PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

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Did you ever have the pleasure of taking a course in statistics either in high school or college? My enduring memory of the statistics course I took in graduate school was the opportunity it gave me to catch up on my sleep while my eyes were still open. Statistics can often be quite boring because they often do not convey the humanity behind the numbers they represent. That said, I will risk giving the reader the opportunity to catch up on sleep while keeping one's eyes open by briefly sharing some statistics regarding workplace violence.

No one knows for sure how many incidents of workplace violence occur in a given year but some years ago the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimated that as many as one million workers are victims of workplace assaults each year. In 2004 the Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that there were 551 workplace murders out of a total of 5,703 fatal workplace injuries. 9% of those workplace murders were committed by co-workers or former co-workers. 13% of non-fatal assaults occur in social service settings. Since that is the milieu in which many of us work that is one statistic that ought to capture our attention.

Back to my contention that statistics tend to obscure the human impact of the numbers presented. Each of those one million workers who are victims of workplace assaults each year is a person whose injuries, while often physical, cannot be measured by medical criteria alone. Some of the invisible yet very real effects of workplace assaults are: fear, stress, loss of trust, anxiety, a sense of vulnerability, timidity and sometimes outright paranoia. Workplace violence is a very serious problem in the United States. No matter where we work, violence can and sometimes does occur anywhere, anytime, and sometimes without any prior warning. Given this reality, it is well for us to explore some of the dynamics

surrounding workplace violence and then identify and implement steps that can be taken to limit the impact of such violence.

Let me start by sharing some of what I will choose to call the "facts of life" in the human service field. If you are easily embarrassed you will not need to be concerned about anyone reading over your shoulder and discovering that you are looking at sexually explicit material. The facts of life as I see them in human services are:

1. There is no such thing as complete safety.
2. We must be accessible to be effective.
3. Some workplace violence is avoidable.
4. Most potential workplace violence is manageable.
5. God makes good out of bad.

As you can see, these facts of life are a bad news/good news collection of beliefs. People who want to work in a totally safe environment surely do not want to work in the human service field. The very nature of social work and its related professions requires that workers be physically and sometimes emotionally accessible to the public. Experience and research has also taught us that while workplace violence is not always predictable it is certainly in some cases preventable. Further, when workplace violence occurs, if staff have been properly trained it is often manageable, though very upsetting and often quite frightening. Finally, God is bigger than our circumstances and knows what will happen to us before circumstances are even set into motion that will create violent workplace incidents. God is able in His love and wisdom to take what appears to be very bad and make out of it something that ultimately brings glory to Himself.   Frankly, without that hope I find the potential of workplace violence quite dreadful.

In workplace settings there are usually three types of situations in which workplace violence can occur. First, there are situations that we (and fellow staff members) can control. Second, there are situations that we can influence. Third, there are situations over which we have virtually no control. Let me illustrate these three types of situations. If you handle money frequently in your job there are ways of reducing and even eliminating the possibility for violence by establishing safety procedures which, if followed, will eliminate most violent situations. Always locking office doors, varying routines if trips to a bank are necessary, and never opening a safe in the presence of any non-staff member are just several ways to reduce or eliminate exposure to violence. There are many other situations which we can control, if not completely, at least to a significant degree which again minimizes greatly the threat of violence. There are also situations that we can influence. Certainly one of the most obvious ways in which we can influence potentially violent situations is to be sure that the way we speak and act towards others, both co-workers and consumers, is sensitive and respectful. Since we know that people with whom we work as well as people we serve are often living under great stress it behooves us to speak and act respectfully towards everyone and to do everything possible to preserve people's dignity even when we must enforce rules and make

unpopular decisions. Finally, there are situations over which we have no control. A simple and sad example is that of a fellow employee who for seemingly no reason assaults a co-worker without any warning. Fortunately, those situations represent a small minority of the total number of workplace assaults that occur each year.   The primary focus of this paper will be those situations which we can either control or influence.

