THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS: The Wave of the Future for Workplace Violence Prevention

Presented by:
Dr. Steve Albrecht, PHR, CPP
619-445-4735
DrSteve@DrSteveAlbrecht
San Diego, CA
OUR THEMES

Safety and security at work is everyone’s job. We take care of each other here.

Our organization will not tolerate threats at work or acts of workplace violence.

There should be consequences for employees or others who violate our workplace violence policies.

There should be support and assistance for every employee who needs help.
Can we *really* learn about Threat Assessment in two hours?
Yes!

By better understanding the concept of “targeted violence.”

By realizing that violence is a process itself.

By early identification of “attack related” behaviors.

By using Threat Assessment Team concepts.

By looking at each issue from the POV of the victim, subject, organization, and witnesses.

By being proactive.
THREAT ASSESSMENT / MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Human Resources
Police or Sheriff
Legal Counsel
Risk Management
EAP / Psych. Services
Employee’s Supervisor

Senior Leadership
Security Dept.
Labor Relations
Union Leaders
Facilities Manager
TA – TM Consultants
ASSESSING OUR EFFORTS

Is our goal “Peace” or “Justice?”

Can we tolerate ambiguous solutions? (“Case Closed” or “Case Inactive?”)

Can we see beyond our specialty areas?

Can we accept that people do not always want our help or our solutions?

Can we accept the fact we may fail?

Are we really willing to think outside the box?
PERPETRATORS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

**CATEGORY 1:** Criminals.

**CATEGORY 2:** Customers, taxpayers, students, patients, passengers, or vendors of the organization or its employees.

**CATEGORY 3:** Current or former employees.

**CATEGORY 4:** Spouse/partner of an employee.
WHAT IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

As defined by the media:
“a disgruntled ex-employee with an AK-47….”

For our purposes, it’s any incident that could:

- escalate and threaten the safety and security of an employee, department, or business;
- make any employee feel afraid to come to work, stay at work, or interact with others;
- involve vandalism to company or personal property;
- start at home and crossover to the workplace.
TYPES OF THREATS

- Direct threats
- Indirect threats
- Conditional threats
- Unlikely threats

Is the threatener a Howler or a Hunter?
HUNTERS vs. HOWLERS

The Dr. Fred Calhoun text

The United States Secret Service:
The “Exceptional Case Study Project”
&
The “Safe Schools Initiative”
Third-Party Threats

http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac.shtml
SUSPICIOUS INDICATORS?

Someone watching our buildings.
Cars parked nearby for too long.
Someone driving by, taking notes, video taping, or asking questions about us.
Mail or packages we’re not expecting.
“Vendors” who are not known to us.
Incoming phone calls, e-mails, letters, or visits that concern you.

Anything that’s out of the ordinary or not normal for our parking lots, streets, or facilities.
THE FIRST VIOLENCE EQUATION

Economic Stress +
Mental Illness +
Desire for Revenge
= Threat Potential

Which of these can we alter, deter, change, or provide solutions for?
WHAT IS A THREAT ASSESSMENT?

“Threat assessment is an investigative process leading to an opinion about the seriousness of a situation (Batza, 1990).”

Threat Assessment is not so much a science as an “intuitive art.”

Beware of statistics or profiles.

Threat Assessment is just a “Window in Time.”

More than just warning signs or threats alone, it’s a unique and overall view of changing, relevant, and related behaviors in context.
A key to identification and resolution of threat cases is early identification of “attack related” behaviors. Perpetrators of targeted acts of violence engage in covert and overt behaviors that precede and are linked to their attacks:

- they consider
- they plan
- they prepare
- they share (often with third parties)
- they move from ideas to actions

Source: USSS
ON-GOING TRENDS (BAD):

- “Zero tolerance” policies.
- “The Empty File Syndrome,” i.e. “We can’t fire him!”
- Fear of lawsuits by disgruntled ex-employees.
- Labor shortages and sliding workplace behavioral norms.
- Police as a late arriver.
- No background or poor reference checks.
- No on-going or database tracking of troubled or terminated employees.
- Misreading boundary probing behaviors.
ON-GOING TRENDS (GOOD):

- Flexible, thorough policies; covering DV, TRO’s, discipline, termination steps.
- Good documentation and courageous managers.
- Attorneys who add value and defend their organizations.
- More 80-20 interview questions.
- The police as partners.
- Effective pre-employment background investigations.
- “Case Inactive” versus “Case Closed.”
- Site Vulnerability Assessments.
- Threat Assessment Teams.
STRONG WPV POLICIES

Away from “zero tolerance” language.

More “duty to report” language for employees.

DV support and TRO notification language.

Progressive discipline and law enforcement consequences for perpetrators, including retaliation warning language.

Victim support, EAP information, and related self-help resources.

Copy the language of other well-crafted policies.
TA BASICS

Do we know who it is? (Do we manage the victim or the suspect?)

What does this person want? Can we solve his / her problem? (Cause, demand, or threat?)

Troubled or troubling?

Hunter or Howler?

Ideas to actions?

Homicidal or suicidal?

Repetition, escalation, or boundary probing?

HR issue, Police issue, or mental health issue?

Internal or external liaison partners?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INHIBITORS VS. IGNITORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love relationship(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends / social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests / hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job loss / Grades issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loner behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrational religious beliefs / thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-dimensional life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Interference”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDICATORS OF HIGHER RISK

- Psychotic, Schizophrenic, Bi-Polar
- Antisocial, Borderline, Paranoid, Narcissistic
- Substance Abuse
- Violent History
- Blaming Behavior
- Severe Depression

Albrecht’s “Big 4”?
Mullen’s “Big 3”?
BENEVOLENT SEVERANCE?
(a/ka/ “lovely parting gifts”)

Post-employment letter.
Uncontested unemployment insurance claim.
Resigning in lieu of termination.
Continuation of EAP benefits.
Severance package.
Outplacement services.
Quick access to final paycheck, vacation pay, retirement accounts.
Agreement on reference check calls.
Single point of contact.
Do we create more / higher “False Positives” when we use case management strategies?
THE LAST VIOLENCE EQUATION

Motive + Opportunity = Threat Potential

We will not always know the motive nor ever be able to change it.

Attacks are usually preceded by surveillance.

Bad people are deterred by good security, sound HR policies, constant awareness, sharing information with others, and reporting hunches, feelings, and suspicious indicators.
KEEP / STOP / START

To work more effectively in TMT groups, we can ask and answer three questions:

What do we need to **KEEP** doing, because it’s working?

What do we need to **STOP** doing, because it’s not working?

What do we need to **START** doing, because it will work better?