



Crisis Management

ABSTRACT

Crisis management is as important as finance management, personnel management, etc. Having a clear and effective program and plan for an event is critical not only to your survival, but critical to the profitability and possibly the survival of the company. Being able to identify risk, assess the situation and respond appropriately is important, and requires not only training, but practice.

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The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger--but recognize the opportunity.

John F. Kennedy

Preface

Crisis management is as important as finance management, personnel management, etc. Having a clear and effective program and plan for an event is critical not only to your survival, but critical to the profitability and possibly the survival of the company. Being able to identify risk, assess the situation and respond appropriately is important, and requires not only training, but practice.

Those who manage their way into a crisis are not necessarily the right people to manage their way out of the crisis.

Albert Einstein

Chapter One: Crisis

What is a crisis? A crisis is any event that threatens a person, group of people, or the company itself and its bottom line. Crisis can occur any time, day or night, weekday or weekend. A company that anticipates a crisis, and prepares for such an event, is better able to avoid negative situations completely, or, if the situation occurs, better manage the crisis.

Internal Risks

Internal risks occur inside of the company property or during company hours involving an employee and their duties. The internal risks to crisis are many. Triggers can occur outside of the workplace, resulting in a reaction or escalation within the company. Vendors, employees, customers, all these people could pose a risk for committing an act of violence inside of the company or on its property. Internal risks are not always a violent act such as an assault, it could also come in the form of threatening emails, unwanted deliveries, etc.

Another source of internal risk for violence, is the company and its management. Understaffed sites, poorly managed departments are another risk that could trigger an escalation to violence. High turnover rates, under equipped areas, and poorly organized departments can be a source of stress that could be addressed before an event does occur.

External Risks

External risks, are just like they sound, they are the risks that the company or employees have from the outside environment. Strangers, non-employees, anyone not related to the company. These risks can include crimes like robbery, larceny, and drive by shootings, etc.

Although external risks are not as easy to control as internal risks, the risk of an event occurring can be lessened. With the proper analysis of the operations of the company, risks can be mitigated such as a drop safe for deposits at the cash register, security cameras, etc.

Aggression

Aggression is defined as violent or hostile behavior, without provocation. It can also mean the readiness to confront others, especially those perceived to have wronged the aggressor. Aggression usually results in the physical or mental harm to one's self, or others. There are sometimes warning signs to aggressive behavior including a withdrawal from social life and isolation from others, losing one's temper easier than before, and possibly violent displays against inanimate objects or in in art.

Aggression can serve a number of different purposes for the perpetrator:

- Competition and assert dominance
- Express possession
- Intimidation or threat
- Reaction to fear and loss of control

Violence

The textbook definition of violence is, “The use of physical force or power to hurt, damage, or otherwise do harm to others or property of others.” Other definitions describe violence as a criminal offense of physical force or intimidation; an extreme form of aggression. Workplace violence occurs more often than many of us realize. Violence can be committed by a stranger, a co-worker, a manager, even the owner. Most violent acts, have warning signs; indications that occurred before the act, that indicated that the person’s emotional state was escalating, and a danger to others.

Every company needs a stern and well planned policy and program against workplace violence. Every employee needs to be made aware that violence will not be tolerated. A culture of non-violence, is one way to protect everyone, including the customers from an unpleasant event.

Practical Illustration

Mr. Smith has just returned from a workplace violence seminar. He asks his department manager, Steve to join him in creating a crisis management plan. First, they need to identify the risks, and complete an assessment rating the risks. Mr. Smith explains that internal risks are those that are within the company, like an employee that has been terminated. Steve says that they also need to consider the external risks like being robbed.

As they are assessing the probability of their risks for violence, Steve asks Mr. Smith what he considers aggression. Mr. Smith explains that aggression is violent or hostile behavior, possible to be powerful or intimidating to someone else. Steve then asks what violence is defined as then, and Mr. Smith tells him what he learned at the conference, that violence is any harmful action that is meant to hurt whether physically or mentally. These definitions helped Steve while he was completing the assessment of risk.

Violence and arms can never solve the problems of man.

Pope John Paul II

Chapter Two: Workplace Violence

Statistics all say that most deaths in the workplace occur due to violence. Not death from equipment or death from natural disaster, but from workplace violence. People, both employees and customers, expect a safe environment. Workplace violence can have many repercussions across the company and the marketplace.

Threats

Threats of violence in the workplace, can come in many forms. Bullying, mailed threats and direct threats of violence are just a few of the ways that violence can be threatened by not only employees and customers, but from complete strangers to the company also.

