



De-escalating Hostile Clients

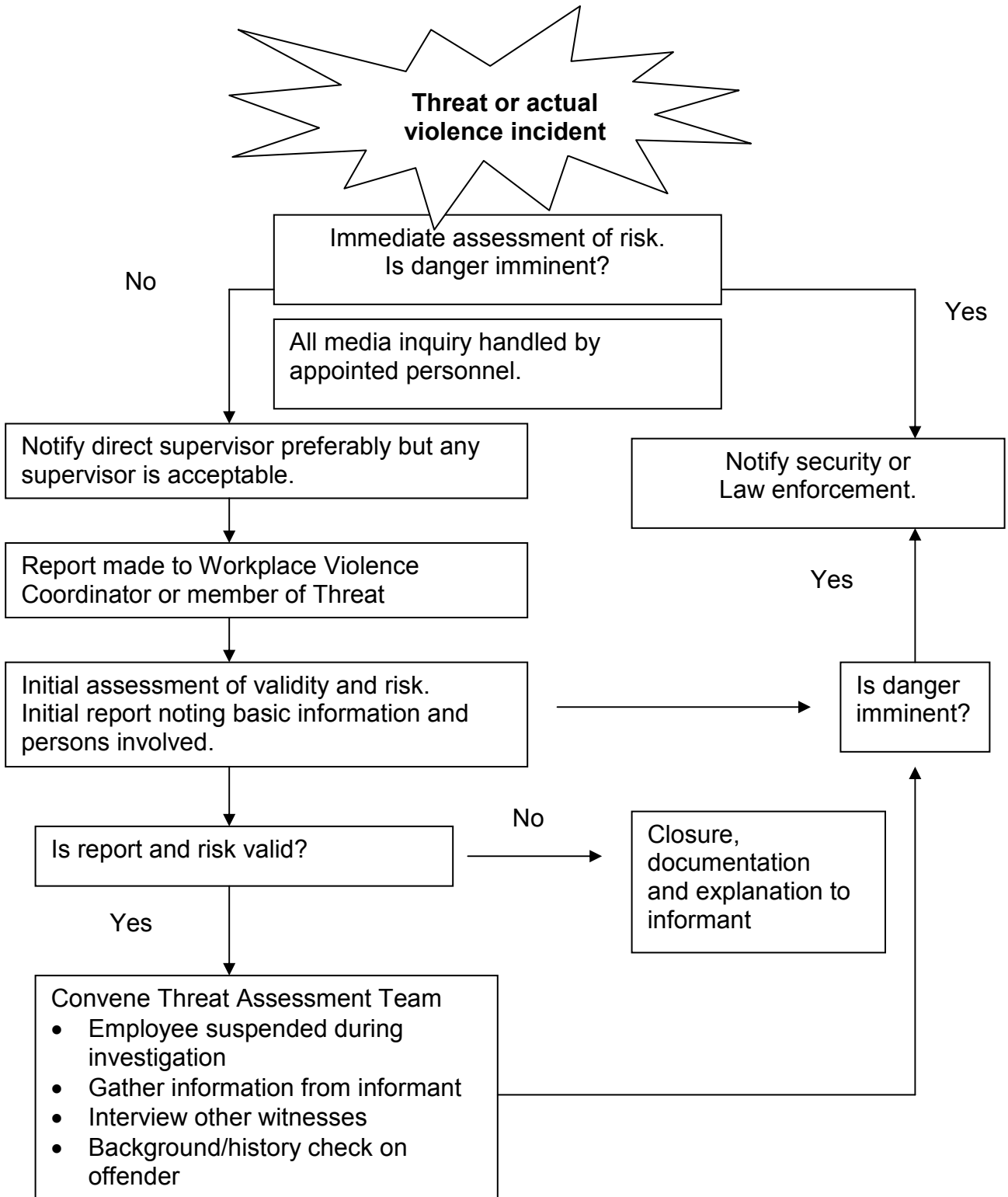
Johnny Lee, M.S.
Director
Peace at Work
Raleigh, NC

