

Who are you Gonna Call? Behavior-Based Services Keep The Workplace Productive

By David Stone, Ph.D.

*Chief Executive Officer
Sound Mental Health*



It's Friday afternoon and you have a problem. Your accounting manager is engaged in a shouting match with one of his staff in front of 10 other employees. It's getting ugly, with references to one's parentage, the other's sexual orientation and both of their levels of intelligence. Threats are exchanged, but luckily, colleagues have separated the would-be combatants. Who are you gonna call?

You run a restaurant on a busy urban street, in an area frequented by homeless and other low income individuals. Occasionally, one or two come through your doors asking for food from your employees or your customers, sometimes in a very insistent manner. While you have some empathy for their plight, you have a business to run -- and these individuals are making that difficult. You've posted signs, asked them to leave and threatened to call the police. But, eventually they return. What are you going to do?

You're responsible for a manufacturing plant, and there's pressure to keep production on schedule. This morning, an employee's arm was crushed by a pressing machine, an event witnessed by eight co-workers. While several of the more obviously traumatized employees went home for the day, a few chose to stay on the job. But they're clearly suffering from the effects of the incident, and aren't able to focus at work. What are you going to do? Who are you gonna call?

These and other situations happen

every day in our workplaces, disrupting productivity, workplace morale and overall operations. When a crisis or other unexpected event takes place, management must find an appropriate and immediate response. Without a solid strategy to handle the complex nature of today's dynamic workplaces, businesses stand to lose billions. Adverse events in the workplace, to be exact, cost businesses \$120 billion annually in lost productivity, legal fees and increased health care expenditures, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Of course, if a situation at work becomes really threatening, or a genuinely traumatic event occurs, most workers know to call their firm's security personnel, or perhaps 911. But once the immediate crisis has passed, what should a business do next?

Behavior-based training and support services are sound, cost-effective tools that enable businesses to comprehend and cope with potentially costly situations that occur in their workplaces. These

services range from consulting services -- that provide structured, evidence-based training to assist employers in recognizing and supporting individuals who are struggling with emotional and behavioral health issues -- to safety and de-escalation training, which helps employees and staff recover from traumatic events, workplace hostilities, harassment and more.

Though these issues may already be addressed by your organization, engaging competent consultation and training from an organization experienced in dealing with workplace crises can be extremely beneficial to the employer's management team. These services not only help the organization recover quickly from traumatic events; they often can assist the firm in preventing similar crises in the future.

Whether your business has internal resources and a contract with an outside firm, or simply provides a toll-free number to an employee assistance service, utilizing

behavior-based consultation and training can reap huge benefits.

Conclusion

The most valuable asset a company has is its employees. Nearly 2 million U.S. workers each year report being victims of hostilities in the workplace by associates, the public or customers. Traumatic events and other crises ripple rapidly throughout an organization and the more serious the crisis, the stronger those ripples become. In small companies or departments of larger ones, those ripples can become waves, and can cause significant damage to operations. It would be penny wise and pound foolish for management to use a minimalist approach in preparing for crises in the workplace. Wise leaders would give strong consideration to using specially-trained consultants that offer both emergent and longer-term assistance to employees.

Executives should choose carefully when dealing with the issue of preparedness for unforeseen crises

and traumatic events in today's workplace. Too much is at stake do otherwise. And although cost shouldn't be a primary issue, it does not have to be an expensive investment to ensure your supervisors and line employees know how to respond to crises and other tough workplace situations. All you just have to know is: "who you are gonna call."

David Stone, Ph.D., is CEO of Sound Mental Health, one of King County's most comprehensive mental health services providers. With more than 30 years of experience developing and managing award-winning community mental health services, his leadership has enabled Sound Mental Health to grow to 80 + programs, supporting more than 17,500 people in the community and generating millions in annual revenue. He received a B.A. in Psychology from Eckerd College, followed by an M.A. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Florida.

Reprinted with permission from the Washington Healthcare News. To learn more about the Washington Healthcare News visit wahcnews.com.