

On the Edge

Managing High-Risk Situations

Version 2.0

Leader's Guide

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Important Note: It is not possible to guarantee that workplace violence will be prevented or eliminated. These training materials are designed to be part of an awareness training program. Their use in no way implies, nor does it constitute, any legal, safety/security, or psychological advice. Businesses and organizations should and are encouraged to contact legal, safety, and medical/psychological professionals for help with issues or concerns regarding workplace violence.

Introduction

You can't get away from it. Stories of violence in the workplace have become all too common. Every time you turn around, there is another incident in the news: An unhappy husband enters his wife's place of work in Carmel, Indiana, shoots her, and then kills himself. A terminated postal worker enters his old place of employment in Royal Oak, Michigan, and kills his former supervisor and several employees. A fired beach maintenance worker in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, returns to his former workplace months later and kills several workers during a meeting.

While these tragic and dramatic incidents continue to make the headlines, many more incidents, less dramatic but equally as terrifying, disrupt our own places of employment. Statistics tell us that one out of every four workers is threatened, harassed, or assaulted each year in the American workplace. These verbal and physical attacks take place in banks, office buildings, factories, stores, restaurants, airports, hospitals, and public institutions. No place of work is exempt from the threat.

It's just not possible to prevent or eliminate *all* workplace violence, but steps can be taken to lessen the threat. When organizations raise employee awareness of workplace violence and teach or communicate ways to prevent volatile incidents from escalating, they are on the road to creating a safer, more secure workplace for their employees.

Program Objectives

This training program will:

- Increase employee awareness of workplace violence and related issues.
- Provide a forum in which employees at all levels of the organization can discuss all issues related to workplace violence.
- Provide the opportunity and the tools needed to evaluate current practices regarding the prevention of and response to threatening or violent situations.
- Help organizations begin to develop and discuss alternatives for employees faced with workplace violence issues.

Obtain Expert Advice

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Professionals who might be of help include the organization's human resource department, senior site managers, legal counsel, security professionals, psychologists or threat-assessment experts, law enforcement officials, emergency medical personnel, and employee-assistance program counselors.

In all cases, it is important that your own in-house or external experts be included in the development of any policies, directives, procedures, or recommendations regarding all aspects of workplace violence.

Training Options

On The Edge, Version 2.0: Managing High Risk Situations can be presented in a variety of formats. Each of the options discussed below can be used individually or grouped together. As the facilitator, you should examine each of the training options and use the format (or combination of formats) that best fits your organization. Suggested training options include:

Video and Expert Advice

After some short introductory remarks, have the group view the video and have an in-house expert tell the group what they should do in each scenario.

Discussion about Pre-selected Vignettes

The facilitator views the video prior to training and selects certain scenarios that best fit the group attending the training session. During the sessions, the trainer can fast-forward the video to the scenarios picked for the session being held.

Video and Small-Group Problem-Solving

After the introductory material, the trainer shows the scenarios, stopping the videotape after each scenario. Have small groups of employees develop solutions and present them to the larger group for discussion.

Video and Role-Play

Have small groups work through the role plays included in the training kit and have members suggest solutions to the role plays.

Video and Discussion of Hypothetical Situations

Develop other potential “on the job” scenarios with participant input and have the group discuss possible resolutions.

Video and Team Critiques

As the videos are played for participants, ask them to observe where improvements in security, safety, or overall procedures can be made.

Video and ASSET Audit by Team(s)

Put together a team or several teams of employees to examine workplace issues listed in the ASSET Audit section of this Leader’s Guide and develop suggestions for improvement.

Discussion Of Video Vignettes

Vignette #1 – Just Try to Fire Me!



Adam is a data-entry clerk in your organization's employee-benefits department. His responsibilities include data-entry of confidential employee medical information. Over the past several months, Adam's performance has been marginal at best. You arrange a meeting with Adam to discuss his poor performance.

Adam blames all his problems on fellow employees, whom he claims are "out to get him." He also blames you and the company for picking on him. He makes threats against you, the company, and other employees, and says he's going to "get you."

Your notes on the video:

Vignette #1 – Discussion Questions

What are you going to do right now?

As an employee of the company, what are you going to do with Adam?

Who are you going to talk to?

Do you plan to have a follow-up discussion with Adam? When and where will you have it? What will you discuss?

What did your group decide?

Some additional points for discussion:

- Do you think this supervisor intended all along to fire Adam, or is Adam just being paranoid?
- Do you think this supervisor is considering firing Adam by the end of this discussion? Is that a good idea? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the physical position the supervisor is in during this confrontation? Is her way to an exit freely accessible, or is Adam in a position to block her in? Should the supervisor have considered her access to the exit prior to this discussion?

