

# **ON THE EDGE**

## **Preventing Violence in the Workplace**

version 1.0

**Leader's Guide**

by

**Dan Thompson**

For Preview Purp

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## Introduction

You can't get away from it. Stories of violence in the workplace have become all too commonplace in our daily lives. Incidents are reported in the newspapers and on television each week. 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 months later and kills several workers holding a meeting in his former workplace.

While these tragic and dramatic incidents continue to make the headlines, many more incidents less dramatic, but equally as terrifying, also disrupt our places of employment. Statistics tell us that 1 in 4 workers is threatened, harassed, or assaulted each year in the American workplace. These attacks take place in banks, office buildings, factories, stores, restaurants, airports, hospitals, wherever people may work.

While no one can prevent or eliminate all workplace violence, steps can be taken to lessen the threat. When organizations create an employee awareness of workplace violence, and explore the ways to prevent volatile incidents from escalating, they are on the road to creating a safer, more secure workplace for their employees.

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## Program Objectives

This training program will:

- Increase workplace violence awareness for all employees.
- Allow employees at all levels of the organization to discuss workplace violence issues.
- Allow organizations to develop and discuss alternatives for employees faced with workplace violence issues.
- Allow organizations to evaluate current practices regarding violence in the workplace.

## Obtain Expert Advice

In all cases, it is recommended that your own in-house or external experts be included in the development of any policies, directives, procedures, or suggested solutions dealing with workplace violence issues.

Some professionals you may want to consider including in your team of experts might be your human resource personnel, senior site managers, legal counsel, security professionals, psychologists or threat assessment experts, law enforcement officials, emergency medical personnel, and employee assistance program counselors.

Obviously, no one can guarantee the prevention or elimination of violence in the workplace. This program is an awareness training program and in no way implies, nor does it constitute, any legal, security, or psychological advice. Organizations should contact their own resources or experts to obtain any legal, security, or psychological advice when dealing with workplace violence issues or concerns.

## Training Options

On The Edge: Preventing Violence in the Workplace 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 fit your organization. Suggested training options include:

- 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.
- 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. – Note: Customized editing of this video is available. Call for details.
- After the introductory material, the trainer shows the scenarios, stopping the video tape after each scenario. Have small groups of employees develop solutions and present them to the larger group for discussion.
- Have small groups work through the role plays included in the training kit and have members suggest solutions to the role plays.
- Develop other potential “on the job” scenarios with participant input and have the group discuss possible resolutions.
- As the videos are played for participants, ask them to observe where improvements in security, safety, or procedures can be made.
- Put together a team or several teams of employees to examine workplace issues listed in the ASSET Audit section of the Participant Booklet and develop suggestions for improvement.

# Discussion of Video Vignettes

## Vignette 1 – Just Try to Fire Me!

Adam is a data entry clerk in your employee benefits area. His work involves computer entry of confidential employee medical information. Over the past several months, Adam's performance has been marginal at best. You hold a performance discussion with Adam.

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

### **Some possible points for discussion:**

- Do you think this supervisor was intending to fire Adam when this discussion began, or is Adam just being paranoid?
- Do you think this supervisor might be contemplating 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 – Broom, Rags, Gun, Mop

Ray has been the janitor in your office for approximately six years. Always known as a loner, Ray usually doesn't have much to say to office employees and is better known for his surly attitude.

As Ray is working in front of your office, he bends over and you notice the handle of a pistol sticking out from under his jacket.

### **Some possible points for discussion:**

- Assume that you are alone in the office late at night with this armed janitor. What is your best course of action right now? Should you handle this internally within the organization, or should you contact law enforcement officials?

- Assume that your organization has a policy prohibiting firearms on the premises. Does it make any difference if the janitor has a concealed weapons permit?

### Vignette 3 – Magnetic Personality

Jane has been an employee of the company for about two years. While a short-term employee, she is very bright and can handle almost any assignment given to her. She also has a violent temper, and has, on occasion, lost her cool with fellow employees, as well as her supervisor, Karen.

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

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

#### **Some possible points for discussion:**

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

### Vignette 4 – Dear John

John has worked for the company for 17 years. He has been a very good employee, never missing work and always making a contribution.

About a year ago John’s wife, also an employee of the company, filed for divorce after 16 years of marriage. Since that time, John has experienced serious episodes of depression. He has been to the medical department, been through the Employee Assistance Program and attended counseling.

John confides in you that he is thinking about doing something to end all his pain and suffering. While he doesn’t tell you all that is going through his mind, he does hint that his ex-wife will also be with him. You have never seen John this depressed.

### **Some possible discussion points:**

- Assume that John is, in fact, suicidally depressed. Does he pose a danger to any others?
- Okay, John seemed pretty serious. But what if John might be just blowing off steam and he doesn't really mean anything by what he's saying? If you report John's statements to others you might make a lot of trouble for John when he really wasn't serious at all. Should you consider this possibility? How would this possibility change any steps you might take?

### **Vignette 5 – 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 has been 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 stalking her. Sandy is very upset by his actions and does not know what to do.

As you leave the office together, you see him sitting in the parking lot next to Sandy's car.

### **Some possible points for discussion:**

- What security measures did you observe in place in this vignette? (Security guard, controlled access doors)
- What security weaknesses did you observe in this vignette? (Security guard reading paper, no window in the door to check parking lot before exiting.)
- 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 their car? How would you respond if you actually did meet some sort of threat?

