



Unit 16

How to Manage Anger and Violence in the Workplace

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Describe what workplace violence is
- ✓ Identify some warning signs of violence
- ✓ Apply the cycle of anger
- ✓ Understand Albert Bandura's behavior wheel and how it applies to anger
- ✓ Develop a seven-step process for managing your anger and others' anger
- ✓ Apply better communication and problem solving skills, which will reduce frustration and anger

Unit 16

An Introduction to Workplace Violence

What is Workplace Violence?

Defining Violence

The actual definition of workplace violence can depend on the company and the area where the company operates. For example, some states classify sexual harassment as workplace violence, while others don't. Likewise, some organizations have separate workplace violence and sexual harassment policies.

Typically, the definition of workplace violence encompasses:

- Verbal abuse (such as yelling)
- Psychological or emotional abuse (such as name-calling or threats)
- Physical abuse (such as hitting or pushing)
- Sexual assault

It is important to remember that no matter what form violence takes, whether it's yelling, threatening, or physical assault, it is essential that your organization have a policy to prevent and respond to such incidents.

A crucial step in developing a workplace violence policy is determining just what workplace violence means to your organization, and therefore determining what your policy will cover.

The Cycle of Violence

In most cases, workplace violence is like a thunderstorm, building slowly before exploding. The process often begins with frustration. If the frustration isn't alleviated, it often turns to anger. Then, that unaddressed anger becomes violence.

Our goal for the first third of this workshop is to work on some tools that can help us interrupt the storm. Problem solving tools, communication strategies, anger management processes, and de-stress routines can all help alleviate anger and frustration, preventing the cycle from reaching the stage of violence.

The Warning Signs

There are many signs that may indicate that a person is on the path towards committing a violent act. These can include:

- Threats (direct or indirect)
- Harassing or obscene phone calls
- Suicidal or homicidal threats or gestures
- Expressions of hopelessness, despair, belligerence, or defiance
- Talk of violent behavior or fantasies
- Frequent profanity
- Challenging or intimidating comments
- Paranoid thoughts or delusions
- Delusions in general
- Hallucinations (particularly those where the person feels that they are being commanded)
- Signs or history of substance abuse
- Physical assault or intimidation of people or property
- Inappropriate use or possession of a weapon
- Obsessing with/stalking another person
- Easily upset, short-tempered, inappropriate emotions
- Sudden personality changes; from extroverted to introverted, or becoming very withdrawn
- Deteriorating appearance (i.e. personal hygiene)
- Deep grudges and resentments
- Belief that everyone is out to get them
- Obsession with public acts of violence or violent figures
- Obsession with fairness and equality
- Frequent misinterpretation (i.e. sees disrespect and injustice everywhere)

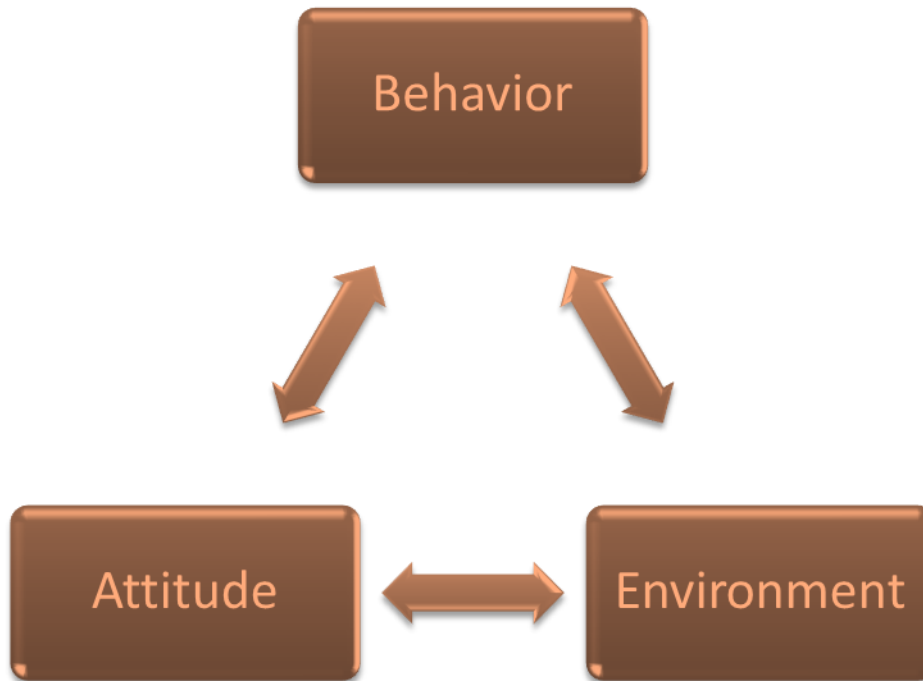
Now, we're not saying that if someone starts cursing a blue streak you should call in the cavalry. These signs can be present for all kinds of reasons, and are easy to see in retrospect, but you are trying to look ahead, not behind. If you notice that a co-worker's behavior changes, their temperament seems different, or if someone pulls out a knife in the lunchroom, then action needs to be taken. Simply mention your concerns to your supervisor. They have the tools and the resources required to help the person and to keep your workplace safe.

