

Dealing With Angry People

**A presentation to:
ValueOptions'
Health & Performance Solutions Program**

Presenter:

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Fired worker kills himself, 5 others

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - He burst through the door, and the workers knew they had trouble. "Everyone's

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dying, another critically wounded. The most gravely wounded died later.

Among the dead: McCree, 41, a fired city beach cleaner who vowed to exact

vengeance and did -- a complex ex-Marine who massacred former co-workers.

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once, apparently caught while trying to hide. McCree lay beside the conference table where he first confronted the doomed workers.

**The news is full of
stories of hostility
at work**

Workplace Homicide: *Declined by half in 15 years...but still an issue*

| | |
|------|-------|
| 1992 | 1,044 |
| 1993 | 1,074 |
| 1994 | 1,080 |
| 1995 | 1,036 |
| 1996 | 927 |
| 1997 | 860 |
| 1998 | 714 |
| 1999 | 651 |
| 2000 | 677 |
| 2001 | 643 |
| 2002 | 609 |
| 2003 | 632 |
| 2004 | 559 |
| 2005 | 567 |
| 2006 | 540 |
| 2007 | 504 |
| 2008 | 517 |



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
<http://www.bls.gov/iif/home.htm#tables>

Scope of the Problem

For 2008, workplace homicide is **tied for third place** among the **causes** of workplace death in the United States

41% Transportation incidents

17% Contact with objects/equipment

15% Assaults and violence

15% Falls

9% Exposure to substances

3% Fire/explosion

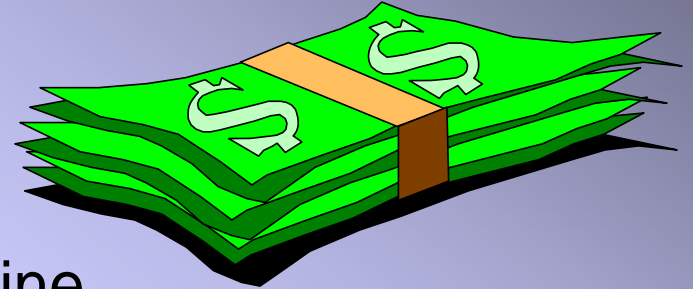
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Scope of the problem...

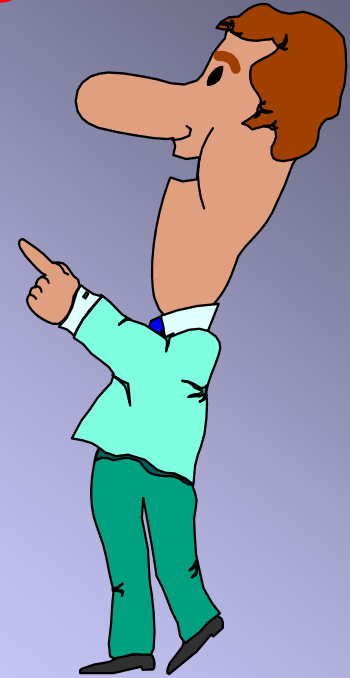
What would be the costs for an incident of workplace violence?

- Medical costs
- Lawsuits
- Workplace productivity decline
- Staff opting to quit rather than return to work
- Clients/customers fearful of our premises
- Workers Comp claims
- Insurance premium increases or cancellation
- Criminal authority investigations
- Negative public relations



Characteristics of Perpetrators

- Inflexible, rigid
- Chronically disgruntled
- Quick to perceive unfairness or malice
- Overreaction, especially to criticism
- Doesn't take responsibility (blames others)
- Actively or passively challenges authority
- May change jobs frequently because can't "fit in" with coworkers



Characteristics...

- Recent stressful event (job problems, death in family, foreclosure, divorce, etc.)
- Keeps a “list of wrongs” committed by others
- Sometimes a history of aggressive behavior or threats (direct or indirect)
- Frequently alludes to violent acts committed by others
- Fascination with weapons

Characteristics...

