

# Beyond the Horizons Consulting

Volume 4, Issue 1

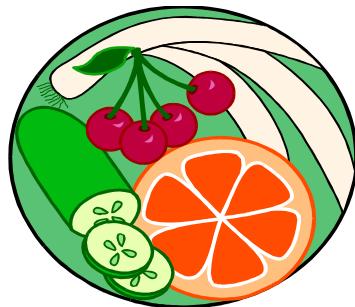
January 2007

## Workplace Violence: Part VIII

This is the eighth article in a series about workplace violence. If you are just “tuning in” now, please read the seven previous articles (June through December 2006 Newsletters) containing 11 important warning signs of workplace violence, the first steps to creating a *workplace violence prevention program*, how to deal with incipient violence, and an introduction to Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). We continue with suggestions for self-care after a critical incident and the role of communication during crises.

### Do's and Don't's in Self-Care after a Critical Incident

Self-care is especially important after an extremely



stressful event, because the whole person — mind and body — have been affected. Here are some suggestions:

#### DO's

- ◆ Eat nutritious foods
- ◆ Drink calming beverages such as water, milk, herbal teas
- ◆ Get plenty of rest
- ◆ Keep moderately busy
- ◆ Follow a healthy exercise routine
- ◆ Share with others who understand
- ◆ Keep a journal of your symptoms

- ◆ Let yourself cry
- ◆ Make small day-to-day decisions
- ◆ Be aware of “survivor guilt”
- ◆ Schedule a time for feeling bad during the day
- ◆ Give yourself permission to focus on someone you care about
- ◆ Pray or read inspirational material if that is meaningful for you
- ◆ Practice stress reduction techniques, such as massage, meditation, progressive relaxation
- ◆ Listen to others as you are able

#### DON'T's

- ◆ Eat lots of sweets
- ◆ Drink alcohol or caffeine
- ◆ Stay in bed all day
- ◆ Keep to yourself or isolate
- ◆ Try to ignore what has happened
- ◆ Make major life-affecting decisions
- ◆ Feel you have to “put on a happy face”
- ◆ Deny yourself quiet time
- ◆ Reject others' attempts to hug
- ◆ Expect your performance to be up to par
- ◆ Be judgmental of others' grieving process
- ◆ Offer false comfort to others
- ◆ Give advice when not specifically asked

### Follow-up Precautions to a CISD

The person hired to do a debriefing should report to human resources or to the appropriate manager the names of any participants who s/he deems may need further care. *This should in no way be construed as a mark against such employees, but rather as an outreach the employer makes and part of the organization's commitment to its workers.* Some signs that an employee may be in need of further help through the EAP or the company's mental health insurance plan follow on page 2.

- ◆ Disproportionate anger, as demonstrated in threats, excessive sarcasm, or other angry nonverbals
- ◆ Numbness of emotion — a feeling of blankness when interacting with the employee
- ◆ Denial of a problem, especially if there is evidence that the employee is abusing drugs or alcohol
- ◆ Lack of self-care, as when the employee looks unkempt
- ◆ Sleep deprivation as evidenced by sharply falling performance standards
- ◆ A depressed appearance, including wearing dark or drab clothing, a slouched posture, the avoidance of eye contact
- ◆ Avoidance of usual social rituals, such as greeting coworkers, chatting in the break room

### **The Role of Communication in Disaster Prevention**

The verbal communication of accurate information, as well as the nonverbal communication of empathy and understanding, goes a long way toward preventing violence in the workplace. In fact, any communication which helps people get cognitive control of what is going on and conveys management's confidence in their ability to guide workers through a crisis will itself reduce stress.

One of the phenomena that causes confusion and escalates stress reactions — for example, in an imminent layoff or workforce reduction — is rumor. There are innumerable ways in which rumors can begin and innocent remarks can be blown out of all proportion. Remember the childhood game of “Whisper down the Alley”? We believe that if a thought is *retained* in mind by one or several persons — say, a management team — it will probably be transmitted unconsciously to all those with whom this primary team comes into contact. The next level of the organization — at the very least — will thus be impacted by stress and anxiety without perhaps knowing why. We mention this because often management assumes that someone has “leaked” a secret to the next level. This need not be the case. In fact, if management is considering a layoff or business reorganization, once initial plans have been formulated, these should be communicated to the next level. This will prevent middle management from becoming unconsciously fearful and communicating these fears to their supervisees and colleagues.

Of course, any communication about a potential reorganization should be stated as concisely and as clearly as possible. The limits of management's knowledge and decisions to that point in time should also be acknowledged. For example, instead of

*Management has determined that your facility in Anytown will be closing at the end of the fiscal year. You will be informed individually as to your last date of employment. Resources will be available for retraining or relocation. ...*

It would be better to convey that this process is evolving and that management has made certain decisions, while others are still in the balance. For example,

*Due to the rising costs of operations in Anystate, management has decided to phase out industrial manufacturing at the facility in Anytown. At this point, pipe fitters will be the*



*first group to be laid off. We expect that to be sometime in January. We will have available, beginning in November, mental health and career*

*counselors for consultation, and we encourage all of you to take advantage of these services. You can do so by making an individual appointment with Human Resources. We will also initiate a group debriefing session before the layoff in February.*

*There will be an employee information session held on October 15th. We encourage you to come with questions. We take your concerns seriously and will attempt either to answer those questions directly or to let you know when or how you may obtain answers.*

*We want to let you know that we have appreciated your dedication to XYZ Corp., and we are committed to helping each of you deal with the personal effects of this closure.*

This kind of communication dispels rumors yet lets employees know the bounds of the information currently available. It also attempts to maintain good will between top management and employees by assuring that further information will be forthcoming in a timely manner and by offering concrete help.

Since natural and manmade disasters can sometimes lead to other tragedies, such as suicide or workplace violence by at-risk individuals, we consider it a preventative measure for supervisors and managers to be informed of the symptoms manifested by those individuals. Refer to the lists in our June and July Newsletters. Feel free to copy them and keep them on hand.

Another preventative measure concerns effective and respectful termination of an employee. If an employee

must be let go because of unacceptable performance, the process must follow prescribed steps, including a verbal warning with agreement by the employee to improve on specific measures of performance or behavior. This of course must be logged by the supervisor. If performance does not improve, a written warning must be given at the second interview. Usually the third notice and interview is the final one, leading to termination.

The exit interview must again stress that the employee is being terminated based on his/her failure to perform the job functions or to amend unacceptable behavior on the job. All such interviews *must* however first acknowledge the positive contributions the employee has made. In addition, exit interviews should end with outplacement offers or resources to further the individual's career track.

Conducting exit interviews in this manner will likely prevent any retaliative strikes against former bosses, colleagues, or the organization in general.

**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 process 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**