



INFORTAL WORLDWIDE
STRATEGIC CORPORATE INVESTIGATIONS

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE : PREVENTION

This article is designed as a brief guideline to assist you in creating greater awareness of workplace violence issues. This information will help in preventing workplace violence and provides a brief review for post-employment termination. We also recommend reviewing Infortal's article on Workplace Violence: Recognizing the Warning Signs.

This article is not intended to be comprehensive and is not a training manual. There are myriad issues involved in workplace-related violence. We strongly recommend that you consult with professional security experts that are capable of performing threat risk assessments any time that you become aware of someone exhibiting threatening or hostile behavior.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION: 25 Tips

With the global recession we see an increase frequency in company downsizings and layoffs; also called Reductions In Force (RIF's). Individual employees are generally more stressed, and all types of people including managers, clients and spouses or life partners may have greater difficulty coping with life and their personal situations.

Whether you are planning a larger RIF or terminating an individual employee's relationship with your company; you may need a refresher on ways to prevent, reduce or diffuse potential violence. The following 25 tips are not a comprehensive list of actions, but a general overall reminder of things to be aware of. Always work with experienced security professionals who understand and have worked with many workplace violence issues before proceeding on your own; it pays to be safe.

1. Keep the exit interview brief
2. Review the purpose of the meeting with the employee and what has led to the termination (poor performance, intimidating or threatening behavior, etc).
3. If the employee was given opportunities to improve this can be briefly re-stated (be polite but clear)
4. Schedule the exit interview with the subject employee a short time in advance of the weekend where possible; this may allow the employee time to discuss with family or friends, reduce some of the stress they may feel, and allows the employee to save face with family and friends
5. Avoid complete surprises
6. Exit interviewer should sit near the exit (never across a table opposite the door!)
7. Employee should not be allowed to bring a purse or briefcase into the exit interview. If they insist, the item should be briefly searched for possible weapons
8. Check that the exit room is cleared of items that can be used as weapons such as scissors, letter openers, glass vases, etc.
9. Always collect or immediately deactivate employee's keys & security access card(s)
10. Change access codes (non-card key systems) to all areas Subject had access to
11. Advise receptionist & security guards that employee is no longer granted access to your building & provide a photo and physical description of the subject & their vehicle
12. Allow employee to save face & maintain their sense of dignity during and following the



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termination process

13. Allow employee to say what is on their mind briefly and the opportunity to say what they would like to have happen next. Sometimes the employee has a request that can be accommodated, and some things can be done to diffuse potentially violent issues
14. Avoid putting the person down: do not allow disparaging remarks or attacking the person verbally
15. Offer retraining or outplacement assistance to the employee (very important in a bad economy).

16. If the person needs medical support or is worried about their medical insurance expiring quickly this should be offered (if the company agrees; even if it is not normally company policy to do so; a little expense here may save a lot of problems later)
17. Review the person's severance package and last paycheck with them, if possible, to avoid misunderstandings and fueling anger
18. Gauge the employee's responses to their exit package. Determine whether additional concerns or additional options may be available
19. Review the company's concern for the employees' future and provide a contact person if there are any problems—you do not want the employee blaming their co-workers if they become frustrated later; this may further complicate the situation
20. If you are aware of other serious issues that the person is facing such as a sick or elderly family member, bitter divorce, child custody battle, impending bankruptcy or financial pressures these should be discussed with your legal department and head of human resources, prior to the exit interview
21. Ask the person what they are thinking of doing next and wherever possible have them focus on the next step being a positive move forward; possible new opportunities, a chance to take time for themselves or do something new and more enjoyable.
22. Extend employee assistance plans and medical coverage for an extra month or two wherever possible.
23. Listen carefully for threatening or unusual comments: do not return threats, instead offer support. Your responses and actions can often help to diffuse threatening situations.
24. Make a note of the person's responses (verbatim; the actual words used are important in risk assessment) and any unusual behavior or language in order to evaluate whether the level of risk has been raised or lowered
25. Review all changes in the employee's actions or reactions with trained security professionals specializing in threat assessment.

Clinical Evaluations

In some serious threat cases, a Clinical Psychologist should be called in to evaluate the seriousness of a current or impending threat at the time of the exit interview. This involves a psychologist experienced in workplace violence & trauma threats, and preferably with hostage negotiation training. These evaluations are needed only for certain types of situation, not for all threat cases. In particular cases where the employee is exhibiting symptoms of mental illness and may harm themselves or others imminently.

In such cases the psychologist will make an evaluation of the person's current propensity for violence; if serious enough, an involuntary psychiatric evaluation can be made; this requires the recommendation of a health professional to the local police who can initiate an arrest based on a medical evaluation.



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Often an employee, who may be on prescription medications for personality and other disorders, may be off their normal medications that allow the person to function well when the medications are taken regularly. As their behavior degrades, they begin acting out in ways that may be considered hostile, intimidating or threatening to most people. It is important to note that in cases like this, the subject may not be thinking normally or rationally and the actions that they would normally take are not feasible for the person. This requires experienced medical psychological evaluation by a licensed practicing professional or admittance to a hospital for psychiatric medical evaluation.

CONTACT

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