Vignette #2 – I'll Go Postal!



You and Jim have worked together for the past two years. During the past six months, he has been acting a little peculiar. His work record is not very good, and just yesterday, he was given a written warning for “poor performance.”

After the disciplinary discussion with his supervisor, Jim made comments to you that he is about to “make a point” with his supervisor. When you ask him about what he means by this, he threatens to “go postal” and “take you out, too.”

Your notes on the video:

Vignette #2 – Discussion Questions

What are you going to say to Jim now?

What are you going to do?

Who are you going to talk to?

What did your group decide?

Some additional points for discussion:

- The First Amendment protects our freedom of speech. Why can't Jim say anything he pleases, without having to worry that someone will report him?
- Should Jim's political views be the concern of his employer? Why, or why not?
- You believe that Jim is deadly serious about his threats. You're afraid to say anything for fear that he will "take you out, too." What can you do?

Vignette #3 – Scary Jerry



Jerry just won't leave you alone. You got the job he wanted and now he's acting like it's your fault that the job was given to you over him. He is constantly giving you dirty looks, making snide remarks about you to other employees, and spreading rumors about you in your department. Jerry has always been a little "different," and frankly, he scares you. Anything you say to him is greeted with greater and greater hostility.

Your notes on the video:

Vignette #3 – Discussion Questions

Jerry has just confronted you.

What are you going to do?

What will you say to Jerry, at this time?

Who will you discuss this incident with?

What do you plan to do next?

What did your group decide to do?

Some additional points for discussion:

- Jerry didn't hit you. He didn't push you. He merely brushed hard against your shoulder as he walked by. Is this something you should report? Will anyone take your concerns seriously? Why, or why not?
- While it's not intended to be a blatant feature of this vignette, your participants will probably pick up on issues of race and class that are simmering just below the surface in this confrontation. Jerry's use of the term "college boy" might indicate some educational disparity, and the use of the word "boy" in this manner might even have been intended as a derogatory racial slur. Be prepared for your participants to notice and discuss this aspect of this vignette.

Vignette #4 – A Walk in the Parking Lot



Sandy, one of your better employees, has worked for you for about seven years. Until recently, Sandy's performance was above-average, but now something is bothering her. She confides in you that an ex-boyfriend has been harassing her at work, making phone calls to her, and even stalking her. Sandy is very upset by his actions and does not know what to do.

As you leave the office together, you notice that the guy's sitting in the parking lot, right next to Sandy's car.

Your notes on the video:

Vignette #4 – Discussion Questions

What are you going to do right now?

Could you have done anything differently?

What do you say to Sandy?

Who else do you need to talk to?

What are you going to do for Sandy?

Some additional points for discussion:

- What security measures did you observe in place in this vignette? (Security guard, controlled visitor access, etc.)
- What security lapses did you pick up on in this vignette? (Security guard reading paper, no window in the door to check parking lot before exiting, etc.)
- Could the man have offered any assistance or advice earlier, when Sandy first told him about her stalker ex-boyfriend?
- Have you ever offered to walk someone to his or her car? How would you respond if you actually did meet some sort of threat?

Vignette #5 – Magnetic Personality



Jane has been an employee of the company for about two years. She is only a short-term employee, but she is very bright and seems to be able to handle almost any assignment given to her. However, Jane also has a violent temper. On occasion, she loses her cool with fellow employees, as well as with her supervisor, Karen.

Earlier in the shift, Karen had to talk to Jane about another temper tantrum she had with a fellow employee. Jane was very upset with Karen for “picking on her.” She commented to someone that she was going to show this company what a “bad attitude” is by hitting them where it hurts, in the pocketbook.

You observe Jane intentionally trying to erase computer disks by rubbing them over a magnetic paperclip dispenser.

Your notes on the video:

Vignette #5 – Discussion Questions

What are you going to do right now?

Who are you going to tell about what you observed?

What could have been done to prevent this incident from occurring?

What did your group decide to do?

Some additional points for discussion:

- Jane has not physically hurt anyone. Why was this vignette included in a film on workplace violence? Is sabotage a form of workplace violence? Is sabotage a precursor to further potential violence?
- Jane is a woman. Most violent employees are men. Should we really be at all concerned about Jane's potential for violence, since she doesn't fit the profile of a violent employee?

Role Play Exercises

Role-plays help strengthen your participants' violence-prevention skills because they use hypothetical situations as springboards for problem-solving discussions.

