

“Refugee accommodations are boring”

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, the security industry gets a lot of attention. In an interview, the Head of Securitas, Manfred Buhl, talks about staff shortage, training and operations at BER airport. VON MARIE RÖVEKAMP



Manfred Buhl has been working in the security industry for more than 25 years. FOTO: DORIS SPIEKERMANN-KLAAS

Mr. Buhl, in Berlin Securitas is looking for 700 employees. Why is it so difficult to find staff?

One reason is the demographic change, another one is the payment: It is not so easy to motivate yourself every morning for ten, twelve euros per hour, for which you also have to work at night and on weekends. In order to get motivated you really have to like your job, or lack the requirements needed to find a better paid one.

Why do you not pay higher wages?

It is not Securitas' fault that the wages in the security industry are low. We have been in favor of the minimum wage.

But?

The market determines the price – and, unfortunately, many customers choose the cheapest supplier. Especially in Berlin, this is a serious problem.

If you cannot offer good money to attract employees, what can you offer instead?

We pay the collectively agreed rates and more. We engage in PR activities and advertising campaigns to show that we are definitely an attractive employer. For example, we participated in the Mobi Pro EU project.

Which helps young people from other European countries to undergo training in Germany.

Exactly. In Spain and Greece, many young people cannot find a training position or job. Here in Germany, we are looking for junior staff. Such a project, however, can only reduce the shortage of specialists.

Do your employees feel the staff shortage?

Yes, of course, they notice it.

This means: Many security officers are overworked?

We regularly carry out employee surveys and, of course, there is a great deal of criticism, but we talk about it, and together with our employee representatives we look at what we can do better. The stress level, however, varies widely within the industry.

In what way?

In the public sector – e.g. in the local public transport sector or in football stadiums – we can already observe an increase in aggressiveness. There, the employees face a particular challenge, and we take counter-measures in the form of de-escalation training. For those who stand in front of a nuclear power station, the situation is relatively relaxed. Unless there is an alarm. There are also factors, however, that we cannot determine.

Which ones?

In the winter, we had a dramatic wave of influenza. The ones who suffer are – as elsewhere – the healthy ones. They have to assume the tasks of the sick colleagues, as well – which can lead to work overload.

In the past months, it was not uncommon that guards in refugee accommodations became violent towards the residents – and one security guard in Heidenau was even said to be a neo-nazi.

After such occurrences, we examine very closely if there was something we could have noticed or done. The only thing that we can look at in an application is the police clearance certificate, which does not reveal what a person believes or thinks, but only if – recently – he committed any criminal acts/was convicted. And even here we cannot be sure, because some of the guys submit forged certificates. It is true, there are black sheep in our sector, yes, and such incidents can be damaging to the sector's image. But it is also annoying that these individual cases overshadow the good work of the vast majority.

Have you inspected the refugee accommodations?

Yes, as early as in the summer of 2015, prior to the actual start of the refugee wave.

And?

I talked to guards, who felt abandoned and unable to cope, and I saw enormous potential for conflicts and misunderstandings. That is why we immediately developed an intercultural training concept.

What should the employees know?

The different religions, the areas the people come from, who gets along with whom, how they must behave towards women, how they must behave towards men – and de-escalation, also with respect to body language.

Was the refugee crisis good for your business?

There was a big hype. Among other things, we are present at the Berlin refugee facilities, but compared to the great, sudden demand, we confined ourselves to protecting only a few accommodation facilities.

Why?

We couldn't and didn't want to accept every order – also because of some tender conditions where e.g. the price alone was decisive and not the quality of the work. If you are not consistent you will be dragged through the market by a spiked collar. It is not my task to run a non-profit institution, but the German national subsidiary of a global corporation.

To which a new market is opening up.

That is true, but the number of refugees are on the decrease. Those, who have already arrived, will be distributed differently, small facilities will close again. From a strategic point of view, this seems boring to me. If I think about the future I have other issues on my mind.

Which ones?

For example, how to become more modern and more digital. When I look at the cameras we use and see how old many of them are...

Are you in favor of more video surveillance in the public sphere?

I am very much in favor of video surveillance. In my opinion, it would be stupid to generally refrain from using video technology. The case of the Neukölln *U-Bahn-Treter* (man who kicked a woman down the stairs) demonstrated how useful camera surveillance can be – and the people become more open-minded in this regard.

Because the need for security increases.

In view of such brutal acts, an increasing number of burglaries and – last but not least – the Berlin attack, many citizens want more protection and are now more open-minded with regard to cameras than they used to be a couple of years ago.

Did your sales increase after the Berlin attack?

No, our sales have not increased exorbitantly since the attack. In the aftermath of attacks, many people have an impulse to react quickly. Then, for two weeks nothing happens and the people become more relaxed again. Consequently, after such terrible events, normally only temporary upward trends are to be noticed.

What can be done against such events at all?

Prevention and early detection. We must try as quickly as possible to make the framework conditions for such attacks more difficult. Bollards and concrete blocks at mass meetings were a useful conclusion and reaction to the weapon "truck".

A security guarantee is impossible.

Nevertheless, we must continuously improve our security concepts – also by means of data, data, data, to be better able to predict events and possibly prevent them. The global development does not suggest that we will experience an economic downturn. Sadly, terrorism will remain one of the mega-topics.

This, however, makes it even more problematic that interested people just have to take a 40-hour IHK course to be able to work in your sector.

First of all, we offer training courses, as well – and, of course, that is a bad thing, but here we come right back to the money issue. You don't get quality for free, but in our industry low prices often beat quality. Whether there stands a properly trained security officer or someone who attended a 40-hour course will in the end be decided by the customer and his willingness to pay. I would be very much in favor of all security guards being obliged to undergo training according to binding standards and to be certified.

Could the quality problem be solved?

Yes, for example by connecting the private security industry to the Ministry of the Interior instead of – as up to now – to the Ministry of Economics. Except in Germany and Austria, that is the case throughout Europe.

What would be changed by doing so?

In the liberal economic policy, the following applies: The market will make it right, that is why the 5500 security companies in this country are OK. But there are too many. For the Ministry of the Interior, on the other hand, security is the top priority. And to guarantee this in the best possible way, the market must be regulated to a greater extent, access must become more difficult, and training must become better. Instead of calling for more *Bundeswehr* operations at home or for more police, the private security sector in Germany could generally be made better use of. I mean, if we can protect nuclear power stations, why can we not also protect an embassy.

Speaking of the protection of buildings. What are your employees doing at BER airport?

Good question (laughs). No, I'm joking. Since all the facilities that are supposed to control people have not become operational yet, our employees provide object protection.

Which means?

For example, they are attentive and ensure that there is no smoke anywhere because the fire protection systems do not work yet. They escort visitors, as well as employees of construction companies or suppliers. In general, construction sites become crime

scenes more and more frequently. And visually speaking, we must of course avoid that someone places an explosive device somewhere behind a fire extinguisher on the construction site of the capital's new airport.

Manfred Buhl, born in Forst (Brandenburg) in 1952, has been an executive in the security industry since 1991. He studied at the Military Academy in Moscow and, at the beginning of the 1990s, he left the Federal Armed Forces to join the Management of the DSW Security in Potsdam. Since 2002, Buhl has been acting as Chairman of the Management Board of Securitas Deutschland. In Germany, Securitas has approx. 20,500 employees, thereof almost 6,000 in Berlin-Brandenburg. Among other things, the German market leader with sales of ca. 800 million euros protects airports. The company is part of the Swedish Securitas Group with 330,000 employees worldwide.