



Securing the Best: Raising the Bar with IFPO Certification

By Dan Mendelson

What's in a name? Everything, if your mission is to raise the branding profile of the security industry.

Guards are called protection officers by the International Foundation for Protection Officers (IFPO), and for good reason. The term guard does little to command respect or convey professionalism to the public who encounter them on a daily basis.

“There's a shadow cast upon the whole industry due to the misconception surrounding guards,” Sandi Davies of the IFPO said. “In truth, these hard-working, highly trained men and women are our first responders who have a wide range of skills.”

The IFPO's main weapons in the fight against the stereotype are training and education, tools that have made it a leading security educational institution and an authoritative voice in the field. The not-for-profit membership organization has provided professional development opportunities to many of the country's protection officers, with over 80,000 guards gaining some type of certification through IFPO programs. These officers represent a mix of proprietary and contract officers working in industries that include hospitals, campuses, nuclear facilities, cultural properties and gaming. Businesses that employ what is known as Certified Protection Officers (CPO) are diverse: Dow Chemical, AFLAC, American Red Cross, Ralph Lauren, Ohio State University and the United States Marine Corps have all hired officers who went through the rigors of IFPO certification programs.

IFPO Tenet: Professionalism through Education

The IFPO was founded by Ron Minion, a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and owner of a large Canadian contract business. Minion was steadfast in his belief that protection officers needed to be properly screened, trained and uniformed, and in 1988 he founded IFPO after selling his agency. He served as its Executive Director until 1992, and was succeeded by Sandi Davies, who has held the office ever since.

Like Minion, the security industry has been a lifelong passion for Sandi Davies. Her career began in 1980, when after college she landed a job with Minion's agency, performing administrative duties in the personnel department. Davies says that during

this era, training programs were scant, if existent at all. “There really wasn’t training for people pursuing a career in private security,” Davies observed. “Officers would come in, get a uniform, get a license and away they would go.” Her interest in the area grew, and over time, she became instrumental in the development of security training programs. “I found a market niche where I could create quality educational programs, so that’s exactly what I did.”

Certification: Gateway to a Higher Standard

More businesses are requiring proof of training these days, a result of a threat landscape that is increasingly sophisticated and global. “It’s the biggest change I’ve seen,” Davies noted about the demand. As a third party, IFPO is an authority that can validate whether or not those officers have proper training. “Businesses that contract out are writing into the bid specifications that there is a requirement of an IFPO certification for new hires.”

IFPO offers several types of certifications. The Certified Protection Officer (CPO) training course is the organization’s premier program. It is considered a basic course that is designed for the career-minded security professional. But make no mistake: it is by no means entry level; you must complete 80 hours of training and pass a final exam before achieving CPO designation. Delivered primarily online or as a correspondence course, units of study include over 40 subject matters a partial list might include crisis intervention, physical security, hazmat, and workplace violence. And officers must recertify every two years in order to maintain CPO certification. “The requirement assures employers that you’re staying current with emerging trends, and is proof of your knowledge base,” Davies added.

The designation is a proven door opener: CPO’s are viewed as more qualified and better equipped than officers who just stepped out of an employment agency, and are often hired for supervisory positions in a variety of settings.

For those management-minded officers, there’s the CSSM, or Certified in Security Supervision and Management designation. This top-tier IFPO certification is viewed as a bridge for officers seeking the highly desired Certified Protection Professional (CPP) credential offered by ASIS.

Reducing Employer Risk

The world of threats, both physical and information-based, moves so quickly that certification is a way to show you have training and understand the issues. For security officers, it can be the key to advancement and increased earning potential.

Certification is equally important to employers seeking protection against lawsuits. Having a professional and knowledgeable security team reduces risk, and the continuing education requirements for recertification offer assurance that guards will remain current with best industry practices.

The surge of companies making it mandatory to gain this type of certification has helped to rebrand the entire image of security industries. And while you may not see an officer with the CPO certification at your local mall just yet, there's growing interest and support from several large shopping center and strip mall management firms.

Such interest might just put an end to the stereotype once and for all.

Quick Facts:

Sandi Davies

- Began her career in 1980 with a contract security agency
- Hired by IFPO in 1988; named Executive Director 1992
- Lead developer of CPO training curriculum, now in its 8th edition
- Recently completed 4th edition of the security supervision and management curriculum
- Authoring a book about the security industry as a career path for women
- Traveled to Saudi Arabia to teach the first group of women allowed to work for a security agency; was required to be completely veiled.
- 2015 recipient of the Karen Marquez Honors Award from ASIS Women in Security Council
- 2016 recipient of the IAPSC Charles A. Sennewald Distinguished Service Accolade

IFPO

- Founded 1988 by Ron Minion
- Headquartered in Florida, staff of 4. Non-profit with 501(c)(3) status.
- International in scope with a presence in 56 countries
- Instructors throughout the world teach the IFPO program. Platforms are delivered through classroom, distance education or online
- Partners with Smart Horizons for management of online training programs.

Security Industry at a Glance

- \$350 billion security industry market breaks out to \$282 billion in private sector spending and \$69 billion in federal government spending on homeland security, according to a 2012 study conducted by ASIS.
- Operational (non-IT) private security spending is estimated to be \$202 billion with expected growth of 5.5 percent in 2013.

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) expects the Protective Services Occupations to add 364,500 new jobs during the period from 2010 to 2020, a growth rate of 11.0 percent.
- Number of full-time security workers is estimated to be between 1.9 and 2.1 million.
- Private detective/investigator is one of the fastest growing occupations, with anticipated growth of 21 percent projected through 2020; several IT positions are to grow 22 percent through 2020
- Recruiters for correctional organizations and security firms know some of their best applicants are the men and women from the military – these applicants are in high demand.