- Violent home life as a child
- Past medical care as a result of aggressive behavior
- Obsessing on a grudge
- Romantic infatuations
- Reclusive or extreme behavior
- May suffer from mental health disorders

Sources of Threats

The Obvious One: The person in front of you

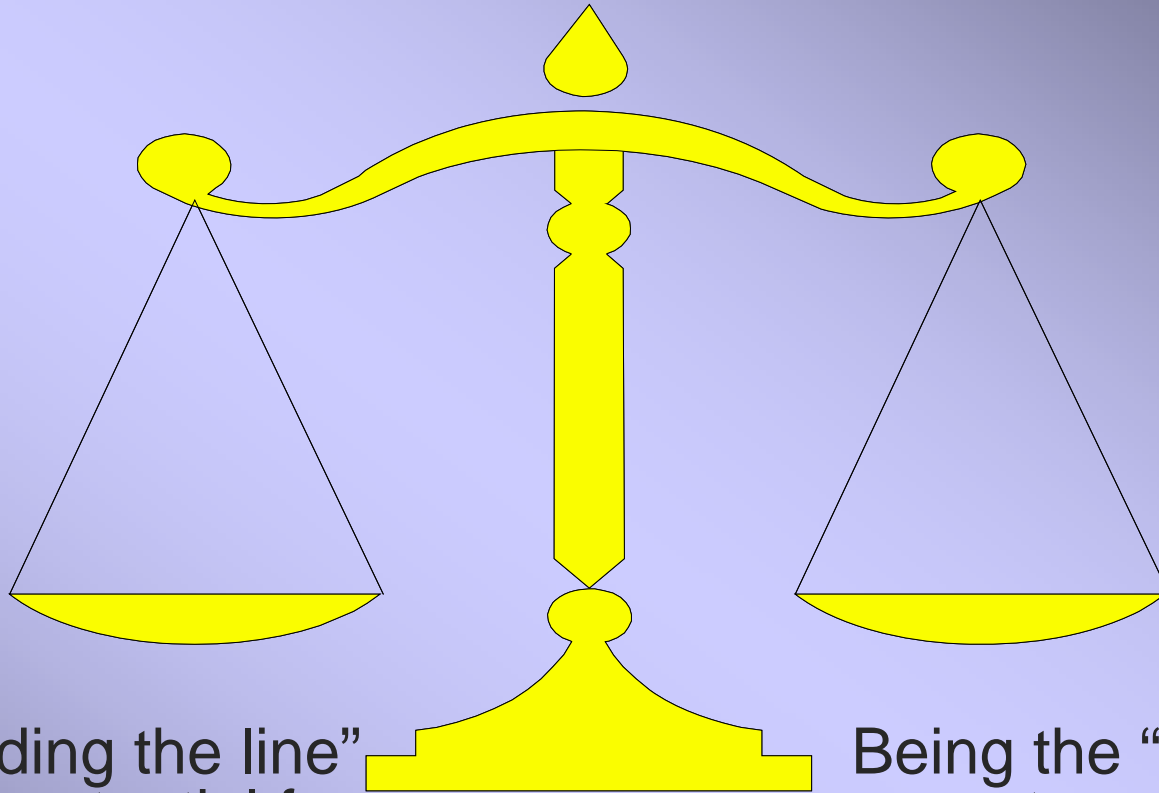
Disciplined, suspended or terminated person. Or someone facing negative criminal justice consequences. In other words, the person who sees YOU as standing between him/her and what he/she wants (e.g., employment, paycheck, parole)

But What About...

- Spouse, ex-spouse or significant other of the person that YOU are “harassing”
- Other family members or relatives (sons, dads, brothers, uncles, etc.)

