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Commercial real estate security: 3 strategies to ensure security provider doesn't get complacent

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In this turbulent real estate market, where occupancy rates are low and budget cuts are abundant, property managers face daily challenges with minimal support. Despite these conditions, experienced property managers know it is important not to let mediocrity creep into their security programs.

When a company has a long-term agreement with a contract security provider, excellent performance may deteriorate over time, creating safety and security issues.

The following strategies can help you maintain a complete and secure program.

Strategy #1: Avoid high turnover with effective management

Turnover is commonly high in the security industry, but it can be detrimental to safety and security at your location. It is important that officers are familiar with the nuances of your building in the event of an emergency. Security officers who are knowledgeable and presentable also give your tenants a sense of security and make a great first impression to potential lessees.

Methods to manage turnover include reviewing wages, benefits, and tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Are the officers at your site paid a competitive wage for the area and responsibilities they have? Are wage increases based on tenure built into the contract?

Is the benefit package being offered attractive enough to retain officers? Some companies don't offer health benefits, or, if they do, the cost is so high the officers cannot participate. Some charge officers for uniforms, replacements and cleaning!

If turnover is not managed and you're losing seasoned officers to new sites hold the company accountable by including key performance indicators in the contract. If they don't meet your expectations, they can be penalized.

Strategy #2: Make sure your Site Supervisor is a Leader as well as a Manager

Is your supervisor effectively leading your security force, or is he or she just a person everyone likes? Tenure and being well-liked alone doesn't constitute an effective manager.

Here are questions to help determine if you have the right Site Supervisor:

- * Does the supervisor show up to randomly check on the officers, or is he or she a 9 a.m.-5 p.m. manager?
- * Has the supervisor trained the security force to implement the site-specific emergency action plans and procedures?
- * Are incidents and issues being reported and managed in a timely manner?
- * Is the supervisor presenting you with ways to save money?

When hiring a security company, you should have confidence in the person and company providing those services.

Strategy #3: Training should be encouraged and enforced

Some security officer responsibilities are relatively straightforward while others are complex and require specialized training. Many companies simply hire officers and prepare them with on-the-job training. If your site requires specialized training, the company should be capable of providing it and should follow through.

The old saying holds true: If you don't use it, you lose it. It can be easy to build bad habits and become complacent. Training officers for an emergency procedure and expecting them to know it three years later in an escalated environment is not realistic. To avoid this, officers should have annual refresher training.

Knowledge of site-specific orders and emergency and safety procedures should be reviewed with quarterly and random inspections.

Finally, many companies offer continuing education. In addition to enhancing your security, this is a great benefit to officers and can decrease turnover.

Is it time to jump out of the water?

There's an anecdote that says if a frog is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will not perceive the danger until the water is boiling. The same can be said of businesses that are unable to recognize and react to troubling changes that occur gradually.

During economically challenging times, it is tempting to overlook issues with your security company, but this complacent approach can lead to trouble.

Don't wait for the water to boil. Assess your security provider and use these strategies to help ensure competency.

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