

"Going Postal" and Beyond: Part I Dynamics Triggering Workplace Violence

"A Dangerously Dysfunctional Work Environment" (edited)



1. From TLC to TNC. Work environment driven by "time, numbers and crises" not by "tender loving care." Beware a philosophy that extols customers as kings while treating employees as peasants; it's a formula for revolt, inertia or sabotage.
2. Rapid and Unpredictable Change. Can be either a downsizing or expansionary mode. Unstable leadership and work force; adjusting to new personnel; loss of wisdom. Rules and procedures don't appear to be operational; "the book" has lost some critical pages. Chronic uncertainty from lack of timely information or from communication not perceived as genuine or accurate.
3. Destructive Communication Style. Excessively aggressive, condescending, explosive or passive aggressive styles of communication; excessive workforce razzing or scapegoating. Managers talking over employees; nobody truly listening. Either defensive counterattacking or robotic groupthink.
4. Authoritarian Leadership. Rigid, militaristic mindset; "superiors" vs. "subordinates" or "inferiors." Typical slogans: "You don't get paid to think" or "My way or the highway." Leaders blow up if challenged and break up any participatory decision-making or team building efforts.
5. Defensive Attitude. Dismissive attitude and atmosphere regarding feedback; little interest in evaluation of people and policies. Only numbers count. Not safe to give feedback; people quick to feel disrespected or rejected. Yelling or intimidation or, conversely, avoidance, preferred ways of dealing with conflict.
6. Double Standard. Different policies and procedures, bias in application, for management and employees, blue collar or white collar, racial or sexual discrimination -- "Workforce vs. Tower" dichotomy. Double standard also manifests as management gets substantial training or support for dealing with change processes and employees get minimal orientation and ongoing support.
7. Unresolved Grievances. No mechanisms or only adversarial ones -- "us vs. them" -- to settle grievances. Or, dysfunctional individuals protected or ignored because of contractual provisions, red tape, old boy network or union cover, etc.
8. Emotionally Troubled Personnel. Management not actively assisting, in a timely manner, troubled employee to get needed help; preferably voluntarily or through a supervisory mandate for EAP counseling. Not professionally engaging the troubled employee (or supervisor, etc.) can create a tumor for the work team -- scapegoating, loss of respect for leader, apathy and lowered morale, etc.
9. Repetitive, Boring Work. Not just assembly line syndrome. Also, "The Bjorn Bored Syndrome": When Mastery times Monotony provides an index of Misery! Your niche of success becomes the ditch of excess and stagnation. Lack of opportunity for job rotation or not enough new blood coming into the system. (Also, see hazardous setting below.)
10. Faulty Equipment/Deficient Training. Equipment or procedures (or lack of same) that don't allow people to work effectively or efficiently...and then workers are criticized for not being productive. Also, rapidly inundating people with new equipment and operational standards while not providing sufficient time and resources for successful startup.

11. Hazardous Setting. Disruptive ambient work conditions -- temperature, air quality, repetitive motion issues, overcrowded space, problematic noise levels, excessive overtime, nocturnal schedule and interrupted sleep, etc. Personnel shortage results in lack of backup resulting in potentially dangerous work expectations and conditions.

12. Culture of Violence. Culture or past history of individual and/or violence and abuse. Violent or explosive role models. Alcohol and drug abuse; employees with lingering Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Source: (<http://www.stressdoc.com>) Mark Gorkin, LICSW, the Stress Doc, a psychotherapist and nationally recognized speaker, trainer, consultant and author, is also known as AOL's and the internet's "Online Psychohumorist"™.