People who have researched workplace violence tell us that there are some basic risk factors that increase the potential for violence in the workplace. Briefly, here are those risk factors:
1. **Interacting with the public**
2. **Exchanging money**
3. **Delivering services or goods**
4. **Working late at night or during early morning hours**
5. **Working alone**
6. **Guarding valuable goods or property**
7. **Dealing with violent people or volatile situations**

If you are currently working in a human service agency you will immediately recognize that at least several of these risks factors, if not most of them, are part and parcel of your daily work experience. Before you start immediately looking over your shoulder it is important to remember several facts that relate to workplace violence:
1. **Violence rarely occurs without some warning signs.**
2. **Negativity and pessimism, nurtured by the emotions of anger, resentment and revenge, can produce the fruit of violence.**
3. **Beneath almost all acts of workplace violence is a sense of helplessness;**
   a. **"No one listens to me".**
   b. **"No one shows me any respect".**

When workplace violent incidents occur at such a level that they are carried by media outlets it is not uncommon to hear a witness or victim say something like, "I never saw it coming. Yesterday he was just another worker and today he tried to kill me. I can't believe that this has happened." If those statements represented the average workplace violent incident then we would all have reason to reconsider our choice of professions. However, looking behind the headlines and sorting through rumor until facts are exposed it is often the case that a violent workplace incident is the end result of precipitating factors that could have and should have been seen and dealt with appropriately.

Industrial psychologists use the phrase "toxic work environments" to describe organizations that are characterized by the following management distinctives:
1. **An authoritarian style of management.**
2. **Top down communication only.**
3. **A high degree of polarization between executive levels and the rest of the workforce.**

Have you ever worked in such an organization? I know in the past I have and, looking back at those experiences, I can understand how anger and resentment build up in the workforce until finally someone feels that he/she can take it no longer and violence erupts. A reasonable question to ask as it relates to the characteristics listed above is, can we control or influence any of these characteristics? If you are a manager or a supervisor then it is certainly possible to control at some level these characteristics. If you are an employee with no supervisory responsibility at all then controlling the characteristics is beyond your reach. One contribution you may be able to provide to your co-workers is to be sensitive to how these characteristics are influencing them. Then, if you perceive the possibility of violence festering under the surface it is your opportunity to bring this possibility to the attention of your superiors. Whether they listen and take appropriate action is again beyond your control.

When management in most organizations looks at a potential problem one of the bottom line questions seems to always come down to "how much will it cost us to deal with this situation?". Let me attempt an oversimplified cost/benefit analysis of this situation. First and most obviously, all of us who are committed to the betterment of others want to do everything we possibly can, regardless of our position in the organization, to help create and maintain a safe environment for our co-workers, our consumers, and ourselves. If that is simply crass self-preservation disguised by euphemisms, then more power to self-preservation. It only takes one violent workplace incident to call everyone's attention to the importance of placing our energy and efforts behind prevention. There is a second and less noble reason for preventing workplace violence. If we are not actively working to prevent violence in the workplace then we are, by default, helping to sustain the grossly over-exaggerated lifestyles of lawyers. I happen to like lawyers since my oldest son is one and my wife has worked for many of them for many years. That said, I have no great need to help support them. If we are not diligent in our hiring processes and we hire an employee who turns out to have a violent employment history, we can be quite sure that a plaintiff's attorney will be pointing the finger at us in court someday saying "you knew (or should have known) that he/she had been violent in the past and you therefore should not have hired him/her, show me the money!". If as managers and supervisors we hear speech or see behaviors that can ultimately lead to violent situations and we do not take appropriate action we also may be facing that same lawyer (or perhaps a new one) and we will hear the same refrain, "Show me the money!". Finally, if speech or behaviors that are unacceptable in the workplace have been tolerated over a period of time and out of the misguided belief that we are trying to allow employees to work out their differences among themselves until finally a violent assault takes place, we will be revisiting that courtroom and it will be "deja vu all over again". Remember at the beginning of this paper we looked at the kinds of situations that relate to workplace violence. They were situations we can control, situations we can influence, and situations we cannot control. When we fail to exercise the controls and/or influence that is within our grasp and violence occurs then the legal, financial and moral consequences should not come as a surprise.

So far we have looked at the reality of violence in the workplace, some of the factors contributing to that violence, and reasons why we should actively work to avoid such incidents. Now let's begin to explore what we can do specifically to prevent workplace violence. Following is a list of some prevention strategies, clearly not inclusive, that can be used in almost any workplace setting.

1. Assess the potential for violence. This will mean looking at both the physical as well as the emotional and relational environment in which you work.

2. Create and distribute clear policies on reporting violence/threatening incidents. If you are a manager then this is your responsibility. If you are a non-managerial employee you can certainly request that such policies be created and distributed.

