



WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

For the most part, the people with whom we work are well-meaning folk who want to contribute to the betterment of the broader community. Occasionally, a handful of people, through their words and action, strike fear in the hearts of private or public sector employees.

For example:

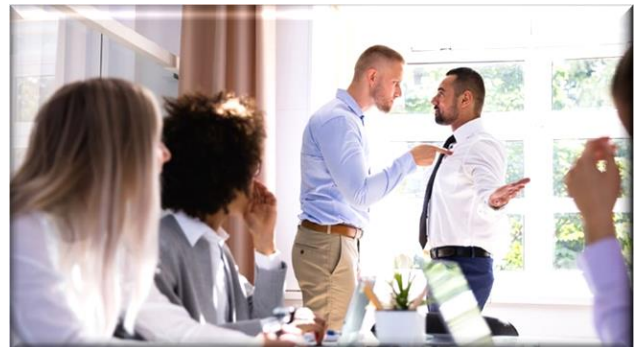
- The recently terminated employee who shouts, “I will get you for this!” as he is being escorted out of the building.
- The parent of a child who has been removed from the community school due to repeated misbehavior who sends an e-mail to the superintendent and the principal promising to “make your life hell for what you’ve done to my kid”.
- The anonymous caller who leaves a message on the entity’s answering machine expressing rage at the entity’s selection of a particular zoning decision.

You need to interpret and address threats against specific people or the company. You need to discern an “empty threat” from one that is serious. You need to know when a threat should be reported to law enforcement or when to obtain outside help to address threats.

EVALUATING THREATS

Determining which threat to take seriously, which is just venting or which is a hoax is part experience, part intuition, and part luck. Create policies that put people on notice that threats will not be tolerated.

In addition to these specific standards, make it clear that staff shall not engage in any conduct which materially and substantially disrupts the organization’s programs or which is otherwise a violation of national, federal, or local law.



HANDLING THREATS

Create policies and procedures to tell employees and volunteers how they are expected to handle specific threats.

- **BOMB THREATS:** No bomb threat or arson threat call should be taken as a joke or disregarded. Treat all such calls as real threats to safety and immediately contact the Safety or Security Department. This includes threats of death or bodily injury. The danger of a possible fire or bombing is too great to ignore. Whenever a threat is received about a bomb or fire threat, the following actions must be taken.

FOR ENQUIRIES:

YOUR SAFETY DEPARTMENT, LLC

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- Call the Safety or Security officer or department immediately.
- Sound the fire alarm and evacuate the building immediately according to the procedure for a fire evacuation.
- Notify the police in the case of a bomb threat or the fire department in the case of a fire threat.
- No one can re-enter the building until authorized by the appropriate police and/or fire authorities.
- Threats of death or bodily injury should be reported to the Safety or Security officer or department immediately.
- **THREAT OF PHYSICAL HARM:** When one of your employees has been threatened with physical harm, it is important to take immediate action to protect the employee. First, meet with the person to obtain details of the threat and assess their feelings about its seriousness and fear level. Next, discuss with the individual what steps the organization might take. Some of the steps that you might agree on include:
 - Requiring that visitors to the office be identified and then buzzed in rather than leaving your front office door open.
 - Restricting the employee's or volunteer's work hours to times when other staff members will be in the office.
 - Providing an escort for the employee or volunteer from the office to his or her vehicle.
 - Allowing the employee to take unscheduled leave.
 - Setting up a meeting with a representative of the local police department and the employee.
- **THREAT OF A LAWSUIT:** In some cases, an angry employee, or client may threaten to sue the organization. At a minimum, make a record of the threat and file a note indicating the statement made, and the date and time in the appropriate file in your office.

- **THREATENING CALLER:** At some time, you may receive a threatening phone call. It is a good idea to train the people who answer the phone to respond appropriately. At a minimum, the staff member should try to record as much information as possible about the caller and the threat.

PREVENTING HARASSMENT HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

The difference between a well-intentioned compliment and troublesome allegations is in the fear of the recipient. Sexual harassment has as much to do with intent shown through body language, facial expression, the proximity of one person to the other, tone of voice, and pacing of delivery as the actual words.

What separates the workplace environment from written "no harassment" policies that are updated annually by leadership is proper education of management and staff members on how to enforce these policies effectively.

The Equal Opportunity Employment Commission defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when:

- submission to such conduct is made either implicitly or explicitly a term or condition of employment,
- submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment."

POSSIBLE HARASSMENT CONDUCT

Some common examples that might be deemed harassment include:

- **PHYSICAL ACTIONS:** giving a neck or shoulder massage; touching a person's body, hair, or clothing; hugging, kissing, or patting another; standing close to or brushing up against a person; touching or rubbing oneself in a private area or with sexual overtones near another person; touching, leaning over, cornering, or pinching someone; or snapping a woman's bra strap.



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- **VERBAL ACTIONS:** referring to another as a “girl,” “doll,” “babe,” “hunk,” or “honey”; whistling or making cat-calls at another; making comments about a person’s body, clothes, looks, anatomy, or manner of walking; turning work discussions into sexual topics; telling sexual jokes or stories; discussing one’s love life; asking about sexual fantasies, preferences, or history; repeatedly asking a person for a date who is not interested; making kissing sounds, howling, or smacking lips; or telling lies or spreading rumors about a person’s sex life.
- **NON-VERBAL ACTIONS:** looking a person up and down; staring at someone; physically blocking a person’s path; making sexual gestures with one’s tongue or hands or other body movements; following a person around; giving unwanted personal gifts; displaying sexually suggestive visuals; making facial expressions such as winking, throwing kisses, licking lips; or requiring an employee to wear provocative clothing.

These actions and others constitute sexual harassment depending on their severity, frequency, and whether they were unwelcoming by the recipient. Indications of “unwelcomeness” include:

- The staff member did not solicit or incite sexual advances.
- The staff member regarded the advance as undesirable or offensive.
- The staff member grimaced, frowned, or otherwise exhibited disagreement or resistance to the advance.
- The staff member turned away or pretended not to hear the sexual comments.
- The staff member pulled away, backed up, or attempted to avoid the perpetrator’s touch
- The staff member immediately complained to management about the incident or complained within a reasonable period under the circumstances.

INVESTIGATING HARASSMENT HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT COMPLAINTS

- There are four basic steps to managing a sexual harassment complaint.
- Taking the complaint.
- Interviewing the alleged offender.
- Investigating the complaint, including interviewing witnesses.
- Taking appropriate action.

Maintain all documentation in separate, confidential personnel files. Ensure that all interviews are conducted in isolated areas. Notify and involve HR.

