

ON THE EDGE

version 2.0

Managing High-Risk Situations

Participant's Booklet

by

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For Preview Purpoc

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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, a 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.

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Introduction

Each week in the United States, an average of 20 workers is murdered and 18,000 are assaulted *while at work*. These staggering figures should not be an accepted cost of doing business in our society—nor should death or injury be an inevitable result of one's chosen occupation.

Workplace violence is the leading cause of death for women at work. Over 41% of the women who are fatally injured on the job are the victims of homicide. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for men on the job, second only to traffic accidents. The difference is negligible: Traffic accidents claim the lives of only a handful more men at work than violence.

Workplace violence can have a devastating effect on productivity and quality of life inside an organization. Just one violent incident can overwhelm a business with massive costs related to medical and psychological care, liability lawsuits, repairs and cleanup, increased insurance rates, increased security, lost productivity, and lost business—not to mention the death or injury of valued employees and co-workers.

Over 1,000 people are killed at work every year in the U.S. Over 7,000 are seriously injured. In just the time it takes you to read this book, at least one more American worker will die as a result of workplace violence.

Many of those workers are killed in robberies or crimes committed by strangers—a taxi driver or a police officer or a convenience-store clerk loses their life because they hold a high-risk job in today's crime-ridden society. Some are killed by their domestic partners, the evil of domestic violence spilling over into the workplace. Others are killed by someone whom they have known and worked with on a daily basis.

This program will address violence in the workplace committed by non-strangers: customers, spouses, supervisors or co-workers. The distraught husband, the disgruntled employee, or the dismissed worker seeks revenge and ends up taking the lives of others almost indiscriminately. Many of these violent incidents could have been predicted and even prevented. This program will provide you with critical information needed to identify the potential for violence—and prevent it.

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The Edmond Post Office Massacre

Patrick Henry Sherrill was an angry man. Angry and surly. Neighbors in Edmond, Oklahoma sometimes referred to him as “Crazy Pat” because of his strange behavior—sneaking around at night in combat fatigues, tying up dogs with baling wire, peering into neighbor’s windows, mowing his lawn at midnight. His grip on reality often seemed rather tenuous.

Sherrill’s work record was also inconsistent; in fact, he seemed to take up a disproportionate amount of his supervisor’s time. His relationships with co-workers were strained at best. His performance was spotty and his productivity was steadily going down. He was making the same mistakes over and over again. It was obvious to co-workers and supervisors that Patrick Sherrill was a “problem employee.”

Sherrill, age 44, had been working for 18 months as a full-time substitute letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. On August 20, 1986, he put on his postal uniform on last time and made preparations for what would be his final day on the job. Sherrill knew that his supervisor planned to speak with him that day about problems with his performance. The supervisor considered it merely a counseling session. Sherrill evidently convinced himself that he was about to be fired.

Just after dawn, Sherrill drove to the Edmond Post Office and entered the rear door, holding a pistol in each hand. Without a word, he walked up to two supervisors and shot them at point-blank range. He walked through the corridors, looking for more people to shoot.

As one survivor later described it, “I heard two quick shots and then a single shot. I thought it was a bunch of guys clowning around, that maybe one of them had dropped a mail tray or something. But then I saw a guy fall with blood all over him. Then I heard another shot. And someone yelled, ‘No! No!’ Then another shot. He didn’t have any preference about whom he was shooting. Women and men, black and white. He shot anything that moved. People were scrambling everywhere, and he was shooting at everyone who was moving.”

One employee was able to slip out an exit door. He leaped on the hood of a passing car, screaming at the driver to take him to the nearby police station. The post office was now filled with screaming, moaning, weeping, terrified employees. Sherrill walked through it all, unhurried, searching out groups of huddled employees and shooting them.

Within a few minutes, he had fired 50 rounds at co-workers and supervisors, wounding six and killing fourteen. As police SWAT teams and ambulances raced toward the scene, Sherrill turned the weapon on himself and took his own life.

It was one of the worst mass murders committed by a single gunman in American history. And it was the first of what would become an all-too-familiar string of violent episodes within the U.S. Postal Service. Patrick Henry Sherrill was only the first “disgruntled postal worker” to bring headline-making violence to the workplace. In the years since the Edmond massacre, more than a dozen incidents of workplace violence have taken place at postal facilities, killing approximately forty people and wounding at least twenty.

