

Employee Aggression and Potential Violence

Presented By:

Dennis A. Davis, Ph.D.

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT
LAW

FROM A DIFFERENT
ANGLE

**Ogletree
Deakins**

Agenda

- Workplace Bullying
- Workplace Violence
 - Risk Factors and Warning Signs
 - Intervention Techniques



Workplace Bullying

Repeated infliction of intentional, malicious, and abusive conduct which interferes with a person's ability to do his/her work and is substantial enough to cause physical and/or psychological harm and a reasonable person would find hostile or offensive

Some Commonly Reported Behaviors

- Glared at
- Excluded from work-related social gatherings
- Others storm out of area when you arrive
- Others consistently late for your meetings
- Given the “silent treatment”
- Treated in a rude or disrespectful manner
- Others refuse your request for assistance
- Others fail to deny false rumors about you
- Given little or no feedback
- Others delay action on matters important to you
- Yelled or shouted at in a hostile manner

More Commonly Reported Behaviors

- Negative comments about intelligence
- Consistently failed to return calls or emails
- Contributions ignored by others
- Someone interferes with your work activities
- Subjected to mean pranks
- Been lied to
- Others fail to give you important information
- Denied a raise without valid reason
- Subjected to derogatory name calling
- Target of rumors or gossip
- Show little empathy when you were having a tough time

Workplace Bullying Statistics

- 43% of bullying from co-workers
 - 36% Supervisors
 - 12% Customers
 - 5% Subordinates
 - 4% Others
- 25% of bullying targets have protected status
- 80% of bullying targets are women

Schools of Thought

- Some believe that bullying is the younger sibling to violence
- Some believe that bullying behavior can lead to violence...
 - On the part of the recipient
 - On the part of those doing the bullying

Homicides in the workplace 1997 – 2009

- Total – 8,127
- Crime-related – 6,169
- Work associate - 1,377
- Relative - 291
- Personal acquaintance – 290

Other Crimes in the Workplace

- One in six violent crimes occurs at work
 - 7% of all rapes
 - 8% of all robberies
 - 16% of all assaults

Stages of Violence

- Stage one – Early potential
- Stage two – Escalated potential
- Stage three – Realized potential

Stage One – Early Potential

- Objectifying and dehumanizing others
- Challenging authority
- Regularly becoming argumentative
- Alienating customers and clients
- Originating and spreading lies about others
- Swearing excessively; using sexually explicit language
- Abusing others verbally; sexually harassing others



Stage Two – Escalated Potential

- Arguing frequently and intensely
- Blatantly disregarding organizational policies and procedures
- Stealing from the company or from other employees
- Vandalism (property destruction)
- Making verbal threats
- Conveying unwanted sexual attention or violent intentions by letter, voice mail or e-mail
- Holding others responsible (blaming others)



Stage Three – Realized Potential

- Getting involved in physical confrontations and altercations
 - There is no such thing as “A little pushing and shoving”
 - Adults don’t get into fistfights, except if they are defending themselves or are out of control
- Displaying weapons
- Committing or attempting to commit assault, sexual assault, murder, arson or suicide



Intervention

Types of Victims

- **Unprepared:**
- Is aware that violence is a problem at work but has done nothing

Types of Victims

Unsecured:

- Has appropriate measures in place, but they are routinely circumvented

Types of Victims

Unsuspecting:

- This is the naïve victim who doesn't believe that bad stuff happens where they work

Types of Victims

Unintelligent:

- Does stupid things like smart mouths the bad guy

Types of Victims

Unfortunate:

- Some times even when everything is done right, bad stuff happens, but this is rare, usually the company has not done all that is possible

Hard Targeting

Hard targeting:

- Term borrowed from the military; it is the act of making oneself and one's organization less opportune targets

Hard Targeting

- **Mental rehearsal:**
- A part of hard targeting that asks you to mentally practice how you might respond in a given situation.
- Some of the questions asked: what would I do if..
 - An employee **threatened** me?
 - An employee **hit** me?
 - Fight or flight.

Hard Targeting

Escape routes:

- Always know where you are and how to flee if you need to

Hard Targeting

Furniture:

- Having a piece of furniture between you and the person you are diffusing helps to keep clear boundaries

Hard Targeting

Office / meeting area:

- Make sure that the meeting area is not set up such that your back is against a wall (no room to back away)
- Make certain that you can get to the door before the bad guy (in case fleeing is necessary)
- Make sure you don't have to go through the bad guy to get out (don't want to accidentally touch him, he will see it as an aggressive move)

Hard Targeting

Employees Turf:

- Meet the person away from his peer group
- When there is an audience, people tend to act out more, they put on a show

Hard Targeting

Clothing

- Men: tuck in your ties so the bad guy can not grab it
- Women: no heavy or thick necklaces or dangling earrings to grab

Hard Targeting

Communication with administration:

- Let other people in your department as well as in other departments know that you are meeting the bad guy
- Where
- What time so they can check on you

Hard Targeting

Reports:

- Everything must be documented--always!!

Diffusing Difficult People

- Diffusing is used when there is an individual on-site who is escalating...and you must prevent further escalation



Diffusing Difficult People

Identify Emotion of the difficult person

Most Common:

Anger:

- The emotion that results when I am hurt or rejected

Frustration:

- The emotion that results when I feel powerless



Diffusing Difficult People

Identify Emotion of the difficult person

Difference between the two....

Signs of Anger:

–Raised voice, and a sense of pleading in the words I use
(violence does not come from this)

Signs of Frustration:

–In your face, pounding my fist, stomping my feet, I am wrestling
with you for power

(violence comes from this)



Diffusing Difficult People

- No Verbal Poker(one-upsmanship)
- Empowerment (must help person feel powerful)
- Body Language (open)
- Eye Contact
- Men verses Women
- Eye Contact Rule of Thumb
(good only if they offer it) Follow their lead
- Touching (never a good idea)



Diffusing Difficult People

Mirroring Effects (people will do what we do)

- a. Evolution (says that mirroring is for survival)**
- b. In everyday life (all people tend to quiet down in libraries)**
- c. A test to see if it works (scratch your nose in front of others)**



Verbal Diffusing Techniques

Words and Phrases to Avoid

- No, Can't, Won't, Don't, Must, Must Not
 - These Words Are Commands
 - When You Use Commands You Take Away Options



Verbal Diffusing Techniques

Words and Phrases That Help

- Us, We, Ours
 - You Want the Bad Guy to Feel Aligned With You
- Let's
- How About?
- What Do You Think About This?
- Is It Possible That ?
 - These Words Are Suggestions
 - Ask Questions

Body Language

Body movements to use

- Facing (not challenging but squared up)
- Arms extended slightly outward and upward (suggesting open and willing to work together, not needing to be in charge)

Body Language

Body movements to avoid

- Arms crossed (I am bored, I already made up my mind)
- Hands in pockets, behind back (suggests being sneaky or evasive)
- No sudden moves