3. Communicate with staff regarding potentially violent consumers and situations. As is true in all workplace situations, communication is one of the best preventive tools you can use. If management is aware that a particular consumer is potentially violent then it is management's moral and probably legal obligation to share this information in a discreet and honest manner.

4. Provide training to staff. It may be possible for your organization to bring in an outside trainer who has some expertise in this field. Lacking that capacity, some in-house training can certainly be arranged.   As Dr.Werner Von Braun used to say, "This is not rocket science".

5. Interview applicants thoroughly. Later in this paper we will look at this issue more thoroughly but suffice it to say that the best time to stop workplace violence is before it begins. Thorough and effective interview techniques can help significantly in this regard.

6. Enforce policies and procedures consistently.   Few issues in the workplace create greater dissatisfaction then inconsistent and unfair application of policies and procedures. One would think that this would be a no-brainer but given the experience of many people in human service organizations it does not appear to be so.

7. Control access to the workplace. This may involve devising a secure entry way that limits access to only those people who actually belong in your building. This may also involve some internal restructuring of office locations and other workplace environment factors.

8. Create visibility and make communication as effective as possible. This might include providing small windows in case manager's office doors and could also include providing staff who regularly walk through buildings

(particularly residential facilities) with walkie talkies or similar equipment.

9. Provide adequate lighting. Again, this seems to be a no-brainer.   The bible says "Men love darkness rather than light" (my wife likes the fact that the reference is specifically to men). Bright, non-glare lighting is in itself a deterrent to people who are considering unacceptable actions in the workplace.

10. Avoid routines when handling money. Previous comments in this paper on this subject still apply. Don't take money to the bank on the same day and at the same time regularly. Mix up your schedule so people who are observing you, perhaps without your knowledge, will not be able to assign a pattern to your behavior. Other steps to take involving money are in some cases quite obvious. Do not open a safe in the presence of consumers, and preferably not in the presence of co-workers unless they have reason to be involved in money matters in your organization.

11. Create/distribute clear procedures for responses to violent incidents. Since we cannot control all violent incidents we surely can control our preparedness to respond with specific directions that all employees have at their disposal, understand and can act upon.

Let's return briefly to the first point mentioned above. How can you assess risk factors in your workplace environment? Several ideas come to mind:

1. Create an employee team that will research internal risk factors in your workplace. Empower them not only to report back to you (if you are a manager) but then accept and act upon viable recommendations coming out of that research. This may mean that the employee team actually walks through every single area of your building to look at such basic issues as lighting, secure doors, the location of offices where employees will be working with consumers, and other such related issues.

2. Perform a personal risk factor analysis. Have you ever looked at your office (its layout, the items on your desk that are within reach of the consumer, etc.) from the perspective of the consumer or possibly a co-worker who might be agitated or disturbed? Do you have items on your desk that are either heavy enough or sharp enough to be used as weapons by someone sitting across from you who reaches a breaking point and wants to strike out at you? Most of us have such items readily available to anyone who decides to use them. It will not take much effort or intelligence to

remove those items from at least the immediate reach of someone on the other side of your desk. The point here is simple. Don't provide ammunition to somebody who is about to start a war. Another issue of which you should be aware is the actual physical arrangement of your office. Is your desk and chair situated in such a manner that if someone on the other side of your desk becomes agitated and potentially violent that you can leave the office without first having to confront that person? This issue may require more thought and planning but in most cases it is possible to arrange your desk so that in an emergency you can be the first one to leave with the assurance that a potentially violent person will be right behind you. There is an old saying that goes, "If you are being run out of town get ahead of the mob so it looks like you are leading a parade". Enough said. You may also want to give some thought to how you actually sit in your chair when you are speaking to or meeting with someone who might become violent at some point during the interaction. If your tendency is to lean back in the chair to either feel comfortable or create the impression that you are cool and in control, you might want to reconsider that posture. If it becomes necessary for you to get up quickly it will be very difficult to do so if you are leaning back. You might want to practice sitting in your chair with your feet in such a position that if you need to get up quickly your body will not get ahead of your feet and subsequently place your nose squarely on the floor. In addition to the pain of being assaulted there might be the humiliation of explaining to co-workers that you were kicked in the rear because you literally fell on your face while trying to get away.