Role-plays can be a fun way to practice the skills learned in a training session, but some participants can find them somewhat threatening. Not everyone enjoys being called to the front of the room and told to perform a role-play in front of a couple dozen colleagues. With this in mind, consider the option of using some role-play exercises in small groups, with some participants playing the roles and the other participants acting as observers. These small groups can then share their learning experiences with the whole group.

Role Play #1 - Supervisor's Role

You have been the supervisor in your department for over 11 years. Your department has just gone through a drastic downsizing, terminating over 30% of your workforce. You know the reasons, but the employees that remain are very upset at what happened to their co-workers and friends. Their emotions cover everything from cynicism to outright hostility. You have to get everyone back on a productive track. You want to get some input from one of your good employees about what to do.

How are you going to approach this?

What are you going to talk about?

How are you going to inform your employees about how you feel?

What are your immediate goals?

Role Play #1 - Employee's Role

Your department has gone through a very bad downsizing. A lot of your friends have lost their jobs. Of those that remain, some are very hostile to the company, while some just shrug it off as bad luck.

You feel fortunate about having a job. Although some very good friends of yours are now out of work, you have to worry about keeping your job and feeding your three kids.

Your supervisor wants to talk with you about how to get the place running smoothly again. You feel for your supervisor because many people who were friends of you both are now out of work.

What ideas do you have for your supervisor?

Role Play #2 - Supervisor's Role

Hank has been one of your employees for about one year. During this first year, Hank's work has been less than acceptable. He is late for work, sometimes abuses the sick leave policy, and complaints about him from other employees are increasing.

You have had several meetings with hank about his performance issues. Hank has a very high opinion of himself, almost to the point of being arrogant. You have decided to terminate him. Hank will be very upset with being terminated.

How are you going to handle this meeting?

Who are you going to talk with about this meeting?

What sort of things are you going to do prior to the meeting?

What are you going to do after the meeting?

Who else needs to be involved?

Role Play #2 - Hank's Role

Your name is Hank. You have worked for this organization for about a year. Since you've taken this job, you've come to find that a lot of the work they want you to do is beneath you. Many of the other employees are jealous of you, so they spread rumors about you that are not true. You think some of them are trying to get you fired. As far as you care, this company can just shove this job. Of course, you're worried that you won't be able to find another job. And you need this job badly.

Your supervisor wants to talk to you today. You're afraid he is going to fire you. You don't intend to make it easy for your supervisor. If they want to try to get rid of you quietly, they've got another thing coming. You intend to be your usual gruff self, at least until you think you have no choice but to give in and apologize to your supervisor. Although you don't intend to grovel, you will try to convince your supervisor to reconsider firing you.

Role Play #3 - Employee One's Role

Mark is a real pain. He doesn't think women should be working in a factory, taking good jobs away from men who need to support their families. He still thinks women should be home taking care of their men or doing simple clerical types of jobs.

Mark is downright hostile to the women in the department. In fact, most of the women are extremely afraid of him. He boasts about "getting rid of the broads" and getting the "good ol' boys" back in control. Mark has taken overt steps to make some of your female co-workers look bad.

You just saw Mark screaming at Helen, yelling that he was "going to make her sorry" if she doesn't get out of the department. You fear for Helen.

Role Play #3 - Helen's Role

Your name is Helen. Your work is very satisfactory, but there is one guy, Mark, who causes a lot of trouble in the department. He doesn't like women working in the factory. He seems to think that all women should be "barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen."

Just now, Mark threatened to "make you sorry" if you did not get out of the department. You have wanted to do something to get this clown off your back for a long time.

You have been approached by a fellow employee who witnessed Mark's threats against you. The fellow employee also wants to do something about Mark.

You two need to develop a plan about what you are going to do.

Applying What You Have Learned

The package includes a worksheet about situations that might come up back on the job. The “back home” worksheet is intended to offer your participants an opportunity to gain insights from the group concerning a real situation at work that might have already happened or that someone thinks is likely to happen.

The handout helps your participants identify some of the questions they should consider in determining how to respond to this kind of situation. Have participants briefly discuss this situation together in the group as a whole or in small discussion groups. Finding ways to resolve this kind of situation together will encourage them to continue their efforts to prevent workplace violence.

Back Home Application

Describe a potentially violent or volatile situation in your organization that concerns you.

How long has this been an issue?

What is the work history of the employee(s) involved in this issue?

What steps have you already taken to resolve the issue, if any?

What would you like the outcome of this issue to look like?

What are the extenuating circumstances, if any, surrounding this issue?

How would you like your group to help?

ASSET Audit

Prevention is one of the keys to minimizing the threat of workplace violence in your organization. While no one can guarantee that there won't be any violent incidents at work, your organization can take concrete steps to minimize the possibility.

