

# Beyond the Horizons Consulting

Volume 3, Issue 8

August 2006

## Workplace Violence: Part III

This is the third article in a series about workplace violence. If you are just “tuning in” now, please read our June and July Newsletters, containing 11 important warning signs of workplace violence. We continue our series with some thoughts on implementing a “Violence Prevention Program.”

### How Do Employers Begin Thinking about a Violence Prevention Program?

Barry Nixon, founder and president of the National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence, continues to be amazed that business leaders are



unaware of how to handle potentially explosive situations in the workplace. Many companies don't even have a policy outlining the kinds of behavior that will absolutely not be tolerated. Of those that do have such policies, perhaps many fail to inculcate their values in their employees. It's not enough just to hand out a pamphlet with guidelines. Company values with respect to violent behavior must be taught during in-service seminars, and not just once in several years. Leaders must make sure that employees get “booster shots” at least yearly. And leaders must exemplify good communication techniques, avoiding anything that could be construed as harassing or threatening in their own behavior.

## Key Areas in Preventing Workplace Violence

There are many factors in your organization that could predispose it to workplace violence. Every facet of your operating policy — from how carefully you screen candidates for a position to how you go about terminating an employee — can affect how violence-prone your organization is. Let's look at some of the key areas.

**Screening of Applicants:** Of particular importance here is checking the candidate's references for any signs of an inability to get along with coworkers or supervisors. With current labor laws, it is often difficult to elicit negative information about an applicant, so prospective employers need to “read between the lines” and piece this information together with what they may be intuiting from interviews.

Secondly, your HR department can require candidates to take pre-employment exams. A wide variety of

**A wide variety of pre-employment exams is available, including the DISC, which measures behavioral factors that impact a person's ability to perform a specific job. Beyond the Horizons administers the DISC and other useful assessments to help you hire and retain the best personnel for the job.**

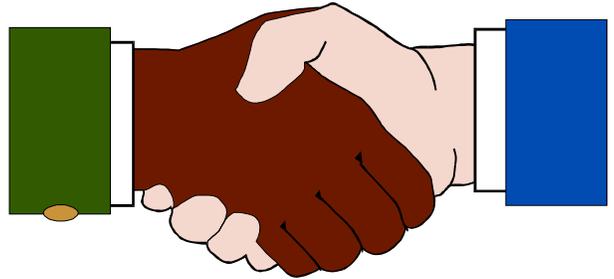
such exams is available. For example, the DISC, administered by Beyond the Horizons Consulting, measures behavioral factors as they impact ability to perform a particular job. The standard test to measure psychological tendencies, including paranoia, depression, and antisocial behavior, is the MMPI. This should be administered by a licensed mental health practitioner, who can “translate” the results into lay terms.

**Learning Opportunities for Employees and Supervisors:** Is your company a learning organization? In many ways, the workplace has become a home away from home. Large companies often provide wholesome food cafeteria style for their employees. Some provide daycare for workers' children, and many have their own workout areas complete with sophisticated exercise equipment. Many also have technical training that helps employees sharpen their technical skills. These are wonderful perks for employees. However, many of these same companies are lacking in providing learning opportunities to enhance employees' emotional IQs. Here are some suggestions:

- 1 HIRE AN EAP (EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM) FIRM TO ASSIST EMPLOYEES WHEN THEY ARE UNDER EXTRAORDINARY STRESS. Usually EAP benefits extend from all sorts of familial/marital crises to work-related stresses. The employee or a member of her family can consult with a mental health professional for anywhere from four to eight sessions without any cost. EAP sessions are confidential unless they are mandated by the employee's supervisor because of a work-related issue. When you have secured EAP benefits for your employees, make sure they understand specifically what these benefits include. Some EAPs include a 24-hour crisis line, phone consults, assistance with daycare selection.
- 2 TRAIN SUPERVISORS IN STRESS MANAGEMENT, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SKILLS. Added to the stresses of raising a family, caring for extended family, managing financial resources (including deciding on the composition of one's IRA), are the stresses of dealing with bureaucracy in every facet of one's life. Supervisors need to know stress management techniques. They also need to practice them and model them for employees. This is part of being a leader in the workplace. **Human resource consulting firms, such as Beyond the Horizons Consulting, will also provide in-service seminars on conflict resolution that will include topics such as deescalating the conflict, finding a common ground, communicating using active listening, and utilizing the deeper emotional content of communications to resolve issues.** Consulting firms can also help configure more adequate performance appraisal instruments that measure the real skills — including interpersonal ones — involved in performing the job. Most importantly, consultants can help supervisors conduct a performance appraisal interview that is balanced, fair, and constructive.

3. PUT IN PLACE GRIEVANCE, DISCIPLINE AND TERMINATION POLICIES. Perhaps the cornerstone of any workplace violence prevention program is making sure disgruntled employees have a channel to voice their grievances and that management takes seriously and follows up on them. Investigation of grievances should be thorough, including interviews with supervisors and coworkers. It may result in changes in company policy, in mediation, in progressive discipline, in termination of one or more employees, or in further training for supervisors.

*Are some employees in your organization able to avoid being sanctioned and disciplined because they*



*are intimidating coworkers or supervisors?* Employee threats, for example, may coerce a female supervisor into overlooking intimidating actions, bullying, or undermining behavior.

*Does your organization conduct exit interviews with concern for both the safety of personnel and also the dignity of the individual being terminated?* Human behavior is unpredictable. No matter how well informed we think we may be about an individual's stress level and behavioral tolerance, there are often unknowns. For this reason, in cases of high-risk termination, it is important to have security personnel close by to quell any potential violence and also to have support personnel ready to call in police reinforcement.

The interview should stress any positive contributions the employee has made to the organization, as well as his skills/talents. Of course, the supervisor needs to state in as factual a way as possible why the employee is being terminated.

To help the employee think beyond the present moment, you may want to give him or her at least one

*(Article continues on page 3.)*

outplacement resource with whom you have contracted to provide career counseling or placement services.

### **Questions for (Re)Designing a Workplace Violence Policy**

Having a workplace violence policy will not automatically prevent lawsuits by disgruntled employees or victims of workplace violence. But it will go a long way toward making your organization less vulnerable to litigation. Here are some questions to ask as you design or revamp your workplace violence policy:

- 1 Does my policy specifically address all types of violence, including verbal, visual, written, and physical?
- 2 Does it clearly outline the steps of progressive discipline for each violation of policy?
- 3 Does it clearly state what is expected of both managers and employees when they experienced violent behaviors? For example, what should an employee do if she experiences intimidating behavior of any kind? What should a manager do when an employee comes to him with “gut feelings” versus hard evidence?
- 4 How will you communicate this policy to employees? It is not sufficient to give them a hard copy of company policy or refer them to a section of your website. A good idea is to hold in-service meetings to review the policy, role play a variety of situations, and allow time for questions. Consider prefacing the policy with a section on warning signs and triggers to workplace violence. In our opinion, this section should be emphasized during the training and highlighted in the policy booklet.
- 5 How will you ensure that your workplace violence policy is fresh in the minds of all personnel? It has been shown that human beings learn by repetition and practice, especially when it comes to altering their behavior. Thus it is NOT enough to present this material in written and in interactive form. It must be reinforced at regular intervals at seminars that require participants to review the policy and come prepared to role play various types of situations.

**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](mailto:info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com)

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

- ◆ 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**