

BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE

Are you content being just Mr or Mrs Average (average meaning typical, common or ordinary; for example, 'the average door supervisor couldn't handle such a nightclub'), or do you pride yourself on your appearance and on the work you do? Do you care about your door team, the management, the staff and the customers? Are you genuinely interested in keeping those around you safe? Can you honestly hold your head up high and say to yourself, "I'm bloody good at what I do"? Do you want other door supervisors to look up to you, to hold you in high regard and to respect you? Do you care what others think? Is it important for you to be excellent? Is it important for you to be professional?

If you answered 'yes' to those questions then you have true self-respect and I applaud you for it. Without self-respect you are nothing, a nobody, a muppet. These are just a few key questions you have to ask yourself, not just at the start of your career on the doors but all the time, each and every night you put on your jacket, clip on your badge and set off for work. From carpenters to lawyers, everyone should want to excel at what they do, at their trade or job. I don't hear carpenters say that they are average, second-rate or mediocre and bumble through their job hour by hour, day by day. Nor do I hear lawyers say, "Yes, I am a lawyer. Hire me, but I'm not very good." I believe that almost everyone wants recognition, credit and respect for what they do from their peers, their colleagues and, of course, from their employers. Almost everyone wants to be seen to be the best - no one wants to be Mr (or Mrs) Average. Do you?

I have worked on a great many doors at a whole range of venues across the UK, from the fairly provincial Norwich in Norfolk, where I started my career, to the city of London, where I had my own small security company and employed some of the biggest and hardest fuckers imaginable. I have worked on the door in the rough and tumble mining communities of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire and Standish in Lancashire where fights are part of a good evening out (for girls as well!), and on a number of different doors in Greater Manchester, where I met more gangsters, gangs and wannabes than I ever thought possible. And over the years and along the way I have met some really excellent door supervisors: ones that I have admired and respected; ones that are professional and that I have most certainly looked up to and learned from. Years after working with them, some have remained my friends and I have maintained contact with many. Sadly, the opposite is also very true, in that I have met many bad, ineffectual, unprofessional door supervisors; ones that I wouldn't waste my spit on; ones that are arrogant, that are bullies, and that display contempt

for those around them. I have also met door supervisors that are clearly not capable of looking after themselves, let alone providing security services to the general public in a licensed venue, and that should definitely be in another profession.

Recently, via Facebook a friend sent me a few reviews that he had read online about some of Norwich's nightclubs and their security. I have edited out the bits that are not really relevant to this book, but the following excerpts provide a really good example of what customers actually see when they visit certain clubs or pubs:

Optic

Optic is the nicest club in Norwich. It ticks all the boxes and I don't mind paying for that, but the big old boy we had (on the front doors) took his work a little too seriously and although I appreciate they're there to do a job, a little customer service wouldn't go amiss, but once past the gorilla on the front door, there was a super friendly female bouncer inside ...

... I've only got one thing to say about Optic - the bouncers. If you're prepared to pay top whack for entry, top whack prices for drinks and then have your night spoilt by over-zealous bouncers then this is the place for you ...

Mercy

Used to be a fun place to go, nice décor, but recently the door staff have seemed very rude and stuck up, and it's put me and my friends off going in ...

... Still love Mercy on a Thursday night and the music is great too, but found a couple of the 'security' staff rude the last couple of times I've been, which I didn't think was very appropriate.

Chicago's

Chicago's - You'll meet friendly faces who you can talk to, the bouncers are discreet and the drinks aren't too expensive.

These are just three examples out of the many clubs and pubs in Norwich, but they really do reveal what impressions customers get when visiting a venue.

