Workplace Violence and the Lethal Employee: Corporate readiness for the worst case scenario

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Objectives

Part I: Prevention

• Participants will also learn how to **identify** potential employee behaviors that may be of concern (case studies presented and discussed), **applying appropriate policies** to address such concerns and **training management staff** on dealing with employee matters.
Objectives

Part I (Continued): Prevention

• Participants will understand why confident and positive forms of leadership, supervision, and management are essential to preventing and/or reducing workplace violence.
Objectives

Part II: Preparing for a Potential Attack

• Participants will also be able to develop proper employee awareness training and what to do in case of an active shooter incident (tactical, medical, and psychological).
Introduction

Keys to Organizational Success

1. Who we bring in the door
2. Sound policy and accountability standards
3. Leadership
Leadership

1. Competence
   - Empathy
   - Self – Aware
   - Socially Aware
   - Self - Regulation
   - Good Listener
   - Good Communicator
   - Consistent
   - Transparent
   - Patient

TRUST

2. Character
3. Connecting with People
   Soft Skills

The Planning Process

Step 1: Choosing a team
Step 2: Define the Problem
Step 3: Goals & Objectives
Step 4: Develop the Plan
Step 5: Write the Plan
Step 6: Implement the Plan & Reassess
Defining the Problem

- Where to Find Information
- Key Definitions
- OSHA Regulations
- Workplace Active Shooter Research
- Case Studies
Where to Find Information

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

**RUN – HIDE – FIGHT**

– Active Shooter booklet
– Pocket guide
– Posters

Retrieved from: [https://www.dhs.gov/publication/active-shooter-how-to-respond](https://www.dhs.gov/publication/active-shooter-how-to-respond)
Where to Find Information

Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)

- Instructor Guides
- Student Manuals
- PDF and PPT Lessons
- Online Courses

Where to Find Information

DHS - Interagency Security Committee

- Free publications on **Workplace Violence & Active Shooter Response** for federal workers.

*Source: [https://www.dhs.gov/publications](https://www.dhs.gov/publications)*
Key Definitions

Mass Murder:

The murdering of **four or more** persons during an event, within a specific geographical location, with no "cooling-off period" between the murders.

Key Definitions

Active Shooter:

An Active Shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.

Key Definitions

Active Shooter Profile:

• Most active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.

• Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly.

• Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation.

  — Employees must become stakeholders in their own personal safety.

Key Definitions

Active Shooter Motivations:

• Anger
• Revenge
• Untreated mental illness
• Ideology (political, religious or social change)

Source: DHS, Federal Emergency Management Administration (2016)
Key Definitions

Workplace Mass Shootings:

Employee related mass shooting incidents (4 or more killed) where a **triggering event** was **related to the workplace** and the active shooter was:

- Current employee
- Former employee
- Family member of employee (spouse or romantically attached)
Currently, there are no standards specific standards for workplace violence. However, under the General Duty Clause, Section 5 (a)(1):

“Employers are required to provide their employees with a place of employment that is free of recognizable hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious harm to its employees.”
Since the law creates a legal duty to protect, the central questions are:

- Was the hazard recognizable or foreseeable?
- Did the employer take feasible steps to abate the hazard?

*Beneke v. Accent Signage Systems*
Accent Signage Systems 2012

Should have Known?

The law suit alleged the company should have recognized the hazard because of his employment history and behavioral indicators.

• Should have taken steps to have a security guard present at the time of the termination

• Should never have allowed him to leave the workplace to retrieve the gun from his car before the meeting with supervisors.

Note: The company admitted they gave advanced notice they were going to fire Engeldinger. The company made a non-disclosed settlement.

Going Postal

US Post Office, Edmond, Okla.
August 20, 1986

Historical Overview
Patrick Henry Sherrill

Employee File Prior to Shooting:

- October 1985: 3 day suspension
- December 1985: Reprimand
- March, 1986: 14 day suspension
- May 1986: Letter of warning
- June 1986: Letter of warning
- August 1986: Verbal warning

August 19, 1986: The day before the Edmond massacre, supervisors met with Sherrill to discuss unsatisfactory work performance. *(Triggering Event)*

Prevention

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIORS: PRE-HIRE INDICATORS
Prevention

Who are we bringing in the door?

