

VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

**A HANDBOOK FOR
PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the founding of our nation we have been a group of people who prided themselves on the values of hard work, creativity and independence. We strongly believed these values would lead us to reach our dream, "the American dream". That dream included feeling personally successful, providing financial security for ourselves and our families, and nationally, to become and remain one of the world economic and military leaders. Yet, our dreams, our security, and perhaps our standing as a world leader are threatened by a rising tide of violence in the workplace, since it is the workplace which serves as the foundation upon which these dreams are brought to a daily reality. Violence in the workplace also sabotages morale, cohesion and productivity, while even more significantly it often results in a tragic loss of personnel. In recent years, there have been several well-publicized incidents of workplace violence at U.S. Postal Service (USPS) facilities, abortion clinics, public schools, and government facilities. USPS, for example, has lost 38 people from homicides between 1986 to 1993. Workplace violence not only creates instability in the specific organization affected, but as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City dramatically points out, shock waves of insecurity are sent across the country.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics offers some chilling information as homicide has accounted for 12% of work related deaths between 1980 and 1985; and homicide is the leading cause of death for women at work (42%). Though we may be used to reading about such occurrences in the private sector, more and more violence is occurring in Federal settings. In late 1993, a disgruntled Fort Knox Federal employee shot and killed two civilian coworkers and his civilian supervisor over his nonselection for a permanent position. In addition, during a recent 2-year period, 12,000 Federal female employees were victims of rape or attempted rape.

The United States Air Force has also experienced an increased trend in violence in the workplace. Most fatalities occurring as a result of violence on our installations were determined to be extensions of domestic disputes. This points out that we can no longer assume that an individual's duty performance can somehow be insulated from off duty behavior/problems. These fatalities occurred at the employee's work site or at public service offices (i.e., base legal office). Examples of less lethal, but equally disruptive incidents of workplace violence consisted of shouting matches, sexual harassment, fist fights, bomb threats, sabotage, vandalism, stalking, computer viruses, and assaults with a deadly weapon. While force protection initiatives are invaluable when deployed, safety initiatives are no less important during normal peacetime duties.

We are living in a period of great change. In fact, the rate of change and the nature of change across the country and within the Air Force is perceived by many as more dramatic than at anytime in our history. We in the military have faced rapid change and downsizings before, after the end of the second World War, and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. However, never before has there been such total organizational restructuring. Psychological research has consistently shown that change, even positive change, produces discomfort that is stressful which can cause emotional and physical illness. The pace and intensity of

change, combined with an uncertain economy, the downsizing of our work force and the threat of possible job loss, and the impact of these events on the individual, and family indirectly translates into an undercurrent of anxiety, doubt, and even despair. To compensate for these feelings, and compensate for very real feelings of helplessness in the midst of these changes, some individuals resort to acts of intimidation often escalating to violence. We all need to be aware of our actions and their impact on our Air Force co-workers. Awareness and understanding will make us more sensitive to possible volatile situations. Recognizing the warning signs, knowing how and where to obtain assistance, and taking proactive steps will reduce incidents and make our Air Force an even more effective, efficient, and caring place to serve our country. It is exactly now, during this time of intense change that our people need to know and see our concern for them as a part of our Air Force family. This handbook is part of an effort to train all Air Force leaders and supervisors on how to prevent or respond to workplace violence, IAW AFI 44-154.

II. COMMANDER'S ROLE IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Whatever the causes of workplace violence, managers and supervisors play a key role in responding to it. Clearly, workplace leadership impacts the problem, either positively or negatively. Since one of the major precipitants to workplace violence is negative action towards employees (discipline and termination), how the individual manager handles these high-risk responsibilities is crucial. However, what is just as clear is the fact that no management action will totally eliminate workplace violence.

Commanders should always expect changes in policies, procedures, and working conditions to cause stress; be aware of changes in people's attitudes, behaviors, and performance; be actively concerned and show interest regarding the impact on people and their families; communicate by listening and being proactive including networking with all the services available to reduce the negative impact of change on the individual; be knowledgeable of available resources; and be supportive of training and empowerment of subordinates.

