

# A violent act-taking place at work

[Business](#), [Work](#)



As difficult as it may be to imagine a violent act-taking place at work, in these times it is an eventuality that cannot be ignored. Too frequently, these days, the evening news leads off with a report about a disgruntled employee committing some horrifying act of violence in the workplace. Something like that could never happen here, is what most assumes. Unfortunately, the statistics show that violence can and does happen in the workplace. In fact, the chances of violence occurring in the workplace are shockingly high and increasing. An important question that should be asked is, what causes violence in the workplace?

The answer to this question is very complex. There are numerous contributing factors that can push an employee to the point that may seem unbearable. To an employee, being perceived unfair is one of the significant factors. Many times the organization is looked upon as not treating their employees properly. Other contributing factors are, but not limited to, an unstable economy, downsizing, layoffs--each causes fear, depression, and paranoia, evaluations, lack of promotion or advancement, authoritarian management, relationships brought to the workplace, and stress (Liabig 33).

Stress is one of the more common causes of violence at any place of employment. The body's response to any demand on it for adaptation is called stress. A stressor may be acute or chronic. Stress can also be both good and bad. Examples of good stress are reasonable deadlines and competition. This type of stress if needed to function, without stress people become stagnates. The level of anxiety caused by a good stressor is usually in the low moderate range. Levels of high anxiety are okay for short periods of time.

If levels of high anxiety last for an extreme period then the stressor is bad, and the person functioning becomes impaired and overwhelmed (NIOSH 1). The failure to adapt to stress can cause clinical depression. Clinical depression is a depression that is organic in nature whose origin is usually a chemical imbalance or caused by outside factors. It is obvious that these circumstances may result in subsequent aggression. In turn, such feelings may produce intense emotions of anger and resentment, which may lead to the feeling of needing to harm the people that is responsible in some manner.

Other contributing factors that may trigger workplace aggression and violence frequently are related to three types of workplace changes. 1) The increased use of part-time and temporary workers. This causes aggressions for two reasons. First, the increased use of contingent workers makes existing employees feel threatened. Secondly, a revolving door of temps can make employees uncomfortable. 2) Management turnover and change. When bosses start changing, the workplace aggression level increases.

This is because employees may not like the new boss style, they may feel uncertain about their own job security or they may view the new managers as an opportunity to act out. 3) Major schedule changes. Employees who suddenly find themselves working a new shift after getting comfortable with a certain set of hours can become uneasy. Detecting the characteristics of an employee that may display some of the above attributes should certainly be continuously in effect (Caudron 51). It is important that data that is

collected be as specific as possible and focus on job performance or any unusual behavior on the job.

Recurring patterns should be noted. Everyone has an off day once in a while so observation or documentation should go on over a period of time.

Collection of data helps the supervisor make a fair and impartial assessment of job performance. It also guards against remembering only the peaks of performance, the good days and not the bad days. There are several characteristics that should alert an employer of possible signs of workplace aggression. Individuals who commit violence tend to fit a pattern. Often, they are loners, and the main focus of their lives is their job.

Absenteeism, which consists of frequent absences or days off with vague or unlikely excuses. Also included would be excessive use of sick leave, tardiness and early departures are some things to look for. There is also the factor of on-the-job absenteeism. This may entail an employee being regularly absent from post, long lunches and always preoccupied. Then there is the issue of personal appearance, attitude and behavior. An employer should take notice when the personal appearance becomes untidy and when distinct mood swings occur during the day for no apparent reason.

If the smell of alcohol and or excessive use of breath deodorizers are used and repeated unusual accidents on or off the job occur, yes the employer should take notice. Another issue that may create workplace aggression would be interpersonal relations. If there are complaints from co-workers and from clients on a regular basis, and if the employee has a tendency to avoid associates. Direct threats of violence, verbal abuse or intimidation toward

employees. An intense anger that does not defuse over time or a fascination with the killing power of weapons that go far beyond a hobbyist gun collection.

These behaviors are observable warning signs of violent behaviors. Having the ability to recognize is one thing but what counts the most is being able to prevent workplace violence. If it is not understood what triggers violence then it is difficult to prevent it. Although many acts of workplace violence appear completely random, there are actually many things companies can do to prevent violent outbreaks from occurring. The initial step would include the screening of potential employees thoroughly.

If the resources are not there, an outside service should be hired to conduct criminal background checks for a nominal cost. The implementation of a zero-tolerance policy with harsh repercussions for violent or threatening behavior at the workplace should be established. All threats of violence should be reported to the police immediately. Certain circumstances may even warrant the temporary use of a security firm. It is significant for an employer to create a workplace culture that encourages mutual respect and open communication.

It would be essential to conduct training for employees and supervisors that covers conflict resolution, how to report and handle complaints of unfair treatment and how to recognize signs of a potentially violent employee. The use of the Employee Assistance Program, which is a plan that provide employees with assistance for various problems, as a means to prevent workplace violence due to stress. All employees should be trained in

methods to handle stress. When firing or disciplining a potentially violent employee, the employer should be sensitive.

To sound as if the employee is being accused, is not a good approach. An example is to simply state that other employees have begun to feel fearful and that according to the company policy, it is required to take action. This approach will avoid blame. Also when firing or disciplining a potentially violent employee, the manager should make sure that they find something good to say about the employee (Liabig 33). By building up the persons dignity, it decreases the likelihood that the employee will see the manager as part of the larger corporate conspiracy that is out to get him or her.

Last but not least, it is very relevant for the employer to provide job counseling for terminated employees. Termination is a traumatic change and counseling can help these individuals cope. It is a fact that an individual can exhibit one or more warning signs and never resort to violence. It is important to remember that people have different levels of sensitivity. What is a violence-triggering event to one person may not be to another. Each case must be examined on an individual basis and, to the extent possible, viewed from that person's perspective.