Understanding the Behavior Wheel

The Behavior Wheel

Psychologist Albert Bandura has developed a theory called the **behavior wheel**. This wheel provides the answer to the timeless question, "Why do people act the way they do?"

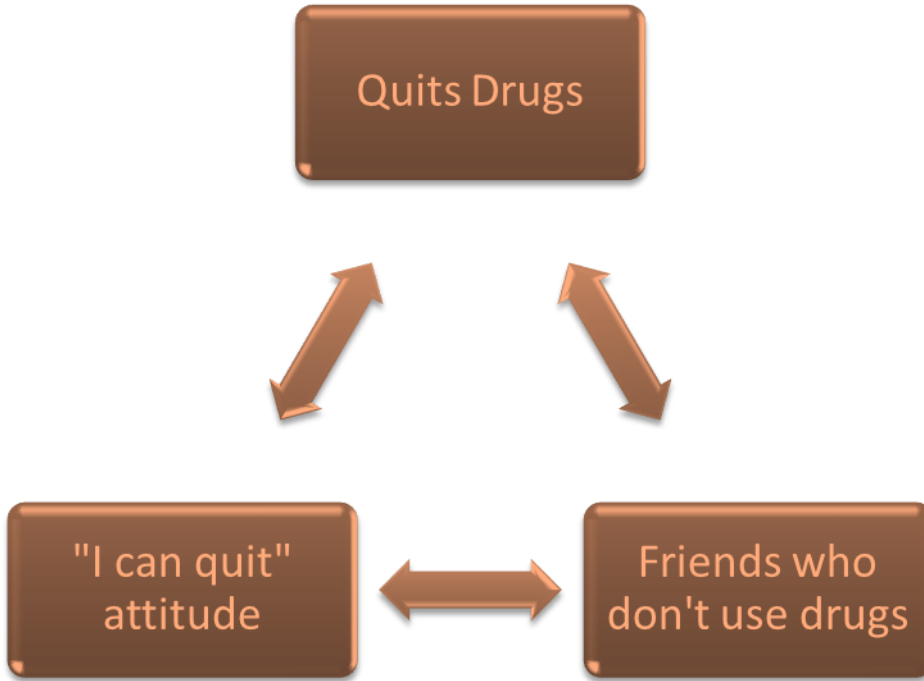
Bandura's wheel looks like this:



This wheel shows us how our attitude, behavior, and environment all influence each other. Note how the arrows go both ways: our environment affects our attitude, but our attitude also affects our environment.

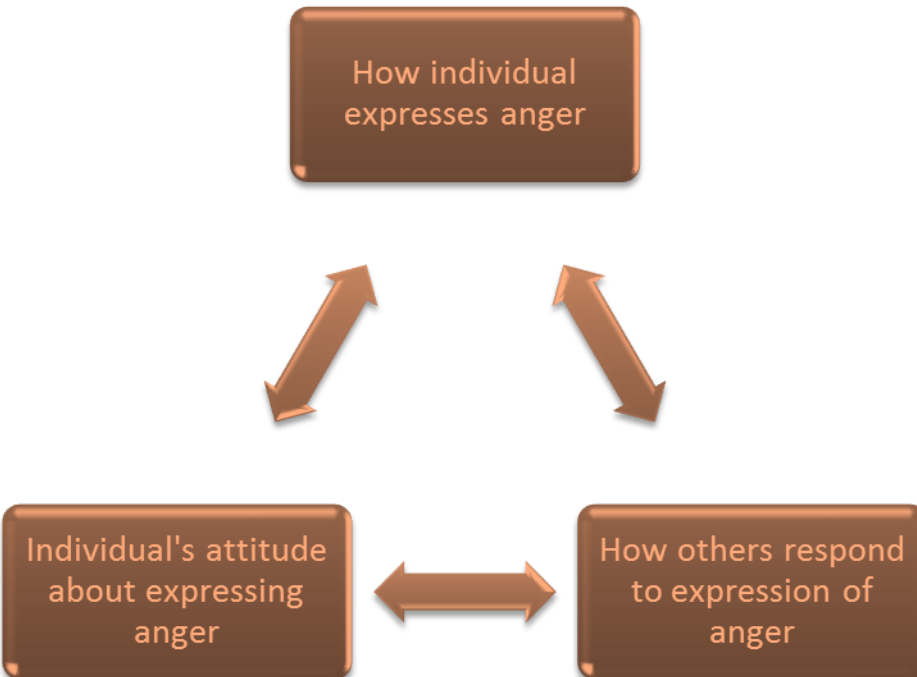
Case Study

Let's apply this wheel to a drug addict. One traditional approach is for the addict to simply quit. However, even if the addict's behavior changes, his attitude may still be that drugs are OK, and he may still associate with drug users. These factors will affect his behavior, contributing to him using drugs again. However, if his environment and attitude change, his behavior will be more likely to change.