Let me give you my honest feelings about door staff, based on my personal experiences as a paying customer at pubs and clubs around the UK (and I'm sure that you will have experienced exactly the same thing too). There have been times when I have been out with friends to clubs and pubs where the door staff have been self-important and rude, have blanked me, and have been bad mannered

and foul-mouthed. Now and then they have even tried to prove to me that they are hard by being arrogant and attempting to stare me out. I don't know whether they know or recognise me, or whether they just do this to everyone, but it seems as though they are really trying to prove something. Why? What do they hope to gain? And my opinion of these door supervisors? Utter cunts. Do I respect them? Do I fuck. Do they have a reputation? Yes, of being cunts. Would I floor them without hesitation if they were in any way aggressive towards me? Without a doubt. Quite simply, if you have no consideration for others and do not treat others with respect, whoever they are, then they in turn will not respect you. Thankfully, this doesn't happen that often and many door supervisors I meet are actually great and I can have a laugh and a drink (non-alcoholic of course, ahem!) with most, but when it does happen I really do feel like punching their tiny fucking lights out and teaching them what respect is all about; not specifically respect for me, but respect for everyone. And if I feel like this, then for sure most other people feel the same way too. As I said earlier, if you treat people like cunts, you will get treated like a cunt. Surely it is better to be nice to people initially, and then, if they respond with nastiness, deal with it as it happens rather than start off by being nasty to everyone and by doing so invoke a nasty response in return? To me that makes much more sense and makes for a much nicer working environment.

Professional door supervisors undeniably stand out from the crowd. They have an air of confidence and ability and they command respect. A professional door supervisor has made a concerted effort not to be average and has tried to develop a reputation as someone that genuinely cares about his or her venue and its customers. An average door supervisor does none of these things and just turns up for work because he or she has to – fills a Saturday night, doesn't it?

If you walk round clubs and pubs on a busy Friday or Saturday night you can definitely spot the professionals, who stand out from their less professional colleagues. I have been to many nightclubs where this is apparent from just a brief glimpse of the team. You can see almost immediately who are the good ones and who are the bad; who are professional and who are not; who should be there and who should not. Of course, I have been proved wrong on a few occasions and the timid and pathetic looking doorman has actually turned out to be a real hard bastard in a kick-off', but generally it is pretty easy to tell who will be there when it gets rough, and who will be hiding in the toilets. Unfortunately, in this day and age, an experienced professional door supervisor working for a big, national security company has little choice with whom he will be working on any particular evening or at any particular venue and very often has to put up with a variety of ineffectual 'jacket fillers' turning up either to cover for absent regulars or, in many cases, just to make up numbers. Almost every head doorman I have spoken to has confirmed that this is

true. Sure, there are venues where the whole team is a great outfit and it rarely changes, or where any new door supervisor coming into an established team is carefully vetted before they start, but this does not happen very often. In the current climate of massive, impersonal security companies with hundreds if not thousands of door supervisors on their books, jacket fillers are frequently sent wherever they are needed. So professional door supervisors frequently have to work with inexperienced scrotes who are only there because the dole paid for their training and if they hadn't complied their benefit would eventually have been stopped. And there is little the professional can do about it.

It seems that venue managers turn a blind eye too, or no longer seem to care - an attitude that actually baffles me. If I were a venue manager who was expected to pay a hefty invoice from a security company that had supplied me with a less than effective team, I would certainly do something about it. The problem is that many venue owners and managers are actually scared of the big door firms, the people that run them and the power they possess, and their view is that so as long as there is no trouble a few jacket fillers on the team now and then won't make much difference. So invoices get paid and no questions are asked - until, of course, something does happen, but then it's too late.

I have noticed, however, that over the past couple of years this trend has been changing. Regional, independent venues once again are asking for smaller, regional, independent security companies to provide them with a more personal, customer focused security service, rather than the impersonal management and constantly changing teams of larger firms. It would also appear that some security companies are purposely staying small and concentrating on giving good service to a select group of clients rather than expanding and losing control. For instance, my good friend Wesley Downham runs FGH Security, and they have a core key market that they focus on maintaining. In doing so, they have built themselves an excellent reputation and year after year have won many awards for their service. I first met Wesley many years ago on the doors at the Tiger Tiger nightclub in central Manchester, and since then he has gone on to build a great little company, together with his partner Peter Harrison. Their area is mainly north Lancashire and south Cumbria, and it would be uncommon for them to take on a venue much further afield that they could not easily control. To this small independent company, providing a good service and maintaining a great relationship with the venue managers and owners are much more important goals than expanding nationally or making a stack of cash.