An analysis of workplace violence indicates that commanders and supervisory personnel need to avoid inaction, and over confidence. Many workplace violence incidents could have been prevented if action had been taken when the warning signs were first evident (ex. significant marital problems, verbal threats, erratic duty performance, or bizarre off duty behavior). Likewise, failure to utilize all consultants (mental health, social actions, family advocacy) or a premature dismissal of their feedback can also lead to preventable workplace violence.

Commanders can also ensure all supervisory personnel obtain training (including updates or refreshers), on how to deal with difficult personnel, and how to effectively utilize both disciplinary procedures and recognition programs. The supervisor's role in preventing and responding to workplace violence needs to be included in Professional Military Education programs, and in courses like the civilian employee supervisors course.

III. “PLAYERS” ON THE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS TEAM

Supervisor: Maintains an environment which promotes individual morale through, frequent and clear performance feedback, and a visible and fair recognition program. Attention to employee “personal variables” like marital/family problems, ability to relate well with coworkers, learning styles (needs to read it vs. do it), and problems with anger or alcohol use need to be as important to the supervisor as the employees technical skills. Supervisors should also be aware of the cultural and religious diversities of their employees; create a work environment free from discrimination; keep personnel informed of rules and standards of conduct; and maintain conduct and discipline according to policy and established procedures. Air Force personnel, active duty, civilian and contract, are expected to discharge their assigned duties conscientiously; respect the administrative authority of those directing their work; and observe laws, regulations, and policies governing their conduct. They also need to know their work will be recognized when it meets or exceeds expectations, and not be ignored until a problem develops. The immediate supervisor has both the power and responsibility to carry out these objectives.

Family Support Center (FSC): Provides information and referral services to assist clients in the proper identification and rectification of unfulfilled needs. The (FSC) also provides transition, relocation, employment, volunteer, and financial services. One of their primary missions is to provide information and assistance to active duty members and their families to eliminate or reduce the stresses of military life, including lengthy or frequent TDY, remote tours, and PCS. Additionally, utilization of their financial counselors can reduce administrative discipline for bounced checks, unpaid bills and misuse of the government American Express card. It is always easier and more beneficial to prevent problems than to react to them.

Behavioral Sciences Flight: Key resource in developing awareness training, and the evaluation and treatment of high-risk personnel. The Counseling and Guidance element provides individual and marital counseling, conducts suicide and stress management briefings, and performs commander-directed evaluations. The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT) program evaluates and treats all alcohol and drug related incidents. Family Advocacy has a dynamic family violence prevention component, and provides treatment to help prevent further violence once an incident occurs. Flight personnel are also key members of the Critical Incident Stress Team (CIST), to provide individual or group support related to grief, or a structured group debriefing for coworkers after a workplace violence incident.

Chaplain: Provides critical violence prevention services through their daily contacts with base personnel and offering spiritual and emotional assistance, or identifying high-risk individuals and situations and making appropriate referrals to Counseling and Guidance. They also provide essential post-violence grief counseling, memorial services, and support to victims, family, coworkers, and supervisors as members of the CIST.

Military Equal Opportunity: Responsible for the dissemination of information on the prevention and intervention process for discrimination actions of any kind. Many staff have specific training in conflict management and mediation to de-escalate personality or

interpersonal conflicts. This helps not only the individuals involved but the morale and productivity of the entire office/unit.

Civilian Personnel Flight: Provides advice and information on matters related to civilian employee's benefit, entitlements, and assistance programs. The CPF may provide managers guidance on taking disciplinary or adverse actions. In addition, they work jointly with the MEO to provide training in the recognition and prevention of discrimination, and conflict management or mediation in cases of personality conflicts or other disruptive interpersonal relationships in the duty section. CPF is also essential in their dialoguing with labor unions.

Security Forces: Provides technical assistance in physical security protection (building vulnerability assessments), personnel security administration, and investigative services. In cases of a barricaded and hostage situation they alert the Hostage Negotiation Team which includes a member of the Behavioral Sciences Flight as consultant to the negotiator.

Exclusive Recognized Union: Works with management in support of safe working conditions for unit members. Perhaps an underutilized resource for helping prevent or de-escalate employee grievances which can snowball into workplace violence.

