

# School Safety Monthly

February 2016

## "Selling" Safety:

Seven Secrets to Success  
for Campus Safety Professionals



Photos: Rachel Wilson



## Message from the Editor



In this Edition of *School Safety Monthly* we explore a topic that is often overlooked in our field: how to be more effective as an agent for change. It is one thing to come up with plans and training, but to captivate your audience and influence them to be a part of your safety program is a different thing altogether.

Safe Havens originated when a group of school safety professionals wanted to make a difference. There is nothing more satisfying than working on the front lines and knowing that you are making children in your community safer. At the same time, there are some ways that we as campus safety professionals can make even more of a difference by bringing

our message to a wider audience and spreading best practices further than our local schools. This is the primary reason behind the founding of Safe Havens International 15 years ago.

One of the things that has impressed me the most about working with Safe Havens is the extent of the passion each member puts forward in their work. This is so important when working in a field where so much is at stake. Our deepest wish is that every school possesses not only the knowledge but the ability to keep children safe so that the focus can return to education rather than the fears that can sometimes overshadow our primary mission of education.

Every time we visit a new school we are met with everyday heroes - the teachers, support staff, administrators and other folks who are keeping our kids safe every day. At the same time, we have probably all known someone who is more likely to remark "that's

above my pay grade" than to try to make a difference address a safety concern. This issue is for those of you who fall in the former category. Those who are eager to make a bigger difference. Maybe you are responsible for motivating your organization's employees to follow safety and security procedures and be involved in emergency preparedness. Perhaps you are a trainer or consultant who works with various school organizations.

For each of us there will come a time when we have the opportunity to make a difference by "selling" safety. When it comes to safety, the saying "actions are louder than words" could not be more true.

As always, we welcome your feedback! Follow us on social media and please forward this to anyone that you feel could benefit from becoming a more effective advocate for school safety!

-Rachel



Photo: Rachel Wilson



# Seven Success Tips for Campus Safety Speakers and Consultants

by Michael Dorn

The fear generated by incidents such as the Columbine, Sandy Hook and Virginia Tech attacks has created an increased demand for campus safety consultants, trainers and presenters. The number of people providing these types of services has exploded since the early 1990s. The quality and impact of the thousands of people who now operate in these arenas varies considerably. I have met hundreds of bright, passionate and competent experts who are included in this group. I have also encountered quite a few people who are less effective at effecting change. Having served as an expert witness in school safety malpractice cases, I have also seen cases where people died - partly as a result of school safety consultants who were not qualified to perform the work they were doing. In my first such case, the consultants who had been hired by the district before the incident quickly settled 26 civil actions filed against them. There is a need for qualified, competent and passionate campus safety experts to counter the people who do not take the time or have the experience to provide solid guidance.

## The Unmet Need

Our non-profit center now has a team of 52 full-time, part-time and adjunct experts. However, we still typically decline projects for a variety of reasons. As we operate as a non-profit, we often steer potential clients to other campus safety experts when we feel that the client's needs

would be better served by their expertise. While this seems strange to some people, our focus is on improving campus safety rather than revenue generation. One way we try to contribute to the field is by providing free advice to people who desire to serve others as a campus safety trainer, conference presenter or consultant.

## Are You Part of this Solution?

I have met many truly impressive campus safety professionals who have expressed an interest in consulting and training work either part time or in retirement. Having been through both of these experiences myself, I have often reflected on what helped me succeed as well as the things I would do differently.

The following are a few of the tips that I often provide to colleagues who seek counsel in this area:

**1. Identify, define and master your niche.** The field of campus safety experts is now quite crowded with far more service providers than available work. I have met many campus safety experts that spend most of their time and often a considerable amount of money trying to get hired. When I first learned that many keynote presenters spend time "cold-calling" organizations trying to get hired to deliver presentations, I was astounded. Most of the national level experts I know in this field rarely if ever do this.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

Instead, they have become so incredibly good at addressing a particular niche that they routinely have to decline work. While some large consulting firms stay quite busy serving a wide array of clients through marketing and sales efforts, their organizations typically have substantial budgets for marketing, sales personnel and other costly approaches.

For the typical campus safety professional, identifying and mastering a limited number of specialty areas may be a more effective strategy. Standing out in a smaller market space may let you reach more people, accomplish more good and provide for your family more effectively. Most of the campus safety experts that are still in the field after two or three decades have adopted this approach. One example of this would be Dr. Marlene Wong, who is one of the world's top experts in school crisis recovery. I would contend that Dr. Wong is still in high demand after many years in the field because she has focused on a few very important areas of expertise.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

**Tip #2. Focus on service to others instead of making money.** Many people in the field will disagree with this statement. My experience has been that the money follows the people who pay more attention to helping others than on how much money they can make. One of the sharpest campus safety experts I have ever met makes a lot less money than he could because he is overly focused on making money. Though highly intelligent and truly gifted in his area of expertise, I have heard a number of people say they would not hire or re-hire him because he is more focused on what he can charge them than he is on solving their problems.

**3. Find the invaluable expertise that you take for granted.** I was contacted by a veteran law enforcement officer who wanted to provide training in campus active shooter response. When I reviewed his resume, I learned that he was an extremely well-trained

traffic fatality investigator who had extensive experience as an expert witness in traffic cases. He also has a solid base of experience relating to K12 schools. I advised him to consider specializing in helping schools prevent school-traffic related fatalities, which is a field in high demand for trainers and expert witness work. The expert had never considered how much easier it would be for him to provide valuable service in this area while also avoided entering an extraordinarily crowded field with massive civil liability exposure for trainers.