Threats can be verbal, written, or stated. No threat should be ignored, no matter the circumstances. Employers are not required to tolerate such behavior, and can be held liable if they ever do ignore a threat of violence. Reporting a threat of violence should always include information such as:

- Where, when, where, and how was the threat expressed?
- What was the wording the person used?
- Have there been any previous incidents involving the person?

Damage

Damage from a crisis, or event of workplace violence, is much greater than just the initial loss. Of course, you think of the physical damage of the event such as injury, damage to the property, and the damage to the day's profits. But there are other ways that damage can occur during an event such as this.

There is the damage to the company's reputation, in the form of being known as an unsafe business, being uncaring for the customers and employees, etc. We must also discuss the damage to the emotional state of the people that were present, which incurs more costs for counseling and loss of work of these employees.

Psychological Acts

What is a psychological act of violence? It is when one person uses hostile behavior against another person, to inflict emotional damage or undermine the other person. This could be in the form of attacking the other person's dignity or integrity, harassment, bullying, or putting the person's employment in jeopardy fraudulently.

Psychological acts like harassment, belittling, and bullying can cause both mental stress and anguish to the victim, and greatly affects his/her quality of life. These effects of these acts can range from anxiety, insomnia, and mood changes to social isolation, PTSD, and cardiac disorders.

Physical Acts

Physical acts of violence can be against an employee or against company property. The intensity can range from vandalism to assault to homicide. Some examples would be grabbing, hitting, pushing, and assault with a weapon, just to name a few different cases.

Physical acts can be against an inanimate object like stabbing a counter with a utility knife. It can be against a person, in the case of an altercation. Physical violence not only leaves a mark on the victim, but it also causes great stress on the staff. Physical acts of violence make others anxious, jumpy, and this affects the crew's productivity.

Practical Illustration

Bob shows the crew a video on workplace violence. The video shows an unhappy employee slamming the door and breaking the window of the manager's office. The team in the video hears the employee state that he will be back to even the score, as he storms off the production floor.

After the video, Bob asks the team to identify the threats of the employee and how this is a psychological act of violence. Steph states that he said his threat to the team as he stormed off, and this could be an emotional stress on the team. Bob then asks the team if there are any physical acts that need to be addressed. Tom states that the damage to the door was a physical act of violence that should be disciplined.

*We must not be hampered by yesterday's myths in
concentrating on today's needs.*

Harold S. Geneen

Chapter Three: Myths

Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” The same can be said for crisis management. Choosing to believe the myths about workplace violence, is setting you up for failure, and this is not something that you want to fail. Workplace violence kills more employees, than any other cause. Here are some of the myths that you need to avoid:

Violence Just Happens

This is a very dangerous myth. Believing that workplace violence just occurs, and that there is nothing that can be done to prevent it, allows employers and employees to avoid the issue completely. Every perpetrator of workplace violence has had a reason for his/her actions. This person has most likely shown signs leading up to the violent incident. Growing aggression, threats, increased absences are all signs of escalation. These signs could have been noticed and reported.

The belief that violence just happens, it is luck, is a belief that encourages the employees to not be aware of their surroundings, to not report suspicious behavior, etc. This is belief also causes companies not to have training, practices, and programs concerning workplace violence. This belief will end in tragedy eventually.

It Is Uncommon

“Workplace violence would never happen here.” Do not ever mistake what has not happened in the past, would never happen in the future. Believing this myth can cause you to ignore any indications or hints that something is about to happen. Believing this myth can cause you to ignore risks that are obvious to those who are aware of the possibility of an event occurring in your location.

Do not believe in luck, and that it just happens to other people or businesses. More often than not, after an act of violence has occurred, the survivors are quoted as saying, “I had no idea,” or, “I never saw it coming.” Don’t be that person. Be aware of your surroundings. Even if it seems harmless at the time, behaviors can escalate and need to be reported.

Problems Will Solve Themselves

Another myth is that workplace issues between employees, or employees and the company, will eventually solve themselves. Wrong! Simply hoping or wishing a problem away is not a successful plan of action. Ignoring a problem only reinforces the behavior, and often allows the problem to grow. Issues that are left ignored give a bad reputation to the team and the manager.

There are many reasons that a manager may ignore personnel issues. Some feel that it is none of their business, when in fact, everything involving the team, is the manager's business. Some managers feel that it isn't their job, that they have more important things pending. But what could be more important than the safety of their employees and customers? Providing programs that employees can use to report issues, and work through their own issues, like an EAP, is not the manager getting involved in personal issues, it is being responsible.

