

ASIS Women in Security Spotlight

MARIA TERESA SEPTIEN is director of business development, Latin America, for AFIMAC Global, as well as ASIS International Women in Security regional liaison for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

A security professional for more than 15 years, Septien has worked for several multinational corporations. She has experience creating innovative risk management solutions and programs that align the security function with the business objectives of organizations.

At AFIMAC, she is responsible for the overall management of strategic and operational marketing and customer relationship activities for Latin America, providing market feedback to the company leadership regarding competitive offerings, prospective needs, and product development in the region. She is in charge of planning and coordinating the implementation of business plans, strategy, and the penetration of new markets in Latin America, and responsible for enhancing operational growth.

Before joining AFIMAC, Septien was director of multinational projects for MSPV Seguridad Privada, a privately held, professional services firm supporting client security needs in Mexico and Central America, and as managing director for Latin America for STEELE International.

During her career, Septien has been directly involved in large-scale consulting projects in the private and public sectors; has provided security training to boards of directors in Mexico, the United States, and Latin America; and has spoken in open forums and to security committees. She holds a BA in information systems from Anahuac University, *summa cum laude*, earned in 1988.



Maria Teresa Septien

Q: *Are there any key threads or themes running through your career?*

A: Throughout my career I have been more focused on corporate security consulting and crisis management. Nevertheless, as a security professional, having general knowledge of the key fields involved in security, and keeping updated on information security, cybersecurity, and technology has proven to be important while working on complex projects.

Q: *Is there any situation, person, or place that changed your career?*

A: There are many security professionals who have marked my career. The first was my brother, security professional Jorge Septien, CPP. He invited me to participate in an information security project and since then I haven't left the security field. The second person who affected me was Enrique

Iturbe, former security director for one of the major banks in Mexico. He taught me to always look at security issues from different angles and to align security solutions to business strategies and objectives. Finally, Jaime Owens, CPP, told me the importance of having direct involvement with ASIS International to promote the profession and to network with professionals in Latin America, especially women.

Q: *Do you have a particular philosophy or approach to security?*

A: Security must be aligned to business objectives and should be seen as an investment and not as an expense. It is our duty as security professionals to transmit this philosophy to our clients and to our organizations. We must be able to demonstrate ROI on what is invested in security. Also, secu-

rity must stand as a synonym for confidence, to our clients or to our organizations. We need to work hard on building this important perception.

Q: *Do you think women can bring different views or approaches to security?*

A: For more than 6 years I was managing director of a multinational security firm for Latin America. The reaction of many clients when they found out that the top managers for Latin America were female was interesting. I do think that we have a different view and approach—for example, looking more in depth to certain details and taking the human factor more into consideration, which is of key importance in security.

Q: *Is being a woman in this profession a net positive or a negative?*



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A: In a marketplace defined by constant change, complexity, and disruption, I believe today's most successful companies are those that bring diverse perspectives and experiences to each new challenge. Including women in the organization can certainly bring a strategic advantage. But also, realistically, sometimes it can be hard to demonstrate that women, especially in Latin America, can be as good at leading, have the hard and soft skills needed, and be as professional in a field that is definitely dominated by men, at least in this region of the world.

Q: *Is there anything you'd say you learned the hard way over the course of your career?*

A: As women we need to work harder to demonstrate our value. Sometimes, we are afraid to assume leadership roles, since we lack the necessary confidence to do so. When you are offered a career opportunity, grab it and just say "Yes!" Use any fears you have as your motivation to be successful. That fear will then turn into confidence.

Q: *Have you ever had a mentor or been a mentor? Are those relationships important?*

A: Yes, I have been involved with a mentorship program in Mexico called InRoads, which is for young people with extraordinary talent but who have very few economic resources. It has been one of the most gratifying experiences in my life. The capacity that mentors have to positively influence these young people's lives and professional development—with just a little effort and time—is really astounding.

Q: *Do you have any professional aspirations or goals you're working on?*

A: I would like to be part of the board of directors of the multinational company. I will soon start working to get my Certified Protection Professional® (CPP) certification, too. ♦