

# Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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## Workplace Violence: Part II

This is the second article in a series about workplace violence. If you are just “tuning in” now, please read our June Newsletter for five important warning signs of workplace violence. We continue with six further “red flags” and also try to educate the reader about the precursors of violent behavior.

### Warning Signs, Continued

- ◆ **Unresolved conflict:** Unresolved conflict often escalates to the point where one of the individuals acts out against the other. In the process, destructive behaviors such as threats (verbal or vi



- ◆ visual) or intimidation, with the possibility of bribes and other manipulative tactics, may occur. That is why mediation, as a form of conflict resolution, has become so popular in recent decades. **(Note that Beyond the Horizons Consulting provides mediation services at clients' worksites or in our headquarters.)**

- ◆ **Crusades or fanaticism:** This is a subset of inflexible thinking. When an employee's whole world is centered on a particular belief system as manifested in “group think” (examples would be Neo-Nazism, hate groups who display no tolerance for other life styles or races), that individual is “tightly wound” and greatly affected by any event that challenges his belief system.
- ◆ **Issues with management:** If the employee has a grievance against management or unreasonable expectations of his supervisor, these factors should be brought into the open and resolved. If resolution is not possible, the individual must be terminated. However, care must be taken to do so in a manner that demonstrates respect for that person.
- ◆ **Behavior that is blaming or critical of others:** When there is a preponderance of such behavior — not just an occasional critical comment — this should be taken as a pervasively angry attitude. Such an attitude rules out taking responsibility for one's own actions and thus tends to become antisocial and dangerous to others.
- ◆ **Coworker fear:** As alluded to in our June Newsletter, one of the best measures of potentially violent behavior is that others in proximity to this person experience fear. The emotional experience of fear is given to us so that we can take appropriate action — in this case, reporting the subjective experience to a supervisor. *This would happen in an ideal world.* The fact is that **ultimately the responsibility for checking in with employees is the supervisor's!**
- ◆ **Police encounters:** Probably the most blatant predictor of potential violence is often overlooked by prospective employers. That's why we must emphasize thorough background checks on all candidates for a position.

(Note: Article continues on Pages 2 and 3.)

## Increasing *YOUR* Understanding of Why Workplace Violence Occurs

It is important to recognize that workplace violence does not occur “out of the blue.” Leaders need to become psychological sleuths! First, they need to become aware of what’s happening in the lives of individual employees. Often, it’s not important to know a great many details, but **an awareness of a person’s stress level**, as affected by one or several of the factors listed below, would be important. After all, employees don’t come to work in a vacuum. There are work-related stresses, but there are also personal stressors that affect the ability of a person to accept criticism, deal with uncertainty or rumors, and so forth.

Second, **business leaders need to develop their own emotional IQ.** They need to go beyond the facts to see patterns — for example, when their supervisors are adding to the stress level by micromanaging or when a disrespectful attitude is developing among team members. Barry Nixon writes, “*Keep in mind that the potential for a violent act to occur is significantly heightened when three variables come together: a highly stressed individual, stressful events, and when a person is exposed to a callous, disrespectful, uncaring, insensitive environment.*” (1)

The following situations often trigger individuals to commit workplace violence:

- Layoff or firing
- Too heavy a workload
- A highly stressed work environment
- A supervisor who micromanages or is highly critical
- Conflict resulting from lack of communication between coworkers
- Feeling devalued because a promotion did not come through
- Recent traumatic experience, such as death of a loved one, divorce, chronic illness, loss of one’s home, etc.
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Feeling unappreciated because management is stingy with “strokes”

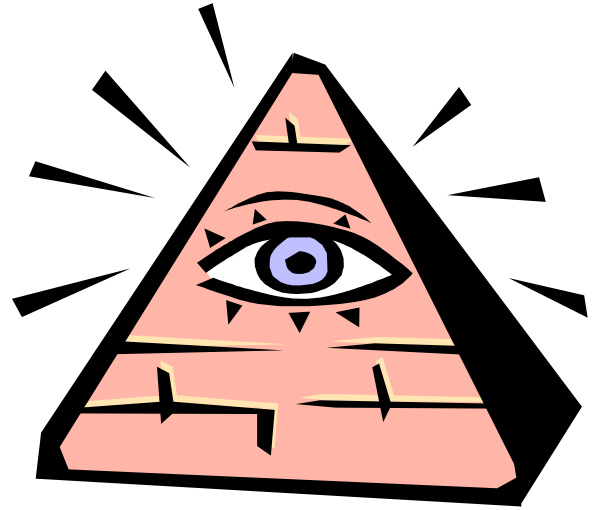
## How to Develop Emotional IQ

Developing emotional IQ involves what the eminent psychological theorist, Carl Gustav Jung, calls the four functions:

**1 Sensing:** The ability to remember facts and details.

(1) Barry Nixon is founder and president of the National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence.

- ♦ Sensing is important for human resource and executive leaders because it facilitates the collection of data to decide whether leaders should pay closer attention to a particular employee, set up a meeting to discuss the employee’s behavior, or arrange a mediation. In other words, sensing — or logging individual observations — is a first step.



- 2 Intuition:** The ability to see the larger pattern. This would include the ability to “guesstimate” whether an employee’s behavior is escalating toward violence. The guesstimate would involve the additional steps of (a) talking with coworkers to elicit their gut feelings based on daily experience of the individual in question, and (b) making a judgment about the individual’s psychological state.
- 3 Thinking:** The ability to make objective, logical decisions and carry them through with all due haste. This ability should be prominent in the writing of an anti-violence policy and in the progressive discipline of employees whose verbal behavior could be construed as intolerant, threatening, or abusive.
- 4 Feeling:** The ability to put yourself in the other’s place, to empathize. Feeling is best expressed in a company’s culture or values. Feeling sees human beings not as a means to an end — for example, crunching the numbers — but instead sees human well being as the end in itself. If properly exercised by managers and supervisors, the feeling function can yield more complete and satisfying communication and, most importantly, deescalate potential conflict and resentment in the workplace.

Next month we continue with **Steps to Creating a Violence Prevention Program** at your workplace.

**Beyond the Horizons Consulting offers a variety of services for individuals, teams, and organizations.**

- ◆ Individual coaching for managers is a process that begins by identifying your style, what you want to retain and strengthen, and what you want to modify. Objective assessments are part of the process, as are also a mutual give-and-take of creative problem solving and supportive guidance.
- ◆ We offer group seminars on identifying and dealing with stress in a relaxing and supportive environment.

- ◆ We also offer group seminars on teamwork, using the MBTI or DISC.
- ◆ Our conflict resolution services help opposing parties identify mutual purpose(s) and restore harmony to your workplace environment.
- ◆ It is our pleasure to tailor a seminar to your company's, department's, or team's needs!

Take a look at our May and June, 2005, Newsletters to see our new, serene home, a place we invite you to take advantage of!

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**Our helpful Office Administrator, Stan, will work with you to schedule a meeting time that fits your schedule.**

**Stan and Jean Eva can be reached at  
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