

Undercover on the job

Agents bust dealers, single out employees for help

By Chris Morris
Staff Writer

When Greg Norred talks about corporate espionage, don't assume he's got insider trading on his mind. When this undercover man starts spying, it's employee secrets he's after, not corporate ones.

Norred is president of Norred and Associates, a security and investigative company specializing in drug problems in the work place. As employers try to combat employee substance abuse, many are hiring security agencies to go undercover to find out who's using and who's selling the drugs.

Others are looking to drug education seminars to help curb the problem, teaching supervisors what signs to look for indicating usage.

"Employers are not even aware they've got a problem until we go in there and educate them," says Don Golden, president of Strategic Consultants Inc. "Then they start picking up on the indicators."

In some cases, education will lead to undercover work as employers come to realize just how bad a problem they have.

Skulking around like the hard-boiled detectives of fiction, undercover agency employees are hired onto the payroll, usually as a janitor or a maintenance man to allow mobility. Blending in with the workers, they search out the dealer or dealers, note the regular customers, make a controlled buy and, finally, a bust.

Ideally the process takes six months, but corporate budget restraints will usually cut the investigation down to two. It's not as thorough, but Norred says the company can usually still uncover the source of the problem.

"Two months is a little bit cramped," he says. "It's more of a shot in the dark, hit-and-miss type thing. But the average client wants it over in a couple of months; they don't want to spend a lot of time and money on it."

Most cases involve problems in blue-collar environments. Golden estimates only 30 percent of his investigations focus on offices. Norred guesses only 25 percent.

"It's a lot harder to uncover drugs in an office environment," says Norred. "There's so much more supervision. It's daytime — people don't use nearly as much in the day as they do in the night. And to be honest, I don't think the red flags are there for an office like they are for a warehouse."

Golden agrees.

"As you move up to the white-collar viola-



Norred: corporate espionage

tor, you get a more sophisticated violator — a little more intelligent and a little more adept at hiding his symptoms," he says.

An undercover agent's training is much like a police officer's. Both companies teach their people to avoid entrapment and the proper way to handle evidence. To facilitate the process, most agents have some sort of law enforcement background.

Almost all of Norred's business requires undercover work, 40 percent involving drugs. The dealers are arrested. The users, however, are usually helped.

Norred guesses only 2 percent of the users his company nabs are prosecuted by their employer. Normally, drug treatment programs and education seminars are the results. Since the wages warehouses pay are generally low, dismissing an employee is usually not a very strong deterrent.

Golden prefers to stay away from the undercover work, harboring doubts as to its effectiveness. Of all the assignments he takes, only 10 percent involve an undercover assignment.

As a 12-year veteran in the law enforcement community, he has seen countless people put in jail, only to resume their drug habits upon release.

"The undercover end of it is not as successful as the education," he says. "You can't legislate morals." ■