It would appear that venue policies in terms of employing security are slowly changing too,

with pubs and clubs reverting back to the eighties and nineties, when many venues employed their door staff directly. For example, after a long series of failures with various national security companies, a good friend of mine who runs a big independent nightclub in the Midlands now prefers to employ his security directly again. He is very specific with his requirements and by employing directly he has much more control over his team and, as a result, infinitely more loyalty from them. His venue is packed night after night and has an excellent reputation as a really safe place to go, so it definitely seems to be working, especially when you hear some of the comments from his customers. And if the large security companies continue to employ muppets and jacket fillers and offer an ever-changing, impersonal service, I can see this happening more and more. Being excellent at anything takes consistency, time and dedication, and being an excellent door supervisor is no exception.

So ask yourself this important question: are you one of those door supervisors that stands out in a crowd because of your professional attitude and manner, or are you one of those that are seen as just jacket fillers? Who do you really want to be? It is easy to become complacent and lazy and not care. It is easy to get through another night doing as little as possible, but is this really who you are? I hope not.

Apart from writing books on the subject of doors and security, I am still very much involved with the day-to-day life of the industry and still frequently get asked to find door staff for pubs and clubs and to consult now and then. And if I can't do the job, I generally know someone that can. I am also occasionally involved in training new door staff. Sure, I could have jumped on the training bandwagon a few years ago when the SIA introduced compulsory training and licences and made myself a lot of money, but because I was so against the SIA at the time and really felt let down (along with most other people in this industry) by the way they had handled things and completely fucked things up, I decided that conforming to something I really did not believe in wasn't for me! But now I really do enjoy running my private courses on Gaining Respect and Building a Reputation for New Door Supervisors, and every single time I stand in front of a group and look out at the rows of new door staff sitting in front of me, I honestly want to see door supervisors that one day I will eventually look up to and respect. It really does give me immense pleasure and pride to think that in some small way I can help contribute to their professionalism and good attitude.

When I stroll down 'nightclub alley' in some godforsaken town or city, stepping over ugly, fat-arsed birds swearing and cursing and vomiting in the gutter (strange, isn't it, that only ugly, fat women get blind drunk, half naked and vomit in the gutter, and you never see gorgeous, slim, well-

educated women stoop so low?!), I don't want to see scumbags standing on the door thinking they are hard, or pimply students picking their noses or fat lumps of lard trying to get laid. I want to see good-looking (not in the 'handsome' sense, of course, but smart and well groomed), polite and respectful door supervisors running a tight and well-controlled door. When I go into a venue I want to feel welcomed by the security and thanked when I leave. I want to look at these door staff with a little bit of admiration and I suppose a wee bit of awe. I want to feel that they can handle themselves both verbally and physically if a group of scrotes decide they want 'in'. But, more importantly, I want to know that they can look after their customers and staff if a fight breaks out inside their venue and they have to go in and sort it out, or if a fire breaks out and everyone has to be evacuated. I don't want to question whether they would be scared shitless, stand and watch until the police arrive, or hide in the toilet. I would want to know that, without any hesitation or doubt, they would steam in and deal with the situation effectively and efficiently and then return to their post with a smile on their face as though nothing had happened. This is what I want to see from the door staff I meet and talk to and this is definitely what I want to see from all the door staff that I train and send out to venues across the UK. I have no time for cowards; I have no time for time-wasters and cheats; and I certainly have no time for people pretending to be something or someone they are not. In my book, if you are content to be Mr or Mrs Average-door-supervisor-who-couldn't really-give-a-toss then you should fuck off and find another job, because I have no time for average door supervisors – they are a danger to themselves, to their team and to everyone around them.