When we talk about assessing risk factors we certainly need to consider not just environmental issues but also human attitudes and behaviors that can serve as warning signs. Here is a list (again not inclusive) of behaviors and attitudes that should cause us to pay close attention to people exhibiting these behaviors and attitudes.

➢ a history of violent behavior
➢ demonstrates obsessive behaviors
➢ displays angry outbursts with little provocation
➢ sullen or withdrawn
➢ a history of serious family problems
➢ makes threats (implicit or explicit)
➢ likes to intimidate others
➢ has serious financial problems
➢ displays open disgust for authority figures

> ➤ expresses feelings of persecution by others

Please understand that a person who exhibits one of the above list of behaviors or attitudes is not necessarily somebody who is going to become violent. However, when you begin to see clusters of behaviors and attitudes they must be taken seriously and preventive measures must then be implemented. It also almost goes without saying (although I am obviously saying it anyhow) that when people are under the influence of either alcohol and/or drugs such behaviors and attitudes are often exaggerated and the potential for violence is magnified.

Earlier in this presentation I briefly referenced the importance of interviewing employment applicants thoroughly and considering this a violence prevention strategy. I would like to flesh out that concept. It would be presumptuous and foolish to suggest that if we do an excellent job of interviewing then we will never experience workplace violence perpetrated by employees. Such a statement would be naïve at best and dishonest at worst. However, there are some interview techniques that can be used to identify applicants who have the potential to become violent under certain circumstances. It is to the advantage of everyone concerned that we use all such techniques to again create the safest workplace environment possible. Following are some questions that should be asked (not necessarily all of them) in an interview to assist in the process of assessing an applicant's suitability for employment as well as their potential for violence in the workplace.

1. Have you ever felt that you were treated unfairly in a job?
2. What did you do about the situation?
3. Why do you think you were treated unfairly?
4. What can a supervisor do to make you angry? (applicants who say "I never get angry" either for dispositional or religious reasons are either one step away from sainthood, totally oblivious to who they are, or plain deceptive – we want to avoid such people regardless of which category they fall into).
5. What do you do when a supervisor makes you angry?
6. When is it hard for you to admit that you made a mistake?
7. In what ways can you be difficult?
8. When do you fail to confront people when you really should?

Since these are not typical interview questions it is important to allow adequate time for people to respond. Pat answers to such questions should be a red flag when we are looking at an applicant's suitability.

Sometimes applicants tell us things about themselves without our ever having to ask questions. When you are reviewing an applicant's employment application it is wise to compare the application to the applicant's resume. Are dates and facts consistent? Is the same information provided in both documents? If there are gaps in a person's work history ask why and don't accept simplistic answers ("I needed to find myself".) Hopefully your organization has an iron clad rule that requires that all applicants be subjected to a criminal record check covering any states in

which they have indicated they have lived. If the applicant will have any contact at all in any workplace setting with children then a child abuse history clearance must also be required. When the applicant is filling out those forms remind him/her that any inconsistency between verbal statements and the actual criminal history and child abuse checks will be immediate cause for termination. If an applicant will work with money or bookkeeping then a credit check is also a must. It is simply not possible to assess a person's character by talking to them for the brief time that usually encompasses an employment interview. If an educational degree or some type of licensure or certification is a job requirement insist on seeing the original of that document. Copies can be made for employment record purposes but the original is essential if you are going to be certain that what you see is what you get. Even then, there are folks who find ways of creating very impressive but nonetheless fraudulent documents. In this situation you can only do what is within your control. Does you organization do employment reference checks? If not, you are playing Russian roulette with a loaded gun. Don't assume that because someone worked with a previous employer for a long period of time that their employment experience was positive. Someone in your organization who is trained to do so should be contacting at least two or three previous employers. It is quite important that this person speak to the person who actually supervised the applicant. Speaking to co-workers is of little or no use. Even my mother used to tell people that I was a good guy. One good question to ask during the interview is as follows: "When we talk to your previous employers tell us what words they will use to describe you and your work". You will record their responses and when an employer tells you that they can only confirm the applicant's position and employment dates one way to attempt to illicit further information is to say, "I understand that you don't want to divulge any information that would be considered confidential. Let me tell you what your former employee said you would say and if you would be kind enough to simply tell me if that sounds correct". You can then recite the words that the employee said his/her supervisor would use to describe him/her. This approach does not always work but it sometimes is a way to get around the "name, rank and serial number" response that is too often available anymore when doing employment reference checks.

