

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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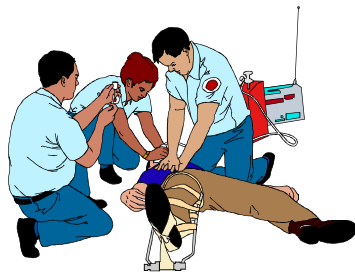
October 2006

Workplace Violence: Part V

This is the fifth article in a series about workplace violence. If you are just “tuning in” now, please read our June, July, August, and September Newsletters, containing 11 important warning signs of workplace violence and the first steps to creating a *workplace violence prevention program*. We continue our series by offering you a template for identifying victims of domestic abuse in the workplace and continue by presenting suggestions for a preventative program.

Raising Awareness of Domestic Violence in the Workplace

The first step in any preventive program is raising the



awareness of everyone involved. Beyond recognizing that domestic abuse is a phenomenon that occurs rather often in our fearful and power-driven society, participants need to be able to recognize the indicators of domestic abuse:

- ◆ Decline in job performance. The victim suffers a severe drop in self-esteem through the shaming she experiences from the perpetrator. She often feels she deserves the abuse.
- ◆ Frequent lateness, absenteeism, or illness. This is the victim's way of coping with the trauma of the previous evening or weekend.

- ◆ Unexplained bruises, injuries, or medical problems. There may be forced sexual relations (rape within marriage) that may lead to genitourinary problems.
- ◆ Withdrawal from coworkers. A normally sociable colleague may isolate in her cubicle, refuse lunch invitations from coworkers, or simply go silent during a conversation.
- ◆ Frequent upsetting phone calls. In all probability, the perpetrator is calling to check up on the victim or to threaten her safety if she doesn't comply with his dictates.
- ◆ Visits by the perpetrator to the victim's workplace. At the very least, this will disrupt the morale and lower the productivity of both the victim and her coworkers. It could also result in the eruption of violence.

Some Suggestions for Structuring a Preventive Domestic Violence Program

The Training and Identification Stage

Companies can work with local domestic abuse and rape crisis centers to train volunteer among their own personnel to become more aware of the signs of domestic violence among employees. The initial selection of volunteers from the pool of those interested in serving in this capacity is important. Management should consider the following factors in choosing volunteer liaisons for this program:

- ◆ The respect the candidate has from colleagues and supervisors.
- ◆ The confidentiality the candidate has previously demonstrated.
- ◆ The keenness of observational skills demonstrated in interpersonal relationships.
- ◆ The availability of the candidate to devote time to carrying through the project.

- ◆ The emotional IQ of the candidate.
- ◆ The candidate's interpersonal skills for working with the team.
- ◆ The longevity of the candidate's career with the company.
- ◆ Candidates should ideally come from different teams and divisions within the organization so as to better serve the total employee pool.

Those who complete the initial training program should meet monthly as a team to review what has been learned and to ask questions of each other. Any questions which the group cannot answer satisfactorily may need to be referred to the initial training organization or coach.

The trained volunteers are now ready to "keep their eyes, ears, and hearts open" to identifying possible signs of domestic abuse. When abuse is suspected, they need to sit down confidentially with the colleague or supervisee and begin by stating diplomatically what they have observed in the workplace. During this time they need to project real concern and caring. Hopefully the employee will be prompted to divulge what is happening. Then the volunteer can suggest professional help through the Employee Assistance Program, a community agency, or the health plan. There clearly must be follow-through to this first meeting,

which should include checking in with the employee about what she is doing to help herself.

A second, very important but radically different step to this kind of program is the public announcement to employees that the company has a policy in place to prevent and deal with domestic violence in the workplace. This raises awareness of both employees and supervisors of the very real and deadly threat of domestic violence and makes it a part of company culture to oppose violence as a way of resolving personal or interpersonal issues that spill over from the home to the workplace.

Some suggested elements of the public program against domestic violence are

- ◆ A company-wide or department-wide briefing for all employees on the domestic violence in the workplace prevention program and protocol for dealing with such an incidence of domestic violence.
- ◆ The procurement of visuals such as poster illustrating the four-stage cycle of domestic violence from organizations such as Domestic Abuse Rape Crisis centers. These visuals should be displayed in prominent places on bulletin boards in lobbies, lunch areas, and break rooms.

- ◆ The clear statement that persons who are suffering from the threat of or actual experience of domestic violence will not be fired from their jobs.
- ◆ The explanation that victims of domestic violence are often ashamed of themselves and that shame often prevents such persons from reaching out for help.
- ◆ The communication to supervisors that victims of domestic violence may need to be "cut a little slack" as they begin their recovery process. They will grow stronger, regain their self-esteem, and



return to being the exemplary employees they had once been.

- ◆ Written communications that clearly state the company's zero-tolerance policy for domestic violence in the workplace.
- ◆ Written communications that outline the policy for prevention of violence in the workplace.
- ◆ Written communications that outline the policy for dealing with acts or threats of violence in the workplace.
- ◆ Follow-up emphasis during team and department meetings on all of the above points.
- ◆ Review of safety procedures at the workplace, including badge identification of all employees entering the building; locking side entrances to the building during working hours; adequate lighting in parking lots; emergency phone lines in bathrooms; and hotline buttons to law enforcement.
- ◆ Use of the buddy system when entering or leaving the building during pre- or post-business hours or when it is dark outside.

Next month's Newsletter completes our series on "Workplace Violence" by giving you useful hints on how to deal with a "critical incident." We sincerely hope that the awareness and prevention techniques we have shared with you will preclude your having to deal with such a devastating event.

Turn to page 3 of our Newsletter for information on how to contact us to arrange for coaching or a seminar.

Meanwhile, stay tuned to Beyond the Horizons Consulting Newsletters for timely information to solve your management challenges! Please feel free to write us at

info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com

or to call us at 505-466-4990 to schedule a free, complimentary coaching session or consultation for your business needs.

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.
- ◆ Our team building seminars will help your team or department run more smoothly, whether it is a brand-new team or one that has been put together after a reorganization.
- ◆ Our communication seminars identify the several parts of the communication equation and help you put them all together by using role play, among other practical, hands-on experiences.

- ◆ 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!

Call us to schedule a complimentary consultation for yourself or your business!

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
(505) 466-4990**