It Is Not Possible to Prevent Violence

Many people believe that it is not possible to prevent violence because it is unpredictable. “He/She just snapped!” We have heard this phrase many times. But is it true? No, this is a myth and a way of avoiding the issue at hand. In fact, many statistics will say that in most situations of workplace violence, there were in fact warning signs to the impending acts and in fact preventable.

Usually these acts of violence are planned, and focused on specific targets. The perpetrator has had a long time of build of negative events such as a bad breakup, a termination, or financial problems. Very seldom is the trigger a sudden and traumatic event. Knowing this can make you more aware of others and their possible changing behavior. Being aware can not only save costs, property, but also lives.

Practical Illustration

Tom and Maria are both managers at a shop in the mall. Maria has proposed that they create a crisis management program that includes a workplace violence police. Tom thinks that this is a huge waste of time and money. Maria did some research and wanted to visit the subject again. Tom's response was that workplace violence is uncommon and when it does happen, there is no way to prevent it. Maria pointed out that it never "just happens," there are almost always warning signs, and if they knew the signs, they could watch for them.

Tom then used the arguments that it isn't their job to get involved and they have better things to do at work. Maria pointed out that safety is number one, and it goes a long way with the shop's reputation. She also points out that problems never work themselves out, they only escalate. Wouldn't he rather be prepared, than surprised? Tom says they will start working on the plan, and doing research. Maria is much happier.

Nothing good ever comes of violence.

Martin Luther

Chapter Four: Escalation

Escalation is usually defined as a rapid increase or an increase in intensity. In the subject of workplace violence, escalation means to increase the intensity of the conflict or the ways of instigating conflict in the workplace. Arguments can escalate into threats, which can then escalate into wanting to inflict harm on another person. Often, the perpetrator believes that it will pressure the other side into bending to their will or perform a certain way.

Threats

The threat of violence is a coercive technique, used to control and have power over another. All threats of violence must be taken seriously and reported for documentation. As a situation escalates, the threats are a critical part of the consideration given the situation.

Threats often are an escalation from an argument or difference in opinions. Feelings of injustice are also a trigger for an escalation into threats of violence. The perpetrator needs to feel power over a situation in which he/she feels helpless. Threatening an act of violence is a way that this person feels that this will force the results they are striving for.

Stalking and Bullying

Stalking, like bullying, an escalation of a pre-existing issue that a person has against a person within the company. Although hard to define, it includes any act that would make any regular person feel ill at ease. Stalking includes, but is not limited to any unwanted contact like the perpetrator “just showing up” in odd places, spying, leaving unwanted gifts, etc. Stalking and bullying can both be conducted not just in person, but also through email, regular mail and packages, etc. It often begins with the spreading of rumors and falsehoods, but can escalate to something much worse if left unchecked.

This kind of activity robs the company of much more than just time on the clock. It affects so much more in regards time lost due to the hostile activity. The victim has increased mental stress, with contributes to increased absenteeism, loss of initiative, distraction from the job at hand, and sometimes termination in employment. Victims often choose to leave the hostile environment, or are terminated due to poor job performance or high absenteeism.

Injury

Injury is usually defined as harm or physical damage to the body, caused by an outside force. Injuries in the workplace, not due to the job description, but due to workplace violence, is extremely common. This injury could occur from a person shoving an employee, slapping or hitting an employee, or even worse, using a weapon against an employee. Injuries from another person cause not only physical harm, but psychological harm from emotional stress of the event. Injuring another person is against the law and punishable not only through the company code of conduct, but also criminally.

Any injury, or threat of injury, needs to be reported and documented. Security needs to be informed of the injury and the proper managers alerted. Injury to an employee, not only affects the employee, but the co-workers and company. The company is no longer viewed as safe as it was, hurting their reputation. The victim's co-workers can also be hurt, emotionally. The stress of the incident affects everyone, and everyone needs to be counseled. The company's EAP should assist in this action.

Death

Death, a very serious outcome, something that no company wants to happen. Death in the workplace often occurs due to workplace violence. For the last few years, homicide has been in the top five reasons for death in workplace.

As we have discussed before and will get into further, is the fact that there are always warning sign to violent incidents, that escalate to someone losing their life. With some training and practice, you and your co-workers can acknowledge these warning signs and hopefully avoid escalation, and save your life.

