



Triggers of Workplace Violence

Studies on past crises, have shown that workplace violence always has a trigger. Most offenders do not just get up and decide to commit an act of violence. The triggers that cause a person to commit workplace violence are many, but can roughly be put into three main groups. The person feels that circumstances are: unfair, personal, or out of his/her control.

Reprimands and Terminations

Persons that are prone to violence, often are unable to accept responsibility for their actions, unable to accept criticism, etc. Reprimands and terminations, to these people is an act of aggression, just another time that the company is “picking on them.” They do not feel that they have done anything wrong and the discipline often makes them angry or emotional.

Disciplinary action against an emotional employee is always a task that the HR department dreads. It always needs to be performed according to the company’s policy. Luckily HR employees have been through the training needed to do it with tact and grace, hopefully avoiding any confrontation. The security and human resource department need to train together for situations such as these.

Financial Strain

We all wish we had more money. The family would be taken care of, emergencies taken care of quickly, and we would enjoy our leisure time more. We spend most of our time trying to make money. We all have financial woes at one time or another. We all respond to this stress in a different way. Some behaviors however can escalate to violence, and that violence could occur at work.



Financial strain can often seem overwhelming or out of control. Some people respond to this stress with anger. He/she is angry with the boss for not giving them the promotion with more pay. They are angry at the company for not paying more in wages. They are angry because they don't win the lottery and fix all their problems. This anger can easily escalate to illegal activities and even violence if not addressed.

Loss of Loved One

Day to day life is stressful for all of us. But when the loss of a loved is added, it is more than some people can handle. The distress on the person surviving, can be unbearable, and along with the feeling of "what more world?" can leave him/her feeling out of control. Even the change in the day to day routines of the survivor can be hard to accept. These intense feelings need an outlet, unfortunately, it can be in the form of lashing out at others.

Sometimes the loss of a loved one can trigger a depression that needs to be addressed. Depression can escalate into hopelessness, isolation, and a perception that their life is meaningless. Depression is a condition that needs to be reported and dealt with by professionals. Depression just doesn't go away, and needs to be treated.

Perceived Slights

Often, the person that is prone to workplace violence, has a belief that the world and everyone is against them. They believe that they are superior to others, and any criticisms are not accurate, and possibly even an attack. The perceived slights of others could range in a cross look to an attack on the integrity of this perceived victim.



These perceived slights will often escalate into anger. This can be: anger towards authority that tells them how to live, anger towards co-workers who are inferior to them, anger towards customers that interrupt their day.

Case Study

Sarah and Megan have been tasked with writing a draft for a portion of the company violence program. They are assigned the section on triggers to violence in the workplace. They both decide to form an outline first. Sarah wants to use the most obvious trigger of reprimands and terminations at the job. This is the first thing she thinks of when workplace violence is the subject. Megan agrees, and thinks another common trigger would be financial strain. Since everyone has this stress, Megan feels it is good to include it also.

Sarah says, "My cousin just passed away and I felt like I couldn't go to work for a few days. The loss of a loved one has got to be a trigger also." Megan agrees, and gives her condolences, and says, "that would be a good example." The last one that the ladies are going to include is perceived slights. Sarah thinks that they need to fully explain this concept as an imagined act of aggression. Explain this concept. Megan wants to include plenty of examples, like bumping into someone accidentally. Sarah agrees, and the women begin to write their rough draft.



Review Questions (Listen to the Audio or watch video for right answers)

1. Which of the following occurrences could escalate into violence?
 - a. A promotion
 - b. Reprimand
 - c. Employee of the month
 - d. Earned time

2. Who should handle disciplinary actions with people with violent backgrounds?
 - a. Security
 - b. General manager
 - c. Outside/third party
 - d. Human resources department

3. Who has financial stress/strain?
 - a. Managers
 - b. Salespeople
 - c. Everyone
 - d. No one

4. Who often gets the blame for financial stress?
 - a. The workplace
 - b. The grocery store
 - c. The church
 - d. The news



5. Loss of a loved one and its grief can escalate into:
 - a. Relief
 - b. Depression
 - c. Promotion
 - d. Security

6. The loss of a loved one is a source of:
 - a. Bonding
 - b. Relief
 - c. Stress
 - d. Dependence

7. Which of the below options could be a perceived slight to someone who is violent?
 - a. Unexpected delivery of flowers
 - b. Cut in hours
 - c. Promotion
 - d. A flat tire on the way to work

8. Perceived slights are:
 - a. Acts of aggression
 - b. Bullying
 - c. Stalking
 - d. Imagined acts of aggression

9. Sara and Megan are outlining a draft on:
 - a. Workplace violence
 - b. Triggers of violence
 - c. Stalking
 - d. Crisis response



10. What do the ladies include in their summary?

- a. Crisis management
- b. Crisis response
- c. Domestic abuse
- d. Loss of a loved one