

Reception Security Guide

TRUE SECURITY INTEGRATION



A  **FIRSTSERVICE** COMPANY



RECEPTION SECURITY GUIDE

Some high profile incidents have brought many security issues such as theft of computers and proprietary information to the forefront of corporate thinking. Reception personnel provide the first line of security for your company, and it is our intention with this Guide to equip receptionists with some knowledge that they require to safely perform their duties.

Since lobby design can have a major impact on receptionist safety and access control, we have **enclosed our Preferred Reception Area Configuration Diagram** that we believe is a very desirable and safe lobby configuration.

As a general rule, all persons approaching the reception desk will be much easier to deal with if you start by making eye contact, smiling and begin the conversation with an appropriate 'seasonal' greeting. Remember, no one likes to be ignored. All visitors should sign in and out, and be escorted by the person they are visiting.

Identifying Unusual Behaviour

It is important that you develop a sense of what is normal behaviour exhibited by persons arriving in your lobby. You should 'benchmark' normal arrival routines and compare new arrivals' behaviour against your 'benchmark'. Most individuals visiting your office for the first time will either pause briefly in the doorway, look for the reception desk and then walk towards it, or they will walk directly to the desk without pausing. Visitors who are confused, or who have arrived early for an appointment, will normally approach the desk after eye contact has been made with him or her. People who do not approach the desk after eye contact has been made should be kept under close observation. These individuals may be waiting for an opportunity to 'tailgate' into the office. Watch to see if they are looking for security devices such as door-release switches, locks and cameras. Suspicious or potentially violent visitors may also spend time evaluating escape routes, looking for a hiding place, or searching for a 'weapon of opportunity'. If their behaviour is suspect, call for assistance.

It is expected that when visitors approach your desk you will be engaged in conversation for a brief period of time. This is acceptable to a point. If the discussion becomes unfriendly, focuses heavily on the 'business' or an employee(s), or certain controversial aspects of company operations, you must immediately end the conversation. If you cannot end the discussion after two or three attempts and the situation becomes threatening, call for assistance and **do not** grant anyone access into the office area until the problem has been resolved.

People will often loiter by your desk while waiting for an employee or admittance. You should politely direct them to have a seat while they wait. If they choose not to sit down, it may be because they are interested to see what is on your desk. Therefore, it is very important that proprietary information, indeed all company-related matters, be kept out of sight. Try to maintain a tidy work area. Keep confidential material in a file folder or a locked drawer when not in use. Individuals may also be trying to see what type of security devices you have, where they are located, and how they operate. On a more sinister note, someone may be looking for a 'weapon of opportunity' such as a letter opener or scissors. If they persist in hanging around your desk after repeated attempts trying to get them seated, summon assistance.



Identifying Unusual Behaviour cont'd

Observe where people sit once they have interacted with you. Most business persons will sit near the telephone, if they do not have one of their own, or pick-up reading materials such as your Company Brochure or Annual Report. Sitting by a window that offers an interesting view or direct sunlight is also a popular spot to wait. You should be aware of individuals who sit very close to entrance/emergency exit doors or who sit out of view of the reception desk. During inclement weather, watch for people who do not remove their coat, hat, gloves, boots, if applicable, while they are waiting, especially if it is for a long period of time. If you get an uneasy feeling from some of these visitors, discreetly call for help and delay their entry. In specially equipped locations, it may be possible to actually 'lock-up' the lobby until assistance arrives.

Angry People

During the course of your duties, you may occasionally encounter angry people. The following section is designed to help you understand the different levels of anger and to assist you in determining if the person is a real threat.

Stage 1: Anxiety

Defined as a 'noticeable change in behaviour, an involuntary reaction or response to something that happens'. Some external changes triggered by anxiety are:

- A flushed face
- Body twitching
- The appearance veins
- Sweating
- Twitching lips
- Head down
- Minimal eye contact
- Pacing
- Shallow breathing
- A dry mouth
- Frowning or twitching eyebrows
- Little verbalization
- Excessive fidgeting with eyeglasses, rings, pen, etc.

Anxiety is triggered by:

- Frustration or anger
- The loss of control
- The receptionist's body language, tone or demeanor



Angry People cont'd

Stage 1: Anxiety cont'd

- A third party
- Depression
- The feeling of being cornered
- Heat

When dealing with anxious people, give them proper space, correct eye contact and non-confrontational facial expressions or posture. Listen carefully and use supportive, verbal communication. Introduce yourself, use your first name, and try and use their first name as often as possible. Avoid using the word 'you' when talking to them. If you do not understand something they have said, ask them to repeat it clearly. Try and use the word 'we' (e.g., "We will be happy to assist you."). **Do not** exchange insults. **Do not** threaten their dignity by patronizing them.

