before computers adopted the term). Euro was active for 23 years and I became involved in the wider world of security and with many of the major lead bodies that still exist ... even creating and co-founding a couple on the way. It was all happening, from technology and business practice to recruitment. SSR was founded in 1986 by Peter French when recruitment companies were not considered the high-profile HR organisations they are today ... both their sector and ours have worked to achieve professional acknowledgment, via chartered status.

Place to go

From the time SSR was formed it instantly became the place to go for recruitment of security staff. It was innovative and different. It was clear that the intent was to specialise within the security industry and it wasn't just another recruitment agency that had bolted on the security sectors as an opportunity for business. As soon as my company started to grow my first stop was SSR to recruit quality electro-technical personnel. I have known Peter French from the first time he attended IFSEC where we both exhibited in those early days. I have also worked with him within the Worshipful Company of



Peter, centre, in ceremonial robes as Master of the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals; and at the Guildhall, speaking on the creation of the Company



Security Professionals (when we were both Masters). In my year as Master I presided over the Guild of Security Professionals when it achieved Company status and became known as the CoSP (Company of Security Professionals) and Peter was Master when the Company became the Worshipful Company ... as Past Masters we are unique in that transition process.

For charity

Having been in the USA for some time I have not been able to meet up with as many UK industry characters as I would like. So, after interviewing Yasmeen Stratton last month I decided to catch up with Peter French MBE. First I said that we hadn't chatted about him being presented with the MBE ... what was it for, and how did he feel about such an honour? Peter replied: "Knowing for eight weeks but not telling anyone makes you push it to the back of your mind, so to get my first call from Mike Bluestone on the morning of the announcement to congratulate me simply stunned me, perhaps I thought it would go unnoticed. I still have the 200 emails and simply loads of letters so if I ever need cheering up I just read a selection. What I realised quickly was how this made not just me feel proud, but family, friends, work colleagues and just those that have known you over the years. I still get people today telling me how proud they are for me, a lot to live up to, hence I have never stopped trying to work with charities, giving time and hopefully making a difference."

Benevolent fund

I asked him to expand upon his charitable endeavours. He said: "SSR continue to sponsor a range of

activities. Having been a past Master of the WCoSP we created the SBF (Security Benevolent Fund) in 2006. Its aim was to assist individuals that needed access to health advice, through an online portal, to monetary assistance for those that care for others and those needing life changing equipment for medical care. The security sector before the SBF did not have an open safety net for people it employed. Acquisitions of brands can lead to people as they get older becoming forgotten." We talked about the difference between the systems and personnel sectors.

Training

Peter talked about the history of manned guarding since the 1930s and about how this section had been mistrusted by Government as a possible unarmed militia. He also said that until recently private security officers could not become special constables ... so much for career progression in the wider world of security! However, things started to change from the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is when both sectors started to evolve and the path to professionalism began. The private sector drove the demand for security officers. The police also began to change from being a police *force* to a police *service*. Also, attitude towards crime changed from a police perspective ... when I started my business in 1985, burglaries were dealt with very differently than they are today. The police used to respond to domestic burglaries and investigate ... now the victims of this type of crime are for the most times simply issued a URN number over the phone to give to their insurance company! Is that a better service offer than before? We continued to talk about the short history of



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business, we see so many different forms of HR practice, we are exposed to many good practices across the world. We also have, to put it bluntly, some poor companies that have no idea how to attract talent.

The Conference Board in the USA polled its CEO members to ask how they rated the HR function and their preparedness in attracting talent; 55 per cent responded that they had no confidence in their HR structures to source future talent. Many HR people are focused on the internal client; going to market may not be that high up on priorities. Having run companies where HR professionals are partners with operators, I have seen added value through the reduction of staffing churn and selling added value services to end users. We wanted to highlight the efforts of those that do it right.

Advantage

“Now in the tenth year our judges are so complimentary about companies that have pride and understand the competitive advantage that their workforce provides. If you are a buyer of services, would you look to see if a service provider had in fact made the nominations list for this award. Every entry that makes it to the judging panel should be proud to have been shortlisted. Our judges who are gathered from organisations such as the SIA, BSIA, ASIS and independent security professionals, have commented year on year that the calibre of nominations have been impressive and have been surprised how short-listed companies have raised the bar regarding workforce development.” I asked if the HR industry have a sector of their own where achievements are recognised. He replied: “Organisational excellence is not restricted to one function; most organisations will have internal employee polling on various aspects of internal performance. These can be mechanisms that those in the internal customer servicing model have tended to ignore – which you do at your peril. As part of a

survey of looking at Future Structures in 2020 we spoke with CSOs [chief security officers] of leading global organisations. How did they see the structure of security in the future, how could they get board ‘face time’, what was on the corporate dashboard, who was looking to take over their function?

Cyber

An overriding theme was, cyber security is not understood, get it into your function, ground it, help the board to understand the risks, become the risk steward. This is not a concept understood by vendor companies that in providing a service they should also mitigate risk.” With the mention of risk, it opened a whole new dialogue that went on for some time and included everything from working hours and illegal workforces to the laundering of cash. It was very interesting but my last question was what changes would he like to see in the wider world of security?

Changes

He said: “We need to professionalise the profession of security, we need CPD to be part of a dynamic profession, 10pc of those people would qualify to be judged by their peer group as a CSyP (Chartered Security Professionals) but those already at the top of their tree, are reluctant to apply in case the fail ... that is damning. Even if you are due for retirement the CSyP register needs people to qualify. We need to engage with the HR professionals, the CFO [chief finance officer] is a chartered professional, it could be worth £30,000 to your pay packet. We need more thinkers challenging the norm. It is good to see people from the security sector making the jump across matrix organisations functions, as this is the way of the future. Generation X sees this as progression, gone are snakes and ladders of corporate life, why not understand what other people do ... if it interests you ... do it. There is a certain sort of intellect that can make that happen and be comfortable with that concept. But wait to see what Generation Alpha has in store.”



the security industry and recognised that it was only with the creation of the BSIA just over 40 years ago in the UK, that training began its journey to set recognised standards through SITO (Security Industry Training Organisation). That became the foundation of training standards within the private security arena to this day. At the very start of this training journey I was the chairman of the SILB (Security Industry Lead Body) when Ray Clarke founded and headed SITO whose parent company was the BSIA. That was the beginning of the revolutionary training journey ... Ray Clarke went on to become the CEO of SITO and has a footprint in the history of our industry. In my opinion there are still people around who felt that it was a travesty how SITO met its end and how the private security profession lost control of its training agenda.

Help

Peter went on to talk more about the SBF and said: “After a slow start, the trustees of SBF today are facing increasingly more requests for help.” We then expanded upon the raising of funds for dispersal and the hard work that goes into fund-raising. Just one charitable endeavour of the WCoSP which French has been heading from the start ... the spring dance ... has alone raised almost £300,000, thanks to all who attend. SSR also sponsor other WCoSP initiatives including the apprentice scheme as well as European initiatives including pro bono work. Talking of such work, Peter also took the time to create the HR Inspirational Awards. I asked what inspired him to create HR awards within the world of security. He replied: “Across our



The ASIS 2016 president, David C Davis, pictured left, presenting an award to Peter French in London last year for his volunteer work for the security industry body

Photos courtesy of Peter French

About the WCoSP

The Worshipful Company of Security Professionals is the 108th Livery Company of the City of London. A charitable trust administers its Security Benevolent Fund. Visit: wcosp.org.

Spring dance

The spring dance is on Saturday evening, March 4 at its usual venue, The Rembrandt Hotel, in London SW7. Last year's raised more than £27,000 for charity.