

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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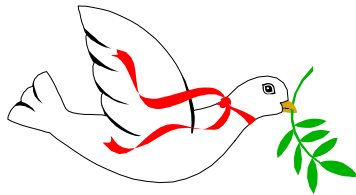
November 2006

Workplace Violence: Part VI

This is the sixth article in a series about workplace violence. If you are just “tuning in” now, please read the five previous articles (June through October 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 some vital suggestions for dealing with an incipiently violent situation. We then look at role play as an effective technique to learn these new behaviors.

Suggestions for Dealing with an Incipiently Violent Situation

The first step in dealing with potential violence is to go



to a calm place within yourself. If there are persons in the immediate environment who are displaying emotional behavior, both verbal and nonverbal, these persons should be guided to leave the area. All of the following steps should be taken with an attitude of calm assurance:

- ◆ Call security or law enforcement, ideally by directing someone else to place the call from another location or by pushing a “hot button.”
- ◆ Clear away bystanders or others who are becoming emotionally out of control.
- ◆ Communicate to the potential perpetrator that you are

there to listen, and maintain an open stance to his demeanor.

- ◆ Reassure the potential perpetrator that there are solutions to his grievances and that these can be worked out.
- ◆ Keep all your bodily movements constrained and your arms low so as to be congruent with your verbal communication and to model nonviolence.
- ◆ Stay at least five feet away from the potential perpetrator so as not to threaten this person.
- ◆ Encourage the person to talk by asking open-ended questions, e.g., “Tell me about what has been bothering you.”
- ◆ Show that you are listening to the person by alert attentiveness to words, gestures, facial expressions, and the like. Feed back what you are hearing in a concise way.
- ◆ Notice any changes in the person’s affect (emotional state). Confirm your perceptions by further observation and a helpful comment, such as, “All this has really stressed you out, hasn’t it?”
- ◆ Use understanding and feedback gradually to gain emotional control of the situation.
- ◆ NEVER LET YOUR GUARD DOWN!

Vital *Don’ts* in Dealing with a Potential Perpetrator of Violence

It may seem obvious that you should *not* behave in ways contrary to the above. Yet for further clarification, we add the following *don’ts* to our suggestions:

- ◆ Don’t encroach on a person’s “space bubble”: thus, don’t come closer than five feet.
- ◆ Don’t use the “take charge” approach. This leads to a control battle between you and the perpetrator, and at this moment *he has control*.
- ◆ Don’t use aggressive body language. This is actually more potent than what you say.

- ◆ Don't ignore the person. Disrespect will engender more anger and more potential for violence.
- ◆ Don't give sharp or smart answers — a sure trigger for anger.
- ◆ Don't use an arrogant tone of voice — another trigger for anger.
- ◆ Don't stare at the person or (the opposite) totally avoid eye contact. Some eye contact communicates to the potential perpetrator that you respect him as a human being. Too much eye contact may give rise to feelings of paranoia.

The Importance of Role Play in Learning to Deescalate Conflict

Obviously when we are confronted with the eruption of violence in the workplace, there is no time adequately to prepare to deal with and hopefully defuse the situation. That is why those personnel more likely to face such a situation — supervisors and those who directly deal with the public, for example — should be trained via role play automatically to adopt the appropriate behavioral style in such situations. Bank tellers, customer service representatives, receptionists and others should be interviewed by

management regarding their comfortability with such a role. If they are overwhelmed by feelings of terror or obsess on the possibility of a violent incident, perhaps they can be redirected within the team or within the organization to a position which does not have direct contact with the public.

After presentation of the guidelines and adequate time for questions and answers, the training can go directly into a role play. Scenarios will have been developed in advance, either by human resources, by the EAP, or by a trainer.

The trainees are then divided into groups. Each group should include the main respondent to the incident, the perpetrator, one or two other players — for example, bystanders or a supervisor in another area of the building — and several observers. Each person then needs a few moments to get acquainted with his/her part in the role play training.

During the role play, the observers take notes. Questions they need to ask would be:

- ◆ How effectively is each person playing their part?
- ◆ Is the main respondent following the “rules of best practice” for responding to incipiently violent behavior?

- ◆ What are the emotions each of the role players is demonstrating?

The trainer will circulate among the groups, encouraging each person fully to experience his/her part. At the end of the role play, the trainer will call for a debriefing. First, the observers will be asked their overall impressions of how effective the role play was and any specific comments they might have. Then all those who played roles will be asked how it felt to play that role and what they learned.



Now new groups will be reassembled, and the roles within each will shift, in order to give trainees a chance to experience a critical incident from every angle. The same debriefing will occur.

This training should take one-half day. At its completion, participants should feel more adequate to deal with potentially violent situations. In addition, trainers will be able to separate out those individuals who may not be suitable to play key roles in dealing with the public or in leading an in vivo violence prevention incident.

Next month's Newsletter will explain how to deal with violence that *has* erupted in the workplace and was not preventable. Despite our best efforts to be aware of potentially violent situations and to “head them off at the pass,” our workplace is not immune to such critical incidents. Knowing what to do after such a disastrous event is critical for all managers nowadays.

Turn to page 3 of our Newsletter for information on some of the seminars and trainings we offer and 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

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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**