There is a lot more that can be said about interviewing but we do need to move along. I want to return briefly to the suggestion that enforcing policies and procedures consistently is one way to avoid potentially violent situations. We have already discussed the fact that one of the behavioral risk factors signaling potentially violent behavior is the expressed belief by some employees that they are being ignored and/or persecuted. It is true that feelings of persecution are often indicators of a troubled person. Sadly however, sometimes the fact that employees feel ignored or persecuted may have some have some basis in fact. When that situation exists it is often the product of lack of consistent enforcement of policies and procedures. When we do not enforce policies and procedures consistently there are at least several obvious consequences. There is at least the perception of favoritism, where certain employees are believed to be given more slack than others. Additionally, some warning signs that potentially violent situations may occur can

be missed when inconsistent policy and procedure enforcement is prevalent. It is not unreasonable for employees to deduce that unacceptable speech and behavior is at least tolerated when certain policies or procedures are either ignored or altered. There is a simple maxim that says, "Behaviors and speech that are not confronted are reinforced". Finally, there is also the perception that the leadership in place is either weak, ineffective or both and this is a perception that no organization can afford to project.

Ultimately we are talking here about holding people, both employees and consumers, accountable for their speech and behavior. Relative to employees we should be focusing on whether or not job descriptions are being followed. If not, any such deviation from a job description must be addressed immediately. When we think of consumers, we are usually thinking about whether or not they are complying with program rules. If non-compliance is tolerated then it should not surprise us if the end result of such non-compliance expresses itself in violent behavior. The basic rule of thumb regarding all of these types of situations is simply deal with problems when they occur. We are not being kind or reasonable when we let problematic speech and behaviors go un-confronted. When we use the word "confront" each of us has a certain mental picture of what that might be. Rather than try to tease out all of the possible meanings for that word let's simply look at some suggestions for speaking to either co-workers or consumers whose speech/behavior/attitudes are such that someone at the management level must address them, and the quicker the better. Here are some ideas that may be helpful in what is always a difficult situation:

1. Meet privately with the person, but not in an isolated place. You will want to know that some other responsible staff person knows where you are and has either visual or auditory accessibility to you and the person with whom you are meeting.
2. Begin with an "I" ownership statement – "I am concerned about …….". Avoid using "You" as the beginning of your discussion since it almost always creates defensiveness on the part of the person to whom you are speaking.
3. Describe specific behaviors, not general situations. One such possibility might be, "I am concerned about the fact that you have been late five times in the past month".
4. Request specific behavior changes. Statements such as, "You need to be on time more often", can be interpreted in different ways by different people. A more measurable directive might be, "If you are late more than once in the next thirty days you will receive a written warning and if you are late subsequently in the next ninety days more than twice you will be terminated." I am not suggesting that this would be an appropriate disciplinary action but simply want to call attention to the fact that requests for speech and behavior changes must be very specific.

5. When someone tries to avoid responsibility ("Everyone does that") you should acknowledge that they have made the statement while not agreeing with it. It is usually not helpful to take a contrary position such as, "No, everyone does not do that". A more successful approach might be to say, in relation to the lateness issue described above, "I do understand that you feel that way and I am simply reminding you that if you are late more than once in the next thirty days you will receive a written reprimand".

6. When you must counter a statement that a co-worker or consumer has made which you know is absolutely not accurate and often is a red herring it is wise to use the word "and" rather than "but". The illustration in number five is one way of doing that. When using the word "but" we almost always put the other person on the defensive which is exactly the opposite of what we want to accomplish.

Now let's look at some additional ways that we can anticipate possible violent situations. Following is a list of what can appropriately be termed "red flags" which indicate the very real possibility that violence is about to erupt:

1. Person gets red in the face
2. Person starts to shake
3. Person clenches fists
4. Person invades your personal space
5. Person makes direct veiled threats
6. Person suddenly becomes sullen and simply stares at you

Regarding the issue of personal space it is important to remember that everyone has a different boundary which they consider to be their personal space. There is no one distance that can be guaranteed to ensure personal safety. However, there are some general guidelines that we will look at quite shortly.

It is important, when dealing with people who must be confronted, to remember that such people are often angry and/or afraid. That means that they will see and experience situations differently than we do. Optometrists tell us that when a person is frightened or angry their vision (what they actually see) changes and we need to be aware of that when we are dealing with such people. Here are some pointers to remember that may help us to understand how we are perceived in difficult and challenging situations.

