



A Protective – and Entrepreneurial – Spirit

Intelligence analysis, security operations and system design are all part of Kris Coleman's Red Five Security firm.

By Casey L. Penn

“The world is getting more challenging,” warns Red Five Security President and CEO Kris Coleman. “On the security front, there are greater risks, especially outside our United States borders. If you do it wrong, it can bite you.”

Coleman, 45, a born-and-bred Arkansan and graduate of the University of Arkansas, has made a career of quietly – and effectively – ensuring the safety of many. His Washington, D.C.-based company provides discreet security solutions to a select group of public and private-sector clients that include corporate executives, diplomats, celebrities and other high-net-worth individuals in the United States and abroad.

An early interest in national security and international intelligence has been an asset to Coleman’s life and his work. “I’ve long had a curiosity, and a sense of service, to my country,” said Coleman, who grew up in Fort Smith. “My parents taught me to be grateful for my freedoms and to respect other cultures. From an early age, I wanted to be successful in a way that gave back to the community. Government service and intelligence was the way I went about doing that.”

While still in college, Coleman was recruited by the CIA – as a student first and later as an employee. While there, he conducted protective operations and threat assessments, and he developed counterterrorism and law-enforcement strategies.

Coleman left the CIA in the late 1990s to become a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A past member of the bureau’s enhanced SWAT Team and an FBI-certified instructor in firearms, protection, surveillance and counter-surveillance, Coleman was also in charge of running international organized crime and terrorism investigations.

After leaving the FBI, Coleman worked as a consultant in the private sector. He founded his own company in 2004, seeking to fill a need in the market while putting his background to use. “There are plenty of commoditized security providers out there,” Coleman says. “Red Five is less about putting an off-the-shelf security apparatus in place and more about understanding and answering a family’s or executive’s specific security needs.”

CLOAK AND DAGGER

So what does Red Five do, exactly? Coleman sums it up nicely and discreetly. “In the end, we are problem solvers,” he says, bringing to mind sly smiles, firm handshakes and the words Bond, James Bond.

Duties are customized to each client and largely confidential, but there are specifics he can share about his work. Assignments typically fall into three categories: intelligence analysis, security operations and security system design. In those areas, Red Five may provide training, program development, protective detail and more.

For instance, Red Five may provide protection to the family of a foreign diplomat, a former board member of a

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of Excivity*

Fortune 500 company or a company under a sophisticated cyber threat (i.e., a company that has been hacked or a CEO who is thinking about carrying his iPhone into China).

“With regard to the uniqueness of our work, a week doesn’t go by when I don’t get a phone call where the client says, ‘You probably haven’t heard this before,’ or ‘This is going to sound a little weird,’” Coleman says with a smile. “I tell them, ‘We do weird well.’ Our team is high end, many former CIA. We take that expertise and apply it in a manner that supports our clients.”

In Arkansas, Red Five has done work for Walmart (executive protection) and other clients. Coleman would like to expand the

company’s reach in the state. “I would like to connect with international clients headquartered here whose operations extend beyond U.S. borders,” he says.

Individual or executive protection, particularly near the border, can be sensitive, Coleman indicates. “You’re dealing with different personalities, law enforcement, security compliance, deployment of firearms, international borders, etc.,” he says.

UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT

In one case, a corporate client, publicly traded, who operates near the U.S. border, was concerned about criminal activity coming across the border, criminal surveillance of his executives and the potential for kidnapping.

“Red Five worked with the client to understand the assets to protect and the threat against those assets,” Coleman shares. “We did a third-party threat vulnerability and risk assessment on the CEO and other executives. The report was briefed to the board, which then made resource decisions about what to spend to protect its executives and its assets.”

About five years ago, El Paso Electric hired Red Five to evaluate its security needs and to help develop and implement a security department within its company, which serves approximately 400,000 customers in west Texas and southern New Mexico. “Kris came in with his team and conducted a robust assessment that opened our eyes to some gaps in our security,” recalls Wayne Soza, vice president for compliance and chief risk officer. Soza expressed gratitude for Coleman and the time he spent to understand the company’s internal culture before planning any strategies. “He and his team were outstanding, and I enjoyed working with them.”