PACKAGE OUTLINE

1. Quick Reference Flow Chart for Incident Response
2. Support and Security Measures Checklists
3. De-escalating Triangle Principles
4. Language Examples



QUICK REFERENCE FOR WORKPLACE VIOLENCE INTERVENTION MANAGEMENT STEPS





Implementing Security

The following security list is meant to provide suggestions and ideas, not specific steps for every situation. Every individual case requires a comprehensive assessment by appropriate personnel and even professional consultation to determine the best course of action. This guideline serves only to provide a range of possible options that management can consider in protecting the victim and the workplace.

Response Plan if Perpetrator Approaches the Workplace:

- Call Law Enforcement!
- If there is no direct threat or court orders against them, notify security if available
- Lock all entrances to the facility
- Warn the targeted victim(s)
- Notify all personnel, especially management or individuals planning security
- Allow passage on an escape route or to a safe location pre-designated

Develop plan to secure workplace and employees:

- Distribute information regarding the description of the perpetrator, and their vehicle, to security and front desk personnel
- Check to see if your state has an automated notification system when an offender is released from incarceration, then register.
- Request increased patrols from local Law Enforcement Agency
- Obtain copy of protective order for security and/or management if available
- Limit access to building; use one entrance, if feasible
- Provide buzzer alarms and/or panic buttons
- Increase security measures i.e. fencing, additional lighting and cameras

Target Hardening of the Victim:

- Change victim's parking spot to a safer location
- Escort the victim to her/his car
- Reassign the victim to a different shift, workspace or duties to safer conditions
- Provide emergency cell phones (available from most domestic violence shelters)
- Screen victim's incoming calls and/or provide new extension and email
- Keep previous phone or email extensions to record abuser's messages as evidence
- Provide support for victim's security at their home or other safety planning

Most effective measures when threat is deemed imminent and lethal

- Hire off-duty law enforcement officers as security (may be able to park their squad car in front of facility)
- Lock all entrances to facility, allowing passage to only valid visitors
- Ensure easy egress for safe evacuation
- Remove victim from facility by assignment to other location or allow time off
- Hire security consultant services
- Provide extensive, customized and expert advice on security measures
- May use an investigator to track perpetrator's movement



DE-ESCALATION OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

Three options to abusive behavior:

- 1) Defensive 2) Passive 3) Pro-Active

How are you going to react?

GENERAL NOTES:

- Developing a relationship with the clients – work with them!
- Don't take it personally and don't assume what made them mad
- Their perception: Customers feel ENTITLED to service

Being prepared:

- Being aware of why a client comes in can prepare an employee to know how interact with the subject.
- Information from referral source
- Have you had issues with them before? Were they angry before?

1) Angry Clients:

- The first step is to recognize the warning signs of an irritated person.
 - (Loud voice, cursing, thumping, gesturing, constant interruptions, non-stop talking, etc.
- Importance of recognizing signs early on.
- Common blocks to not recognizing someone else's state.
 - They come at worst time
 - You might have your own issues
 - Previous history w/client
- Awareness that unknown precipitating events in customer's life may be the cause of frustration- it is not you so don't be the straw that breaks the camel's back.
- Safety issue: what are they wearing, can they be concealing something?



RESPONSE

Body Language

- Crucial to maintain one's own sense of calm
 - Kinetics- body language
 - Stance (back to an angle, posture, gestures- cultural issues)
 - Para-verbal communication
 - Volume, rate and tone
 - Shouting occurs from wanting to heard as well as interruptions
- Breathing exercises to slow physiological response.
 - Visualization of peaceful resolution

