

Workplace Violence: Ideas on Handling Terminations

Many reported workplace violence incidents start with terminations. Not all individuals distraught about job termination or layoff become violent; however, firings *are* the cause of most of the rampage attacks that occur in the workplace. To help mitigate the likelihood of a workplace violence tragedy, consider the following measures:

- **Plan all aspects of the meeting.** Define the time, location, individuals to be present and agenda clearly in advance.
 - *Protect the employee's dignity: don't advertise the event.* Making the termination "public" knowledge also makes it personally humiliating. Only involve those that have a need to know. This will also reduce the propensity for the spread of rumors.
 - *Conduct the meeting early in the week and first thing in the morning.* When feasible, plan the event around a timeframe that permits sufficient post-incident monitoring of the employee and the workplace. This provides the employee with time during the same week to meet with counselors or seek psychological assistance. In contrast, terminating employees at the end of the week allows an individual's feelings of hopelessness and anger to escalate if he or she is left alone or isolated over a weekend or holiday.
- **Conduct the meeting in a room with a door leading to the outside of the building.** If not possible, ensure that the employee will be escorted out of the building and off the premises after the meeting's conclusion. Supervisors and managers involved in the meeting should never walk the terminated employee through the workplace after a termination.
 - *Keep the termination meeting brief and to the point.* This is not the time to foster a debate.
 - *Advise the employee of non-admittance policy.* The terminated employee should be advised that, in accordance with the organization's policy, he/she is no longer permitted on the employer's property.
 - *Offer access to the employee assistance program.* Employee assistance counseling and out-placement services can help employees facing termination for whatever reason.
- **Ensure that all employee-owned property is returned at the separation.** Disable the employee's physical and electronic access to the facility, voicemail and e-mail prior to the meeting. Notify all relevant department heads immediately once the termination is completed. Also cancel the individual's corporate credit cards and phone cards.
 - *Do not allow the employee to return to his or her work station.* Ensure that they exit the building immediately. Advise them that all personal items will be either brought to them or sent to their home. All property should be screened for potential weapons.

- **Offer as generous a severance package as possible.** If the employee feels the organization cares about his or her well-being, potential anger can be diffused and post-incident violence minimized.
 - *Involve security/local law enforcement.* Identify potential violence-related problems. If concerned, arrange for on-site security. Also, local law enforcement should be alerted in case an officer response is necessary.

These ideas don't solve all of the challenges when terminating a person; however, they can help curtail and prevent someone from "going over the edge" into violence.