1. Respect people's personal space. Do not attempt to stand very close to someone in order to make a point. The general rule of thumb regarding a "safe space" between you and another person is to allow six feet when you are sitting and ten feet when you are standing. The ten foot guideline may seem awkward and can certainly be modified but depending upon the potential for violence you surely do

not want to place yourself physically within easy striking distance.

2. Be aware of how you are standing; don't square off and stare at people. That posture works well for the "alpha" dog but it sure doesn't work with people. It is helpful to try to stand at a slight angle to the person you are facing so that if you are kicked you would not receive the full impact of the blow.

3. Be conscious of your voice tone, volume and speed.
   a. Keep your voice steady and confident (you don't need to feel confident, you just need to project it). If necessary take a deep, quiet breath before you begin to speak so that your voice remains steady.
   b. Don't raise the volume of your voice, even if the other person is talking louder. That simply exacerbates a poor situation.
   c. Don't speak quickly. It is often our unintended reaction to a challenging interaction that we begin to speak more rapidly. That usually means that the other person has a harder time understanding us and may perceive the rapid speech as aggression. A helpful mantra is, "Low and slow".

4. Be careful of the gestures that you are using, both facial and other body movements.
   a. Practice controlling your facial gestures before you ever entering into these types of interactions. As silly as it may seem practicing in front of a mirror with someone else filling in as the opposing person may help you to assess the level of control you have over facial gestures. It is extremely important that you do not roll your eyes or clench your teeth, no matter how ludicrous, bizarre or frightening the other person becomes.
   b. Practice limiting your hand gestures. Do not raise your hand under any circumstances to either make a point or to imply control.   Keep your hands at your side. When people are frightened and/or angry such gestures are always viewed as a sign of aggression and possibility imminent attack.

5. Don't touch people who are upset. Such contact is often perceived as an aggressive act. Remember the importance of respecting other people's personal space.

6. Listen to what the person is saying. Assure them that you do hear them. If you don't understand what is being said ask them to clarify for you. Do not react to the other

person's anger and fear. You must remain in control of your own responses.

7. Acknowledge the person's strong feelings.
8. Never argue with someone who is angry. Further, do not make statements or deliver ultimatums that you cannot enforce.
9. Don't tell people to "Calm down". If they could they would.
10. Reassure the person that a solution can be reached. It is not necessary to try to spell out the details of that solution immediately but to assure the person that the problem is not unresolvable.

When you meet with people who are potentially violent, meet in a place where you have privacy but where you can be seen and/or heard. Again, arrange beforehand to have some other responsible staff person nearby.

Almost everything that we have been considering so far pertains to person to person interactions.   It is worthwhile remembering that most, if not all, of the suggestions and principles that we have looked at also apply to telephone interactions. It would be a serious mistake to believe that because we are not physically present with another person that we therefore are in control of the situation. There have been too many sad and tragic situations in the workplace that began through telephone contact and because an employee was careless eventually a face to face confrontation occurred, sometimes with tragic results. All of the techniques and skills that are brought into play in face to face interactions should also be implemented when dealing with people on the phone.

One of the sad realities that many supervisors and managers must deal with is the occasional need to terminate an employee for cause. Research and anecdotal experience tells us that these termination meetings can be either an effective way to close the book on a difficult employee's relationship with your organization or the spark that ignites a fire that expresses itself in violence. Let's look at some "Do's and "Don't's" regarding termination meetings. Incidentally, these same recommendations also apply to disciplinary meetings.

1. If you were the person threatened, do not conduct the termination meeting. It may be necessary for you to be physically present but some other manager should actually facilitate the meeting.
2. Do not argue under any circumstances.
3. Do not make promises you cannot keep such as, "We'll help you get another job".
4. Do not negotiate anything. Termination is non-negotiable.
5. Do not rehash past problems.
6. Do state clearly and succinctly why the person is being terminated.