Anger and the Behavior Wheel

Dr. Lynn McClure has applied the behavior wheel to anger:

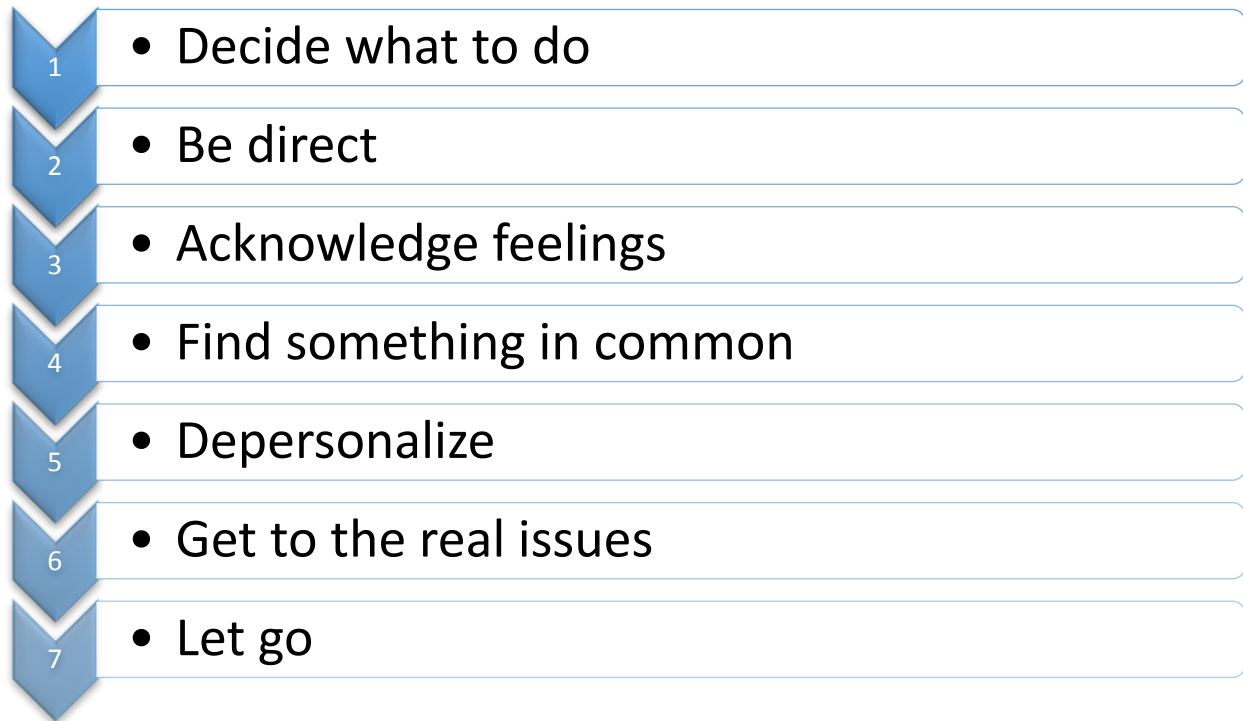


Understanding this cycle of behavior, attitude, and environment is crucial to managing anger.

The Anger Management Process

The Seven Steps

Dr. Lynn McClure has identified a seven-step process to manage anger. This process can be used whether you're angry or whether you're responding to someone else's anger.



The first step must always be deciding. Then, the other steps can be performed in any order.

Step One: Decide What to Do

Before you try to resolve the situation, ask yourself three questions:

- Do I want to work it out?
- Does the other person want to work it out?
- Is it appropriate for me to be involved?

The answer for all three questions must be yes or the process will not work. However, both parties don't have to be 100% committed. Even if they both are only willing to resolve the problem to get a project done, for example, that's still a level of commitment that can be built on.

Step Two: Be Direct

Once you have decided that you need to address this situation, it's time to start the process. Your next step should be to address the problem in the proper way, to the right person.

For example, let's say you've just seen your work schedule for next week and you're not impressed with the amount of evenings you're working.

Some improper ways of dealing with this (that are not direct or appropriate):

- Yelling at your supervisor
- Threatening to quit
- Complaining to your colleagues

The proper way to deal with this would be to approach your supervisor and talk to them calmly and logically. You want to lay out the issue and some solutions.

For example, you could say, "I saw that you posted the schedule and I wanted to talk to you about it. I noticed I'm working the most evenings again. I'd like to switch some of those shifts with Karen, since she likes the evening shift better. That would work better for both of us."

By dealing with the problem in this way, you're addressing the issue before it escalates to anger and violence. You're also setting a good example for your co-workers. Having solved this problem will probably make you feel better about yourself and about your job, thereby making work a happier place for you. (If we apply the behavior wheel, this improved attitude will spill over to your behavior and your environment.)

Step Three: Acknowledge Feelings

Another key skill in managing anger is acknowledging the other person's feelings. This step does two things: it helps the other person calm down, and it can help you understand their point of view.

Acknowledging anger doesn't mean explaining it away. An answer that starts with, "We have to do this because..." tends to make the angry person angrier and it makes them feel like no one is listening.