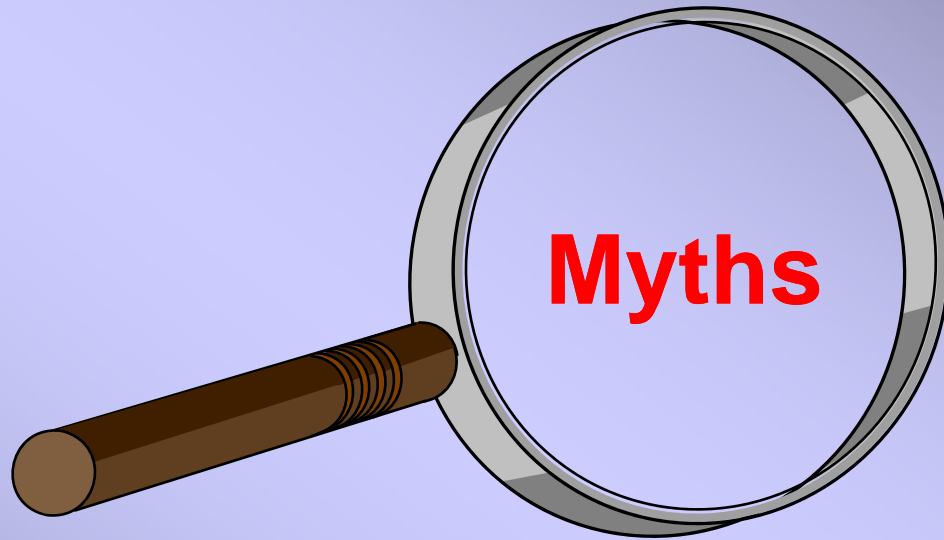


Violence Prevention is a Delicate Balance



“Holding the line”
with potential for
increased agitation
or aggression

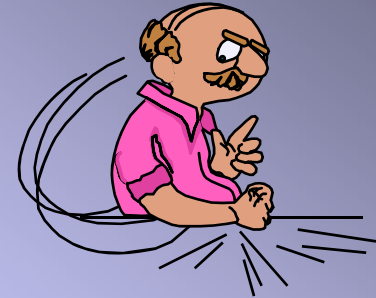
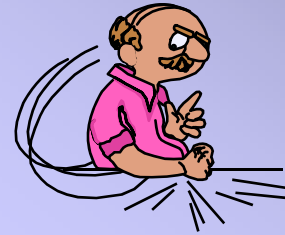
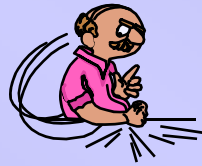
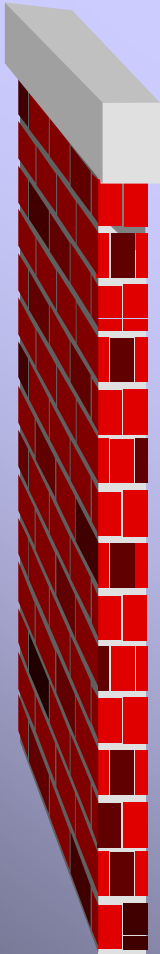
Being the “nice guy”
to avoid
confrontation



- Violent people just “**snap**” without warning or giving off clues
- Warning clues are too **subtle** for the average people to recognize

Be Watchful for the Escalating Nature of “Clues”

ACCEPTABLE
BEHAVIOR

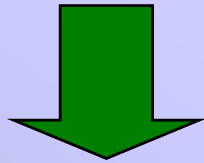


Verbal threats ⇒ Displays weapon ⇒ Uses weapon

Arguing ⇒ Tantrum outbursts ⇒ Rages

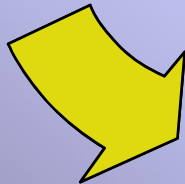
Stages of an Aggressive Event

1. Normal State



2. Tension Building

Perceived humiliation
Required to “jump through hoops”
Job termination
Loss of income



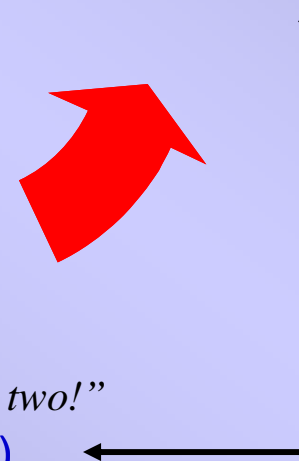
3. Escalation

“This is absolute BS!”
“Oh yeah, let me tell you a thing or two!”
(Diminished rational control)



4. ACTING OUT

Verbal or physical
(Loss of rational control)



Change is Often the Trigger

Phases of Working Through a Change

- Initial impact (*minutes, hours*)
- Disorganization, turmoil (*hours, days*)
- Coping, adjustment (*days, weeks*)
- Rebuilding, moving forward (*weeks, months*)

Most likely you'll only be dealing with people in the **initial impact** or **disorganization** phase. The initial impact phase can be dangerous because the person may feel "cornered." But the disorganization phase can also be a dangerous one, because it's there that shock is lifting and the full weight of the negative consequences can be seen or felt.

