

# Workplace: Making a Safe Environment

A step-by-step guide for business owners to create a threat-free zone

by Doc Elliot

▶ In the midst of COVID-19, workers in all industries are being affected by societal tensions, unprecedented stress and pressures at home. Those stressors find their way to the workplace, creating dangerous environments that put both employees and customers at great risk.

The following steps will help every business owner prevent workplace violence and keep employees and customers safe while instituting a culture of safety in the workplace.

Who Is at Risk for Workplace Violence?

There are four major types of workplace violence:

- Criminal intent (e.g., robbery by someone with no relationship to the business)
- Customer/client violence
- Worker-on-worker
- Personal relationship (i.e., domestic violence)

While workplace violence can affect anyone, there are certain risk factors that increase a person's risk, including gender and occupation. Women in particular are vulnerable to domestic violence in the workplace — they are twice as often the victim of workplace homicides, with 32% of the homicides committed by a domestic partner.

While taxi drivers, healthcare workers and other social work occupations have some of the highest rates of workplace violence, other sectors of employment are seeing an increase in workplace violence, too. These include government, education and health services, professional and business services, and retail. For these employees, workplace violence is the third leading cause of death on the job.

Occupations with the highest risk of workplace violence include any that interact with the public, are open after dark and serve alcohol.

## WHAT IS VIOLENCE PREVENTION TRAINING AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

In general, workplace violence is the product of the interaction between three factors:

- The person committing the violence,
- The triggering event that motivates the person, and
- A workplace that is more conducive to allowing violence to happen.

## WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION TRAINING CAN HELP MITIGATE ALL THREE FACTORS.

7 Key Steps to Identify, Address and Prevent Violence in the Workplace

**1. Analyze the workplace.** A thorough assessment of the workplace is necessary to understand where the bulk of a business's workplace violence prevention training should focus. This process is similar to risk management. Answering these questions will help business owners figure out where they are in terms of workplace violence prevention:

- Has there been violence in the workplace before?

- When, what kind, and who was involved?
- How was it handled?
- What systems were put in place afterward, and were they effective?
- If there have been no violent incidents in the company's history, what is the company doing well?
- Are there gaps in the company's workplace violence policies? Where?
- How safe is the physical environment? Which doors stay locked? How are employees protected if they leave late at night?

**2. Create a supportive environment.** Every training program starts with developing a relationship with employees. It is important that company leadership, including the HR department, make employees feel heard and supported at work.

For example, this could help workers who are experiencing domestic violence to be more open with their employer. Should the domestic partner show up at work, the employer is then able to respond accordingly. This also means that workers reporting potential violence or verbally threatening remarks should be supported and not face reprisals, regardless of who they are reporting. Workplace violence policies apply all the way up the corporate ladder and with any client.

**3. Offer communication and empathy training.** Workplace violence training is often about how to handle a violent episode as it is occurring, but offering workers training in effective, empathetic training and coaching can prevent it before it starts.

In today's crisis-driven environment, some organizations are partnering with psychologists and therapists to offer employees a safe outlet for their feelings at work.

**4. Establish a clear workplace violence policy.** Employers should consider how they handle workplace violence — what supports or disciplinary actions are in place for verbal and nonverbal threats and actions? And they should let their employees know this information with consistent, constant training.

**5. Commit to a non-violent workplace.** Commitment to a non-violent workplace means regularly allocating resources — money and time — to training workers and preventing workplace violence. And this workplace violence prevention training should be annual.

**6. Train employees to recognize warning signs.** Training employees to be alert to warning signs of potential workplace violence can stop an incident before it starts.

**7. Create an action plan, share it with employees, and practice.** No one wants to think about the worst-case scenario, much less practice it regularly, but practicing drills for active shooters and other workplace emergencies and having a plan in place could save lives.

Workplace violence prevention training and techniques have evolved over the years to reflect the real-life situations we are facing in the business world today. ■



### Warning Signs of Potential Violence

Signs include *some or all* of the following:

- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- Behavioral changes that include poor job performance
- Depression or withdrawal
- Complaints about unfair treatment
- Violation of company policies
- Mood swings and overreaction to criticism or evaluations
- Paranoia



A nationally renowned Federal Crisis Negotiation Specialist, Doc Elliot is founder and president of Phoenix Training Group. Since 1976, Phoenix Training Group has been the nation's leader in workplace violence prevention training, customizing effective anti-violence training programs for corporations across all industries.

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