**4. Carefully consider legal and tax requirements.** I have seen numerous campus safety professionals who perform private work without being incorporated or obtaining liability insurance. One common example of this is people who provide options-based active shooter training. Many of these well-intentioned people do not realize that they

people do not realize that they are putting all of their current and future personal assets at risk when they provide free or for fee services in this manner as an individual. Even when teaching or consulting for a larger organization, it is important to understand that attorneys often litigate multiple parties and when they see the opportunity, people in their individual capacity. A simple broken ankle during an active shooter training program can result in several hundred thousand dollars of expenses for attorneys and expert witnesses. Losing one's home and having their retirement check garnished could be a heavy price to pay for a part-time teaching or consulting project. Seek legal advice as well as advice from a qualified tax professional before performing any private work for free or for a fee as an individual.



## Seven Secrets to Success for Campus Safety Presenters (Continued)

by Michael S. Dorn

### **Tip #5: Network effectively.**

Highly experienced campus safety professionals typically have an excellent network of colleagues. Building and drawing on these relationships can be especially important for those wanting to serve as a campus safety expert. It is also important to understand that a true professional will refer potential clients to other experts, especially if they know they are not a good fit. For example, accepting one case as an expert witness where you are not qualified can cost you years of potential future work because of the reputation you could develop. Similarly, delivering a great presentation that does not fit or serve the needs of the event can cause irreparable harm to your reputation and the case. While you should be very careful to only refer experts that you feel confident will serve a client's needs, this type of networking will help you in the long run. I have a number of colleagues that I trust eminently. I have referred hundreds of potential clients to these experts.

### **Tip #6: Be ready to work.**

I talk to many people who say they want to learn how to keynote professional conferences. Some people hear the fees charged by experts and mistakenly think that presenters simply show up, present and get a large check. The reality is that most subject matter experts present many times before they are ever paid to present. I know that I presented more than 100 times before a client in my state insisted on paying

me for helping them. The time required to learn and remain current, properly prepare, travel to and from engagements and to properly deliver school safety services should not be taken lightly. Investing the time, energy and in some cases the money to become a better presenter can also be critical. Consider joining organizations like the National Speaker's Association to hone your craft.

### **Tip #7: Take care of yourself.**

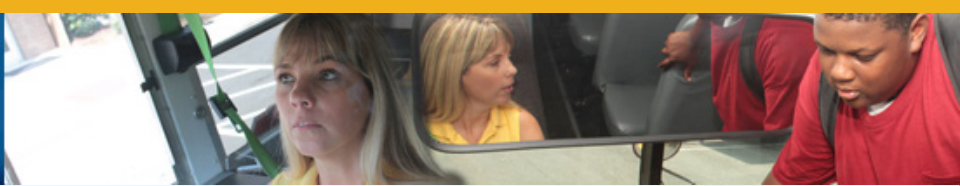
Another aspect of hard work and constant travel is the toll on your health. Adjusting to time zones, close contact with other travelers on airplanes and general fatigue from traveling can have an adverse effect on your health. Staying in good shape and taking the time to eat right and get adequate rest is not only important for yourself, but your audience and the quality of your work as well.

Though I still love what I do after 34 years in the field, it does require drive and dedication. If you have a passion for what you do, focus on helping others and are willing to work hard for long periods of time to do so, you can find joy in the blessings that this type of work offers. As someone once told me "if you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life". I am blessed to feel just as passionate about making campuses safer as I did when I became a university police officer in 1980 at the age of 18, and I am indebted to the many people that selflessly helped me along the way.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

The author of 27 books on school safety, Michael is a passionate advocate for safer schools. Michael welcomes reader feedback and stands ready to help others in their efforts to become more effective campus safety experts. Michael can be reached at: [mike@weakfish.org](mailto:mike@weakfish.org)



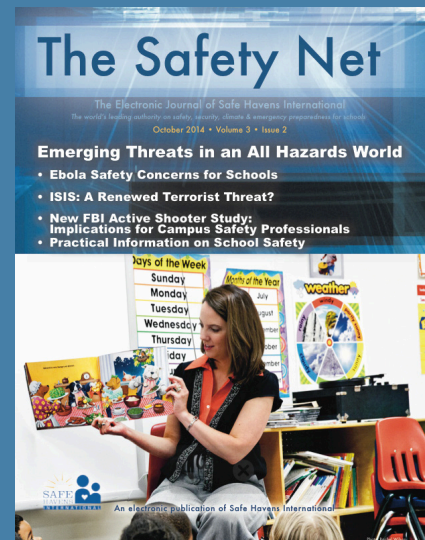
# Photo of the Month: What's in your classroom???



This photo was taken during an assessment of an elementary school, where these items were all found in a single unlocked classroom.  
Rachel Wilson/Safe Havens International

## The Safety Net

In addition to School Safety Monthly, Safe Havens International also publishes an annual electronic journal titled The Safety Net. This is a more in-depth publication that allows for a longer format of articles and a detailed look at topics related to school safety, school security, emergency preparedness for schools, safe school design, building climate, safe school culture and school law enforcement concepts. If you are on the mailing list for School Safety Monthly you will also receive new issues of The Safety Net. If you are not already a subscriber, click here to sign up: <http://www.safehavensinternational.org/newsletter>



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