Action Steps

- A. Reflective, active listening: review of skills to increase comprehension and show empathy.
 - WHAT IS IT? What does it look like?
 - What do you agree with?
 - Taking Notes: taking them seriously, also documentation
 - Language examples
- B. Providing solutions: Often, there may a rule or problem that gets in the way of what the customer needs. Help identify the need, brainstorm solutions, include their input in looking for solutions. Try to offer them something, a compromise. Nothing is more frustrating than bureaucratic stonewalling.
 - Think outside box- find out what they really want.
 - Don't just repeat the rules: ultimate sign of miscommunication
 - Offer something, anything
 - Appeal process: have an option
 - No options? Make it painless as possible- give them something.
 - Don't criticize, even if they are wrong
 - Don't be judgmental, don't blame them for their mistakes
- C. Knowing your hot buttons: Recognizing what comments or issues get YOU riled. Customer may be looking for a way to get you into an argument/fight. Realizing what makes you angry prepares you to manage it. Okay to have them- only human.
 - Customer hot buttons: inflexible, red tape, stupid rules
 - "You people" racial, sexual remarks, "only could find government work".



2) **Crossing the line:** When a customer has gone beyond decent, respectful behavior.

Line maybe different for different people. The following responses may be skipped if the behavior is too extreme, too quickly.

RESPONSES:

A. Setting limits- establishing the need for mutual respect.

- Be Fair but FIRM
- Don't fall in trap- YOU have the power to end it.
- Examples:
 - Practice with statements such as "I want to help you but first, I need to be treated respectfully" or "If I am to be of any help to you, I need you to stop using foul language". Interest in dignity for everyone
- Not in a scolding, parental stance but sharing what expectations you may need
- Only use this response if you feel comfortable and that it is safe.

B. Getting help

- If you feel over your head or feel your own frustration rising, it is entirely appropriate to contact someone else to handle the matter (may have a fresh perspective, may be able to relate better with client, etc.) It is not reflection on your ability.
- Maybe it is a bad mix between you and them.
- Calling a supervisor helps them feel important
- Separate them from public- option to consider

C. Leave

- Not a power struggle, not worth fighting over.
- Contact security and/or supervisor



3) **Hostile or Dangerous behavior:** If they become threatening.
Often, people do not recognize a threat while it is being made.

- Definition of **threats**:
 - Direct,
 - conditional,
 - veiled and
 - Criminal definitions.

RESPONSE

- Always take it seriously, even if you are not afraid.
- Body placement and positioning. Stay at least 6 feet away from offender and try to arrange yourself to make an escape.
- PROXIMICS, avoid blocking yourself in, stay outside, out front
- Knowing when to leave. If you feel threatened, remove yourself. It is not your job to be abused. Do not interfere if property is being damaged or stolen.
- Calling the police. Then the main office/supervisor.
 - Don't be afraid of making it a big deal- police have a calming influence.
- Making a report. Follow the workplace Violence Policy guidelines.

4) **Assaults and Threats:**

- REMAINING CALM- DON'T PANIC

If you feel in danger of imminent violence.

- Escape if possible.
- Hostage: follow directions- don't try to get the gun
- Comply with perpetrator's wishes, if possible and safe.
- Warn co-workers and other customers if possible.
- Never intervene physically, unless in self-defense or saving another, even if you are capable.
- Call 911



Language Examples For Handling Aggressive Encounters

Calming the Tension/ Noticing the needs:

- “I see that you are in a hurry, we will get through this process as quickly as possible and get you on your way.”
- “Sir, I realize that this is your third time here. I will do what I can to make sure we get this taken care of today.”
- “I know it is pretty hectic here today. Thank you for being patient during the wait.”

Reflective Listening:

- “So let me see if I understand you right. You have/tried/feel (repeat back the main points that they have stated).”
- “You must be feeling... (frustrated, treated unfairly, anxious, concerned, etc.)”
- “I would be feeling (appropriate emotion) too.”
- “So your main concern is).”

Setting Limits:

- “If we are going to continue to work together, I have to insist that you stop using that language.”
- “In order for us to continue, I am going to ask that you show me the respect that I have been showing you.”
- “I realize that you are mad but I do not deserve to be spoken to in that manner.”
- “If we are going to continue, we have to do so in a respectful and dignified manner.”