



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The Safer, The Better

Incidents of workplace violence are on the rise. With globalization and a fast-encroaching multinational culture most industries will be wrestling with the issue of escalating workplace violence.

The Risk Factors

What are the factors that place employees at risk? Common risk factors include delivering services/goods, working during early morning hours or late at night and dealing with money. Working alone, interacting with customers, guarding valuables or property and dealing with difficult people or volatile situations also pose risk.

Putting certain wrong stresses on an employee predisposed to violent behavior is also bound to trigger undesired, even harmful behavior. Examples are pressure to constantly excel or improve productivity, overbearing, autocratic and unsympathetic superiors and upward communication systems

Furthermore, workplace violence is not distributed randomly across all work settings. Risks are much greater in certain occupations and industries. Workers in retail settings, health care and community services (social service agencies, hospitals and nursing homes) face the highest risk.

The Hiring Filter

Anyone can become a victim of workplace violence. Also any business or employer can hire employees with a history of violent behavior. An effective preventive strategy would be to screen and drop such candidates right at the hiring stage.

Employers can attempt to find out if a candidate was fired for hitting his supervisor or subordinate. It also matters if he has a history of insubordination or spousal abuse or if he carries a short fuse! However, this is easier said than done.

Given the terrible tales of workplace violence, most employers do invest in thorough background investigations and put candidates through grueling interviews. However, these methods may not be practical in most instances. What can employers do then to prevent potentially damaging incidents and deal with the issue of workplace violence?

The Solution

No single strategy works for all places and situations. According to leading psychologists a blend of administrative, environmental and behavioral strategies can reduce workplace violence. These strategies can further be divided into long and short term efforts. Long-term efforts would include addressing a variety of social issues such as poverty, education and environmental fairness. These are often beyond the influence of employers.



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Employers can however, effectively indulge in short-term efforts to minimize workplace violence. They should train employees to understand pervasive nature of workplace violence and treat it as a serious occupational safety hazard.

In Safe Hands

Training is considered an effective tool in preventing and minimizing workplace violence. Experts recommend conducting violence prevention training programs to address the issue formally. Both employers and workers should be trained to assess risks of violence and take appropriate action to minimize the risks.

Some organizations begin with putting together training manuals that document common incidents of workplace violence. Giving employees exhaustive information about such incidents and preventive strategies used to resolve them is a good way to start. In addition to such information the manual should clearly define undesirable behaviors and state its consequences.

This manual can later on be converted into a written policy on preventing workplace violence. The policy should include disciplinary actions that would be taken against employees indulging in violent behavior.

Communication- a Key Factor

Most organizations have effective upward communication channels where an employee can voice his grievances without the fear of reprisal. Even then, some employees hesitate to speak up. This in most cases is a result of poor communication skills. A good program puts employees through a basic communication course. They should be taught to overcome fears and report problems to superiors.

Training also comes to the rescue of organizations where uncommunicative managers and supervisors add to workplace violence. Employees are bound to grow frustrated when they cannot exercise any control over their work environment.

A lack of communication compounds this problem and is considered a leading contributor to employee frustration. Training managers and supervisors to communicate with subordinates and keep them "in the loop" can undo this problem. The communication should be regular and timely and should cover organizational policies and plans

The Identification Parade

A vigilant supervisor can prevent a probable violent situation. Therefore, an important aspect of training deals with teaching supervisors to recognize potentially violent employees and behaviors.

According to behavioral psychologists those with violent predispositions almost always give out warning signs. These signs include frequent bouts of depression, high absenteeism, impatience, irritability, startling easily and lack of concentration. Other signs are tendency to blame others for ones' failures, inability to do the job and even an abnormally loud voice.



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It is only after training that supervisors find it easier to observe and record such irrational or inconsistent behaviors. In most cases a supervisor can intervene to nip the problem in the bud. However, in extreme cases, the employee is put up for counseling or disciplinary action.

Only The Wearer Knows!

It is equally important to train supervisors and managers to be more caring about their subordinates. While employees too need to be caring about their co-workers, insensitive superiors contribute more to workplace violence. As part of training supervisors are taught how to discuss personal issues with their subordinates.

Keeping in touch with workers and correlating information gathered with work factors can uncover situations or individuals waiting to explode! In the absence of training most managements tend to ignore personal problems which later escalate into potentially violent situations.

While training is not meant to turn supervisors into employee assistance counselors, they need training to recognize errant employees.

As a short-term effort, training can be very effective in curbing workplace violence. All it takes is putting together a formal workplace violence prevention training program.