Practical Illustration

Fiona and Anne work next door to an office that had a workplace violence event. They sat at lunch the next day, discussing the need for awareness of their surroundings, and all the ways that an unhappy person could escalate to an unfortunate incident at work. Anne first mentions that threats get thrown around, but no one really pays attention to them. They decide that that should be noticed more by everyone in the company. No threat should go unnoticed. Fiona mentions that there are some bullies on their crew. This would fall into the stalking and bullying category. She also mentions the creepy guy at the mall, he could be watched for stalking behaviors.

The ladies further their discussion to when things escalate to something worse. The crisis that occurred next door was an all too horrible of a reminder. They discuss they people they knew that were injured and of the man that lost his life. Fiona mentioned that she read somewhere that homicide is one of the leading killers in the workplace. She thought that it would be equipment failure, but it isn't.

Ignored behavior is condoned behavior.

Anonymous

Chapter Five: Concerning Behaviors

As we covered before, there are always signs before an incident of violence is committed. You should always take notice when someone's behavior patterns change or the frequency and intensity of the person's behavior is disruptive to others and the work environment. If a person is exhibiting many of the following behaviors discussed in this chapter it should be reported to the appropriate manager.

Disruptive

Being disruptive is one of the warning signs of a distressed co-worker and impending issues. Disruptive behavior is anything that impedes the employees/company from operating in a normal manner. Customers and co-workers are all affected by this behavior. Slamming doors, crying, sulking, and having temper tantrums puts the entire team in a negative working environment.

Repeated acts of testing the limits of the company regarding personal behavior and a disrespect for authority are also disruptive behaviors, not conducive to the team environment. Continually blaming others and constant complaining is also disruptive to all. This behavior, if allowed, will more than likely escalate.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is intended to degrade, or humiliate another person. It causes emotional pain and isolation of the victim. Emotional abuse can occur in many forms, it is the purpose of the act, that makes it abusive. Emotional abuse can come in the form of exclusion from a group, undermining another person's reputation, sabotage of another's work and bullying are all good examples of emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse costs the victim in loss of productivity in absenteeism, loss of motivation, and increased health issues. It also costs the company in time documenting and investigating the incidents, loss of the productivity of the employees, and increased health care costs for the affected employees.

Causes Anxiety

Another behavior that could be a cause for concern is a person's disregard for other's feelings in that they have no problem causing other anxiety, and may go out of their way to behave in a way that causes anxiety in co-workers, customers, and management.

How could one person cause a team anxiety? This behavior could be displayed in the destruction of company property, such as throwing things; it could also be displayed in emotional language such as swearing. Another behavior that causes anxiety on the crew, someone who is never wrong, that handles criticism poorly and holds grudges especially against management. This type of person makes others walk on eggshells around them, avoiding this person often.

Examples of Behavior

Other examples of warning signs that need to be reported are a sudden change in behaviors like absenteeism, tardiness, confusion and distraction. This not only costs the company money in production, but also indicates a lack of regard for the company. Someone that no longer takes care of themselves, in regards to personal hygiene, or becomes isolated, with no friends or limited contact with others are more behaviors that need to be noted.

In many cases, there have been clear patterns of warning behaviors prior to escalation. A person that has displayed violence towards inanimate objects in the past, or has a preoccupation with violence. These behaviors need to be reported to the proper manager, to be documented for future reference.

Practical Illustration

Steve and Ian carpool together every day. They are both signed up for the crisis response team training next week. Steve wants to go over situations in preparing for the course. Ian asks Steve about concerning behaviors in co-workers. Steve responds that anyone that is continually being disruptive, could be having issues that need to be addressed. He also tells Ian about the emotional abuse that some insubordinates may feel exists. Ian agrees and says these are things they could report to HR.

Ian says that being disruptive, could also go with causing anxiety. People who act this way, sometimes cause anxiety in the new employees and customers. Steve agrees with Ian. He says that changes in behavior and isolation would alert him to a problem. Ian also adds that any behaviors like bullying, threatening, etc. are a given that they should always be reported immediately.

*Anger doesn't solve anything, it builds nothing,
but it can destroy everything.*

Lawrence Douglas Wilder

Chapter Six: Domestic Violence Indicators

Domestic abuse may not begin at the workplace, but it affects the victim's workplace. It can happen to men or women, but more often women. There are many warning signs that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse. Changes in behavior, subordinate behavior, and many other tell-tale signs, can indicate abuse in the relationship of a co-worker. Remember, there is one place that the abuser knows the victim will always be – work.

Disruptive Calls

Any phone calls that are not work related are a disruption to the work day. But when they are numerous, abusive in nature, and from a significant other, these could be signs of domestic abuse at the home. These calls not only come to the victim, but also to co-workers, the abuser seeking information on the victim and their activities.

