

## Are you prepared to deal with a violent scenario in your workplace?

More often than not, CEOs and their HR professionals have so many challenges on their plates that they try hard NOT to think about these worst-case scenarios.

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When they do, they often just hope that nothing happens on their watch.

Unfortunately, hope is not a strategy that works very well when dealing with potential workplace violence issues.

Executives must be on the look out for intentional bullying, threats, sexual harassment, verbal abuse and violent outbreaks that can occur in any work environment.

HR directors today must be prepared and heed any warning signs that problems are developing. Early detection is the only way to avoid serious outcomes, including the loss of property and life, not to mention the goodwill of the company. Even if an incident is never taken to trial, a company is oftentimes "tried" in the press and its reputation is tarnished for years – just for allowing, and not preventing, a violent incident.

Violence at the workplace could even cause a company to go bankrupt, if the incident is serious enough and lawsuits are filed. Consider that you are a juror, for a moment, and you have been assigned to a workplace violence case. Would you NOT be wondering: What were the company's policies and what proactive measures were in place to prevent this violent act from happening to the victim?

Instead of relying on hope, HR directors should be focusing on adopting some overall prevention measures, as noted below, as the first steps to avoid workplace violence from occurring.

### Work with an outside expert

A good place to start is to call in an outside expert who is trained to:

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» Assess the vulnerabilities that may exist in your company's physical security program that you are unaware of;

» Appraise the security measures that are in place and measure how well they protect property and people; and

» Evaluate your company's policies and procedures to make sure they meet current industry and legal standards.

You should require that this individual provide analysis based on the knowledge of industry standards and successes, other companies' programs and an understanding of the laws regarding these issues – information that is sometimes hard for your inside staff to know and accumulate.

### **Get your senior management onboard**

In addition to working with an objective expert, another key "must" is to get senior management buy-in to the whole prevention program. If you don't, your employees will have a hard time believing that the company really cares about them and how they are treated. The leadership of the company must be solidly committed to a safe and secure environment. Without the backing of the Board of Directors, for example, all the policies in the world will not make a difference. This is definitely a top-down priority.

### **Make your Security Director a senior-level officer**

If your company does not have a security director at the executive level, then you are not as prepared as you should be. Some companies have put their custodians in charge of security. While they are good at the implementation, they are not always qualified on the strategic issues, which is why the function needs a more senior security executive. Who oversees and directs the entire security management operations for your company? Is one person wearing multiple hats i.e. H.R., Training, and Security? What is the level of that person's security training? Are they just making sure the doors are locked and the inventory is not walking away at night?

### **Keep policies and procedures current**

Make sure that your policies and procedures about appropriate behavior and inappropriate actions are up-to-date, available to all staff and reviewed and agreed to by all your employees every year. You don't want someone to say that they were not aware of company policy after some incident occurs.

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### **Take time to educate and train staff**

Education and training are the foundation elements to helping a company understand and mitigate workplace violence. All too often education and training is not addressed until "AFTER" an incident has occurred and then it's too late. Threats to the organization come from two (2) places; inside and outside the organization. Education and training of every member of your staff, to increase the security awareness levels, is needed on a regular yearly basis.

### **Evaluate your work environment**

Stress in the workplace and other situational conditions often are causes of workplace violence. Be sure to be on the lookout for red flags and watch for individuals who are not handling their workload effectively. These are just a few of the many criteria for preventing workplace violence. Each of them will be discussed in more detail in later issues.

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### **About the author...**



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