SMART WORKPLACES BY HR TO GO - MARCH 2004

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Take These Steps to Defuse a Volatile Confrontation

If you haven't confronted violence in your workplace, it's only a matter of time. "The problem is so pervasive that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has classified workplace violence as a national epidemic," Sheppard told HR managers and security officers attending the National Summit on Security here recently. In fact, he said, the Justice Department now considers the workplace the most dangerous place to be in America.

HR Departments can provide a flash point for angry workers. If you're confronted with someone threatening violence, Sheppard advocates these six steps:

1. **Try to understand the person's mind-set**. "In the overwhelming number of cases, the person just wants fairness."

2. **Practice "active listening"** by rephrasing what the person has said and ask clarifying, open-ended questions.

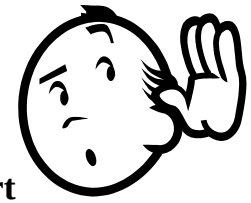
3. **Act calmly,** even if you're ready to jump out of your skin, and never embarrass or verbally attack the person.

4. **Let the person vent.** Many times that alone is enough to calm him or her. "Visualize a big balloon that's about to burst. It must be gradually deflated rather than punctured."

5. **Allow the person to suggest a solution.** "It may surprise you that the person's suggestion may be very reasonable."

6. **Switch the focus toward what you can do.** You may be able to call on additional resources to help solve the person's problem, such as an employee assistance program or call your consultant at HR to Go.

"If your organization hasn't experienced this issue yet, be glad. Do not, however, be content."



Time to Listen, Build Rapport

"Market thyself" has been the theme of career advancement books in recent years. But now many experts say that building rapport with co-workers will produce better, longer lasting benefits.

It's a time, they say, to stop tooting your own horn and listen up. To get what you want in your career, observe how others process information and what their needs are.

It's especially important when others work for you. Daniel Goldman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* , says, "To inspire people and move them in the right direction, you have to engage them emotionally." Career success comes more from the ability to deal with others' feelings than from personal power.

When working with your own boss, you will be more effective if you take time to understand his or her style of communication. One boss might say, "Could you please do this," and it would mean the same as when another says, "I need this done right away." By knowing the boss's communication style, it's easier to know what is needed.

Linguists at Georgetown University say people are never taught how listening works. As they listen, they think of what they will say next or do later. But they should be giving their full attention to what the other person is saying.

When you learn how to listen and observe people, you will be able to build a network of supportive coworkers and customers that will benefit your career.

When you Witness an Accident...

Seeing someone be injured in an accident can leave you feeling shocked. But for better or worse, you are a witness, and you will play a role in an accident investigation.

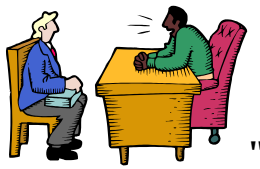
Some witnesses are concerned about what information they should give. They may not want to put a fellow worker at fault or think their own position will be in jeopardy if they describe the circumstances.

There are two types of witnesses: Those who actually saw or heard what happened, and those who can shed some light on the incident. In either case, it's important to volunteer as a witness right away. If your information isn't taken very soon, important details could be forgotten.

The purpose of an accident investigation is to prevent future injuries. Interviews are fact-finding exercises, not for fault finding or placing blame. If you are interviewed, give your complete version of what happened. Even small bits of information about circumstances and equipment can fill gaps and lead to a safer workplace.

In such an interview, you could be asked for your opinion on how the accident could have been prevented. Give your opinion freely because you are an important partner in the investigation process.

Inquiries will ultimately lead to a higher level of safety. Hopefully, you will never witness a serious injury. But if you do, be prepared to give information that could reduce chances of such an incident occurring again.



"Don't Call Us, We'll Call You..."

Job interviews sometimes draw the strangest candidates. Here are true tales of the world's bizarre encounters collected by recruiting

experts:

- "Said if he was hired, he'd teach me ballroom dancing at no charge, and started demonstrating."
- "After a difficult question, she wanted to leave the room momentarily to meditate."
- "Applicant walked in and inquired why he was here."
- "Said that if I hired him, I'd soon regret it."
- "Woman brought in a large shopping bag of canceled checks and thumbed through them during the interview."
- "Applicant indicated that if he wasn't hired, the future of the company would be jeopardized for confidential reasons."
- "Arrived with a snake around her neck. Said she took her pet everywhere."
- "Took three cellular phone calls. Said she has a similar business on the side."
- "She returned that afternoon asking if we could redo the entire interview."

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