

SUPPORTING THE KIDNAP VICTIM'S FAMILY

By Gary Noesner

Managing any kidnap incident presents a host of challenges, from negotiating with the kidnapers, to coordinating with law enforcement authorities, handling news media inquiries, and perhaps most time consuming of all, providing family support. Family members of a kidnap victim may have a wide range of needs which can easily be overlooked, dismissed, or improperly attended to by the corporation. Under the strain of a kidnap event, family dysfunction, personality conflicts, and strong differing opinions on how to proceed, will surface.

Experience shows that many pitfalls await us if we do not keep the family close, maintain their confidence and trust, and are seen by them as being their advocates, acting in their best interests.

I have found that families need assistance in two critical areas: 1) operational information and 2) emotional support. Too often, corporations will dispatch only a Human Resource (HR) representative to assist the family with monetary support, re-location assistance, benefit claims, and other logistical needs, but cannot inform them of operational updates and initiatives. This HR or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) model fails to address the families strong need for operational information about what is going on. They will want to know what the organization is doing to secure the freedom of their loved one. Sending out and HR/EAP representative alone, and thinking this constitutes sufficient "duty of care", is just as problematic as if we gave them action updates but then failed to address their emotional support needs. We must do both.

A blended model suggests the corporation should immediately dispatch a knowledgeable security representative who can fully inform the family of: 1) what we know, 2) what we don't know, and 3) what we are doing to find out about what we don't know. It is critical that the company demonstrate its care and concern for the victim, and show that it will do everything possible to affect

their safe and timely release. This contact needs to be immediate, ongoing, and timely. The family needs to understand and believe that the company is on the job, won't give up, and will leave no stone unturned in its efforts to get the victim home safe. The need for day to day HR type support tends to increase with time, and runs in parallel to operational briefings.

The corporation should also provide media management assistance to the family, to help them decide whether or not they may want to respond to any media inquiries. Note: ensure that the family is shown any company planned press releases in advance.

Fully engaging the family by providing timely and ongoing operational information, while guarding against the desire to shield them from "bad news" (they will find out anyway), and supporting their emotional needs, are two separate but critical components. Such a dual approach is the key to keeping the family on your team, supportive of your actions, and greatly reduces the chances that they will question your motives, criticize your actions, or undertake independent counterproductive initiatives.

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