Office of Special Investigation: Provides investigative service to the commander. They also supply critical data analysis and summaries of information essential to the commander to help prevent workplace violence. Examples include data on Air Force suicide attempters and completers, perpetrators of family violence, and perpetrators of workplace violence.

IV. FACTORS FOSTERING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Workplace violence on Department of Defense installations and at public schools (where our children go to work) are mirroring the increase of violent acts which occur in today's general society. Though it is very difficult to assess the culminating factor, "the straw that broke the camel's back," some precipitating stressors (straws) include the following:

- Death of family member
- Discharge for discipline or poor performance
- Discrimination
- Excessive temporary duty/denial of leave
- Fatal attraction
- Financial difficulties
- Inappropriate distribution of work tasks
- Long working hours
- Loss of employment benefits or entitlements
- Passed over for promotion
- Perception of supervisor as unjust
- Reduction in Force
- Rejection, end of a relationship, divorce
- Retirement concerns
- Selective Early Retirement Board determination

- Unemployment, and fear of job loss

You can quickly see that all these precipitants are fairly common occurrences in many peoples lives, and worse, they often occur back-to-back and are not isolated. With so many stressful issues occurring, often but not always, out of the individuals control, the drain on emotional batteries can be severe. This leaves individuals “close to the edge” and men in particular prefer action to helplessness, including threats and acts of violence to attempt to reassert some sense of control or personal power in their life.

V. PROFILE OF THE POTENTIALLY VIOLENT PERSON

Despite the frequent occurrence of the above event-related risk factors, these always interact with certain person-related risk factors. This interaction creates a profile you can use to identify those at particular risk to commit acts of violence in the workplace. The profile described here, the “avenger personality” is the product of incident reviews and statistical data. It is a composite of information and will not fit every person responsible for committing such acts of violence, but will significantly aid in your identifying those at risk. A more detailed analysis is provided in Appendix A, Threat Assessment Protocol.

Among the observable behaviors of a potentially violent person are: a standing history of complaints; feelings of victimization related to a failure to accurately perceive their role in poor interpersonal relationships or in adverse administrative actions; increasing angry or sullen moods; and an individual who has threatened that some violent act or confrontation could happen. Just as in suicide, **there is often plenty of warning** that violence is about to erupt. Unfortunately, too many supervisors or coworkers are intimidated by this type of individual, and do not appropriately confront him (almost always male), which only serves to reinforce the sense of power through intimidation the avenger feels. Another common, but equally dangerous reaction of others is to down play the likelihood of violence with such armchair psychology as, “that’s just the way _____ is, he would never do anything.”

Research suggests that an individual with the propensity to commit homicides in the workplace is typically a male in his 40s who is distrustful, paranoid, unable to accept alternative viewpoints, and does not take responsibility for his shortcomings. This person is generally seen as a loner, has an obsession with weapons and paramilitary gear and magazines, and has made threats or otherwise expressed an intention to use violence to solve a problem at work. However, they often do not have a history of actual mental illness or violent outbursts.

Those who commit assaults in the workplace, but who do not “hunt others down” with intent to inflict death tend to be younger males with a history of violence and who are possibly drug involved.

A second, very real and growing threat for workplace violence is not the aggrieved, terminated employee described above, but “the angry lover.” A recent survey of security directors for 248 companies in 27 states found that 93% rated domestic violence as an

increasing security problem relative to other security issues. The Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that slightly more than 10% of the men killed at work die of murder, but more than 40% of women are murdered. Inaction by supervisors in these "personal problems" can prove fatal. Consider the case of a 31-year-old receptionist and mother of four children who was harassed stalked by a 17-year-old male employee at the same company. She asked the company vice-president for assistance but was turned down. It's just juvenile infatuation, he probably thought. A few weeks later, the young man tailed his target and fatally shot her eight times with two pistols. The murder, which resulted in a lawsuit against the company and a settlement for the receptionist's heirs. In an article titled, "Making sense of violence in the workplace" (Risk Management, Oct 1995) author Susan Kelley notes, "Courts frequently recognize the theory of negligent supervision when one employee alleges that an employer should have taken reasonable care in supervising a second employee who is threatening the first with violent conduct. When the threatening spouse is active duty his/her First Sergeant should be notified. When the spouse is a dependent, the Family Advocacy Office and Security Police should be notified. Joseph Kinney, in an article entitled, "When domestic violence strikes the workplace" (HRMagazine, Aug 1995), recommends the supervisor who takes an allegation of threatened violence or harassment, ask the following specific questions:

