

Professional And Business Ethics: Private Security in Australia

15 October 2021



John Gellel, Doctoral candidate, Australian Institute of Business; General Manager Kastle Systems Australia; President Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL).

Dr Donald Winchester, Senior lecturer – finance discipline, Australian Institute of Business.

Introduction

Let us first define who a professional is.

A Professional is a member of a Profession. Professionals are governed by codes of ethics and profess commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism and the promotion of the public good within their expert domain. Professionals are accountable to those they serve and to society ([Australian Council of Professions](#)).

A professional was often considered to be a white-collar worker as opposed to a blue-collar worker. A short list of examples for professional occupations includes lawyer, accountant, surveyor, engineer, security professional (e.g. police, armed forces, private), among others. Each professional belongs to their profession which may require a certain level of education and practice experience or a licence to be admitted to their professional body/association. In some professions, there may be different levels of attainment for different levels of appointment. A professional association can determine who can join their association via a constitution or other rules.

Often an association will have a code of conduct and or code of ethics members must abide by e.g. see [Australian Council of Professions](#). These codes are in addition to and can include legislative requirements of a particular jurisdiction. Legislation has its own rules and consequences. This could be why it could be said that 'professional and business ethics' is a grey area, or it is not black and white, or ethical behaviour is not a clear-cut thing, as the letter of the law is 'black and white'. In all the professions mentioned above an example of a scandal could be provided for a breach of law – often called [white collar crime or corporate crime](#).

Breaches of professional and business ethics may not always be white collar or a corporate crime. So, what are professional and business ethics and what do they (don't they) look like? We will provide a vignette of one profession – the private security profession and to give some context discussing how their professionals engage with commercial real estate of dealing with tenants, property managers and office building owners.

Mobile security patrols are a security activity under guard services, which represent about 26.5% of the total \$11 billion private security industry revenue and account for half of the 150,000 [industries licenced security personal](#). The [primary role](#) of a mobile security patrol is to attend a customer's premises in response to an alarm or security incident, escort others or undertake routine checks on a customer's premises. In certain states, security guards have no greater arrest powers than an ordinary citizen. Security guards can carry out a citizen arrest only. They cannot search the suspect; nor can they force the intruder to give their name or other details. If they do conduct a citizen arrest, they can only apply reasonable force and not excessive force.

Specific to office buildings in Australia, a mobile security patrol may attend a site randomly throughout the night to check if the site appears normal (i.e. no visible break-ins), and the checking and locking of doors which the building manager or tenant may have left open before leaving the building. The [National Emergency Communications Working Group](#) stated emergency service organisations across Australia estimate up to 95% of alarm activations are false. For example, a large spider walks across an alarm sensor which then activates an alarm. As [police](#) do not generally attend a single activation (e.g. by a spider) alarm, often a mobile security patrol is sent to the customer's premises to verify if an alarm is genuine or false.

The Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL) is the peak national body representing 85% of the security professionals in Australia. ASIAL provides advice, assistance and representation to members in the security sector, and expects its members to adhere to the ASIAL Code of Conduct. In addition to the Code of Conduct, ASIAL expects its members to adhere to the Code of Practice when undertaking security activities relating to mobile security patrols. The Code of Practice outlines the performance criteria, equipment (e.g. vehicles and personal equipment), training and recruitment (i.e. of security officers), workplace health and safety and record keeping for security individuals and security organisations.

[ASIAL](#) plays a key role in raising the level of professionalism within the security industry and develops codes which exceed the requirement of law. For example, the Code of Practice Mobile Security Patrols state organisations must have "random and incident-based alcohol and drug-based testing in the workplace". Record management of all mobile security patrol attendance to customer's premises is required, including the identification of the security officers attending site. In addition to organisational management, record management provides customers with evidence that the security officer attended site.

Security guards may soon face an ethical dilemma once businesses reopen their doors and mandate that only twice pandemic (i.e. COVID-19 and variants) vaccinated people can enter. With the recent protests across [Australia](#), security guards may face antivaxxer individuals that are a tenant's visitor, or even a tenant's employee. Even though a licenced security guard can refuse entry to a premise, the guard may be faced with an ethical decision in allowing the customer or staff into the tenancy. Perhaps the visitor is a dignitary (i.e. government official) or the employee or a yet to be vaccinated child under 12 years of a senior manager/owner. Professional ethics suggest the guard should refuse entry, despite the pressure and potential abuse the guard may face.



John Gellel

General Manager, Kastle Systems Australia

John Gellel is the General Manager of Kastle Systems Australia, a leading provider in managed security services, and President of the Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL), the peak body for the Australian security industry. John has over 20 years' experience in the security industry and is undertaking a DBA with AIB researching the 'Values and drivers of private security in office buildings across Australia'. John holds an MBA and Advanced Diploma of Management.



Dr. Donald Winchester

Senior Lecturer, Australian Institute of Business

Donald is a Senior Lecturer in Finance and joined AIB in 2015. His research specialises in asset pricing, corporate governance and how information systems improve an organisation. He holds a PhD from UNSW, a Masters of Business Studies, an MBA and a Bachelor of Commerce and Management degree – all with a Finance Major.