



## The Prism of Ethics in the Workplace and Its Contributions to Workplace Violence

*By Calvin Daniels*

The adopted culture within today's workplace contributes to the frequency of Workplace Violence. 'Applied Ethics' within the workplace contributes to the development of this culture. Statistics have outlined that insiders cause many Workplace Violence incidents. These insiders are familiar with operational practices and are familiar with security deficiencies. The risks associated with these deficiencies (physical or procedural) and the will of an employee to take action to solve a dispute creates unsafe working environments.

When insiders are familiar with the 'lay of the land' it is difficult for security personnel to identify potential threats and identify risk exposure. In order for security personnel to identify potential threats and exposure they must identify the root causes of Workplace Violence. One of these root causes that is often overlooked is 'Applied Ethics' and its influence on the organizational culture. Marion-Webster dictionary defines ethics as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with the moral duty and obligation." If a group of managing bodies were evaluated and ask a question about 'Applied Ethics' the majority of these organizations would outline that their organizational practices are in fact 'ethical' and that the majority of workplace violence issues are caused by bad hires. These organizations may never identify that there are issues associated with violence in the workplace that is linked to 'Organizational Agents' and the management practices that these agents implement to meet organizational goals.

The U.S. Department of Labor defines Workplace Violence as "any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site." Statistics outline that Workplace Violence is a major contributor to homicides within the workplace and that at least 2 million workers file complaints on being abused in the workplace every year. These statistics are gathered from reported incidents but when you identify the economic factors associated with the need to 'remain employed' the statistics of abuse may be even higher if employees choose not to report abuse. The following questions can be asked: How much of bad ethical practices do employees tolerate and choose not to report incidences? How are bad ethical practices putting your organizations at risk?

On the national and state levels there seems to be very little laws that fall outside of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970 that provide protection to employees from Workplace Violence. Organizations are given the option to develop sound policies and procedures in an effort to make the workplace safe. These policies and procedures rely primarily on effective communication; which in some large organizations can be blurred as information is distributed. Large organizations have a hard time policing these policies and procedures due to decentralization; and often rely on its 'agents' to promote policies who may be major contributors to Workplace Violence incidents. This often creates the perpetrator to victim conversion which puts the original perpetrator and other innocent employees at risk.

Effective policies and procedures must be created to address the threat of Workplace Violence. Policies and procedures are key to recognition and prevention. Each level of an organization can implement practices that will influence 'Applied Ethics' and that can make positive contributions to the organizations culture.

#### Human Resources

1. Ensure that detailed policies and procedures are in place - enforce publication.
2. Measure organizational culture by conducting climate surveys and evaluating turnover rates.
3. Promote open door policy and protect employees who report different forms of Workplace Violence.
4. Evaluate the managerial practices of all personnel who have been designated as 'Organizational Agents'.
5. Promote non-biased investigations.
6. Discourage the cronyism and nepotism method of management.

#### Line Management

1. Evaluate and promote organizational Workplace Violence policies.
2. Provide bi-annual training on Workplace Violence to subordinates.
3. Promote team building.
4. Communicate effectively with 'all' employees.
5. When Workplace Violence incidences occur ensure that all details of the incident are given to Human Resources for mitigation.

#### Victims

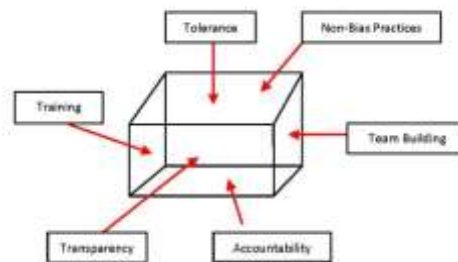
1. Strive to be an above average employee.
2. Identify current organizational policies.
3. Notify potential perpetrators through the use of Human Resource - placing perpetrator(s) on notice.
4. Document incidences.
5. Seek legal action.
6. Last but certainly not least, know your worth.

## Security Personnel

1. Ensure that there is a Workplace Violence policy in place.
2. Conduct non-biased investigations.
3. Gather information from Human Resources and Line Managers on incidents; make recommendations.
4. Foster a relationship with employees.
5. Inform top-level management of risk and threat levels.
6. Protect information that outlines physical security vulnerabilities.
7. Test Security and Comprehensive Emergency Management plans annually.

## Top Level Management

In an effort to prevent insider threats and their contributions to Workplace Violence organizations must be founded on an Ethical Prism. This prism consists of an organization's floor (Accountability), ceiling (Tolerance) and four walls (Transparency, Training, Non-Biased Practices and Team Building).



Accountability - Hold all employees accountable no matter what position they hold.

Tolerance – Implement "0" Tolerance practices on Workplace Violence.

Transparency – Implement a checks and balance system within the organization.

Training - Provide bi-annual Workplace Violence training to all employees.

Non-Biased Practices - Treat Everyone Equal.

Team Building - Ensure that the organization promotes team building.

Ethical practices foster the organizational culture that exists within the workforce. Sometimes these cultures stray away from the true meaning of 'Applied Ethics' and can cause an increase in Workplace Violence incidents. Organizational awareness can be raised by having sound policies and procedures in place; and by promoting these policies and procedures. Insiders pose the

greatest threats to organizations because they are familiar with the Physical Protection Systems in place. In an effort to reduce the risk associated with Workplace Violence security personnel must enforce security policies that are supported by ethical practices and must operate within an organizational culture that is ethical.

Organizations may not have the staff or expertise required to aid Workplace Violence prevention efforts. Fortunately, there are multiple resources that are available. Organizations such as the CTCH Security Business Consulting, International Association of Professional Security Consultants (IAPSC) and Human Resource Consulting Firms can help organizations develop policies that are beneficial to prevention. These organizations may also help reduce the risk associated with premise liability lawsuits that are normally the result of Workplace Violence incidents.