

Workplace Violence: Pre-Vention, Inter-Vention, & Post-Vention Services

Introduction

There is no place safe to work anymore. There probably never was. That is the lesson learned from watching the local news broadcaster or reading the paper. While it seemed to always be someplace else, it has now come here, in our community no matter where that community is.

Murder in the workplace is the fastest growing type of homicide in the United States with more than 1000 homicides taking place each year. While we expect to hear about police or security personnel being killed on the job, three quarters of them took place during a robbery. About 14% of all homicides represented murders in the workplace by someone the victim knew.

While homicides are certainly the most dramatic examples of workplace violence, they represent only a small fraction of workplace violence that occurs everyday. Workplace violence can include all types of harassment, such as verbal intimidation, sexual or racial intimidation, threats, physical pushing, yelling, kicking lockers, and fights. It is estimated that one third of workplaces have faced a violent act in the last 5 years.

In addition to aggressive acts committed in the workplace, employees also face emotion risks from accidents, suicide or health problems. The aftermath of experiencing any of these factors takes a toll in the workplace. Estimates vary as to the amount of money lost by a company in the aftermath of a workplace violence event. They frequently see a higher turnover rate, increased use of sick benefits, higher rate of worker compensation applications, and a lowered morale among employees.

Can something be done?

Fortunately a wide variety of things can be done to reduce the occurrence of violence in the workplace and to reduce the traumatic impact on employees and customers if one takes place. These generally fall into three categories of activities, things you can do before the event, things you can do during the event, and things you can do after the event. Kantu Consultants is prepared to assist the organization in the development of a comprehensive Workplace Violence Prevention Program that incorporates activities in all three areas.

Pre-Vention Activities

Approximately six months before your next workplace violence situation you should have:

- a written anti-violence policy that has been distributed so that all employees are aware of it
- reviewed the physical plant to determine any safety issues that should be resolved

- established a Threat Management Team and provided the necessary training for it
- provided training to key organizational personnel in identifying problem situations
- provided general information to all employees about the policies and what to look for or report
- written an emergency plan that includes guidelines for handling a situation
- identified or trained individuals who will provide services after a Critical Incident

P.S. you are late!!!

The key to prevention is always education and training! The more people are sensitized to the issue of workplace violence and prevention, the greater the likelihood that you will avoid a serious situation. Some of the first set of activities are listed above. They are not an exhaustive list, but rather a good starting point for the organization.

Inter-Vention Activities

At the first threat of violence, your action plan is put into action. The Threat Management Team is called in to evaluate the situation. They follow the protocol already developed and create a Plan of Action. This is carried out by the organization and hopefully the situation is defused.

If an act of violence occurs, the emergency plan serves as a set of guidelines to follow, much like your fire emergency plan or industrial accident plan, with roles and responsibilities clearly delineated. This includes notifying the proper authorities.

Post-Vention Activities

Virtually everyone who has experienced or witnessed a violent act, be it intentional or accidental suffers psychological distress from the event. A Critical Incident is any event that has the power to disrupt an individual or group's ability to cope on a temporary basis. There are proven individual and group techniques for assisting people in the aftermath and speeding up their recovery process. By providing this assistance, you are not only assisting the affected personnel, you are getting the organization back to normal more quickly.

One of the most studied and taught set of techniques are derived from the work of Jeffrey T. Mitchell, Ph.D. and George S. Everly Jr., Ph.D. and is called Critical Incident Stress Management. It consists of both individual and group educational activities designed to mitigate the effects of the trauma. These sessions can be held by trained personnel from the organization (depending on size), or from the community, or from the EAP, or other outside consultants. The key here is to know that the staff are properly trained and

that they have agreed that your organization is appropriate for coverage by their team.

How do I prepare my organization?

You can rely on your own personnel. You can send them off to seminars, have them read the literature, and have them re-invent the wheel at your expense. When you are done with your product, you can hope that it will work. You, of course, will not know until an actual event occurs. It might be a little late. To be able to complete this task completely, they probably would not be able to do their regular jobs for several months.

You can buy a book and tell everyone to read it and to be ready to do the work.

Neither of these approaches are a very safe method of preparing for the prevention of violence or responding to it. OSHA would not be pleased.

You can hire Kantu Consultants to serve your organization to help develop your Critical Incident Stress Management Plan. This could include working with the organization to develop the zero tolerance violence policy, training the Threat Management Team, providing training to other key staff as identified by the organization in identifying problem situations and how to handle them, evaluating your organization for physical safety issues, providing general employee training materials or training, providing training in Critical Incident Stress Defusing and Debriefing, or serving as direct service providers.

Kantu Consultants can deliver what you need, train staff to provide the services or deliver the Post-Vention services directly.