- How long has there been a problem?
- Have threats been made at work?
- Does the perpetrator know the victim's work schedule:
- Does the perpetrator know other employees?
- Are any other employees involved, perhaps in a love triangle?
- Does the perpetrator have a history of violence against the victim or former romantic partners?
- Does the perpetrator have a history of other forms of violence?
- Is the perpetrator a known drug or alcohol abuser?
- Has the victim sought restraining orders?

While these may seem like questions for Security Forces or the OSI, the concerned supervisor should also be in the loop for this information. Ms Kelley, cited above, recommends the supervisor take the following actions once a threat allegation has been made:

- Relocate the work station of threatened employees.
- Alter the employees work schedule.
- Provide photographs of stalkers or alleged perpetrators (spouses) to receptionists and security officers.
- Encourage law enforcement to enforce restraining orders.
- If threats are recent, provide employees with time off.
- Deploy security cameras near entrances to employees work areas.
- Place silent alarms at employee work stations.

VI. PROACTIVE STEPS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

1. Physical Security Measures

Many incidents of workplace violence can be prevented by some direct, if not always simple, precautionary actions. For example, in August 1994, a security card access system in a Dallas transport company kept a fired employee with a shotgun from entering the company's executive offices. In another incident, an Iowa Department of Revenue and Finance rearranged offices so workers could escape by a back entrance if confronted by hostile taxpayers. It is easy to assume that such precautions are overreactions to media hype. However, using statistics gathered in 1993 as an example, there were 1,063 workplace homicides and an additional 100,000 incidents. Altogether, the total cost of these episodes, including lost time, medical care, morale, public relations and physical repairs, has been estimated at \$4.2 billion per year. Lastly, these tragic deaths and astronomical costs are not isolated to civilian facilities and personnel. Although government employees make up approximately 18% of the U.S. work force they make up 30% of the victims of workplace violence.

For these reasons, organizations may wish to take precautionary steps by ensuring employees have some level of protection by providing the following safeguards:

- Reduction of the number of exterior entrances
- Entry control devices
- Panic buttons—i.e., key executive, receptionist areas
(Alarm indicators may alert security or employee's supervisor)
- Periodic physical security surveys
- Internal rumor control "hot line" to reduce stress
- Use of local resource protection crime prevention specialist

2. Preassignment Screening

Screening of prospective personnel resources should be accomplished within applicable guidelines. For active duty Air Force personnel there are several key checkpoints. One of these is the Behavioral Analysis Service, (BAS) Lackland AFB, TX. The BAS provides assessment of potentially unstable personnel identified while at basic training. The tragic incident at Fairchild is a case in point. The airman who eventually shot and killed two mental health officers and wounded or killed several other bystanders at the hospital had been identified as unfit for military service by the BAS. However, the airman's commander did not accept their recommendations. The Fairchild incident brought about a key change in the commander-directed evaluation process. Commanders retain the ability to make the final decision about their personnel, however, when that decision contradicts that of mental health's recommendation for discharge, the commander must justify it to the wing commander, or equivalent (IAW AFI 36-3208, 5.11., and AFI 36-3206, 2.3.7). Another check point is the screening process which occurs whenever a member, contractor or other personnel need to have special credentials for the performance of their duties. Examples

include security clearance, unescorted entry and work with the Personnel Reliability Program. In these and other credentials situations all personnel are screened by the Defense Investigative Service. For members already on active duty, any potentially disqualifying information is carefully screened by mental health and/or the aeromedical squadron. Remember, one of the best ways to prevent violence in the workplace is by not hiring a violence-prone individual in the first place.

