

BULLIES, TROLLS & WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

by

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What Is Workplace Violence?

“Any actual or threatened physical, verbal or nonverbal abuse occurring in or outside the work setting.”

This definition includes such conduct as beatings, stabbings, suicides, rapes, psychological trauma, threats or obscene calls, intimidation, harassment of any kind, stalking, and being sworn or shouted at.

Other examples of **workplace violence** may include:

- Verbally threatening to inflict bodily harm;
- Attempting to cause physical harm by striking, pushing, or other aggressive acts;
- Using verbal harassment, abusive or offensive language or gestures, or other discourteous conduct;
- Engaging in disorderly conduct, shouting, throwing or pushing objects, punching walls, or slamming doors;
- Making false, malicious, or unfounded statements that tend to damage reputations or undermine authority; or
- Making inappropriate remarks or delusional statements.

What Factors Put Employees At Risk?

NIOSH has identified several factors that increase a worker's risk for becoming a victim of assault on the job. These include

1. Contact with the public;
2. Exchange of money;
3. Delivery of passengers, goods, or services;
4. Working alone or in small numbers; and
5. Late night or early morning shifts.

Source: *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*. NIOSH statistics are available by calling 1-800-35-NIOSH for recorded information, or on the Internet at www.osha.gov.

What Employees Are Most At Risk?

NIOSH has identified several types of workers that are at increased risk for becoming a victim of assault on the job. Workers most likely to become victims

1. Retail salespeople,
2. Police officers,
3. Private security guards,
4. Taxi drivers,
5. Prison guards,
6. Bartenders,
7. Mental health professionals,
8. Gas station attendants,
9. Convenience store and liquor store clerks and
10. Mental health custodial workers.

Source: *National Crime Victimization Survey* conducted by the Department of Justice, available at www.osha.gov.

What Behaviors To Watch For?

The U.S. Postal Service studied 15 assailants involved in acts of violence in postal service facilities and found that 14 had the following characteristics in common:

1. A history of violence,
2. Substance abuse,
3. Mental health problems, and/or
4. Criminal convictions.

People who are prone to commit workplace violence often provide warning signs before the violent act. Be aware of the general profile of a potentially violent employee, and heed the following warning signs.

Myth #1

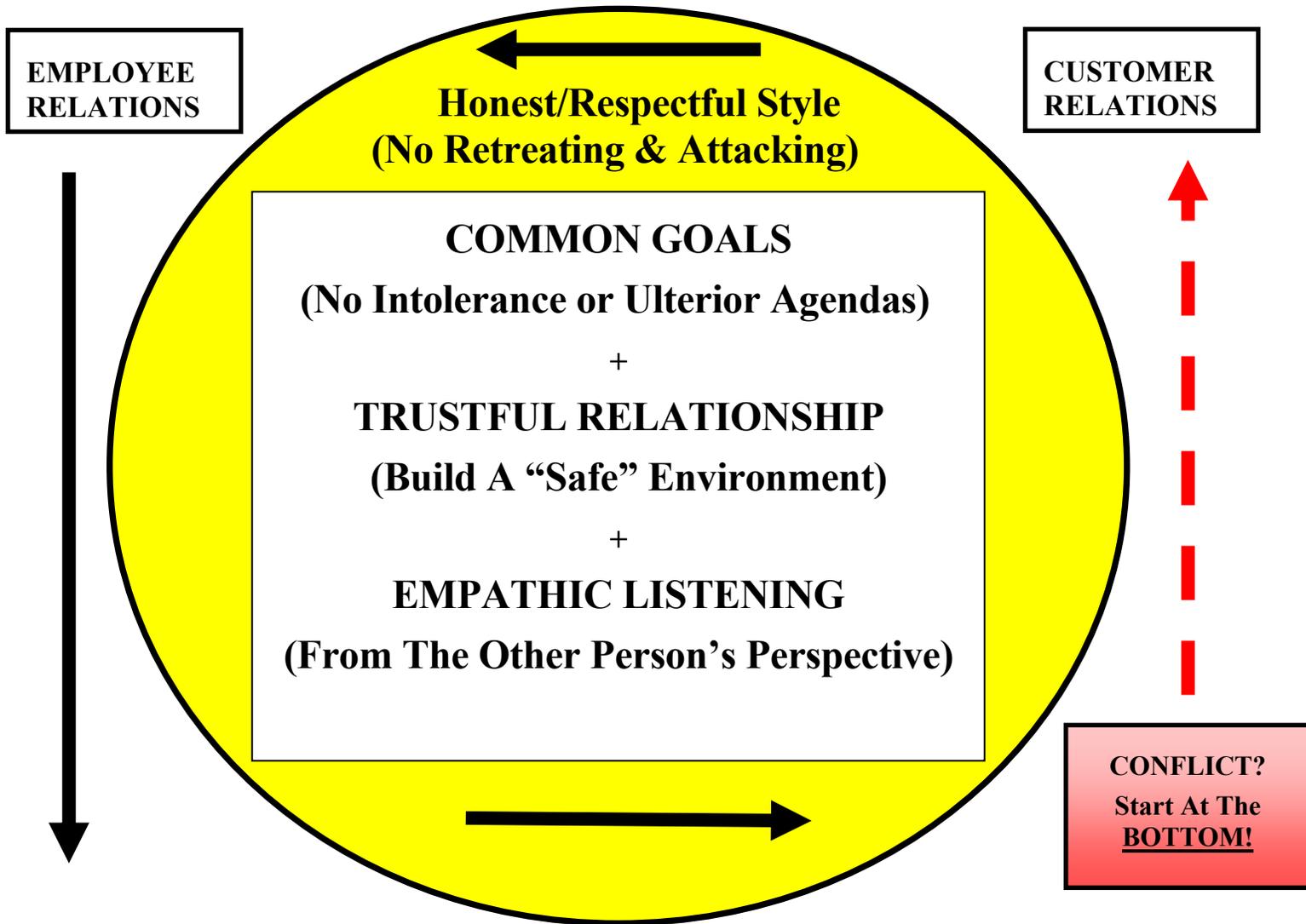
Violence is random and unpredictable; therefore, nothing this company does will protect us from something that we can't see, can't hear, and can't prepare for.