Let's take the scheduling example again. Let's say you said to your supervisor, "I saw that you posted the schedule and I wanted to talk to you about it. I noticed I'm working the most evenings again."

If he or she said, "Well, I have to do that because of company policy," you would probably get angry or defensive, even if you had already calmed down after you saw the schedule.

A better way for the supervisor to respond would be to say, “Yes, I can understand why you’re angry about the schedule. It certainly doesn’t seem fair.” This sort of response would be more likely to calm the angry person and make them feel as though their opinion counts.

Step Four: Find Something in Common

If you can find something in common with the person, rather than emphasizing differences, you will be well on the way to solving the disagreement. (After all, solving the problem is all about finding a mutually acceptable solution. The process is a lot easier when you know that you and the other person are on the same team.)

For example, let’s say you and a team member have had a disagreement over a project you’re working on together. An easy commonality would be that you’re working on the same team, towards the same goal. This common goal may be enough for both of you to start resolving the disagreement.

Step Five: Depersonalize

If you’re on the receiving end of someone’s anger, it is essential that you depersonalize their emotions or actions so that you don’t become angry as well. This can be very hard to do and does require some practice.

It’s very easy to misinterpret things and take things personally. You must first determine if this is professional feedback or a personal attack.

Professional feedback...	Personal attacks...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on your performance at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on you as a person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intended to help you grow as a professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intended to make you feel bad or guilty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can help you learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually have no valuable advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should be accepted as constructive criticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to make you angry

If this is professional feedback, you need to focus on how the feedback can help you grow, rather than mistakes you have made in the past or emotional interpretations you received from the conversation.

If this is a personal attack, think about how seriously you should take the incident. Is it worth causing a scene and damaging your professional reputation? Is there a mature way that you can handle this? Another good way to depersonalize is to think about what their attack says about them, not about you.

Example: You are in your supervisor’s office for your monthly review. He says to you, “You know, you might get a raise if you weren’t such a slob.”

Let’s say you took a moment to analyze his comments before allowing yourself to get upset. You think about your desk: how its surface is always neat and how you organize it every morning. He certainly can’t be referring to your work environment.

But then you take a look around his office. It looks like a landfill, with papers, CD’s, and even garbage everywhere! You feel a little bit sorry for your supervisor; it seems clear that he’s the disorganized one and is taking his insecurities out on you.

To ensure that this is the case, you can try to turn his personal attack into professional feedback. You could say, “I’m sorry you feel that way, Jim. What areas do you think I need improvement in?” This way, you have not only managed to depersonalize his attack, but you have also turned it into a learning opportunity.

Step Six: Getting to the Real Issues

Earlier we discussed how frustration can build into anger, which can then escalate into violence. Often, the event that triggers anger or violence is not the original issue that caused frustration. It is important to identify the real issue so that the problem can get solved.

Case Study

Let’s look at an example. Gina and Cindy are working on a project together. All of a sudden, Cindy explodes, yelling, “You’re so stupid! I’m never going to get this done if I have to work with you.” Gina is shocked; she and Cindy have always worked together well in the past.

Gina moves through some of the anger management steps within a few seconds.

<p>Step One: Decide what to do.</p> <p>Gina wants to work it out and she is the right person to do so. But, does Cindy want to work it out?</p>	<p>Gina: “Cindy, I’m sorry you feel that way. Can we talk about this?”</p> <p>Cindy: “Sure.”</p>
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Step Two: Be direct.	Gina is doing this by speaking to Cindy.
Step Three: Acknowledge feelings.	Gina: "I can tell that you're really upset."
Step Four: Find something in common.	Gina: "We've always worked well as a team in the past, and I'd like to continue working as a team. We do need to get this project done." Cindy: "That's true."
Step Five: Depersonalize.	Gina thinks to herself, "I haven't done anything different today, so I think Cindy is upset about something else. This isn't my fault. I can grow from this by helping her through the issue."
Step Six: Get to the real issues.	Gina: "I don't feel like you're angry at me. I feel like there is something else going on. I've noticed you have been distracted the past few days. I'd really like to help you." Cindy: "I'm really sorry for calling you stupid. My husband and I have been having problems, and it's really affecting me. I'm very angry at him."

Now that Gina knows what the real issue is, it's easier for her to depersonalize and help Cindy work through the real problem, or to help her find the appropriate resource. This process has probably helped Cindy calm down and let go of some emotional baggage.

When you do talk to the angry person, make sure you:

- Speak to them in a calm manner.
- Don't blame or judge.
- Choose a quiet, private place free of interruptions.
- Follow Step Two: be direct and discuss the issue in an appropriate way.

