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Why Hold Up Convenience Stores ?

"Why Hold Up Convenience Stores " was the title of one of six workshops that ran concurrently each day for three days at the Convention of the National Association of Convenience Stores held September 12-16th in New Orleans.

The moderator, Mr. Bob McKinney of Project J.O.V.E. in San Diego, California, was introduced by Dick Dole of the Southland Corp. The panel included six men who had been criminals and had served time in prison, but were now working with Project J.O.V.E. in the re-introduction of ex-convicts to society. One of the services they are performing is just this sort of seminar, the first of which was held in San Diego under Dick Dole's sponsorship.

The panelists were: Tony Regoso, Frank Valenti and Ray Johnson. Mr. Johnson had served 15 years in Folsom prison and had the distinction of having been the only man ever to escape from that institution. Mr. Dole made a short talk outlining the growing problem of crime against Convenience Stores and the fact that the program operating in San Diego had had noticeable results in a lowering of the rate of armed robbery in the area.

The entire workshop was run on a question and answer basis, with the ex-cons (Mr. McKinney, the moderator, shared that background) answering queries from the floor.

Basic to the method of preventing holdups..and that was the theme of the presentation, not apprehension after the fact..was making the cash register area easily visible from the street. This meant no window-covering signs, and placement of checkout toward the front of the store.

The comment was made that the title of the workshop might well be "Why NOT Hold Up Convenience Stores " It was clearly indicated by these experts that these stores almost invite robbery with single person staffing at night, hidden cash registers and easy in-and -out . Essential in prevention was the job of making all employees aware of the possibility of robbery, and training them in behavior both in operation of the stores to prevent robbery and in the process of an actual holdup.

The panelists indicated that the most dangerous robbers were the young amateurs, who would shoot at any slight sound or movement. It was pointed out that managers, because they are essentially friendly folk, talk entirely too much about their operations to strangers, giving potential robbers information about times when large sums are available, the protection they have, etc. All the experts agreed that almost any sign of special surveillance, such as TV cameras (operational or not) , Surveillance Warning signs, and the like, would deter a potential holdup man. Additionally, they suggested that safes be clearly visible and if double keyed, so marked so the holdup man before he draws a weapon will be aware that he cannot get into that safe.

The panelists did not feel that drug addicts did much armed robbery.. these people confine themselves, they felt, to shoplifting, burglary and similar non-contact crimes.

Copies of the booklet "Planning for Protection" made available by the Southland Corporation and reprinted by Convenience Store Journal were distributed at the session.

These workshops, held on three different days, made it possible for different groups of Convenience Store Operators to hear the presentation and panel discussion and to add their special questions to the general give and take.

Other workshops held at the convention were: "To Advertise or not to Advertise", "Site Location", "Opportunities to Serve Convenience Stores" "Legal Problems in Franchising" and "Future of the Convenience Store Industry".