

## **A Guide to Using the CPO Program as a Method of Organizational Development**

*INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR PROTECTION OFFICERS*

Security is a dynamic, rapidly evolving field of endeavor. As the needs of business, government and non-profit organizations grow, so do the responsibilities of the security officer. There is an increasing demand for responsible, well-trained personnel to fulfill security and safety needs.

The security officer of today is responsible for more important and more diverse functions than ever before. These include, but are by no means limited to:

- Relations with employees, clients and the public
- Relations with other departments and external organizations (police, fire, EMS, etc.)
- Physical security
- Safety
- Fire Protection
- Access control of both persons and packages
- Prevention and response to terrorist activities
- Employee theft prevention, response and recovery
- Investigation
- Developing and initiating crisis/emergency plans
- Traffic control
- Crowd Management/Special Events

These responsibilities are very important and they must be performed with the minimum degree of error. It is for this reason that the Certified Protection Officer (CPO) program was designed. Created by the International Foundation of Protection Officers in 1988 to provide current, useful, 'need to know' information for Protection Officers throughout the Security Industry; the CPO process is based upon the [Professional Protection Officer: Practical Security Strategies and Emerging Trends](#). This text consists of 45 chapters, each dealing with a separate topic that is essential to the efficient functioning of a professional security officer. Each chapter is followed by summary questions. There is an open book, unsupervised midterm and a proctored final exam. If the final exam is completed within one year of the student's enrollment within the course and they have obtained a score of 70% or greater, they can earn a certificate of completion. If they have six months of full-time or one year of part-time protection officer experience; they have earned the title of Certified Protection Officer (CPO).

The benefits gained by both employer and employee are extensive. One might even say "immeasurable":

The increased knowledge gained by going through the course and certification process is a form of ready-made cross-training. Protection staff are better able to assume new roles as the situation dictates.

Increased knowledge grooms the officer to become a supervisor. They will have a firm foundation of professional knowledge. They will not be "Stuffed Shirts": people promoted based on ability alone without any background in Security/Asset Protection. "Stuffed Shirts" are common in security services; a point which makes the CPO process uniquely valuable. Those firms using it stand far above the competition.

CPO program completion gives the officer a career path; it allows the employer to easily provide growth opportunities for the more motivated officers. They in turn provide a positive influence for other officers. They are living examples of professional knowledge.

The increased knowledge leads to a more consultative role for the officer. Certified Protection Officers can offer meaningful suggestions. They can work hand-in-hand with Safety specialists, HR, supervisors and others. This aids in organizational growth and development as it puts “knowledge on the ground”. For contract security arrangements, CPO’s can assist substantially when dealing with clients; helping to create and maintain the partnership/marriage necessary for successful contract relationships. Program completion not only builds upon initial pre-service training, it serves as a refresher and helps in reducing ‘training decay’ where what was originally taught gets pushed aside by operational and peer group factors. The CPO provides management with another avenue for positively influencing the security force.

A more professional officer also interacts better with law enforcement, EMS, fire protection, HAZMAT teams and other external agencies. A knowledgeable, competent officer is welcomed by first responders of all types. These officers and supervisors are also appreciated by insurance carriers and regulatory agencies for the knowledge they possess.

Security service firms can provide increased service to clients. A contract security force that is comprised of Certified Protection Officers is much more than a staffing service. This is an important transition as violence, cyber crime and protection of the brand become more pressing issues. “Warm bodies” don’t cut it.

Obviously this increased service aids in client satisfaction and retention.

On the proprietary side, a CPO qualified force makes a strong argument against replacement by a contract firm.

For the employer, the knowledge that they have an effective, well trained and skilled security force that, when needed, will be able to respond to challenging situations with competence and professionalism is one less worry.

The employee gains the benefits of a higher level of training at low cost, gets confidence in his skills, pride in the performance of his job, and an internationally recognized title to associate himself with.