Developing a Policy and Program for Anger Management

The Policy

The Purpose

A properly implemented violence policy and program is crucial to preventing workplace violence. The purpose of the policy is:

- To focus on preventing workplace violence
- To consider the work environment and organization in developing these guidelines, to create a policy unique to the organization
- To involve all levels of staff, including union representatives
- To develop a series of ever-evolving guidelines that will be reviewed at a particular interval

The Elements

The policy should contain:

- A statement that the organization has a zero-tolerance approach to violence
- Resources (time, authority, materials, people) to manage and prevent violence
- Requirement for staff to be involved in development and implementation of policy and programs
- Commitment to apply policy consistently and fairly
- Commitment to report incidents promptly and accurately
- Commitment to have the appropriate agency (such as the police or occupational health and safety board) investigate incidents
- Recognition that workplace violence is recognized in most areas as an occupational safety hazard, meaning the organization is responsible for preventing and managing it

Staff responsibilities in the policy should include:

- Participate in violence education, including training on defusing violent situations and self-defense
- Do not put yourself or others at risk for violence
- Report incidents on time and accurately

Note that the workplace can extend beyond the physical office. It should include parking lots, field offices, and any other places that employees do business.

The Programs

There are many types of programs that can be included in a workplace violence program. Here are some ideas:

- Buddy system for field work
- Safety system for excursions outside the building at night (for example, to the parking lot or closest bus stop)
- Visitor identification cards
- Warning system for violent clients or patients
- Emergency backup systems

What other ideas do you have?

Risk Assessment

The Five Stages

Before the policy is finalized, it is essential that a risk assessment is performed at the workplace. Norman Keith has identified five stages of this assessment process. Note that this process should be performed every one to two years to ensure the ongoing applicability and accuracy of the assessment.

Stage One: The Risk Assessment Team

In order for the risk assessment process to be successful in identifying all possible hazards, the risk assessment team must have defined responsibilities. These can include:

- Defining and refining the assessment process
- Identifying areas that workers may need training in
- Planning and implementing emergency response plans
- Communicating their progress and recommendations

The team should include representatives from all levels of the company, including:

- Senior management

- Operations managers
- Safety committee
- Security personnel
- Finance personnel
- Legal counsel (internal or external)
- Human resources manager

Stage Two: The Workplace Assessment

The assessment of the workplace generally has two stages. First, the team will identify scenarios that could result in violence, including:

- Exchanging money with the public
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Working late at night or in early morning
- Working in high crime areas
- Guarding property, possessions, or money
- Working in the community, away from the actual office

The second stage is an analysis of previous incidents of violence, including threats that were not carried out. This may help the assessment team identify additional scenarios, patterns, and risks that need to be addressed.

Stage Three, Part One: Victim Assessment

This part of the assessment is the flip side of the workplace assessment: who is at risk for becoming a victim of violence?

Norman Keith suggests that there are three categories that must be considered.

Occupational Factors

What factors related to a person's job responsibilities could put them at risk? Think about:

- People who handle money
- People who work outside the physical office
- People who work alone and/or at late hours
- Caregivers
- People who handle complaints
- People who enact public laws

Environmental Factors

What factors related to a person's work environment could put them at risk? Think about:

- How the workplace is laid out (crowded, loud, etc.)
- How jobs are managed (unfair workloads, angry employees, long lineups for customers)
- Management styles
- External environments (i.e., working in a dangerous neighborhood)

Personal Factors

What unique factors can put a person at risk? Think about:

- Their personality
- Attitude of workers (such as loyalty)
- Level of training and knowledge
- Ability to handle dangerous situations

Stage Three, Part Two: Perpetrator Assessment

This part of the risk assessment process attempts to identify those who may commit violence. This is not intended to be a hit list, but rather to generate ideas and identify scenarios where staff may be in danger.

To start, we must be aware that there are typically four types of violence that we see in the workplace.

- Committed by clients
- Committed by strangers
- Between co-workers
- Domestic violence

Dr. Graham Glancy has noted some characteristics that can elevate the risk of that person committing a violent act.

- Those who are mentally ill and not properly supervised
- Gang members
- Drug or alcohol users
- People who have had a troubled childhood
- History of violence (as perpetrator or victim)
- Criminal record

- Males commit violence more often than females
- Young people commit violence more often than elderly people
- Obsession with violent symbols or literature
- Obsessive tendencies in general

In particular, disgruntled or obsessed customers or employees (or their relatives) should raise a red flag.

Stage Four: Workplace Survey

A survey can give employees the chance to talk about things that they are unwilling to bring forward. It's also a great tool to use in a large organization, where interviewing each employee would be difficult. Its purpose should be to help identify the potential for violence and the need for improved security measures. The risk assessment team should work with the human resources department to develop a survey appropriate for the organization.

Stage Five: Developing a Hazard Checklist

After the three-part assessment has taken place, the risk assessment team should develop a checklist to analyze, organize, and record the information accrued from the first four steps. The checklist helps to ensure that all areas of the workplace are inspected consistently and that standards are applied uniformly. It also highlights specific areas of concern that should be rectified immediately.