The following pages deal with ASSET Audits. These pages should be used to generate ideas and help you scrutinize and evaluate all aspects of company management, layout, and operations. We focus on the five general areas: Administrative Procedures, Selection Systems, Security, Empowerment, and Training. As a "memory jogger," we offer the acronym ASSET to describe these areas:

A = Administrative Procedures

S = Selection Systems

S = Security

E = Empowerment

T = Training

ASSET Audit

Administrative Procedures

Federal and state OSHA regulations stipulate that employers must “furnish to each employee, employment and a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious harm to the employee.” It is incumbent upon all organizations to make sure that their administrative procedures and policies are clear and well-conceived, and that they reflect the need to provide a workplace that is safe and productive.

- Policies and procedures must be viewed as fair and equitable.
- Policies and procedures must be well communicated and understood.
- Policies and procedures must be administered equally.
- Disciplinary processes must be well communicated and fairly administered.
- The disciplinary process must be progressive, with procedures for appeals built in.
- The performance management system must be used.
- Reporting procedures for incidents must be clear and well-communicated.
- Employee assistance programs must be in place and well-known.
- Emergency response systems must be developed and well-known.
- Evacuation procedures must be well-known and practiced.
- An emergency telephone number must be on file for every employee to use.
- The definitions of harassment (sexual and otherwise) must be understood by all.

ASSET Audit

Selection Process

A selection process involves much more than interviewing a potential hire. The process begins immediately after the decision is made to fill an existing job or create a new job. The process does not end until a person has been selected to fill the vacant job and their performance is up to some acceptable level.

The major steps in a selection process should include the following:

- Determining the key decision points in the process
- Developing job descriptions or a task analysis
- Understanding the culture of your organization and identifying its key characteristics
- Keeping appropriate records
- Factoring in EEOC/ADA considerations
- Training Interviewers
- Asking behavioral-based interview questions
- Testing the applicant
- Following all applicant-notification procedures
- Screening for drugs
- Establishing and communicating probationary guidelines and status

ASSET Audit

Security

Security continues to be a major concern in today's organizations. Access to the workplace has become a matter of keys, electronic gates and doors, identification cards, metal detectors, security guards, and policies and procedures to keep outsiders out. Well-publicized incidents of workplace violence have resulted in increased efforts to protect employees, but also to protect organizations from related issues of theft and sabotage. The focus now is on rightsizing organizations and tightening budgets, but security is still an imperative that must be re-examined on a regular basis.

Areas to review include:

- Facility access
- Key and identification controls
- Exit interviews and procedures
- Product safety
- Computer security
- Information access and control

ASSET Audit

Empowerment

An empowered workforce is a workforce that utilizes all of its capabilities to improve the business. What do we mean by “employee empowerment”? Employee empowerment involves two things:

- The ability of employees to make decisions that affect their work.
- The understanding that employees function as business partners.

An empowered workforce cares about the organization, cares about fellow employees, and wants the organization to flourish.

As we ask employees to take more responsibility for their work, we must open doors of communication and decision-making that will allow empowerment to take place. Employees can perform these functions in their organizations:

- Select new employees
- Conduct safety audits
- Conduct security audits
- Train other employees
- Lead emergency response teams
- Lead first-aid teams
- Review and recommend changes to administrative procedures and processes

Partnership relationships with employees can be solidified by:

- Providing regular business updates to employees
- Giving employees the opportunity to ask questions and surface issues
- Allowing employees to solve problems that are related to their work
- Providing time for teams of employees to meet regularly to discuss organization issues
- Making sure members of the organization understand their roles and responsibilities

ASSET Audit

Training

A properly trained workforce can be a strategic competitive advantage for any organization. Better yet is a workforce composed of employees who are able to function way beyond the basic skills required for their jobs. Training employees in such areas as Violence Awareness and Prevention fosters a spirit of commitment to the overall well-being of co-workers and the organization as a whole.

Workplace violence is a pressing problem. The employer is wise to raise worker sensitivity to potentially harmful situations, inform people about how they can protect themselves and help the organization lessen its impact, and clarify roles and responsibilities should a threatening incident occur.

Training in each of these important areas will increase the organization's ability to deal with the threat of workplace violence, and improve overall performance in achieving its business goals:

- Communication skills/Listening skills
- Workforce diversity
- Sexual harassment
- Appropriate work habits
- Giving positive feedback
- Handling conflict/Handling emotion
- Establishing performance expectations
- Coaching
- Conducting termination interviews
- Using effective discipline
- Fundamentals of supervision
- Effective employee relations
- Working in teams

Notes

Notes