7. Treat the person with respect, no matter what the reason might be for the termination. You may be tempted to say, "You're fired!", but you need to remember that Donald Trump is an entertainer and not a manager that anyone should emulate.
8. Rehearse ahead of time what you plan to say.
9. When the meeting is over either you or another manager must accompany the person to his/her office or workstation to allow them to collect all of their personal belongings. If there is strong reason to believe that violence may occur during or after the meeting it might be wise to pack all of the person's things in advance if that is possible and simply present the box(es) at the end of the meeting. The down side of this tactic is that the person might claim that he/she has no way of knowing whether anything was removed from their work area prior to everything being packed.
10. Prepare for the worst. Have a crisis plan in place prior to the meeting and have all people who would be involved well versed in their respective roles.
11. Schedule the meeting when the fewest people are around.
12. As a rule schedule termination meetings on any day but Friday. Why not Friday? If I am terminated on Friday afternoon I cannot file for unemployment compensation until Monday morning at the earliest. I cannot go out and look for another job until Monday morning at the earliest. I therefore have two full days in which to stew over my termination which I probably already perceive to be unfair. Don't give people those two "stew" days.
13. Call the police <u>before</u> a tragedy occurs. If a person is losing control of his/her actions do not wait for something tragic to happen.

I should have begun this presentation with the following disclaimer. I am not an expert on violence prevention and do not purport to have all of the answers to the complexities of workplace violence. That said, even if everything cited previously is accurate and effective the sad reality is that workplace violence can still occur, even when we have "done everything right". Therefore, it is worth spending a few minutes discussing those steps that should be taken after a violent incident occurs. Following are some of those suggestions:
1. Meet with all affected staff as soon as possible.
2. Describe what happened, without defaming the perpetrator. The purpose of this meeting is to communicate clearly, not to settle scores.
3. Allow any employees who are obviously deeply upset to go home if they want to. Don't count pennies when you have all just experienced a violent situation.

4. Do not expect people to be able to return to "normal" quickly. Each person has his/her own resilience factor and that can differ widely for any two persons.
5. Do not mistake silence as a sign that everyone is okay with what happened. You may need to privately speak with a number of people who were impacted to assess their level of recovery.
6. Do not deny your own feelings. You do not have to play superman or superwoman. We are all human and share many of the same emotions. Your willingness to express your own frustration, fear, anger, and other such emotions (within certain parameters) may be the best way to help the healing process with everyone else.
7. Do not waste time attempting to place blame or play the "if only" game. Even if the violent situation could have been avoided it will not benefit anyone to dwell on that fact immediately after the violent incident occurs. There may be time later on to debrief and think through what can be done differently if another such situation arises.
8. Appoint one person to deal with the media, if this is necessary. It is extremely unwise to have a number of people speaking to reporters or other media personnel since everyone has their own take on what happened.
9. Hire a clean-up crew if property has been damaged or destroyed, and especially if blood is present. We are all aware of the severe budgetary constraints that most non-profits operate under but this is not the time to try to save money. Particularly if blood or other bodily fluids are present it is extremely unwise to ask your own staff to do the clean-up.
10. Designate employees who will need to perform special functions, such as covering shifts, providing transportation to employees who must go home, performing critical functions e.g. payroll, etc. In addition to designating employees to perform these functions it will also be necessary to assure that they are properly trained to do so.

Did any of you have the joy of taking a course in high school or college called "Abnormal Psychology", or anything similar? My main recollection of the course I took was how abnormal I thought the behaviors were of the psychiatrist who taught the course. However, I do have one other recollection and the rather odd man who taught the course needs to be credited for telling us that we needed to read the text book from cover to cover. He mentioned that we would enjoy reading the first chapter which was titled "Normal Behavior". He then recommended that when we had finished the course and had read the last chapter that we return to the front of the book and again read that chapter on normal behavior. Why? Because it is

possible to see oneself on every page of a book that talks about abnormal behavior. We all have idiosyncrasies and behaviors that can under some circumstances be perceived as odd, if not downright weird. Therefore, it is in the interest of self-preservation that most of us need to remind ourselves that we are more normal than abnormal.   That said, it would seem to be appropriate to now spend just a few minutes reviewing some of our earlier deliberations in this presentation. If our main reaction to a focus on preventing workplace violence is to become paranoid then we have clearly missed the main point and also caused ourselves unnecessary harm. Let me review again those facts of life which early in the presentation were delineated:

1. There is no such thing as complete safety.
2. In the human service field we must be accessible, which automatically exposes us to the potential of violence.
3. Some workplace violence is avoidable.
4. Most potential workplace violence is manageable.
5. God makes good out of bad.

I leave with you my desire that you spend the time, energy and money to prepare your employees and yourself to maximize your readiness for those situations that you can control and influence.