The victim, often, not only feels anxiety due to the content of the calls, but tension from the calls coming at work. The employee knows that the calls are against company policy, but cannot stop the calls from coming in. This causes even more stress for the victim. Threats via the phone calls, cause the victim to be uneasy, distracted, and unable to concentrate on anything except the abuse. All the signs that we will discuss, need to be reported to the proper manager.

Poor Concentration

One of the most glaring indications to a problem at home, is a good employee that suddenly has poor work performance. The employee seems distracted, maybe he/she takes longer to complete the tasks at hand, this is a behavior to note. This person's concentration is not on work anymore, but on something else, probably the abuser. The victim is planning a get-away, planning how to hide the bruises, planning what to say to the abuser, but not planning on how they will get the work complete.

This lack of concentration can cost the team time, energy, and cost the company in productivity. In essence, the violence that occurs outside of the company, is costing the company in the end. Identifying changes in the victim's behavior, like this, could help in identifying the problem and getting the victim the help that they need.

Bruising

Black eyes, bruising, broken bones, these are all signs of abuse. Adults typically do not fall, run into doors, or slip and fall, in normal situations. But when the employee explains away injuries with convenient accident stories, further investigation is warranted.

Another warning sign is inappropriate attire or dress. For example, when the victim dresses in long sleeves on hot days, or wears sunglasses inside the building, this is to hide the bruising. The victim is covering the signs of the abuse with their dress. Wincing in pain when touched can be a sign of an underlying condition. Being suddenly startled, or unconsciously ducking when surprised can also be signs of physical abuse and possibly injuries.

Absences

Due to the circumstances at home, victims of domestic abuse frequently have high absenteeism rates. Victims often take unplanned vacations, and sudden uses of earned time. Absenteeism is frequent so to hide the injuries, but also due to the emotional abuse taking its toll on the victim's physical condition. These absences cost the victim money, the team in time and recovery from the loss of a member, and the company in profits, and productivity of a trained employee.

Domestic abuse and the stress it exerts on the victim, often causes many other physical conditions, much like bullying. The victim can have health effects such as insomnia, headaches, gastric issues like ulcers, and even cardiac issues. This contributes to the increasing absenteeism of a domestic abuse victim.

Practical Illustration

Nick notices that Sandra has been missing a lot of work lately. And when she is there, her work is subpar. He calls his manager Stacy and reports that he thinks that Sandra may be a victim of domestic abuse. Stacy asks him to elaborate, a few absences does make a domestic abuse case. He tells her that Sandra has been wearing long sleeves, and it is July in Texas. This is not normal. He also mentions that she has been getting a lot of phone calls from home. Her husband called Nick last week, asking if Sandra was at work that day. Stacy agrees that there may be a problem and thanks Nick for his observant nature and reporting.

Stacy calls in Sandra, and offers her assistance. She tells her that there is also an Employee Assistance Program that she can use, free of charge, anonymously. Sandra makes an appointment with them for next week.

*Successful emergency management relies upon
experience and expertise.*

Leo Bosner

Chapter Seven: Triggers of Workplace Violence

Studies on past crises, have shown that workplace violence always has a trigger. Most offenders do not just get up and decide to commit an act of violence. The triggers that cause a person to commit workplace violence are many, but can roughly be put into three main groups. The person feels that circumstances are: unfair, personal, or out of his/her control.

Reprimands and Terminations

Persons that are prone to violence, often are unable to accept responsibility for their actions, unable to accept criticism, etc. Reprimands and terminations, to these people is an act of aggression, just another time that the company is “picking on them.” They do not feel that they have done anything wrong and the discipline often makes them angry or emotional.

Disciplinary action against an emotional employee is always a task that the HR department dreads. It always needs to be performed according to the company’s policy. Luckily HR employees have been through the training needed to do it with tact and grace, hopefully avoiding any confrontation. The security and human resource department need to train together for situations such as these.

Financial Strain

We all wish we had more money. The family would be taken care of, emergencies taken care of quickly, and we would enjoy our leisure time more. We spend most of our time trying to make money. We all have financial woes at one time or another. We all respond to this stress in a different way. Some behaviors however can escalate to violence, and that violence could occur at work.

Financial strain can often seem overwhelming or out of control. Some people respond to this stress with anger. He/she is angry with the boss for not giving them the promotion with more pay. They are angry at the company for not paying more in wages. They are angry because they don't win the lottery and fix all their problems. This anger can easily escalate to illegal activities and even violence if not addressed.