Violence in Today's Workplace

Estimates of the impact of violence and statistical information about incidents vary widely, depending on the definitions and methodologies used. What we do know of the extent of workplace violence, however, is staggering:

- Over 1,000 employees are killed each year in violent incidents at work. Over 7,000 others are seriously injured.
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death overall in the workplace, and the leading cause of death for women in the workplace.
- According to recent statistics kept by the U.S. Department of Justice, approximately 1,000,000 individuals are victims of some form of violent crime in the workplace each year. About 60% of these crimes were categorized as "simple assault" by the Department of Justice.
- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) learned in a recent study that one-third of all managers surveyed had experience with at least one violent incident in their workplace. Twenty-five percent of these incidents were shootings or stabbings. Seventy-five percent were fistfights.
- Another government study estimates that violent crime in the workplace causes some 500,000 employees to miss a total of 1,751,000 days of work each year, or an average of 3.5 days per incident. This missed work equates to approximately \$55,000,000 in lost wages.

Many of the homicides that occur in the workplace are the result of robberies or other crimes committed by strangers, but the vast majority of other violent workplace crimes and almost 20% of the homicides are committed by employees against other employees.

Recent Cases

February 2001 – Melrose Park, Illinois – On the day he was to begin a prison sentence for theft from his ex-employer, a plant worker returns to his former workplace with an AK-47, shotgun, and rifle hidden in a golf bag. He kills four employees and wounds four others before killing himself.

December 2000 – Wakefield, Massachusetts – A software tester armed with a shotgun, a semiautomatic rifle, and a pistol kills seven employees at the internet consulting firm where he worked.

November 1999 – Honolulu, Hawaii – A copier repairman employed by Xerox since 1984 enters his workplace and kills seven co-workers in one of the worst mass murders ever to take place in Hawaii, a place known for its low crime rate.

July 1999 – Atlanta, Georgia – A former chemist-turned-stock trader entered an office where he did his trading, asked how the market was doing, then opened fire, killing four people. He then went across the street to another securities firm and killed five more people. In all, nine people were killed and twelve were wounded in Atlanta's worst mass-shooting.

June 1998 – Allentown, Pennsylvania – A 41-year old warehouse worker at a food distribution plant opened fire just before lunch time, killing his supervisor and wounding the manager of human resources and the vice-president of operations before taking his own life.

March 1998 – Newington, Connecticut – An accountant for the state lottery office returns to his job after a four-month leave of absence, angry about a salary dispute and his failure to win a promotion. Shortly after arriving at work on a Friday morning, he takes a walk through the office and guns down three of his

supervisors. He then chases the lottery commission director out into the parking lot, where he shoots him to death and then turns the gun on himself, committing suicide.

December 1997 – Orange, California – A man enters a maintenance yard in Orange, Calif., with an AK-47 and kills his former boss and three other people. The former employee, who blamed the supervisor for getting him fired, is later shot by police during a skirmish.

September 1997 – Aiken, South Carolina – Two months after being fired from his job at a parts plant, a former employee returns to the plant and opens fire, killing four people and wounding three others.

June 1997 – Santa Fe Springs, California – An employee at a plastics factory fatally shoots two co-workers and wounds four others after an argument at work. He kills himself less than two hours later.

February, 1996 - Fort Lauderdale, Florida - A former city maintenance employee, fired two years earlier for failing a drug test and making threats against co-workers, walks into a meeting shouting "Everyone is going to die!" He opens fire and kills five people, pausing only to reload. One more employee was injured and survived.

Recognizing Warning Signs

It's important that we all understand one thing: Many violent incidents are predictable. They rarely come as a complete surprise: The employee, ex-employee, or employee's domestic partner is often known to be a problem employee or a potential threat to that workplace. What is critically important is that we recognize the warning signs in time to take action, before the violence occurs.

Profile of a violent worker

In the vast majority of employee vs. employee violence, the perpetrator meets many of the following characteristics:

- white male
- age 25 - 50
- tends to be a loner
- has a history of violence
- demonstrates a fascination with weapons
- has a history of conflict with others
- is likely to exhibit some signs of depression
- might appear paranoid, or exhibit other behaviors associated with personality disorder
- is likely to exhibit self-destructive behaviors, such as abusing alcohol or drugs

It should be carefully noted that these characteristics are not prerequisites for violence, but merely factors that are common to many people known to be violent. Simply because an employee does not display all of these characteristics is no reason to disregard their potential for violent behavior. White males are, at the moment, the predominant perpetrators of these crimes, but many recent workplace homicides have been committed by females, Asians, African-American, and members of other groups.