3. Training

Research has consistently underscored the relationship between management and supervisor styles and the comfort level of the employees in the work center; however, this is not to say that there is a direct relationship between them. Yet, given the tremendous amount of change in our company, the Air Force, and society in general and all the concurrent stresses this involves it is more imperative than ever that the commander or supervisor know how to help foster and maintain a harmonious work environment. As our DOD and Air Force leadership has emphasized recently, productivity and mission accomplishment cannot occur without a particular emphasis on strengthening the morale, teamwork and office environment in the workplace. The following topics are considered essential in the training of supervisors to help create a workplace environment in which violent outbursts may be less likely to occur. When leadership is knowledgeable about these issues they can be confident that their workplace is equipped to prevent, defuse or respond to violence.

Establish clear policies. Workplace guidelines should specifically state a zero tolerance for violence, including intimidation through verbal or physical means (see Appendix B for an example). Similarly, there should be a 100% reporting policy for all incidents. Ensure all personnel attend periodic refresher courses on the implementation of performance feedback, recognition programs, and disciplinary actions.

Give employees a voice. Promote communication channels that keep an employee from feeling helpless. Allow these channels to be used to resolve conflict (where there is smoke, there is fire). An individual who knows he or she may, without fear of retaliation, approach his or her respective supervisor or use the many avenues of complaint resolution (discrimination complaint procedure, IG system, mediation, grievance process, etc.) will generally be confident that his or her side of the story will be respected. Remember, a smoldering pot will always boil over.

Stress management. Stress is “a perception of threat or expectation of future discomfort (demand) that arouses, alerts, or otherwise activates the organism,” (Woolfolk and Richardson, 1978, Stress, Sanity and Survival). As stated several times in this handbook, all aspects of our Air Force, and civilian work force are undergoing rapid and dramatic changes and their concurrent “perceptions of threat or expectations of future discomfort.” Mental health experts and medical researchers tell us that our bodies can only handle so much at one time before we breakdown. Remaining in “warp drive” leads to a breakdown in our immune system and various physical illnesses. We need a “new paradigm” regarding stress tolerance and stress fractures in our people. The old mind set saw expressions of stress, depression, marital problems, decreased morale and productivity as signs of individual failure. Our new mind set, given the frequency with which our mental and physical coping skills are assaulted

by repeated/lengthy TDYs, manning shortages, reorganizations in our product lines and processes, and organizational charts, requires us as business leaders and leaders of our Air Force family to make available all support/resources possible to help protect our employees and increase their stress reliance. There are a wealth of resources available to meet this challenge. Contacting your installation's Behavioral Sciences Flight, Health and Wellness Center, and Family Support Center will get you and your people started in the right direction. Furthermore, with the advent of the "web" health and wellness information is only seconds away.

Marital/relationship counseling. The "Quality of Life Survey" by former Defense Secretary Perry targeted the impact of the rapid operational tempo on the family. That task force stated what has been stated and known for years "our people work (and fight) their best when they know their loved ones are taken care of back home." Yet employers and supervisors at all levels have expected their personnel to leave their personal problems at the front door. With the percentage of marriages ending in divorce remaining at 50%, with the number of single parent and dual active duty couples rising, and with the problem of domestic violence becoming an increasingly destructive problem in the workplace we would all be wise to provide all available resources to our people to preserve their marital or intimate relationships. To emphasize this need let us remember that Congress included an additional \$30 million in the 1996 defense authorization bill for family advocacy programs. These programs are the "tip-of-the-spear" to prevent or effectively intervene in domestic situations at risk for violence. Other resources to prevent marital/relationship tensions spilling over into workplace violence include the Counseling and Guidance Center, chaplains, and the Family Support Center. The Family Advocacy Program also conducts numerous marital and communication skills classes.

Alcohol/drug abuse. Understanding alcoholism, drug abuse, and other destructive behaviors can aid in identifying potential abusers and may assist in reducing possible violence in the workplace. Supervisors are "key players." We must be proactive by identifying and removing substance abuse as a threat or catalyst. Treatment and education programs are available through your installation's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT) program.