### **Vignette 6 – Scary Jerry**

Jerry just won't leave you alone. You go the job he wanted and now he's acting like it's your fault for getting the job over him. He constantly gives you dirty looks, makes snide remarks about you to other employees, and is spreading rumors about you in your



department. Jerry has always been a little “different” and he scares you. Anything you say to him is greeted with greater and greater hostility.

**Some possible 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? Would anyone take you 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 which are running 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 may even have been intended by Jerry as a derogatory racial slur. Be prepared for your participants to notice and discuss this aspect of this vignette.

## Vignette 7 – Bad News

The rumors are true. You just got the word that your area will be downsizing and you will be losing 13 jobs, about one-half your group.

You have been confronted over the past several weeks by worried employees, as well as hostile employees. For the first time you now know what will happen, who will be terminated, and who will be retained, as well as what the jobs will look like for those who will survive the cutback.

**Some possible points for discussion:**

- Why is this vignette included in a film on workplace violence?
- Bad news is bad news. Does how you deliver that news make any difference?

## Vignette 8 – The Nitrogen Plan

Al and Joe have been supervisors for your organization for about five years. They have always worked the same shift and, in fact, do a lot of hunting and fishing together outside of work. They are good friends.

Last week the organization announced a headcount reduction that would put 27 people out of work. Al and Joe are in the 27. Al’s wife is having serious medical problems, and Joe has been known to drink quite heavily. Neither graduated from high school and

probably will not have an easy time finding another job that pays as well as their current one.

You observed them acting suspiciously near some chemical tanks and overheard them planning to do “something” on their last day that will make your organization remember them.

**Some possible points for discussion:**

- Assume that you didn’t hear exactly what the two were planning. You only heard them say something like “We’ll make them remember us!” Is this enough to cause you to report what you saw and heard? Why, or why not?
- You’re pretty sure these two are planning to cause an explosion, a chemical spill, or some other type of sabotage. Assume that you are also part of the 27 and will lose your own job as well. You’re pretty upset with the company too. Does this affect your decision as to whether or not you should take action?

**Vignette 9 – I’ll Go Postal!**

You and Jim have worked together for the past two years. During the past six months, Jim has been acting a little peculiar. Jim’s work record is not very good. He got a written warning for “poor performance” yesterday.

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 Jim about this, he threatens to “go postal” and “take you out, too.”

**Some possible points for discussion:**

- The First Amendment protects freedom of speech. Why can’t Jim say anything he pleases, without having to worry that you’ll report him?
- Should Jim’s political views be any 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?

## Role Play Exercises

Included in this video training package are reproducible handouts which may be copied and used for role play exercises. Role plays help build your participants' violence prevention skills using hypothetical situations which they are asked to resolve.

Role plays can be a fun way to practice the skills learned in a training session. They can also, sometimes, be a little threatening to participants. Some participants do not enjoy being called to the front of the room and told to perform a role play in front of a couple dozen of their fellow participants. With this in mind, you might choose to use these 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.

## Back Home Application Exercise

In addition to the role play sheets, the handouts include a worksheet for Back Home Application. This worksheet is intended to offer your participants an opportunity to gain insights from the group on a real situation which may have happened (or which they foresee happening) in their own workplace.

The handout helps your participants identify some of the questions they should consider in determining how to respond to this situation. It can also be helpful to have participants discuss this situation with other participants, either in the group as a whole or in smaller discussion groups in order to get others' ideas for appropriate resolution to this situation.

## ASSET Audit

Prevention is one of the keys to minimizing the threat of workplace violence from occurring in your organization. While no one can guarantee the elimination or prevention of violence, there are some concrete steps your organization can take to minimize your exposure.

In this participant's booklet accompanying this video program is a section on conducting an ASSET Audit. These pages should be used as an idea generator and a checklist of areas your organization should scrutinize and evaluate. The topics cover broad subject headings of administrative procedures, selection systems, security, empowerment, and training. As a "memory jogger" we have developed the acronym ASSET to describe these areas.

**A = Administrative Procedures**

**S = Selection Systems**

**S = Security**

**E = Empowerment**

**T = Training**

**Notes:**

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Other leading video programs available from EDGE include ...

### **Sexual Harassment – New Roles/New Rules**

Described by a lawyer for a Fortune 10 corporation as the best video she'd ever seen on sexual harassment, this video program focuses on making the workplace a comfortable environment for all people. By addressing the concerns of both men and women regarding the current issues of sexual harassment, this video helps defuse the tension which surrounds this topic and allows your participants to deal with the subject of sexual harassment in a realistic and non-threatening way. The laws regarding sexual harassment are explained in terms that can be easily understood, and common sense guidelines are provided to help your participants avoid crossing the line in the workplace and committing acts which might be interpreted as harassment.

### **Let's Talk Diversity!**

Diversity is not just a buzzword, a fad, a training topic that's hot today and forgotten tomorrow – diversity is a reality in today's workplace. This terrific video uses a number of thought-provoking vignettes, images, and street interviews to inspire your participants to think about – and talk about – the topic of diversity. One of the finest discussion-starters ever made on the subject, this video deals with issues like labeling, cultural differences, affirmative action, stereotyping, white-male bashing, and more in a thoughtful and humorous manner. You'll see why this video is one of the best-selling diversity videos available today.