Loss of Loved One

Day to day life is stressful for all of us. But when the loss of a loved is added, it is more than some people can handle. The distress on the person surviving, can be unbearable, and along with the feeling of “what more world?” can leave him/her feeling out of control. Even the change in the day to day routines of the survivor can be hard to accept. These intense feelings need an outlet, unfortunately, it can be in the form of lashing out at others.

Sometimes the loss of a loved one can trigger a depression that needs to be addressed. Depression can escalate into hopelessness, isolation, and a perception that their life is meaningless. Depression is a condition that needs to be reported and dealt with by professionals. Depression just doesn't go away, and needs to be treated.

Perceived Slights

Often, the person that is prone to workplace violence, has a belief that the world and everyone is against them. They believe that they are superior to others, and any criticisms are not accurate, and possibly even an attack. The perceived slights of others could range in a cross look to an attack on the integrity of this perceived victim.

These perceived slights will often escalate into anger. This can be: anger towards authority that tells them how to live, anger towards co-workers who are inferior to them, anger towards customers that interrupt their day.

Practical Illustration

Sarah and Megan have been tasked with writing a draft for a portion of the company violence program. They are assigned the section on triggers to violence in the workplace. They both decide to form an outline first. Sarah wants to use the most obvious trigger of reprimands and terminations at the job. This is the first thing she thinks of when workplace violence is the subject. Megan agrees, and thinks another common trigger would be financial strain. Since everyone has this stress, Megan feels it is good to include it also.

Sarah says, "My cousin just passed away and I felt like I couldn't go to work for a few days. The loss of a loved one has got to be a trigger also." Megan agrees, and gives her condolences, and says, "that would be a good example." The last one that the ladies are going to include is perceived slights. Sarah thinks that they need to fully explain this concept as an imagined act of aggression. explain this concept. Megan wants to include plenty of examples, like bumping into someone accidentally. Sarah agrees, and the women begin to write their rough draft.

The secret of crisis management is not good vs. bad, it's preventing the bad from getting worse.

Andy Gilman

Chapter Eight: Conflict Dangers

Everyone disagrees, especially in the workplace, where you spend more awake time than anywhere else. It is natural. Conflict is an escalation of a disagreement. The danger to unresolved conflict can be enormous. Allowing bottled up feelings and unresolved conflict can escalate into a verbal or even physical response. By not stepping in and finding a resolution, you are ignoring a very important trigger, and possibly inviting a much larger incident.

Triggers

A trigger is an event that causes another event. For example, the trigger for the 9/11 attacks was terrorism. The triggers to conflict can occur anywhere, not necessarily at the location where the violence may occur. Being aware of the different triggers that may escalate into further bad behavior, will allow you to be able to report the behavior to HR or the appropriate manager.

A trigger could be:

- Reprimand from the supervisor
- Mistake pointed out by the manager
- Customer that did acknowledge the person's presence.

These could all trigger aggressive behavior in some people. The trigger may not even be work related, possibly personal issues at home, but a trigger none the less, to more hostile behavior.

Action Point

The action point is considered the point in the timeline where you recognize that violence is a probable outcome and you must respond. When investigators have analyzed past workplace violence episodes, they have found that there are many times there were action points leading up to the incident.

Identifying the event is probably going to occur and being the first to move, gives you the advantage. An example is how everyone moves away from an argument, when it looks like punches are going to start to fly. Identify that a trigger has occurred and an incident is probably going to happen. Notify the proper managers or departments. In most companies, security needs to be informed of the issues. After this proceed with your company's outlined procedures.

Flashpoint

The flashpoint of an event is the point in the timeline, where the violence actually occurs. In a robbery, it is at the cash register, in a disagreement it is when the first punch is thrown, etc. This is the point of no return for the perpetrator. Your responsibility is to act, and act as quickly as possible, in accordance with the company policies and procedures.

The location of a flashpoint can vary. The flashpoint is not always at the trigger point. The trigger can push the perpetrator over the edge, but he/she may not act until at another location. Do not hesitate to think that the abuser may be triggered by a home event, and come to the victim's workplace and carry out an attack. Being prepared and aware for the worst case scenario will help you respond during the event.

Identify

The first mistake most people make is the lack of awareness of their surroundings. Be knowledgeable to the behaviors and triggers that can escalate into a crisis, always. Your first line of defense is your ability to identify the situation, and properly respond, and as quickly as possible.