Diversity training and conflict resolution. The Air Force has taken very proactive steps to help prevent and de-escalate conflict in the workplace which stems from misunderstanding or outright prejudice. As mentioned previously the MEO, in conjunction with the Civilian Personnel Office have extensive training and program materials with which to educate our work force that we are truly all a team despite our differences. In fact differences are critical if new ideas and new procedures are to be generated in our ever changing society. Most people experience and deal with anger in a healthy and constructive way. For others, though, the way in which they deal with anger causes serious problems. Some people are unable to express anger directly and, instead, let it build up. Others respond inappropriately when angered. Many of these individuals grew up in extremely abusive homes. Chaplains and mental health personnel report horrifying stories in the developmental histories of many of our young troops. For these and others, when angered they become abusive or violent in what they say and how they act. Such problems with

anger can be a factor in alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, anxiety, anti-social behavior, or self destructive behavior.

4. Reducing Risk When Taking Disciplinary Action

Discipline often becomes a trigger event to violence or retaliation (See Appendix C, “Handling Difficult People”). When considering taking constructive disciplinary action:

- Avoid arguments over merits of the action
- Don’t make up reasons—be factual
- Focus on the actual problem, not irrelevant issues
- Put the responsibility on the subordinate—provide the person an opportunity to correct the problem
- Supervisors must look and act comfortable with their role

One of the major objectives in taking discipline is to be rehabilitative rather than punitive. The traditional disciplinary approach may not provide this objective in today’s society. Consideration may be given to a more partnership or team approach concept. Key elements to discipline and the comparison characteristics of the traditional versus the nontraditional approaches are as follows:

<u>Element</u>	<u>Traditional Approach</u>	<u>Nontraditional Approach</u>
Goal	Compliance	Commitment
Focus	Employee	Problem
Responsibility	Supervisor	Employee
Time frame	Past	Future
Communication	At the Employee	With the Employee
Mode	Parent to Child	Adult to Adult
Process	Punishment	Coaching
Climate	Authoritarian	Collaborative

According to Dr. Michael R. Mantell, author of Ticking Bombs: Defusing Violence in the Workplace, the five processes of discipline are as follows:

Identify:

1. Determine desired behavior
2. Determine actual behavior
3. Focus on specifics

Analyze:

1. Determine the impact of the problem
2. Determine the consequences the employee will face
3. Determine the appropriate action

Discuss:

1. Gain the employee's agreement to change
2. Discuss the alternative solutions
3. Decide what action the employee will take

Document:

1. Describe the problem
2. Describe the history
3. Describe the discussion

Follow-up:

1. Determine if the problem has been solved
2. Reinforce improvement
3. Take required action (e.g., reduction in rank, change to lower grade, forfeiture of pay, suspension, reprimand, discharge, etc.)

5. Employment Termination Procedures

In light of the increasing threat of employment-related violence, we suggest the following considerations be given when dealing with employees being involuntarily separated:

- Managers and supervisors must be sensitive to the fact that involuntary separation is highly stressful to most people
- Separation notices should be given at the end-of-the-day
- Consideration should be given to providing an escort from the location of the termination meeting to the exit of the installation
- If the person is allowed to clean out his or her desk, this should be done in the presence of the supervisor
- Persons who have been terminated and who have a potential for violence may be restricted from the installation when "probable cause" has been shown

VII. RESPONDING TO VIOLENT ACTS IN THE WORKPLACE

The first thing you can do is create and publicize a plan to identify and manage actions related to workplace violence, to include workplace threats. The plan should identify a wing focal point, as well as specific organizational contacts. Current operational plans may be modified or adopted. Plan scope should define behaviors to be identified, evaluated, managed, and monitored; (e.g., a worker who bullies or intimidates co-workers, a worker who has threatened the supervisor, etc.). Next, the commander or supervisor can familiarize the organization with the information in this handbook, especially the avenger and angry lover risk types, the warnings signs, and major players to address and resolve workplace violence. Then he or she may decide to form a specific workplace violence response team.

After the introduction of AFI 44-154, Suicide and Violence Awareness Training, there is now a format to organize and train a team at each installation. The team is often called the Workplace Violence Response Team, and is chaired by the Support Group Commander.