Eye Communications

Break eye contact when you speak, but maintain eye contact while the angry person is speaking. Messages you may receive from the angry person's eyes are:

- Pupil size getting smaller, this means the person is getting angrier
- Person sizing you up
- Eyes jerking/darting
- Eyes looking around for possible access/escape routes, or for a 'weapon of opportunity'
- Eyes glazed, empty, or looking through you
- Eyes widening in fear
- Eyes glistening, ready to cry
- Eyes continually glancing at a target
- Generally, lengthy eye contact is a sign of aggression. The wearing of sunglasses indoors is also a sign of aggressive behaviour.

Stage 2: Verbal Aggression

In order not to injure him/herself, an angry person will attempt to 'win' through the use of words and/or body language. Some external changes to watch for are:

- A red face
- Standing as tall as possible
- Lips tightly pursed
- Hand waving and finger pointing



Angry People cont'd

Stage 2: Verbal Aggression cont'd

- Clenched fists
- Direct, prolonged eye contact
- Deep and rapid breathing
- Person moves into your personal space (e.g., closer than three feet)
- Excessive salivation
- Belligerent
- Cursing and yelling
- Eyebrows frowning
- Fists pounding on your desk or on the walls, etc.
- Stamps feet or kicks nearby objects
- Head and shoulders are back
- Shoulders are square

At this stage, the aggressor is testing you. Let them vent. Be assertive in your verbal communication. Use their name frequently when addressing them. Try and remain composed, use a firm but steady, even-toned voice. Set and enforce reasonable limits (e.g., "Please move away from the door and sit down."). If possible, redirect their anger to the past (e.g., "The person that instituted that policy is no longer with the company."). Use the substitution technique (e.g., "I can't solve this problem, but let me check with Fred."). Your subsequent call to 'Fred' is actually a call for assistance.

Stage 3: Aggression/Assault/Imminent Danger

External changes to watch for are:

- Face turns white
- All verbalization stops
- Lips tighten over the teeth
- Breaks eye contact and begins to focus on a 'target'
- Very deep and rapid breathing
- Forehead creases and eyebrows furrow
- Head is down
- The shoulders begin to shift
- Person changes their stance



Angry People cont'd

Stage 3: Aggression/Assault/Imminent Danger cont'd

- Bobbing or rocking
- No movement at all
- **FINAL SIGNAL:** Dropping their centre of balance or lowering the body. This indicates that a person is ready to attack.

You must summon assistance right away. Use loud, positive commands (e.g., “Stop!”) and extending commands (e.g., “Drop that chair! Do it now!”). Use defensive body language and direct eye contact. Keep your head and shoulders straight and your hands ‘bladed’ or ‘fisted’. Consider distracting your assailant by dropping or throwing something.

Your ‘Sixth’ Sense

The most important safety asset we have is our ‘sixth’ sense. Our five normal senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch – combine to produce our ‘sixth’ sense. The ‘sixth’ sense is the ability of our subconscious mind to detect danger by responding to stimuli that our conscious mind may not be able to recognize or articulate.

“Intuition is the journey from A to Z without stopping at any other letter along the way. It is knowing without knowing why.”

Gavin De Becker
Noted Violence Prevention Expert
Excerpt from the Book *‘The Gift of Fear’*

Persons who can be exposed to potentially hazardous situations must be prepared to listen to their intuition or ‘sixth’ sense. Although it may not be apparent at the time, signals from the ‘sixth’ sense are always based on something (e.g., “That sports bag looks very heavy, or “That man is not making eye contact.”). The ‘sixth’ sense picks up signals and analyzes them faster than we can do consciously. Intuition is a survival mechanism of the unconscious mind and as such, always has your best interest at heart. It will not tell you to put yourself in a dangerous situation.