Another mistake is people are unsure of the seriousness of the situation. Do not discount what your eyes may see. You would much rather be safe than sorry. If you sense something, or witness something, say something. Report it to your supervisor, to the security department, anyone, but do not ignore the situation in hopes it will go away.

Practical Illustration

Tonya and Gina are watching a training video including a simulation of a robbery. They need to answer the questions that are asked as the video progresses. The first scene shows a man getting fired and being sent home. Gina states that this is a trigger to many emotions, including anger with the manager. The video continues and shows the same man returning to the workplace that afternoon. Tonya points out that the action point is when the secretary sees him in the parking lot, parking his car. That is when she knows that something is going to happen, and she calls security.

The video continues to show the terminated employee entering in the office with a loaded shotgun. The video ends. Tonya says that this could be the flashpoint, but the man could still be negotiated. If he shoots someone, that is the flashpoint. The video points out how well the secretary responded to the situation and identified the threat, quickly and responsibly.

Awareness means understanding that workplace violence can impact anyone, in any work setting, and across all levels of employment.

Anonymous

Chapter Nine: Response

You know what causes the violent incident, and the warning signs that may be expressed. What should you do in the case that you may see something alarming? Do you go straight to HR? What if it isn't what it seems? What if you do not say anything to anyone, and a terrible event occurs tomorrow? This section is going to address a general idea of how to react to warning signs and behaviors that may lead up to a workplace crisis event.

Note Areas of Concern

A disruptive co-worker, one that throws temper tantrums, would be what would be considered as a lower level area of concern. The co-worker isn't threatening anyone, or abusing someone, but disruptive. Another example of an area that should be noticed would be a co-worker that has no respect for authority. These are both behaviors that need to be noted, but not immediately alarming. This may be a good time for an "informal intervention".

Maybe this co-worker doesn't realize how his/her behavior is perceived. A quick, private discussion could be in order, to let the co-worker know that they are not in line with the company's policy on conduct. A friendly reminder that it bothers the team to have this behavior. Make sure you document your conversation afterwards. The documentation does not have to be sent anywhere, but could be used in the future if the problem persists.

Discuss It

You notice some concerning behaviors in a co-worker. You are now noticing that these bad behaviors are not occasional or isolated incidents, but more of a pattern. A pushy co-worker, is more disrespectful and a bully. He/she pushes the envelope with authority and what rules they follow. This is more of a risk to escalation than the previous section, and needs to be handled differently.

This level of behavior is more aggressive than the last examples that could be handled with an informal discussion. This type of behavior is more disruptive to the team, and being a pattern, needs to be stopped immediately. This type of behavior needs to have a superior, such as the supervisor's attention. The supervisor can express to the employee that this behavior is not allowed according to company policy on conduct. The supervisor will then document the conversation, and forward it to the proper manager.

Report It

This is the level of behavior that is intimidating others, being disruptive and disrespectful, etc. Or maybe you have witnessed bullying and intimidation. These behaviors cause anxiety on the team and affects everyone. The supervisor has counseled the employee, but the problems are persisting. It is apparent that he/she is not interested in improving their behavior, and has a total disregard for the situation. You need to report the incidents, and all the pertinent information to the appropriate manager.

At this point, there needs to be a formal conversation between management and the employee, possibly with a witness. Specific behaviors and occurrences need to be addressed. This could also be the time that the employee is given a warning, or reprimand. Most employees would at that time change their behaviors. This discussion will also need to be documented and forwarded to the HR department for placement in the employee's file.

Report Extreme Cases to HR/Tip Line

Let's use an example of a co-worker is bullying customers, like always. You are the only one that sees this happen, every day. You can report your concerns to a supervisor, but if that makes you uncomfortable, or there are extreme behaviors being exhibited, you can always go the human resources department (HR), or the employee assistance program (EAP). This example is not only bad behavior on the co-worker's part, but is also a form of intimidation. The employee assumes that since you haven't reported it, you condone it. This behavior cannot go unreported, and you have to bring it to the proper department's attention.

HR, tip lines, or the EAP, all are trained to handle your situation. Your safety and wellbeing are the company's top priority. You just need to report the issues, incidents, or occurrences. Have your details ready such as date, time, other witnesses, location, etc. The company can't improve things, if they do not know there is an issue.

Practical Illustration

Harry is addressing his crew on the company's workplace violence program and policies. This year, Harry is sharing the spotlight with Clara, and they are training both of their crews at the same time. Harry tells Clara that he always starts the presentation with the explanation that noticing concerning behaviors like a temper tantrums and documenting them is the first level of response to disruptive behavior. That way the team knows that not every case means the employee needs disciplined. Clara agrees.