Some possible items on such a checklist can include:

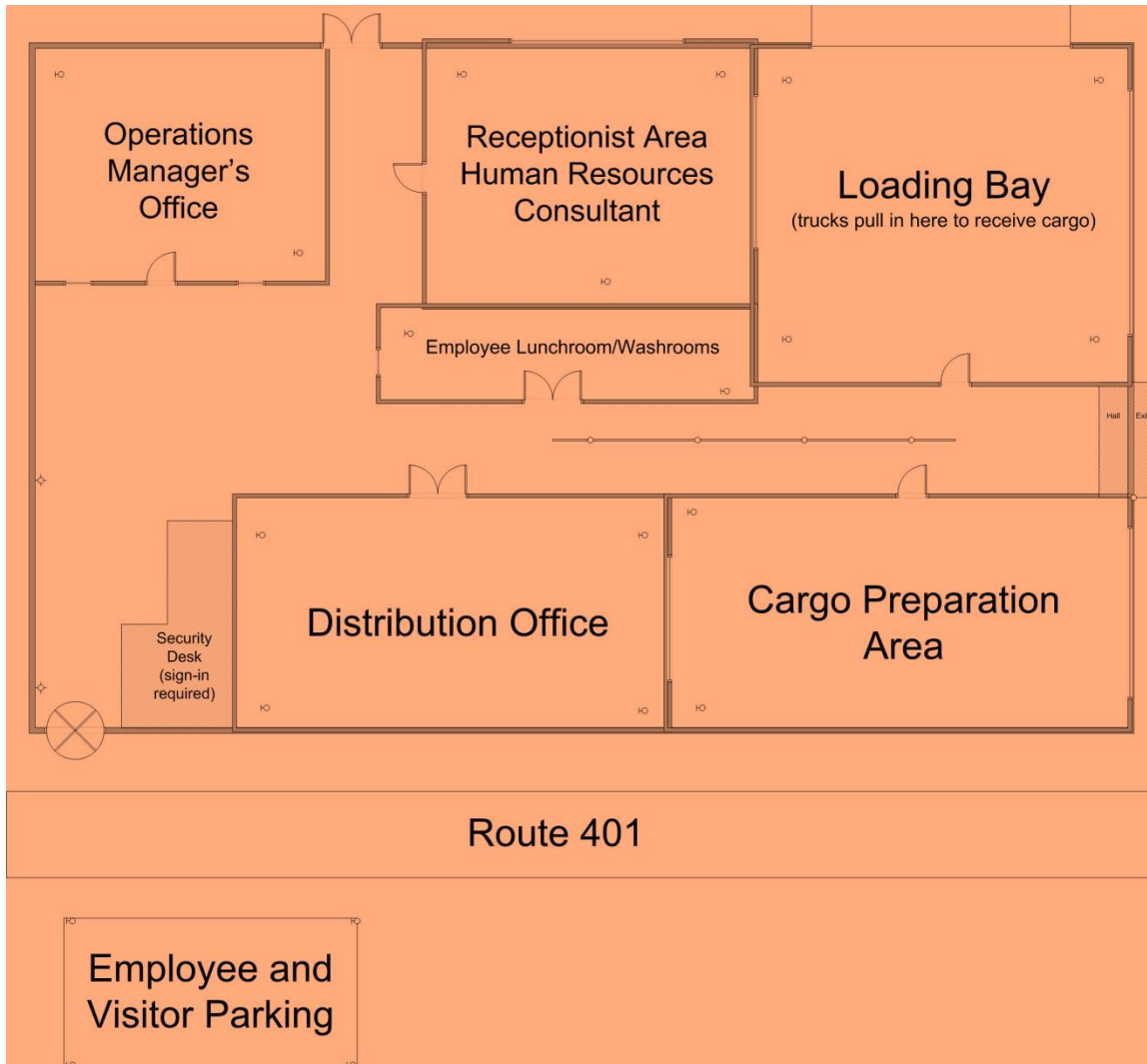
- Hidden doors, closets, hallways, alleys, and driveways
- Isolated work areas
- Late hours of operation
- Lighting
- Unrestricted areas (which may enable non-employees to access the workplace)
- Proper, working locks on doors and windows
- Working security and fire systems (including surveillance systems)
- Adequate, clearly identified escape routes
- Enforcement of security protocols and access systems (such as ID badges)
- Metal detectors
- Armed guards or guard dogs
- Bullet-proof glass partitions
- Buddy system in case of emergency

Risk Assessment for the Acme Widgets Company

Part One: Case Study

The Acme Widget Company manufactures and distributes widgets. It occupies the main floor of a warehouse in a waterfront neighborhood that has experienced gang violence. Employees use public parking across the street.

The floor plan looks like this:



The staff and their hours are outlined below.

Staff Member	Responsibility	# of Staff	Hours Worked
Security guards	Patrol building and grounds every half hour	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 am to 7 pm (Thu-Sat)
	Monitor security desk and cameras	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
Operations manager	Oversee all staff	1	8 am to 4 pm
Distribution clerks	Check invoices and prepare cargo	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
		1	7 am to 7 pm (Thu-Sat)
	Transport cargo to loading bay	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		1	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
HR consultant	Manage all human resource issues, including personal counseling, hiring, firing	1	8 am to 4 pm, although can be called in off-hours
Receptionist	Respond to incoming phone calls, e-mails, faxes	3	8 am to 4 pm
		2	4 pm to midnight
	Prepare invoices and send to distribution clerks	1	Midnight to 6 a.m.
Warehouse workers	Let trucks into loading bay, place cargo onto trucks, and ensure paperwork is signed and cash received	4	8 am to 4 pm
		4	4 pm to midnight
		4	Midnight to 6 a.m.