Our ‘sixth’ sense speaks to us in many ways. Some of the warning signs of the ‘sixth’ sense are:

Physically

- Acidic taste in the back of the mouth. This is caused by the ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ reflex sending blood from our vital organs to our arms and legs.
- Hair-raising on the back of the neck and arms
- Quavering voice
- Accelerated heartbeat
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Feelings of fear, discomfort and/or panic



Your 'Sixth' Sense cont'd

Mentally

- Nagging feelings
- Resistant thoughts
- Humour (e.g., "I am leaving before that bomb goes off.")
- Wonder (e.g., "I wonder what is on his mind?")
- Anxiety
- Curiosity (e.g., "What is in that hockey bag? It looks really heavy!")
- Hunches
- Gut feelings
- Doubt
- Hesitation
- Suspicion
- Apprehension
- Fear

In lobby (reception) contact situations, abnormal visitors send signals that trigger your 'sixth' sense telling you something is wrong. Triggers from an abnormal visitor include:

- Refuses to remove/leave his/her coat and/or boots during inclement weather
- Is wearing clothing inappropriate for the weather/time of year, and/or is wearing multiple layers
- Is carrying something that could be used as a weapon, or is carrying something large enough to contain a weapon
- Makes prolonged eye contact, no eye contact, or eyes radiate hostility/fear
- Reading their 'face' scares you
- They are too nice. Charm is often used to mask criminal intent. They are not charming. They are trying to charm you.
- Gives you too many details. He/she does not believe what they themselves are saying.
- Makes unsolicited promises (e.g., "I won't cause trouble, I promise.")
- Will not take no for an answer (e.g., "I have to see Mr. Smith and I won't leave until I do!")



Getting Help

When your 'sixth' sense is triggered, take action sooner rather than later. For reception security situations, if your 'sixth' sense tells you that 'something is wrong with this person', you should discreetly attempt to summon help by:

- If so equipped, use the hold-up or duress button. This button should be located on the receptionist's side of the desk, and in an area not visible to the public.
- Making a pre-arranged, 'coded' announcement over the PA system to alert a supervisor and/or security of a problem in the reception area.
- If your office does not have a PA system, call your supervisor and/or security. Use a pre-arranged message that will not alert the perpetrator to the fact that you are calling for help.

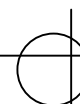
If none of the above options are available to you, another method of getting assistance is to deliberately engage the suspicious person in conversation with a third party that might be passing through the reception area. If possible, try and get the message across to this 'third' party that you require assistance, and that they should inform your supervisor and/or security. You can use subtle tactics such as incorrect references to company events, former employees, or culture.

Stalling For Time

Once you have discreetly summoned assistance, you may now find yourself in the lobby with a hostile person. This individual may be demanding action or admittance while you are waiting for 'the cavalry to arrive'. To reduce the potential for violence during this interval, continue trying to call around looking for a person of authority to assist this individual. If the person has been told that the employee they want to see is not in the office, when in fact they are, it is important that said employee be made immediately aware of the situation to avoid any confrontations. If possible, call the employee directly and using an incorrect name (e.g., "Mr. Smith, we are looking for Mr. Jones. Bill, who used to work here with us, is in the lobby and would like to see Mr. Jones as soon as possible."). **Do not** use a speaker phone for this exercise.

If a violent incident begins:

- If at all possible, calm yourself, get assistance, and get security if you can
- Leave the area or lock yourself in a secure room
- Position yourself out of range of the aggressor
- **Do not** allow yourself to be perceived as a barrier to the aggressor's goals
- Position yourself below the aggressor
- **Do not** make steady eye contact with the aggressor
- Reflect their thoughts back to them so that they feel understood
- **Do not** turn your back on the aggressor
- Personalize yourself, preferably as a fellow 'victim' also struggling against a third party





Categories of Suspicious Persons

Thieves: Opportunists

Basically, there are two types of thieves you will encounter: opportunists and 'probers'. Opportunists will try to get past reception either on a pretext (e.g., "I am here to see Jane in Human Resources."), or with a modest disguise (e.g., A courier baseball cap and clipboard, a watering can and a 'plant' company t-shirt, etc.).

Once past reception, they will wander around until they encounter a 'target of opportunity' that they will then steal. Some of these perpetrators will focus only on certain items such as laptops, while others will steal anything of value (e.g., purses, wallets, art objects, cash, stamps, etc.). The best defense is to politely, but firmly, stop and question these people and verify their story **prior** to granting them entry into your premises. If they do happen to get past you, alert your supervisor, site security, if so equipped at your facility, or some other person of authority. A search should then be initiated.

These thieves are often intelligent, confident, and will make eye contact with you as they give you a seasonal greeting and continue to walk past you. Generally, the longer you can engage these people in conversation, the more likely it is that their story will unravel. Once 'discovered', they will usually flee your office. However, you should be prepared to get help in case the situation deteriorates and they are unwilling to leave the building.