In addition to knowing the typical profile of someone likely to be involved in workplace violence, you should be aware of behaviors that suggest trouble is brewing. These behavioral warning signs include the following:

Behavioral Indicators

- *Reduced Productivity*
When a previously efficient and productive worker shows a sudden or sustained decrease in performance, there is reason for concern: This is a classic warning sign of dissatisfaction or stress, and it should not be ignored.
- *Increased Need for Supervision*
The typical employee requires less supervision as he or she becomes more proficient in their work. An employee with whom the supervisor must spend an increasing or inordinate amount of time might be signaling a need for help.
- *Externalization of Blame*
An employee who constantly blames others for his poor performance or who is hypersensitive to criticism or incapable of taking personal responsibility for his failures might need help.
- *Inconsistency*

Employees are usually quite consistent in their work habits. Should this change, you might need to intervene.

- *Excessive Tardiness or Absences*
Frequent absences or tardiness are particularly significant indications of a problem in an individual who has typically been prompt and committed to a full workday.
- *Unreciprocated Romantic Obsession (Erotomania)*
An employee who is romantically obsessed with another employee might behave normally in all other conduct. This seemingly bizarre behavior is not a sexual attraction, but rather an erotic delusion of idealized romantic love. The obsessed person is likely to engage in any of these things: spy, stalk, send love letters, give gifts, and phone or e-mail the object of their romantic obsession.
- *Strained Workplace Relationships*
Disruptive behavior in the workplace is cause for immediate concern. It is imperative that some sort of intervention takes place to defuse a potentially violent situation.
- *Stress*
Stress is a serious and widespread problem in the workplace, for the person who is going through it, but also for co-workers. An organization should have procedures in place to identify workers who are suffering from stress and then provide some sort of effective intervention.
- *Unusual Behavior*
A sustained change in behavior is often indicative of an employee in trouble. Co-workers are typically quite familiar with the individual's personality traits, and are quick to notice significant changes that indicate a need for assistance.
- *Substance Abuse*
Alcohol and drugs agitate, cause aggressive behavior, and create paranoia in some employees. An employee who might have been on the margins of trouble can be pushed over the edge by the efforts of chemical dependence.
- *Depression*
Depression is the most common problem treated by counselors. Approximately one out of seven people with a depressive illness will commit acts of violence on themselves or others, including suicide and homicide.
- *Threats*
Any employee who makes threats should be taken seriously. All such incidents must be reported and investigated to determine the potential for violence, and to intervene, if necessary.

In addition to these general behavioral indicators, you should know that two recognized personality disorders appear to be linked to many incidents of violence (and especially homicide) committed by employees or ex-employees. These disorders are Antisocial Personality Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder. Some of the behaviors associated with these disorders are listed below. An individual who exhibits some of these behaviors should be evaluated by a professional.

Antisocial Personality Disorder

- Disregard for the rights of others

- Persistent non-conformance to laws, regulations, and social norms
- Deceitfulness and lying
- Impulsive and erratic behavior
- Irritability and aggressiveness
- Reckless disregard for the safety of others
- Consistent irresponsibility
- Lack of remorse for harmful actions to others
- Indifference to others
- More prevalent in men than women

Borderline Personality Disorder

- Significant fear of real or imagined abandonment
- Pattern of unstable interpersonal relationships
- Unstable sense of self or self-identify
- Impulsive, self-damaging behavior
- Suicidal behavior
- Behavior threatening to self or others
- Unstable moods and reactions
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Inappropriate and intense outburst of anger
- Fighting and other forms of physical aggression
- Paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms
- More prevalent in women than men

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Taking Action

Keep this list of Do's and Don'ts handy in case you are confronted by a person in the workplace and fear that the situation might be on the edge of violence. One important rule: **If at any time a person's conduct begins to escalate beyond your self-defined comfort zone, try to disengage from contact with the person immediately.**

With that in mind, let's look at some other suggestions of things you can do:

Do:

- Project calmness. Move and speak quietly, slowly, and with confidence.
- Listen with empathy. Encourage the person to talk and listen patiently to him or her.
- Let them know that you are interested in what they are saying. Focus your attention on them.
- Keep your posture relaxed but attentive. Position yourself at a right angle, rather than directly in front of the other person in a confrontational position.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings and indicate that you can see they are upset.
- Establish ground rules if the unacceptable behavior continues. Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
- Ask for specific, small favors such as asking the person to move to a quiet area.
- Use delaying tactics in order to give the person time to calm down. You might offer a drink of water (preferably in a paper cup!).
- Break big problems down into manageable units. Be reassuring and point out available choices.
- Accept criticism positively.
- Ask for recommendations, and repeat back what is requested.
- Position yourself so that your access to an exit is not blocked.