What Can You Do to Reduce Violence Potential

- If you see people in person, use a **standardized** reception function (*getting an “eyeball” on the person before the interaction*)
- Be aware of the need for security of **data** and **equipment**, especially when left unattended
- Pre-establish procedures to **alert** other staff or summon help



Reducing Potential . . .

- Physical comfort reduces stress
- Having access to door or **escape route**
- Seating in appropriate spot
- No items available that could be used as a **weapon**
- Don't serve hot drinks

Interacting With an Angry Person

- This is likely “not about you,” but **you still have to deal with it**
- Sometimes anger is real, other times it’s a device to **get your attention** or to demonstrate how serious the angry person is about the issue
- Lead without appearing to “dominate”
- What side of the table are you on?
- **Build rapport** (e.g., tone of voice, eye contact, are you displaying an “attitude,” etc.)
- Use **positive body language**

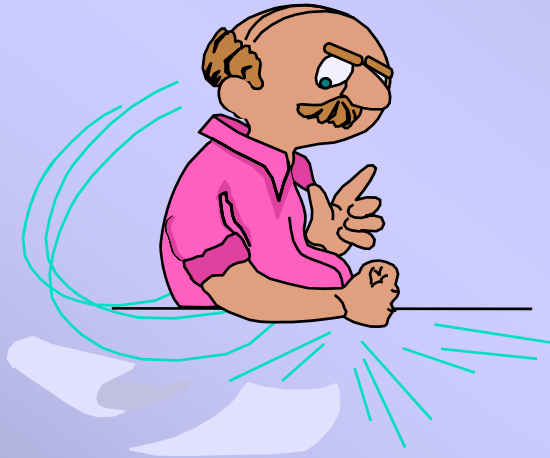
Person to Person Factors

- Use positive non-verbal communication (e.g., smiling, nodding in agreement, etc.)
- Respect **personal space** (i.e., being close enough to be supportive but not threatening)
- If standing, use an **open stance** rather than face-on
- Use a courteous, calm, **relaxed speaking style**
- **Eliminate time pressures** and deadlines
- Don't lose your temper, browbeat, talk down to, or try out-macho

Interacting

- **Listening** is active, alert and interested *SILENCE*
- Let them **ventilate** as long as it is done constructively
 - *People often have to work through their anger*
 - *Sometimes people just want to “have their say”*
- **Listen** some more unless talking seems to increase their agitation
 - *“Tell me more about ...”*

Interacting...



- Listen for the **real need**
- Anger or aggression often masks other feelings, such as fear, anxiety, confusion, desperation, helplessness, lowered self-esteem, loss of face, shame . . .

Catastrophic Thinking

Listen for “awfulizing” comments

*“I’ll **never** get another job”*

*“This will **ruin** my career”*

*“Now I’m going to **lose** my house”*

Listen for the “if-thens”

*“I’ve lost my job, **now** without a job I can’t pay my car note so I’ll lose my car, **then** without a car I can’t look for other work to pay my rent, **then** I’ll get evicted, **then** I’ll be a homeless person, **then, then, then**”*

Special Situations

- Emotionality (*full blown hysterics*)
- Intoxicated or stoned
- Comments about **suicide**
 - “I wish I were dead”*
 - “I’m tired of living”*
 - “The world would be better off without me”*
 - “I can’t go on anymore”*
- Comments about **assault/violence**
 - “I’m not leaving here alone”*
 - “I’m going to get him/her”*
 - “He/she will be sorry”*



Signs of High Stress

- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Getting “red-faced”
- Scowling, sneering, glaring
- Talking loud (or even yelling)
- Cursing
- Clenched fist or clenching of fist
- Exaggerated gestures
- Pacing or “approach-then-retreat” behavior



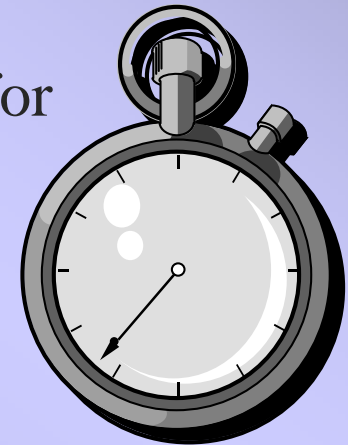
Many of these can be thought of as a “mini assault”