But I honestly don't really believe that there are too many people currently working the doors who would be pleased to be classed in the 'mindless muppet' category. Nor do I really believe that there are many door supervisors going to work every evening who genuinely see themselves as just jacket fillers. Fuck, how totally humiliating it would be if you actually knew you were a muppet and just filling in until a 'proper' doorman came along! Conversely, however, most people would confirm that door supervision is now full of such muppets and jacket fillers, and that there are more of them working on the doors now than in the entire history of door supervision! So this can only lead to one real and lasting conclusion: muppets and jacket fillers genuinely see themselves as being good door supervisors! This is really bizarre! So you are content with being just average (and therefore a knob) and everyone knows you're just average (and therefore a knob), and yet when you look in the mirror you actually see nothing average or knob-like. Therefore, you must either be blind (in which case you shouldn't be on the doors anyway) or have one hell of an ego and attitude and, as we have said before, having an ego and attitude is definitely not a good way to gain respect.

So a really important part of becoming a better than average door supervisor is to take a

long, hard look at yourself and ask yourself honestly and truthfully: am I really a good door supervisor and, if I am not, do I want to be? This is a crucial step. Take it and you will go on to great things; disregard it and you will remain a cunt because you simply cannot be someone you are not. If you don't want to be good at your job, then find another job, because you cannot lead your life being average and knowing that you are average. Strive for more. You can do almost anything you want to do if you want it bad enough. This is a fact. But you simply cannot be anyone you want to be. This is also a fact. You are who you are. You cannot be a hard man if you are not, nor can you be a wimp if you are a hard man. This is part of the reason why there are so many idiots and wannabes on the streets trying to be someone they are not and making an arse of themselves and everyone around them in the process.

Let me be really honest with you: I was not a good doorman when I started; in fact I was crap. I couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag, I wore jumpers under my shirt to make me look bigger, and all I wanted to do was to shag as many pretty women as I could (and quite a number of the not-so-pretty too, I have to add). I started my long and often turbulent career on the doors one gloomy afternoon as I was wandering through my hometown of Norwich. I was unemployed, a dropout and completely broke, and I saw an advert for door supervisors in the local Job Centre window. I honestly didn't really know what a door supervisor was and genuinely thought it was like being on the door at a hotel, opening and closing the doors, greeting people and being polite. I reckoned I could do that job, so I popped in and they told me that the position was at a new nightclub called The Ritzy and the adjoining upstairs bar called Central Park. The premises were currently closed and under refurbishment and they would be opening in the place of the old and notorious Samson and Hercules nightclub, which had quite a reputation. I knew the Samson well and often drank there as a teenager, well before my eighteenth birthday. The Samson was a numbers place, and your age and attitude didn't matter much so long as you had a few quid to spend on beer. As I briefly mentioned earlier, I was beaten up by the bouncers there one evening when I was about 17. I was being a knob and larking around, as you do when you're that age, bizarrely thinking I was some tough man. I went too far and the bouncers dragged me out the back and gave me a good hiding, leaving me bloodied and probably crying like a baby in the gutter. Funnily enough, I never misbehaved in that place again! Like many teenagers trying to prove themselves, I had a couple of fights but they never lasted very long and I was always the one that got floored pretty quickly. I didn't know how to fight. I was never abused as a kid and my family were never violent; in fact, I didn't really know what proper violence was. Anyway, the job wasn't as a 'bouncer', it was a 'door supervisor', so it was nothing to do with 'bouncing', and of course I applied. I was sent to meet the general manager, who immediately took me on. The excitement of the club scene in the mid-

eighties was undeniable and The Ritzy was just going to be a few fun-filled months over the summer while I looked around for another job, as I had other grandiose plans for my life.

Within the first few hours of my very first night I found out that working as a door supervisor at The Ritzy was going to be violent, but surprisingly I also quickly found out that violence didn't actually bother me that much; I wasn't scared of it. In fact, it wasn't long before I got used to it and it excited me. I longed for something to happen - a fight or someone to throw out, and when nothing happened I was disappointed and bored. Twenty or so years later I was still working as a doorman (unfortunately, though, the shagging of the pretty women had long since stopped). So how did I move from being a naïve twat whose sole reason for working the doors was to shag, to a professional and respected doorman? Simple. I was humbled by the team I was working with. Back then the team that opened the new Ritzy nightclub were a strong, tough, hard team that pulled no punches and that didn't suffer fools gladly. And I was certainly a fool, so either I learned quickly and proved myself or I was going to have a real tough time. I decided to shut my big mouth and learn as much as I could and follow my mentors, and it wasn't always easy. I followed what they showed me and learned how they operated, and, although I didn't always get it right and it took a while, slowly and surely my reputation developed and I became part of the team. And the team at The Ritzy back then was awesome. This is what you must do too if you want to gain respect and reputation and become a professional door supervisor.