Perpetrator Assessment

What kind of violence could be committed by strangers?

What kind of violence could be committed by clients (including truck drivers)?

What kind of violence could be committed between co-workers?

Hiring Practices

Getting it Right

A key part of preventing workplace violence is hiring the right people. There are two reasons for this. The most obvious is that hiring people who can manage stress and anger properly reduces the chance of those people committing violence in the workplace.

The less obvious reason is that most workplace violence stems from frustration, which builds to anger. If you hire people who are suitable for the job, and if you ensure you have adequate, competent staff, you reduce workplace stress, thereby reducing the anger in your workplace and reducing the chance for violence. Also, this group creates a supportive, caring community that is better able to deal with outside threats that can come from external sources.

Key Strategies

Some ways to screen employees can include the following.

Criminal Records Check

These types of checks usually must be done with the permission of the employee.

Personality Testing

You normally cannot restrict hiring based on this kind of test, but you can use it as a way to get to know the people that you hire. It can also help you understand if they will be a good fit with a particular team.

Behavior Descriptive Interview Questions

These interview questions help you see how an individual would react in a stressful situation, based on how they have acted in the past.

Performance Testing

These tests will show you if they can do the job competently.

Aptitude Testing

These tests will determine whether they have the ability to learn the skills needed for your workplace.

Alcohol and Drug Testing

These types of checks usually must be done with the permission of the employee. Restrictions vary by region, so make sure you know the rules in your area.

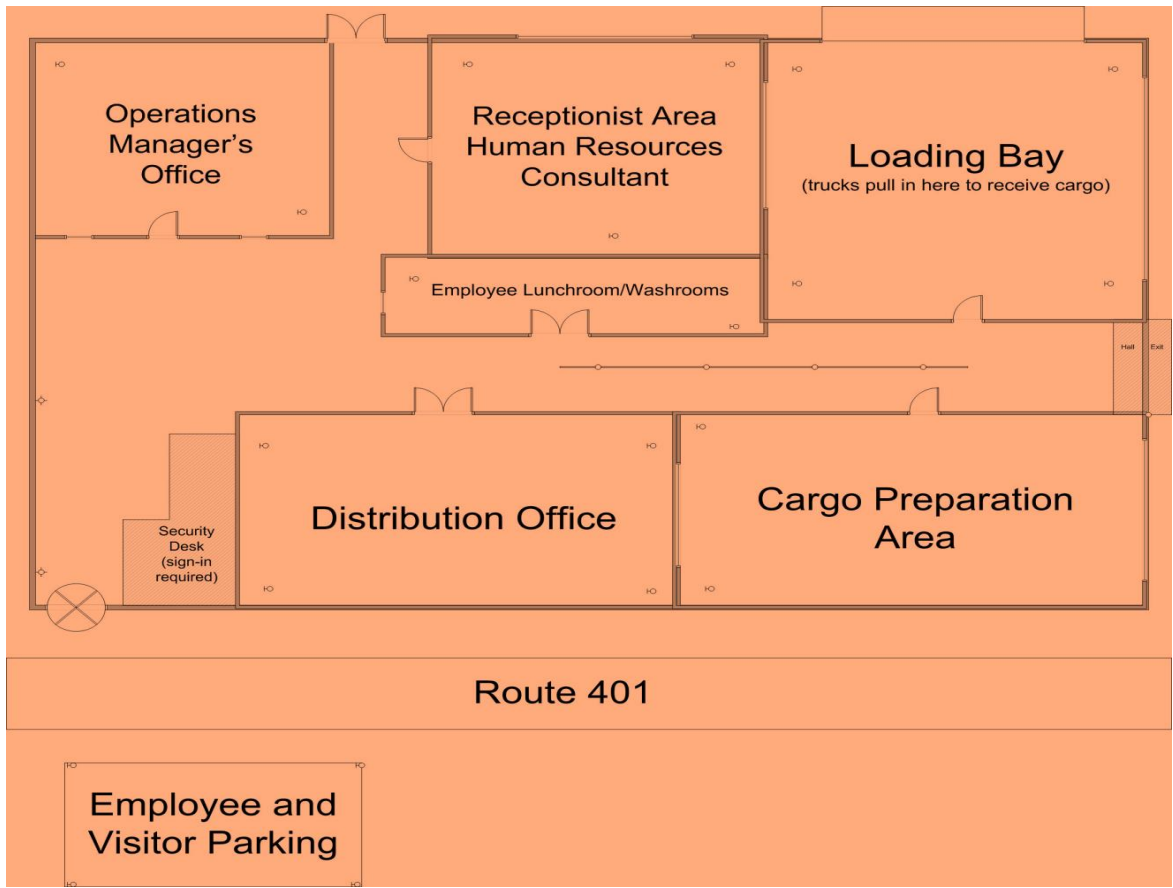
Checking Tests Out

The legality of these tests varies by jurisdiction. The human resources department must work with senior management to determine what tests are appropriate for which positions, and which tests are legal in their area.