Threat Assessment

It's not just a simple "yes/no" decision

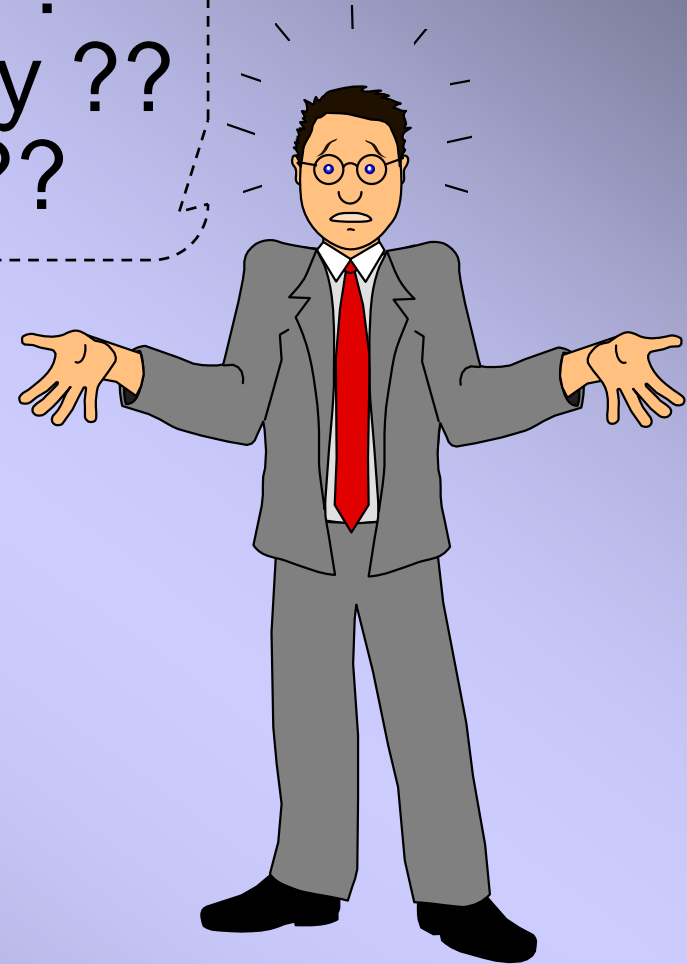
1. **Possible** threat but **no current danger** exists
2. **Intentional** threat made but **low** potential for violence
3. **Intentional** threat made with **moderate** potential for violence
4. **Intentional** threat made with **high** potential for violence (or act of violence committed)

The higher the threat potential, the less time you have to act



What is Your “Gut” Telling You?

9-1-1 ??
Run away ??
Fight ??



After-Effects of Workplace Violence

Grief

Anger/Blame

Distractibility

Apprehension

Guilt

Concentration

Startle reflex

Appetite loss

Restlessness

Vulnerability

Sleeping

Irritability

Emotional shock

Depression

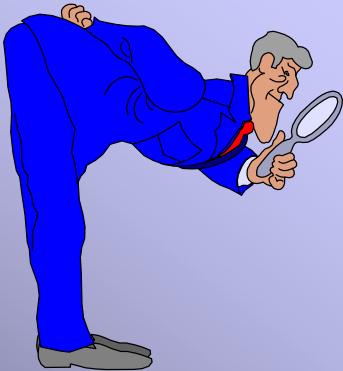
Flashbacks

Memory problems

Stress

Nightmares

Before You Re-Engage With an Aggressive Person



- The aggressive event has to be over
- Perpetrator sincerely wants to comply with your recommendations
- Perpetrator shows good impulse control
- Perpetrator has insight into past behavior

- Perpetrator would like to apologize and make amends
- Perpetrator has a positive attitude
- Perpetrator is future focused
- Perpetrator realizes the need for appropriate behavior in order to continue working with you



In Closing, Take it Seriously

- Always be aware of the potential for violence
- Know your resources and emergency procedures
- Document the incident while the details are still fresh in your memory
- Keep your defusing skills sharp
- Go with your “gut feeling”