Red Five has a diverse, experienced team to carry out its work. “Many of our directors and operators are former government, military or federal law enforcement. It’s CIA, FBI, Secret Service, Department of Energy, Department of State,” says the CEO. “It’s a lot of experience packed into about 80 employees.”

With world travel being the norm for Coleman and his team, Red Five is able also to tap into a network that expands into Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, →

Profiles: Red Five Security

South America, etc. “It’s important to have security experience and knowledge where the client is going to be,” Coleman says. “We don’t propose you consult from a single office in a U.S. city and then try to tell people what’s happening in Yemen. You need that network, and that’s where we’re very strong.”

“For a number of clients, we keep track of where they are going and what their contingency plans are for getting out. We give them accurate and timely intelligence prior to their departure to those locations. We help them design facilities in those overseas locations to make sure they can weather the challenges being presented to them in high-risk environments.”

Red Five is growing, and recently opened a fourth office in Scottsdale, Ariz., which is in addition to offices in Washington, D.C., Laguna Niguel, Calif., and Sunnyvale, Calif. As for continued growth, Coleman has set only one ceiling. “When the company becomes too big to hire good people,” he says, “we will stop growing. I’m not going to do work that’s below us.”

NURTURING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Coleman’s first business experience came during his high school years, from working for his father’s construction company during summers. “There was an entrepreneurial spirit in the family that helped me understand what it takes to run a small business,” Coleman recalls. “My family – and Fort Smith – gave me a solid foundation in my values, and Fayetteville’s creative and open-university atmosphere helped me understand how Walmart, ABF, USA Truck, Tyson’s and Stephens developed and have flourished in Arkansas.”

Knowing that his small business is helping to drive the U.S. economy brings Coleman a sense of accomplishment. Even more than that, he says, is the reward of hearing a client express newfound peace of mind after he and his team have handled something for them that was threatening or somehow unpleasant. “The second most gratifying thing [about that] is seeing a group of people that I brought together accomplish great things and in giving back to the community.”



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Through Red Hands Helping, an informal group within the company, Red Five supports food drives, Wounded Warrior Project, Little League and more. “We place wreaths on the gravestones of our armed forces at Arlington Cemetery,” adds Coleman, who allots time and resources to these things on at least a quarterly basis.

Matt Ramsey, president of cyber and technology security company Excivity, calls Coleman a colleague and a friend. “My company has been pulled in to support Red Five’s cyber security offerings,” Ramsey says. “Kris and I talk about business, leadership and family. Kris has always run faster than most and put in more effort than most, which is evidenced in his business and Red Five’s growth,” he explains. “As a small business leader, you are the master of many, and you have many masters in your clients, employees and family. Kris keeps his eye on the ball with the end goal of having a better life balance.”

Finding that balance, Coleman says, takes focus, help from others and a little down time, too. “I’m an avid list maker, and I know how to delegate to people who can execute – that’s important. I get out there and see the troops. The other part of being successful is staying fit and healthy. You need a plan in place to do that if you’re going to manage the stress.”

To decompress, Coleman likes a little adventure, and some hometown fun. “I like motorcycling. I do a couple of long rides each year, and it’s hard to beat the scenery, roads and low traffic of the Ozarks,” he says. “That’s always a great ride. I frequently get back to the Bikes, Blues and BBQ in Fayetteville. My brother and parents are still in Arkansas. I always love to get back there to see friends and family, and to take in a ball game. There’s no other sports team besides the Razorbacks. ‘Course, that goes without saying. It’s part of where I’m from.”

Coleman is a member of the American Society for Industrial Security, the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI and the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. He is also the author of a copyrighted protective intelligence methodology for executives known as PrIME©. For more information, visit red5security.com. 