CPO training is easy to implement and is applicable in many diverse employment settings. One of the biggest benefits of the CPO program is the different approaches that the employer can take to implement it. The CPO designation can be tailored to an organization in many different ways. A few commonly used approaches are:

- As a condition of employment.
- As a condition of retention.
- To designate different levels of rank such as Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, etc.
- For promotions to supervisors
- For promotion to Investigator, Crime Prevention Officer, Safety Supervisor, Physical Security Specialist or other position with added responsibilities.

One of the most important facets of the CPO program is motivation by the employee. Although the learning is of great benefit to the employee, it is still extra work and the employee may want and deserve some type of recognition for his accomplishments. This may be accomplished in a myriad of

different ways. Many of these different ideas can be implemented at low cost and can reap motivational benefits in and of themselves. Some simple ways to motivate employees are:

- Extra days off for employees upon completion of the CPO program.
- Awards of merit (plaques, certificates, posted photographs).
- Pay raises.
- Cash bonus for completing the CPO program.
- Recognition through a company memo, newspaper or announcement.
- A promotion in rank or position for successful CPO candidates.
- Authorizing the CPO to wear the CPO lapel pin on their uniform.

CPO program completion can be accomplished in many different ways:

- During initial hiring / pre-service training
- During weekly / monthly meetings
- Utilizing off-hours study groups
- Set classroom time
- During coffee / lunch breaks
- While on post via online or text
- On employee's own time

An additional approach is to hold voluntary classes on Saturdays. An interesting topic such as Investigation, Terrorism, or Executive Protection can be offered. Using both the text and supplemental material will help to provide a stimulating learning session. With lunch provided and a certificate awarded, these sessions will help promote learning outside of work.

Classroom supervision is not necessary! That is what makes the CPO program so versatile and cost effective. It can be done at home during the candidate's spare time or during coffee breaks at work. It provides the candidate with a multitude of possibilities. Employees can do it on their own time and hand in progress reports on how far they have progressed. Set up a tentative time line for completion for the mid-term and final exam. Every two weeks or so have the candidate submit a report on his/her progress and discuss what they've learned so far.

Those organizations with internal training staff can arrange this in many ways:

*Learning never stops and neither does the CPO process.*

If a classroom learning environment is chosen it should be free from distractions (visual or audible), comfortable enough that one can relax yet not fall asleep or lose focus, have ample lighting and is able to accommodate learning aids. Learning environments could be; school classrooms, meeting rooms, or living rooms of an employee's home.

Academies have used the CPO and other Foundation programs as have secondary schools and colleges. Collaborative initiatives between employers, schools and professional associations such as ASIS chapters create the potential for mutual benefit – and professional protection staff.

Ideally, instructors should be Certified Protection Officer Instructors (CPOI's); but it is not necessary that everyone in front of a class or acting in a tutorial capacity be so designated. The CPOI credential is

perhaps best seen as *something people aspire to*. It has a rigorous set of requirements and demands considerable commitment from the candidate.

Rewards and recognition at key junctures throughout the process also help to keep employees motivated. And they may have additional marketing benefits as well. . A newsletter, email or website mention of a candidate completing their interim exam. Recognition at a meeting. A letter of congratulations. A luncheon or dinner. A bonus or gift certificate. A press release with photos for those who become certified.

The list is endless.

One thing to stress is that the Certified Protection Officer designation is not just another job requirement. It is a professional title that they should be proud of. Make them aware of that! Present it to them as something they'll want to do not something that they have to do.

Lead – and teach – by example. Set an example to subordinates by certifying the managers and supervisors first. Grow the organization. Giving those in charge professional knowledge aids them in coaching and instructing their subordinates. That's what supervisors are supposed to do!

At the same time, let the officers know through the experiences of their superiors how rewarding the process can be. In many cases people want to know what good pursuing a certification will do them. That is not the right approach to take. Certifications, like degrees, are only beneficial if the holder uses them well:

***It's not what the certification can do for you; it's what you can do with the certification.***

Finally, having supervisory personnel go through the CPO process enables them to answer any questions that officers may come across while studying for their CPO.

A candidate successfully obtaining the CPO designation is a substantial and necessary step toward a better trained and confident security force as well as more peace of mind for employees and managers alike.

Everyone wins.

***Originally written by Andrew Rossetti, CPO as a student project at York College of Pennsylvania***