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Ex-Experts Reveal Shoplifting Guile

By ERNEST MURPHY

There's an old maxim that people do best what they do well, and at Delancy Street, the foundation which rehabilitates former convicts, they're taking it to heart.

Along with the highly successful restaurant and auto repair business which provide work for the ex-convicts and income for their foundation, the Delancy Streeters who live at the Ebbtide Road center in Sausalito have set up the Insecurity Force, an operation dealing in shoplifting, till tapping, pocket picking and other small-time underworld esoterica.

And it's strictly on the up-and-up.

The business's clients are mainly banks and retail stores which have had problems.

For a \$300 fee, a team of Delancy Street's eminently qualified rip-off consultants will present a two-hour seminar on the psychology and techniques of five-finger discounting.

Thomas Grapshi, 44, head of the Insecurity project, and Delancy Street members Morris Hodges, 59, and Jose Amador,

30, talked about the project in an interview the other day. Grapshi and Hodges are directors of the foundation.

"I picked pockets, used credit cards and did some short changing and till tapping," Grapshi said — "but not very successfully, I might add. I spent 17 years in jail."

He said Insecurity got started in 1972, shortly after the foundation opened its Union Street restaurant in San Francisco.

"The merchants were having problems with boosters," Grapshi recalled. (Boosters are shoplifters.)

"After we'd been there a month or two, they asked us because we had some prior experience, if we could help them devise better methods to deal with the problem," he said. "We held a seminar and the word started spreading, just by word-of-mouth, and security heads from shopping centers started contacting us to ask if we'd give the seminar again. After a period of time banks started getting interested."

Since then, Insecurity Force has presented its seminar more than 70 times all over the state and expanded into other fields such as mediating at prison



THOMAS GRAPSHI
Heads Insecurity Force

riots and providing bodyguards for diplomats in the Bay Area.

The seminars for businesses rely heavily on common sense.

"We try to impress upon them the fact that they've gotta be prepared for everything — the management may be aware but often they have young employees who are naive, especially at Christmas time when they hire people short-term and don't screen them or train them as much," Grapshi said.

"We don't pull any punches," Hodges said. "We tell them that the problem isn't always with professional rip-off artists as much as it is with employees and bored middle class housewives looking for vicarious thrills."

The seminar includes demonstrations of widely practiced shoplifting techniques.

"There are ways to distract store personnel," Hodges said. "Like the 'black-and-white team.' That's two guys who



MORRIS HODGES
Foundation director

operate by going into a store. The black guy will act suspicious and the white one will point him out to a clerk and remind him that you can't trust those people anyway. While the clerks are preoccupied watching the black guy, the white one cleans them out."

According to Amador, whose life turned around on June 30, 1967 when he kicked a heroin habit ("How could I ever forget that date?"), the brashness of a rip-off scheme often is directly related to how desperate the thief is. He and his Delancy Street coworkers said they knew of people with drug habits who actually walked into stores and carried out cash registers.



JOSE AMADOR
Knows the tricks

"This is a time of high unemployment and a lot of people are on welfare now," Grapshi said. "There are a lot of people who are going to be looking for a subsidy so they can make ends meet — and the subsidy's going to come from banks and merchants."

Hodges said Delancy Street hopes to broaden its Insecurity Force, and he envisions it becoming "a security service that

investigates complaints from the disenfranchised class against corrupt cops, crooked politicians and others who exploit them."

If that ever becomes Insecurity's business, he said, it will only go as far as calling problems to the attention of official enforcement authorities. The people at Delancy Street aren't interested in taking the law into their own hands.