Fact. While there's no "sure bet" formula for predicting exactly who will become violent, there are some early warning signs that research has shown to have a high correlation to violence:

1. A criminal record or history of violent behavior, including a history of domestic violence;
2. Serious personal or family problems, such as divorce, death of a relative or close friend, or bankruptcy;
3. Statements indicating depression (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide;
4. Incidents involving an employee bringing weapon to the workplace, making inappropriate references to guns, or showing a fascination with weapons,
5. Threatening co-employees or exhibiting an "everyone is against me" attitude; paranoia,
6. Talking about past incidents of violence or exhibiting a fascination with violent behavior,
7. Direct or veiled threats that some violent action will take place;
8. A significant change in behavior, such as mood swings, outbursts, etc.;

9. A significant decline in work performance, including decreasing productivity or inconsistency in work performance, *e.g.*, alternating periods of high and low productivity;
10. An inability to accept criticism;
11. Drug and/or alcohol abuse;
12. Tendencies to be a loner — someone obsessed with the job but not involved with others;
13. Times of downsizing and restructuring in which employees may feel their jobs are threatened;
14. Poor workplace relationships, including intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior;
15. Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;
16. Increased mood swings;
17. Excessive tardiness or use of sick leave;
18. Repeatedly violating company rules or policies;
19. Showing poor health or hygiene.

E.I. COMMUNICATION MODEL



EXERCISES

WILMA and BETTY

Wilma is a very distraught mother of the hospital's patient. However, the mother is suspected of child abuse. As a result, the hospital's social worker, Betty, asks to see the mother in the conference room alone to discuss the case. The two women go into the conference room. Betty sits at the table across from Wilma. Wilma's back is to the door.

When Betty mentions that the hospital suspects that the child has been abused, Wilma turns violent. Wilma leaps across table, extends her fingernails into Betty's face and scratches her. Betty struggles to get past Wilma and make it to the door, but finally escapes.

Security comes and takes Wilma away.

FRED

Fred has a son who is a patient in the Hematology/Oncology ward. Fred is also going through a tough divorce from the child's mother.

The father has history of being problematic. Fred has become verbally abusive with the staff over the care they have been providing his son.

Today, Fred threatened the physician by saying, "if my child dies, I will kill you." Security is summoned and Fred is asked to leave the hospital. He complies after a nasty verbal confrontation with security.

BAM-BAM

Bam-Bam was brought into the ER for drowning. Bam-Bam was pronounced dead at the hospital. Several family members & friends have gathered in the waiting room. They are very distraught.

Barney accuses Betty of not watching Bam-Bam. Betty threatens Barney with profanity. The two quickly begin to physically attack each other.



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