Don't:

- Use communications styles which generate hostility - these might include apathy, condescension, brushing off, coldness, going strictly by the rules, or giving the run-around.
- Reject all of the person's demands from the start.
- Pose in challenging stances, such as standing directly opposite them with your hands on hips or your arms crossed.
- Engage in physical contact, finger pointing, or staring them down.
- Make sudden or threatening movements.
- Threaten, dare, challenge, belittle, or make the person feel foolish.
- Act impatiently or criticize the person.
- Attempt to bargain with a threatening person.
- Make false statements or promises you cannot or will not keep.
- Take sides or agree with distorted points of view.

- Invade the person's personal space - usually a zone of 3 to 6 feet between you and the agitated individual.

You must report all violent threats and any other behavior that you feel might indicate a tendency toward violence. Immediately inform an appropriate person in your organization about the threat or aggressive behavior: the person defined within your organization's policy as a contact person, your supervisor, another supervisor, or someone within the human resources department.

Take all threats and unusual behavior very seriously. Many tragic incidents would not have taken place if co-workers had not concluded, "Something like that couldn't happen here."

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Video Exercises

The following pages offer an opportunity for you to review nine video vignettes, take notes on each of them, and then respond to a series of discussion questions about each of the scenarios.

These scenarios are based on actual events. Try to place yourself in each of them. Try to imagine how you would respond if you were in that situation. Consider carefully how you *should* respond if you were to actually face those circumstances at work.

Resolutions to these situations will vary, depending on your organization. One of the objectives of this training is for you and others in your group to discuss each of the situations presented and come up with the most appropriate response for your group, business, or organization. There are no easy “cookie cutter” answers to these situations. That’s why they are so realistic. If there are situations you or your colleagues do not feel comfortable resolving, please do not hesitate to ask your leaders for help.

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:

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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?

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 this 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:

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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?

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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 constantly gives 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:

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Vignette 3—Discussion Questions

Jerry has just confronted you.

What are you going to do?

What would 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?

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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:

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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?

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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:

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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?

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ASSET Audit

Prevention is one of the keys to minimizing the threat of workplace violence in your organization. While no one can eliminate workplace violence entirely, there are some steps your organization can take to minimize your exposure.

The following pages should be used to generate ideas and help you scrutinize and evaluate all areas of company management, layout, and operations. We focus here on five general areas: administrative procedures, selection systems, security, empowerment, and training. As a reminder of these subjects, think of them as your ASSET audit for the prevention of violence. This acronym stands for:

- A = Administrative Procedures**
- S = Selection Systems**
- S = Security**
- E = Empowerment**
- T = Training**

An ASSET audit should cover five broad topic areas your organization should look at in its effort to prevent workplace violence. While we provide some general points to consider, your organization will want to add its own specific areas of concern as they become evident during the review process.

We also suggest involving a broad spectrum of employees in this review. Some organizations have developed individual teams around each of the ASSET topics in order to make the review more complete.

You should feel free to add to, delete from, or “localize” the following ASSET topic lists so that the ASSET audit reflects the needs of *your* organization, not someone else’s.

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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.

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

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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

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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

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:

- Communications 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

Violence in Our Society

Reducing vs. Displacing violence

Many of the steps organizations take to reduce violence in the workplace do not prevent violence—they merely displace it. A person who is screened out from being hired by one employer will probably be hired by another employer who has a less-thorough screening procedure.

In order to actually reduce violence, communities need to prevent children from developing into violent adults. Some children get involved with violence because they lack adequate supervision and support, especially after school. Offering these kids an alternative to gangs, drugs, and other dangerous or criminal activities can help to steer them away from a life of violence.

Organizations should take the lead in their communities. They can help young people in ways that need not be expensive. They can find ways to use school, church, public housing, and park facilities that are underutilized during certain times of the year, to keep program costs low. Peer programs where participants help provide instruction (more advanced pupils teaching the less advanced) can be successful as well as cost-effective. Some businesses even encourage their employees and managers to donate their time as paid or unpaid volunteers, and provide opportunities during the work day.

We must act, and act immediately, to reduce the threat of violence in our workplaces, our communities, and our society at large. Educating ourselves about this problem is only the starting point. Now we must be prepared to act on the knowledge we have gained.

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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?

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