In an article titled, “Forming a violence response team” (HR Focus, Aug 1995), Dr Charles E. Labig describes how this team can work. Dr. Labig states, “This team’s mandate is to gather facts about a potentially violent situation, decide if the company should intervene and, if so, identify the most appropriate method of doing so. The team develops a course of action to resolve any threats of violence, while protecting potential victims.” Dr. Labig suggests the following steps to address a potentially violent situation:

- Conduct a risk assessment designed to gather data and determine if a person represents enough of a risk to engage the team and its resources.
- Develop an initial action plan which includes the activation of the team and other appropriate resources to review the information gathered and determine what further information is needed or steps to be taken.
- Defusing the individual or stress interaction (two people, or an individual in a particular situation) is the next step. Referrals may also be appropriate for medical, employee assistance, grievance, security or other support services.
- Reevaluate initial information and action steps for further intervention planning.
- Assign members to consult with appropriate experts, review security processes, and establish privacy protection and communications procedures.
- Set time frames for follow-up actions. Included here would be a critical incident stress debriefing, or trauma counseling as the situation dictates following a violent incident.

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Ticking Bombs: Defusing Violence in the Workplace, Michael R. Mantell, Ph.D., Business One Irwin, Homewood, IL (EPD - 1994).

THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

Workplace Violence Response Team

Purpose: This protocol is a guide in the collection of information after a team member has been informed of a possible threat of violence. It serves to guide the team in assessing the potential threat, and as an aid in the attempt to accurately predict future violence (further threats or actions). Additionally, this protocol is intended to be an overview of a meaningful line of inquiry unique to the needs of the team. It is not meant to subsume or interfere with either an administrative investigation or a criminal investigation/prosecution.

Goal: The team's goal is to keep the workplace and potential individual targets of violence safe.

Source Data:

1. What exactly was said or done?
2. What is the relationship between the subject/threatener and the hearer?
3. What is the context of the threat, gesture or act?
4. What happened just before and just after the threat, gesture or act?
5. Why does the hearer feel concerned or fearful?
6. Are there other witnesses or individuals with relevant information?
7. Where is the subject now?

Subject Background Info:

8. Any history of violence, threats, or hostility?
9. Any history of alcohol or drug use (including medication)?
10. Any psychiatric history?
11. Any history of interpersonal problems?
12. Does the subject have access to weapons?
13. Any recent stressors (failure to get promoted, legal problems, rejection by intimate partner etc)?

Subject Interview Data:

14. Intent, plan, means to perpetrate violence?
15. Subjects perspective on the trigger incident/accusation?
16. Any compulsive, paranoid, antisocial or dependent personality features?
17. Any features of impulsiveness, brooding, or sense of “being wronged”?
18. What is subject’s alcohol and drug use history?
19. Does psychological testing show evidence of severe mood, thought or personality disorder?

Overview: Consider DeBecker’s “JACA” to help predict the likelihood of violence

Perceived Justification (J): Does the person feel justified in using violence?

Perceived Alternatives (A): Does the person perceive available alternatives to violence?

Perceived Consequences (C): How does the person view the consequences associated with using violence?

Perceived Ability (A): Does the person believe he/she can successfully deliver the blows or bullet or bomb?

Items taken from literature review on workplace violence including:

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7 Apr 00

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL SQUADRON COMMANDERS

FROM: 437 AW/CC

SUBJECT: Workplace Violence Policy Letter

1. Members of the 437th Airlift Wing have a right to perform their assigned duties in an atmosphere free of threats, assaults, and other acts of workplace violence. We are committed to ensuring a safe working environment for all employees. This policy letter reflects the high value we place on you as a team member and is consistent with Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines, and AFI 44-154.
2. **Threats or assaults made directly or indirectly toward any employee or customer, even in jest, will not be tolerated.** This misconduct causes very real concern and apprehension on the part of people to whom this type of action is directed. This type of misbehavior also negatively affects unit morale and degrades mission accomplishment.
3. This zero tolerance policy places all employees on notice that threats, assaults, or other acts of violence committed against other employees or customers will result in severe disciplinary action. Any employee who has been subjected to a threat or assault is by this policy instructed to immediately report the incident to his or her commander. Employees are also encouraged to report any unusual situation that has the potential to cause workplace violence. Threats of suicide are considered acts of violence.
4. Below are definitions to help you understand and clarify when a threat, assault, or other acts of workplace violence have occurred:
 - a. **Threat (broadly defined)** - A statement or act intended to inflict harm or injury on any person, or on his or her property. Threats also include words or actions intended to intimidate another person or to interfere with the performance of his or her official duties (e.g., standing in front of a corridor with a menacing posture and not permitting another person access to a copy machine, vehicle, or to leave the premises). Do not play expert, "oh, he's just blowing off steam" or "he's just going through a hard time at home." Report all hostile, intimidating or abusive comments.
 - b. **Assault (broadly defined)** - Any willful attempt to inflict injury upon the person of another, when coupled with an apparent ability to do so, or any intentional display of force that would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm.