• Prevention is the best way to prevent workplace violence. The best opportunity for prevention is your selection process because we hire our problems.

A persons past is the best indicator of future performance
Pre-Employment Background

March 1985

• Written test was found below standards, but given points for veterans preferences.

• No investigation of previous employers by the Personnel Office (HR Failure)

• Rejected as a candidate for unsuitability, but pressured to hire for veterans preferences.

April 1985 - Sherrill was hired as a part-time flexible (PTF) Mail Carrier and entered his 90 - day introductory phase of employment.

30 Day Review:

• *Was told several times to do things, but either didn’t comprehend or just didn’t want to do it the way things are suppose to be done.*

• “*no sense of urgency*”

90 - Day Introductory Period

60 Day Review:

• “Failed 4 of the 5 categories”

• “Recommend a special 75-day evaluation”.

90 – Day Introductory Period

Special 75 Day Review:

“Sherrill has not improved since is last 60 day evaluation”..

Note: A required 80-day review was never conducted. After the 90 – day Introductory Period, Sherrill became a career postal carrier.

Prevention

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIORS: POST HIRE
Mass Shooting Research

Research conducted by Adam Lankford (2012) sought to understand the differences between mass shootings of terrorist, school shooters, and workplace shooters.

- Workplace shooters were far more likely to target specific people whom they felt victimized by (supervisors, bosses and co-workers).

- In many cases, workplace shooters were acting to symbolically attack the institution itself.

Behavioral Indicators

Bryce Williams
Employee profile

• Short tenured jobs working as a news reporter
• Hired 2012
• After only 2 months he received a reprimand for making coworkers feel threatened and uncomfortable on three separate occasions
• Easily offended
• Ordered to EAP for counseling
• Continued complaints by co-workers
• Terminated 2013
• Filed an EEOC complaint alleging racial discrimination and wrongful termination – Dismissed in July 2015

Overview of Shooting
Indicators of Workplace Violence

• Behavior that might indicate paranoia - “everybody is against me”
• Repeated violations of organizational policies
• Explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation
• Increased severe mood swings
• Noticeably unstable, emotional responses
• Empathy with individuals who commit violence

Behavioral Indicators

“It’s not unusual to find that the lethal employee, who suffers from chronic frustration, commits multiple murders suddenly after having experienced a triggering event that pushes him beyond his ability to cope” (Kelleher, p.19, 1997).

Behavioral Indicators

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

In most cases, "The Potentially violent employee will vocalize, or act out, violent intentions prior to committing a violent act" (Kelleher, p.21, 1997)

Potentially Lethal Employee

Prolonged Frustration

Behavioral warnings
- Increased severe mood swings
- Lack of empathy
- Easily offended
- Antisocial
- Social isolation
- Unstable emotional responses

Violent Intentions
- Threats
- Veiled threats
- Threatening gestures

Emotional Trigger
- Loss of Job
- Lost opportunity for promotion
- Loss of loved one
- Separation with significant other

Points of Intervention
Point of no return
Boom
Bryce Williams Manifesto

"My anger has been building steadily ... I've been a human powder keg for a while ... just waiting to go BOOM!!!! at any moment.” (CNN, 2015)

Early Intervention

LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
All Post Office Homicides

1998 US Postal Service Commission indicated a need to:

- Beefed up employment pre-screening measures
- Supervisor training to identify changes in personality and mood of workers
- **Coaching for better Interpersonal skills**
- Better handling of employee terminations.

Source: (1) Associated Press, Fox News (August 19, 2006) Survivors recall terror of “Going Postal” massacre 20 years later
(2) USPS Workplace Violence Improvement (WEI) Retrieved from :http://about.usps.com/strategic-planning/cs01/c1c-7.htm
Early Intervention

LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
All Post Office Homicides

Total Injuries

Total Fatalities

Post Office
Edmond, OK
1986

Total shooting incidents - 17


0 5 10 15 20 25

1 1 1 2 2 2 1 3

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Leadership is a Relationship

1. Competence
   - Empathy
   - Self – Aware
   - Socially Aware
   - Self - Regulation
   - Good Listener
   - Good Communicator
   - Consistent
   - Transparent
   - Patient

2. Character
   Influences others to accomplish the mission

3. Connecting with People
   Soft Skills

Toxic Leadership

1. Competence
   - Lack of Empathy
   - Self Centered
   - Bad Listener
   - Vague
   - Unfair
   - Inconsistent
   - Impatient

2. Character
   Uses positional authority to get things done

3. Connecting with People
   Soft Skills

Developing a **Fair** Procedural Justice Climate

What happens when we don’t treat people fairly?

