



# Ask the Experts

Why should the boss listen to you?

You've got questions – and we've got answers straight from the pros. What better way to work through a problem than with a little support and advice from those who have been there ... done that?

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This month, Jim E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CCEP, offers advice for new additions to the security and crisis response field wishing to get involved in the discussion.

**Question:** My background is in law enforcement. I've been in my position as manager of crisis response and continuity planning for more than a year. I was hired specifically because of my background, but there are quite a number of times when I am not included in discussions or am excluded, intentionally, when certain kinds of discussions begin. This makes me very uncomfortable. What are my options?

**Answer:** Security and crisis response professionals with your background are exceptionally valuable, but there is a certain amount of baggage that comes with prior careers – including those from various protection professions. The situations you mention occur to other staff functions as well. For example, attorneys might either be dismissed or dismiss themselves to avoid being part of certain kinds of discussions; the communications staff is often looked at as people who tell everything to everyone and, as a result, are told very little; the human resources staff is viewed as being more worried about people than profits, so they are excluded from certain discussions. You may not feel any better, but at least you know this happens to others besides you.

Let me make three suggestions:

- First, mention to your boss what you're noticing the exclusion and ask why it is happening. Ask if there is some specific circumstance that makes him or her uncomfortable, and tell your boss that you would like a shot at understanding what is going on. Be direct. Be positive. Be prepared to be persistent. Mostly, though, stress that you can make constructive, substantive contributions, constantly.
- Second, suggest to your boss that your desire to grow in your position and truly be a trusted strategic advisor is in his or her interest, and that you should be included in more meetings to be a better resource for this top individual. Presumably, you have already demonstrated that, when you are in meetings, you know how to make solid contributions.
- Third, if, as might be the case, you are being dismissed because the discussions actually are about things that lie on the borderline somewhere, you might suggest to your boss that one of the reasons you were an appropriate hire for your position is that, in situations where decision making is hazy, where there is controversy but no clear cut dilemma, your training, background and instincts can help make certain that the correct decision is made earlier in the process. This is the age where everything is remembered and stupid things always rise to the surface faster than the smart stuff. To maximize your value, you should be in on those conversations precisely because of your mental approach and thinking process. You can keep your mouth shut – or open it in time to keep people from doing, saying or proposing silly, dangerous things.

Almost every corporate crisis in recent years was allowed to occur because people who knew better decided to do "dumb" things, and the people who should have stepped forward to say that something was "stupid," wrong or illegal either remained silent or were left out of the conversation.

In regard to your law enforcement background, the very thing that makes an excellent law enforcement officer – the clarity required to determine infractions and make proper enforcement decisions – is less valuable in other settings. This is because, outside of protection, there are many ways to accomplish tasks and there are a wide variety of options. Part of the executive mentality is to gather information from a wide variety of sources, choose options and fashion a solution or resolution from those many ingredients. One of the great lessons learned by most law enforcement professionals who come into a corporate or large organizational practice is the importance of gaining this ability – to have more perspective, to recognize that there are always a wide variety of options for getting things done. Sadly, some things, while incredibly stupid, are legal and doable and often attempted. Be the voice of reason. Be the voice of pragmatism. Be the voice of civility and integrity within your organization. And be ready to clean up the mess. It goes with the territory.

– James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CCEP, has been a trusted advisor for nearly 30 years. Corporate Legal Times named him as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and PR Week called him one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis." His new book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You*, published by Jossey-Bass, will be released in January of 2008. (Amazon.com will be accepting pre-orders of this book this month.)

If you have a question and need an expert answer, e-mail [dkichline@contingencyplanning.com](mailto:dkichline@contingencyplanning.com), or Jim Lukaszewski at [crisisguru@e911.com](mailto:crisisguru@e911.com). Title your subject line "CPM Questions." Also, please include your full contact information, including telephone number and e-mail address, so that we can contact you if we require clarification of your question.

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