Note: An assault may be committed without touching, striking, or doing bodily harm to another person (e.g., throwing a brick at a person that does not actually strike the person, raising a fist but not hitting someone). Remaining calm in the face of a threat is extremely important but not reporting it only teaches the threatener that his/her behavior works and is tolerated. Therefore it will happen again and will likely become more intense, threatening and dangerous.

c. **Violence** is not limited to fatalities or physical injuries. It is recognized that any intentional words, acts, or action(s) meant to provoke another can escalate and result in injury if not immediately and appropriately addressed by the chain-of-command. Threats of suicide are considered acts of violence.

5. It is the responsibility of every Team Charleston member, active duty or civilian, to recognize and report any comment or act that can serve as a warning sign of possible violence. Reports are to be made to your supervisor or commander, or to the Behavioral Sciences Flight Commander (x6852) who will then ensure your report is followed-up and the incident assessed. We all must do our part to protect our workcenter, ourselves, and our customers from violence. Finally, keep in mind that one of the biggest threats of workplace violence is domestic violence. Verbal and physical violence between intimates (married or not) can spill into the workcenter, especially after a threatened or actual break-up of that relationship. Let your supervisor and Family Advocacy (x6972) know of any suspicions of domestic violence. Help can then be offered, and a potentially violent situation in the home or at the workcenter may be defused. You may report any potential workplace violence incident anonymously to Behavioral Sciences or Family Advocacy. However, malicious reports will be reported to the appropriate authorities for corrective action.

VERN M. FINDLEY II, Colonel, USAF
Commander

APPENDIX C

MEMORANDUM FOR All Staff Members

FROM:

SUBJECT: Handling Difficult People

1. In our daily contacts with customers, we can anticipate that at times we will be confronted with difficult situations. To keep such encounters from escalating, there are a number of actions we all can take.
 - a. Be aware of what is going on around you. For example, if you overhear loud, angry, or abusive remarks directed at a staff member, it may be helpful to distract the visitor by asking a question or saying hello. Then, if possible, the visitor could be taken to a more private location to continue the conversation in a calmer atmosphere.
 - b. If you know you will be meeting with someone who may become upset or threatening, have your supervisor or a coworker sit in on the meeting (or remain within earshot). Otherwise, notify others in the office area to get your supervisor or manager if they hear the visitor become—and remain—loud and angry.
 - c. If a visitor becomes abusive or threatens you while you are in your office or a closed room, get up and walk to the door while you continue to talk with the individual. Tell the person you need to get some information and walk out of your office. If you sincerely feel you face imminent harm, fake illness or a forgotten errand and leave your work area, explaining why you're leaving and saying you'll be right back. Notify your supervisor or, if necessary, the Security Police via the "crime stop line" or "911" immediately.
 - d. If you have reason to believe an abusive visitor is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, or may not be in touch with reality, notify Security Forces. Don't take chances that the person could become violent.
2. Most often, we can defuse unpleasant situations by simply listening to the caller's complaints. If we listen patient, ask questions, avoid defensiveness, and truly attempt to assist the customer, we can often reduce the potential for violence. Speaking softly and slowly may encourage the caller to turn down the volume, also. However, if the situation does not improve, remember that you do not have to put up with abuse, whether verbal or physical, and you should try some of the suggestions listed above.
3. Notify your supervisor and/or manager immediately whenever you have called the

Security Forces for help. If you must call, ensure you tell the Security Forces why you are calling, your location, your name, and how the person is threatening you (e.g., fist, weapon, etc.).

4. I expect all functional chiefs to be vigilant about potentially dangerous situations and to act prudently in reducing conflict.

This sample letter was written and published by the Civilian Personnel Flight Chief, Nellis AFB, NV.