Thieves: 'Probers'

These individuals will often use the same methods as opportunists to gain entry. Once on site, they will search our specific items and then come back after hours to steal them. While on site, these people will be interested in locating and learning about your security measures. For this reason, **do not** discuss any security measures with anyone. All inquiries you receive about security should be immediately reported to your supervisor for his/her follow up. Since co-workers have been known to be involved in theft, you should report any non-routine security, employee inquiries to your supervisor. If you feel that someone you did not grant access to is a possible 'prober', be sure to notify a person of authority once he/she leaves the premises. This is so that further security measures can be temporarily instituted.

Solicitors/Pedlars

Generally, these people are seeking access to sell some type of product or service. Some on the other hand, are opportunistic thieves. You should be polite, firm and perhaps slightly sympathetic when you deny these individuals entry. Try and refer to company or building 'policies' that do not permit solicitors/pedlars on the premises. A copy of written policies and/or lobby signage to this effect is also beneficial. Keep in mind that you may be the tenth or eleventh person to deny them access today. These people may be frustrated and not take too kindly to being refused again. Watch for individuals trying to sneak past you. Be prepared to summon assistance quickly if the situation gets out of hand.



Categories of Suspicious Persons cont'd

Charities/Religious Organizations

These groups should be handled in the same manner as solicitors and pedlars. Company/building policy to this effect should be visible in the lobby. Be prepared for walk-bys and 'tailgating'. Summon for help if these individuals refuse to co-operate, argue, or become violent.

Terminated Employees

From time to time, you will have ex-employees arrive in the lobby. Generally, these people are not a problem. However, they do require sensitive handling and every attempt should be made not to embarrass them. Be prepared to summon for assistance if they appear to be angry, or refuse to leave when told the person they wish to see is 'not here'. Be especially alert for ex-employees whom you have been advised are potentially violent. Pay attention to see if they are carrying a weapon, or bag large enough to hold a weapon such as a shotgun/rifle. **If violence is imminent, consider fleeing the lobby and calling 911.** Advise your supervisor and other co-workers from a safe location.