- Ignoring good employees, and/or ignoring bad employees **creates a sense of injustice**. **Left** unchecked by a management, it can create a climate of unfairness in the entire system.
A Vigilante Model of Justice

When a perceived injustice in the workplace occurs, victims need justice:

- In order for employees to seek justice through formal channels they need to trust the system.
- If employees perceive it’s not, and they have the means, they are more likely to seek revenge by their own hand.
- If an employee takes revenge, and the revenge is greater than the injustice, the original aggressor becomes a victim that needs to seek revenge. (Hatfield and McCoy’s).

The type of revenge depends on the victim’s power to achieve justice.

Part II

TRAINING FOR THE WORST CASE SCENARIO
What to Expect from a Law Enforcement Response

Most active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene.

• Employees must take charge of their own personal safety.
Victim Employee Behaviors: Edmond

• Caught by surprise
• Didn’t recognize the sounds of gunshots
• Unsure where to exit
• Hid in unsecure areas and/or didn’t exit when they had the opportunity
• Didn’t seek cover when they got outside
• Panicked or “froze” (fight, flight or freeze)
Emotions are Impulses to Act

- **Amygdala** – Controls the emotional centers of the brain
- Emotions are impulses to act
- Emotional centers process faster than the cognitive areas of the brain
- Heightened emotions can override cognitive (logical) thinking
- It has been essential for the survival of our species

Survivor Employee Behavior: Edmond

Run – Hide - Fight

• Luck
• Recognized threat and committed to action
• Immediately ran for the nearest exit
• Hid in secure areas
• Hid in unsecure areas, but when the first opportunity arose they trusted their instinct and ran for an exit (or a more secure area)
• Fought back as a means of last resort
• DIDN’T GIVE UP: Had a survivors mindset
Psychological Conditioning

• The brain is a neural transmitter that sends chemically based electrical impulses through out the body to perform task.

• Performing new task requires building new neural pathways.

• Repetition of task speeds action without conscious thought.

Mental and Psychological Conditioning

Mental planning

• Scenario based table top exercises
• Group discussions for what to do
• **Reduce the number of options (KISS)**

Hands on physical training

• Dialing 9-1-1
• Walk through to exits
• Walk to Secure hiding locations (lock doors, barricade, start first aid)
• Shouting “GUN” to alert others
• Defensive tactics / improvised weapons
• Showing hands when law enforcement arrives
Remember Edmond

A comprehensive active shooter plan should include planning for after an attack. Accounting for psychological first aid deliveries in an EAP (short term and long term) is important for the long term health of the organization.
Conclusions

Objective One:

• Remember the first key to success is whom we bring in the door. We hire our problems! Prevention remains the best method to prevent workplace violence and an active shooter incident. Identifying pre-employment indicators of poor performance, or antisocial behaviors could prevent introducing workplace violence into your workforce.
Conclusions

Objective One (Continued):

• Most active shooters provided pre-attack indicators for violence. While hindsight maybe 20/20, Training your management and staff to identify and deal with potential employee behaviors that may be of concern is critically important.
Conclusions

Objective Two:

• Organizational success depends on leadership.

• While the development of sound policies and accountability standards are critically important to organizational success, a successful workplace violence policy is dependent on the perceived fairness of the system we create. Confident and positive forms of leadership, supervision, and management are essential to preventing and/or reducing workplace violence.
Conclusions

Objective Three:

- Being caught by surprise increases an employee’s probability of becoming a casualty in an active shooter incident. Developing proper employee awareness training and what to do in case of an active shooter incident (tactical, medical, and psychological) is critical to employee survival in an active shooter incident.


References


References