Workplace Design

Layout Issues with the Acme Widgets Company: Case Study

The physical environment of the workplace can contribute to, or help prevent, workplace violence.



Workplace Practices and Procedures

Workplace Policies

Training

Training on violence prevention, communication strategies, stress awareness, anger management, and self-defense can all contribute to preventing workplace violence. Training should be ongoing and should be subject to periodic reviews. It should also reflect workplace and worker needs.

Human Resources

Some human resources actions that can support workplace violence prevention include:

- Implementing and enforcing code of conduct for staff (including unacceptable behavior)
- Proper hiring and screening practices
- Implementation and fair application of policies and procedures
- Consistent, firm, fair, and prompt disciplinary measures
- Implementing and enforcing reporting procedures for violence (including threats)
- Adequate staff resources (internal and external) for issues such as domestic violence, stress management, conflict resolution, and crisis management
- Commit to resolving issues with staff as quickly as possible
- Take legal recourse when necessary
- Handle terminations (layoffs, firing, restructuring) as humanely as possible to reduce anger

Staff Management

As we mentioned earlier, violence often stems from frustration and anger that has not been addressed. Therefore, managing staff properly to prevent frustration can help prevent violence. Some measures that managers can take include:

- Ensuring staff are supervised and have adequate resources
- Ensuring staff are properly scheduled
- Ensuring job duties are distributed fairly
- Maintaining open channels of communication with staff (such as staff and one-on-one meetings)
- Monitoring potentially dangerous workers
- Addressing staff issues (such as negligent or incompetent staff)
- Commit to resolving issues with staff as quickly as possible

Security Measures

There are also some measures that the security department can take.

- Have action plan for warning staff of violent persons on the premises
- Monitor potentially dangerous workers after disciplinary action, suspension, or termination
- Develop relationship with local police
- Take legal recourse when necessary
- Ensure staff concerns are investigated and addressed

Workplace Procedures

Rate the following procedures on a scale of one to ten, with one being very ineffective and ten being very effective. Your rating should be based on how effective you think the procedure would be in preventing violence.

Procedure	Rating
ID cards for staff	
Sign in policy for visitors	
Intercom system in building, with panic button	
Buddy system where security guards escort staff to parking garage	
Banning all weapons in facility	
Information pamphlets on domestic violence	
Self-defense training	
Bulletproof glass protecting workers from clients (for example, at a front desk or cash register)	
Cell phones that workers can use when away from office	
Security system with surveillance cameras	
Written violence policy	

Security Systems and Personnel

Systems Criteria

Part six of Norman Keith's violence prevention plan is having a good security system in place.

Security Systems

Typically when we think of a security system, we think of an electronic system with motion sensors and a panel that tells us when a sensor detects motion. This can be one part of the system; however, there can be many other parts, including:

- Metal detectors
- Access restrictions (locks, access cards, buzzer entry systems)
- Panic buttons
- Intercoms
- Cell phones and pagers
- Bulletproof glass
- Partitions
- Proper escape routes
- Surveillance cameras
- Patrol by guards and/or guard dogs

The general point of the security system is to keep employees on the inside of the workplace safe and protected from internal and external threats. The development of a security system should not be limited to operations managers; human resources and the risk assessment team must also be involved. The components of a security system will depend on a workplace's risks and needs, and therefore will differ from workplace to workplace.

Like the risk assessment process we discussed earlier, the security system must be reviewed every one to two years, or after major building renovations or staff changes. All security equipment should also be inspected and maintained according to the manufacturer's requirements; there's not much good in a security system that doesn't work properly.

Security Personnel

Operations managers, the risk assessment team, and human resources will also want to develop a security team. This team will be in charge of the physical protection of the work site, as well as reporting

and recording violent incidents (including threats). They should be trained in negotiation, defusing violent situations, communication, leadership, and self-defense measures.

Security personnel should always be in groups of two to three, never alone. They should also have some responsibility for employee safety. For example, if a security guard sees a staff member working alone at night or engaging in some other unsafe behavior, they should advise the staff member that their behavior is breaching the company policy. The security guard should also inform the appropriate supervisor.

A System for the Acme Widgets Company

Case Study

Staffing Schedule

Staff Member	Responsibility	# of Staff	Hours Worked
Security guards	Patrol building and grounds every half hour	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 am to 7 pm (Thu-Sat)
	Monitor security desk and cameras	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
Operations manager	Oversee all staff	1	8 am to 4 pm
Distribution clerks	Check invoices and prepare cargo	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
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	Transport cargo to loading bay	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		1	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
HR consultant	Manage all human resource issues, including personal	1	8 am to 4 pm, although can be called in off-hours

	counseling, hiring, firing		
Receptionist	Respond to incoming phone calls, e-mails, faxes	3	8 am to 4 pm
		2	4 pm to midnight
	Prepare invoices and send to distribution clerks	1	Midnight to 6 a.m.
Warehouse workers	Let trucks into loading bay, place cargo onto trucks, and ensure paperwork is signed and cash received	4	8 am to 4 pm

Floor Plan