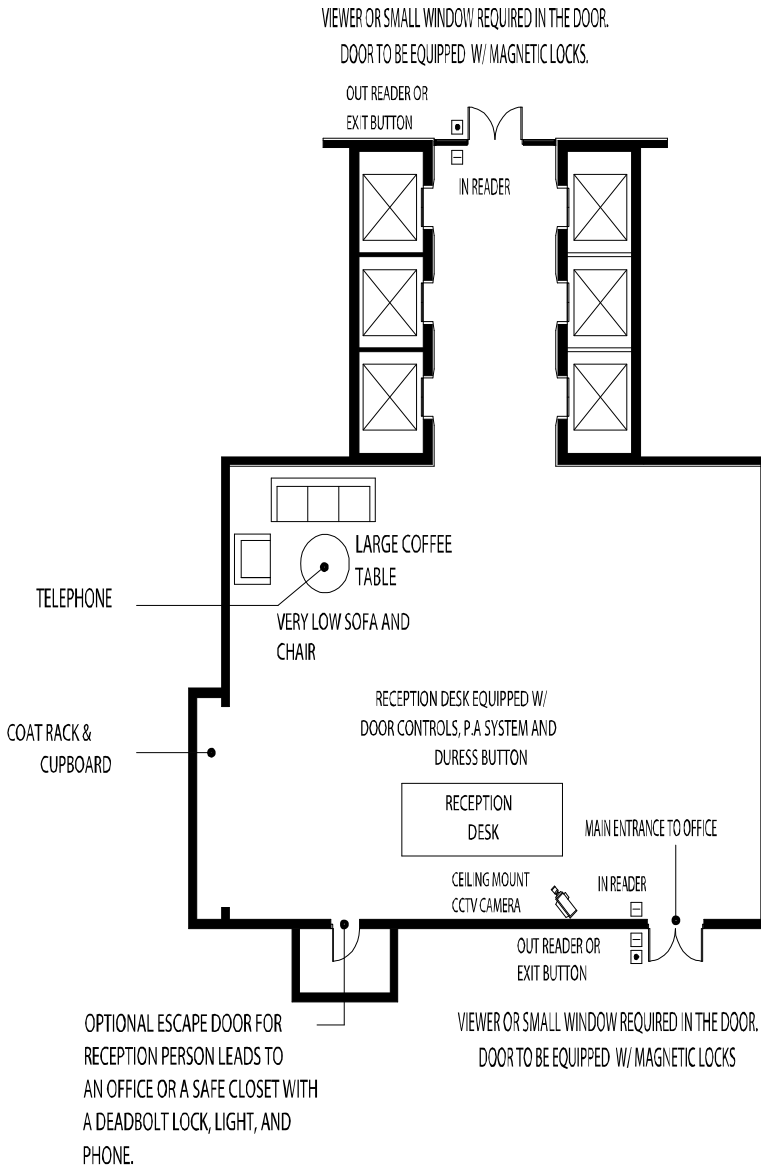
Property Removal

While working at your desk, you will occasionally see people removing company property such as laptops. If this is routine, no action is necessary. If this appears to be unusual, and the person is known to you, record the event in general terms. If this individual is not known to you and you do not feel threatened by them, ask for their name, company they work for, what they are taking and why. If they are resistant, **do not** pursue the matter. Record their description and any other pertinent information, and summon assistance. **(Note: In property removal situations, evaluate the 'remover' before initiating a conversation. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, do not confront them).**



RECEPTION SECURITY GUIDE

PREFERRED RECEPTION AREA CONFIGURATION DIAGRAM



- 1- LOBBY FURNITURE FOR WAITING GUESTS SHOULD BE LOW AND VERY SOFT SO AS TO MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR PERSONS TO GET UP FROM THEIR SEAT QUICKLY. THIS COULD AID THE RECEPTIONIST IN THE EVENT THAT HE / SHE HAS TO ESCAPE.
- 2- THIS FURNITURE SHOULD BE POSITIONED AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM THE ENTRANCE TO THE OFFICE, AND AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM THE RECEPTIONIST.
- 3- THE RECEPTION DESK SHOULD BE OPEN AT BOTH ENDS TO ENHANCE ESCAPE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RECEPTIONIST. IT SHOULD BE WIDE ENOUGH, AND HEAVY ENOUGH, SO THAT HE / SHE COULD TAKE SHELTER UNDERNEATH IT IN THE EVENT OF AN EXTREME EMERGENCY. THE DESK SHOULD HAVE GOOD VISION OF THE ELEVATOR, ALL ACCESS POINTS, AND THE WAITING AREA.
- 4- IN A LOBBY WHERE THE OCCURRENCE HISTORY INDICATES REGULAR CONFRONTATIONS NOTHING THAT CAN BE USED AS A WEAPON OF OPPORTUNITY (SUCH AS A NON-BOLTED DOWN SCULPTURE, ETC.) SHOULD BE LEFT IN THE LOBBY.
- 5- IN GENERAL, TO MAKE A LOBBY EASIER TO SEARCH IN THE EVENT OF A BOMB THREAT, IT SHOULD BE FREE OF CLUTTER AND CONTAIN MINIMAL PLANTERS. PLANTER SHOULD BE SO FULL OF SOIL THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO BURY OR INSERT A BOMB WILL BE NOTICED.
- 6- THE COAT RACK SHOULD BE LOCATED IN AN AREA WHERE THE RECEPTIONIST CAN CLOSELY MONITOR IT. THIS AREA SHOULD ALSO BE KEPT CLEAR OF CLUTTER TO FACILITATE FASTER, EASIER SEARCHING DURING A BOMB THREAT. COAT CLOSETS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED FOR LOBBY AREAS.
- 7- A RESTRICTED-USE TELEPHONE IS REQUIRED IN RECEPTION NOT ONLY FOR GUEST USE, BUT ALSO TO PERMIT A PHONE CALL TO BE MADE TO AN ASSAILANT OR HOSTILE GUEST WAITING IN THE LOBBY. THIS CAN BE USED AS A DISTRACTION TO ALLOW THE RECEPTIONIST AN OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE.
- 8- WHERE LOBBY DOORS ARE GLASS OR ARE MOSTLY GLASS IF AN EXIT BUTTON IS USED FOR EGRESS IT SHOULD BE LOCATED 40 INCHES FROM GLASS.
- 9- CONSIDER ACE/SECURITY LAMINATES, OR THE EQUIVALENT, SECURITY FILM FOR LOBBY OR HALLWAY GLASS, WHICH AN ASSAILANT COULD BREAK TO GAIN ENTRY. SECURITY FILM WORKS BEST ON GLASS WITH SOLID FRAMING.

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