Clara suggests that she cover the sections on discussing issues with the employee, in hopes of curbing the bad behavior, without a disciplinary action being needed. A warning for the employee, and ensure that the worker knows the company's policy on this behavior. She would also like to cover the section on reporting and documenting more extreme cases to the manager for a reprimand that would go into the employee's file. Harry wants to end the presentation with the discussion on extreme behavior that needs to be reported immediately, and possibly anonymously to the company tip line. Clara and Harry feel they have a good presentation, and schedule the meeting for the next day.

*The enemy doesn't stand a chance when the
victim decides to survive.*

Rae Smith

Chapter Ten: Strategies

Be proactive. You should also have a strategy of what to do in a “worst case scenario.” Workplace violence prevention programs, policies, and training programs like this, will educate you and those around you to recognize the warning signs and triggers of workplace violence. You can learn what to do when you see these behaviors to stop the escalation. The company should also include emergency responses specific to different crisis. What does your company do to stop workplace violence? What are you supposed to do in the event of a crisis?

Policies

There are several policies that the company needs to have in their workplace violence policy. First, a clear company policy stating their position on violence and how it will be handled. This code of conduct needs to come from the top of the company, to stress the importance. This will emphasize that zero tolerance is the company’s stance. Second, policies on natural disaster, such as fire or tornado, need to be included in the plan. Step by step policies address evacuations, documentations, department involvement, etc. Last, policies should be included on criminal acts from outside (unknown) sources, such as robbery or active shooter need to be addressed and distributed throughout the workforce, along with all the other policies on crisis.

Programs

Second, there should be programs to perform risk assessments on a regular basis and a statement of how the company will handle these risks available to all employees; this analysis should identify the necessary changes to the company's response to a crisis. There should also be a program designed for the reporting, documenting, and investigation into behaviors that cause concern. Employee assistance programs (EAP) are a good example of a company program that could aid employees in this area. They are also usually equipped to work with the aftercare of employees in the unfortunate event of a crisis.

These programs should be known to all employees. These programs will better equip everyone to identify risks, potential problems, and possible sources of violence, or crisis. It will also train the employees the proper responses to any crisis. These programs will also nurture an open door culture within the company. Communication is one of the most important factors to the success of crisis management.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency procedures need to be included in the crisis management program of any company. The procedures and responsibilities of not only the emergency response team need to be specified, but also the procedures that the rest of the employees need to follow. For example, there needs to be a fire evacuation procedure, an active shooter procedure, etc.

These procedures need to specifically explain, step by step, each employees' responsibility and needed response. Each risk, or crisis type needs to have its own procedure and documentation. This documentation can then be used in future analysis. Review and response to these procedures needs to occur on a regular basis. These procedures should include:

- Procedures for calling for help.
- Emergency escape routes.
- Procedures for accounting for all employees during crisis.

Train Employees

All employees need to be trained on the warning signs of crisis, along with reporting policies and emergency procedures, in the event that there is an occurrence. New hires should be trained as they are hired. As the risks and policies change, the entire workforce needs to be retrained. There should also be practices or drills where applicable. For example, fire drills or active shooter drills are good ways to practice a crisis so that there is less panic if/when a crisis occurs.

Employees need to know how important the workplace violence program is to the well-being of the company. They also need to understand the consequences to breaking these rules. Emergency preparedness training includes the employees' responsibilities and necessary responses. Training will provide the experience needed to react during a crisis.

Practical Illustration

Scott is going over the crisis/workplace violence program with the new employee Jenni. He first gives Jenni a code of conduct guide that includes the policy of violence and behavior. He points out that there is an HR department and EAP for any issues that Jenni may have and need to report. He also shows her where to find copies of the crisis management program in the employee handbook.

Jenni asks about some different procedures like active shooter and fire evacuations. Scott goes over emergency procedures and different policies on her specific questions. He also refers her to her manager for any more questions on the procedures for her department. Scott tells Jenni that they will have an annual training session for everyone in the company to go over any changes. Jenni is glad that Scott covered these topics, as it is easy to forget to ask, until it is too late.

*We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor,
never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor,
never the tormented.*

Elie Wiesel

Closing Thoughts

- **Andy Gilman:** The secret of crisis management is not good vs. bad, it's preventing the bad from getting worse.
- **Lawrence Douglas Wilder:** Anger doesn't solve anything, it builds nothing, but it can destroy everything.
- **Harold S. Geneen:** We must not be hampered by yesterday's myths in concentrating on today's needs.