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**A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT MAKE AN EXPERT**

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*By Gordon Graham*

Editor’s note: This article is part of a series. [*Click here*](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/whos-your-hr-subject-matter-expert-hint-its-not-you/) for the previous article.

Gordon Graham here, continuing with my ramblings on risk management. On the off chance this is your first exposure to this effort to summarize my thoughts on the discipline that consumes most of my professional (and personal) life, here is a quick recapitulation to get you up to speed.

When I first started my live lectures on risk management in the late 70s, I had many smart people posing this question to me: “Gordon, I like what you’re saying, but where do we get started? We face thousands and thousands of risks in police work—where do we get started?”

Way back then I did not have the answer, but the question kept popping up. *Where do we get started?*

As I developed my topic-specific live programs over the next 10 years, it finally hit me. We can take all the risks we face and put them into [10 Families](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/are-you-biased-when-it-comes-to-risk-management/). And the challenge I have posed to people since the early 1990s has been, “What are the greatest risks you (and your department) face in each of these families? What control measures—policies, procedures, protocols, rules, directives, initiatives, etc.—do you have in place to fully and properly address these risks? And are these control measures properly designed, up to date and being taken seriously?”

Several years ago, I was asked by Lexipol to summarize my thoughts on these families of risk. In the subsequent [series of articles](https://www.lexipol.com/author/gordon-graham/), I have briefly addressed the families of [external risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/lack-compliance-creates-instant-liability-public-safety/), [legal and regulatory risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/lack-compliance-creates-instant-liability-public-safety/), [strategic risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/seeing-the-future-how-strategic-risk-management-can-improve-your-operations-2/), [organizational risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/real-risk-management-getting-to-the-root-of-the-problem/), [operational risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/bad-behavior-by-bad-people-understanding-external-intentional-misconduct-in-public-safety/), [information risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/the-danger-of-rearranging-the-truth-in-public-safety/) and [human resources risks](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/the-most-expensive-risks-we-face/). I will now address Family Eight—technology risks.

So let me start this piece off with a thought from the great Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus, who I had never heard of prior to today (he is older than I am as he was born in 1466—more on birthyears later in this writing)—but for decades I have heard a statement attributed to him:

*“In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.”*

If you are really into this, you can order a book from Amazon written by John R. Nelson, *Clearly Ambiguous: In the Land of the Blind the One-Eyed Man Is King*. Not to digress (but readers of these articles know I am bent in that direction), for a mere $46.41 you can get *The One-Eyed Man Is King: A Story of Winning* by—and you are going to think, *“He’s making this up!”*—none other than Gordon Graham. Seriously!

Now, this Gordon Graham is not me, but in his own words “a consumer of correctional services in the State of Washington”—you can figure out what that means. I have read his book. And again, not to digress, but when I started giving talks in Washington state, a lot of cops did not like me because they thought I was the “other” Gordon Graham.

Regardless, the aforementioned Desiderius Erasmus quote speaks for itself. Just because someone knows more about something than you do does not make them an expert on the given topic.

By now, the new readers of this series are thinking, “Gordon, is there a point you are trying to make here? We are now 600 words into this piece. Where the heck are you going with this?”

Ah yes, I am supposed to be making a point here—so here is my point: I am a tech idiot! I am not proud of my lack of knowledge about technology—but I am realistic about it. Malcolm Gladwell told me in his great work [*Outliers: The Story of Success*](https://www.amazon.com/Outliers-Story-Success-Malcolm-Gladwell/dp/0316017930) (which is on my [reading list](https://info.lexipol.com/Gordon-Graham-Recommended-Reading-List)) that I was born in the wrong year.

You may be using some Microsoft technology as you read this today. Who were the founders of this trillion-dollar company? Bill Gates (smart guy who has done well) was born on Oct. 28, 1955. Paul Allen (another smart and rich tech guy) was born on Jan. 21, 1953. Steve Ballmer was born on March 24, 1956. Eric Schmidt, who ran Novell, one of Silicon Valley’s most important software firms, and later became the CEO of Google—guess when he was born? April 27, 1955. I could go on and on, but here’s the point: From a technology perspective, the “sweet spot” to be born was 1953 to 1956.

Think it through! If you were born during these years, you turned 21 right at the start of the tech revolution and were on the “ground floor.” If you were a hard charger who thought differently (an outlier)—Blammo! You did well in the tech world.

I was born several years earlier than this sweet spot. When I was 21, these tech opportunities were not apparent to most people. So instead, I ended up being a motorcycle cop for the CHP. And while I don’t have the money that Gates, Allen, Ballmer et al have, they cannot say they rode motors in Los Angeles and worked with some great cops in the CHP, LAPD and LASO. They cannot make a U-turn on a Harley inside a traffic lane without dragging the rear brake nor have they got their butt kicked at 103rd and Grape St.

So there!

I’m fast coming up on my word allotment for this article, but I will repeat: I am a tech idiot! But I have been doing live lectures now for 40 years and I just don’t talk to cops; I talk to people in every high-risk industry. I relish the opportunity to talk with people at programs I deliver. And occasionally I will run into someone who says they are the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) for a city or more specifically, a police department.

Sometimes, as I chat with these CTOs, I quickly learn I know more about technology than they do! *Uno momento, por favor!* (Lieutenant, that is Spanish for “one moment please.”) If I am the idiot and I know more than they do about technology, that is a “problem lying in wait.” Just because someone knows more about tech than you do does not qualify them to be a Chief Technology Officer. Remember, in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

Time to stop this rambling for today, but in our next piece I will give you some further thoughts on the risks involved in technology and what your role is in addressing Family Eight, the fastest growing family of risks we face.

**Timely Takeaway—**Between now and our next visit, find out how much your department paid for the copy machine in your Internal Affairs or Intelligence unit. Seriously—this will be a big part of my next article.

Gordon Graham is a 33-year veteran of law enforcement and is the co-founder of [Lexipol](http://info.lexipol.com/nysacop), where he serves on the current board of directors. A practicing attorney, Graham focuses on managing risk in public safety operations and has presented a commonsense approach to risk management to hundreds of thousands of public safety professionals around the world. He holds a master’s degree in Safety and Systems Management from University of Southern California and a Juris Doctorate from Western State University.