

Essay on workplace stress and aggression: a relative perspective

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Workplace aggression and violence have become a serious problem for many organisations these days. Employees who see themselves as underpaid or unfairly treated may take such extreme steps. Speaking of United States, there are over one million incidents of workplace violence being reported daily. Such a serious issue not only affects the co-worker and the victim but also the customers. Sometimes, it can even tarnish the image of the company if that issue is reported in the media or newspaper.

According to the U. S. Department of Justice, workplace violence in United States has declined over the last two decades. However, it is still a cause of concern. In January 2013, 70 year old Arthur Douglas Harmon, allegedly shot and killed 48 year old Steve Singer, C. E. O. of the Scottsdale- based Fusion Contact centres LLC which is a call centre company. Harmon was pursuing a legal claim of \$ 20, 000 when he turned violent, killing Steve Singer and injuring two other co-workers. Harmon was on contract and had alleged that the call centre had not paid him in full for the contract work performed.

If we analyse this case, we can find the following causes that triggered this event:

- Workplace Conflict: There was a high degree of workplace conflict in this case. The shooting incident occurred while the mediation process was concluded between the contractor and the call centre, and it was awarded in the favour of the call centre. Harmon wanted \$20, 000 from the call centre for the alleged damages.

- Prolonged Stress and frustration among the employee: This is one of the leading factors of work related violence in America. Clearly, in this case the contractor was frustrated with the call centre as they blatantly refused to

listen to his demands and he had to resort to 'mediation' to get his dues. Fusion had allegedly failed to pay the contractor \$17,000 of a \$47,000 mentioned in the contract to refurbish the office. This situation might have caused some psychological stress to Harmon which eventually led him to take such an extreme step.

- Economic causes: Many workers have been affected by the ongoing economic crisis in the U. S. This incident took place after Harmon lost his claim during mediation. Moreover, a high unemployment rate of America has increased the insecurity in the minds of the employees.

- Failure of effective communication between the company and contractor: It is clear from the case that there was huge communication failure which led to 'mediation' and the subsequent violence.

Fusion contact centre was founded in 1999, and it has several clients from various industries. It has its call centres in different parts of America, and its services include customer care, technical support, billing enquiry, inbound sales and retention. Being in the customer-centric service business, Leaders of such a company must have following attributes:

- Hiring its employees: Since it is a service industry, its employees need to be hired with utmost care. Apart from the necessary technical skills, a thorough background check must be made of the prospective employee along with at least three reference checks. Even those working on a contractual basis must be selected based on merit and their background.

- Treat Employees and Contractors Fairly: There are concrete reasons to treat employees fairly. The mediators, arbitrators and courts will consider the fairness of the employer's disciplinary procedures when reviewing the

disciplinary or discharge decisions. Fairness also results in a wide range of positive employee outcomes. These include employee commitment, enhanced satisfaction and peace.

- Develop clear and robust company policies and employee-contractor handbooks: Employees and contractors must know that violating company policy especially when it comes to violence will not be tolerated. If an employee or a contractor shows such signs, a meeting with the manager will be initiated. Any acts of aggression and violence towards the co-workers or customers and the individual will be terminated from the company, and the concerned authorities would be contacted.

- Develop a committee to deal with such issues and improve the internal security: This committee must keep a track of the company policies and the relevant laws. Moreover, a good security agency must be hired to handle the security aspects of the company.

- Interact more with the employees and management to know if there is any resentment and try and solve it by addressing its core issues.

No company is immune from the rising threat of workplace violence. Some proactive measures and robust company policies can definitely reduce its occurrence. The victims of workplace violence (including co-workers) sometimes find it difficult to come out of shock and often quit the organisation or even their profession. Some of the coping strategies that might be beneficial to workers being subjected to workplace violence and stress are:

- Use of courts to take restraining orders: It can provide a legal relief to the victim of violence. The state law can provide a court order that would

prevent the alleged perpetrator from gaining access to the victim.

- Approach the employer for counselling or any help: Today, most of the organisations have policies that provide the victim of violence or an aggression with facilities like paid holidays, counselling sessions with the company appointed psychiatrist or human resource personnel. This can be a very good strategy to come out of shock and grief of violence.
- Be proactive in future and report any form of aggressive behaviour to the concerned authority: It is said that ' prevention is better than cure'. Most of the case of workplace violence would not have occurred had it not been detected and resolved earlier.
- Have a positive outlook and try to be vocal about any form of working issues.
- Try and assess the security of the work environment.
- Receive education and know the guidelines for the prevention of violence at the workplace: This is one of the most important coping strategies. Because, it would remove fear and stress from the victim's mind, and he would be confident that such an incident would never again happen in the future.
- Try to develop a proactive approach and report any issues which might lead to potential conflict.

Workplace violence can be avoided and resolved by a proactive and positive approach.

References

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