This is not meant in any egotistical or conceited way whatsoever, but when I stand up in front of a class of students or when I'm chatting with my colleagues on the doors I want people to say: "You know that Robin, well he's getting on a bit now, and a bit old school, but he's polite and respectful and almost always prefers a non-violent way if at all possible, but even though he isn't far off his pension, he is rarely fazed by some of the scum that roam the streets at night, can still handle most situations and will always, always back you up to the very end if necessary, without question". Well, words to that effect anyway!

I want to earn the respect of those that don't know me and have never heard of me, as well as continue to earn the respect of the old-timers who know me and have worked with me over the years and around the world. And this is what you should want, too. Being average is definitely not the way to earn respect. Nobody ever says, "Oh, he's an average doorman and I respect him for it." No one ever says, "Fuck me, he has a mighty average reputation when the going gets tough." So, to be honest, if you really are content just to fumble through your job night after night being Mr or Mrs Average door supervisor, a muppet or a jacket filler, then don't bother reading any further because, as I have said before, you really are a waste of space and you shouldn't be working the

doors anyway. And if you were really and truthfully honest with yourself you would probably agree with me anyway.

Listen, you do not have to be experienced, nor do you even have to be any good at first, but you must want to be good, to be willing to learn and to follow others that are more experienced. Most importantly, you must also remain modest and humble as you grow and develop. People will then see you as the quiet one, always willing to learn, who follows orders and is always there when the going gets tough, rather than as the ineffectual, loud-mouthed braggart who knows nothing and hides every time it kicks off. Actually, it is okay to start off in this industry as a Mr or Mrs Average, or even a Mr or Mrs Below Average Knobhead, so long as you have the goals and the desire to become a professional and respected doorman eventually.

It is a fact that some people are born great, stand out in a crowd, look good and can handle themselves with little or no formal training. Sadly, however, the opposite is also very true, in that some people are definitely not great at all, disappear in a crowd, look pathetic and will run a mile from any confrontation. You cannot change your genes and you cannot change who you are; sure, you can change certain things, but not who you fundamentally are. Yes, you can poke your arse with steroids and turn yourself from a 10-stone weakling into a 20-stone musclehead, but if you are naturally afraid of confrontation then having strength and muscles won't change a thing. This was highlighted to me when I worked in Standish. A huge doorman started working the door, but he ended up hiding in the toilets when the mightiest of all kick-offs erupted. He certainly looked the business, but he was ineffectual and a coward. Learning a martial art will not make you someone you are not either. You may study for years and have great technique, but on the streets in real-time aggressive situations even the most skilled martial artist can become overwhelmed quickly. Again, this was highlighted in Wigan when my friend 'one-punch' Neil floored two boasting, arrogant black-belts with just one punch on each (but what mighty punches they were!) It isn't the technique or the skill or even the knowledge that is important, it is who you are and, conversely, who you are not.

Also, you will only get a good reputation as a door supervisor if you know the job backwards and inside out. As in any job, the more you know the better you become, and the better you become the more professional you are, and the more professional you are the more powerful you are. Your first compulsory SIA door supervisor training course should only be the beginning of a career on the doors, and like any professional you should develop your career by constantly learning, growing, experiencing and attending other add-on training courses, in particular self-defence, control and restraint, first aid, advanced conflict management and cuffing. If you are

serious about being a professional then you should be serious about gaining knowledge about the industry.

What matters most is that you are honest with yourself. It is okay not being a door supervisor, but it is not okay being a door supervisor when you should be doing something else, because this not only puts you at risk but also your customers and your team. Whoever you are and whatever you desire to be, the most important thing is to try to be the very best you can be, and if you are a door supervisor you should strive to be the very best door supervisor you can be – and accept nothing less.