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THIS MONTH'S CONVERSATION IS WITH GREG NORRED, founder and president of Norred & Associates, a corporate security and investigative firm in Atlanta. Founded in 1981, Norred & Associates today has 300 employees and a second office in Savannah. Norred & Associates has handled the personal security for such notables as Lt. Col. Oliver North, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Vice President Dan Quayle. Corporate clients include The Kroger Co., Bell South, Emory University and the Atlanta Braves. Norred discusses crime and violence in today's workplace.

Q. You have been quoted as saying that more than 2 million assaults take place in the workplace every year and that the number is steadily increasing. What precautions are employers presently taking to deal with this growing threat?

A. Most companies are doing nothing. What they need to be doing is concentrating on prevention. Prevention involves four basic categories: First, a company needs to have the right policies and procedures in place to send the message that threats or violence will not be tolerated, but if they do occur, the people involved will be severely disciplined or punished. It is a good idea to have a way for employees to confidentially report suspicious activities or threats. Some companies provide an 800 number for this purpose. Another priority is that companies have a "no weapons" policy. It is very simple. If you bring a weapon to work, you are going to be fired. And all prospective employees should be carefully screened before they are hired. This includes criminal checks and reports, reference checks, credit reports and drug testing. In general, it is important to have a drug program in place. This includes pre-employment testing, post-accident testing and testing for reasonable suspicion.

The second preventive category is that supervisors and employees need training on how to recognize the warning signs of a potential act of violence and how to communicate their concerns. Supervisors, managers and personnel officers should also be trained in how to terminate people - how not to strip them of their dignity or humiliate them. Believe it or not, there have been cases where someone has been called to the personnel office over the loudspeaker, fired and then escorted out the door by security. Besides being inhumane, that is just asking for trouble. The right thing to do is to allow the person being termi-

nated to vent his or her frustrations verbally. They should also be offered placement counseling and you should consider the option of severance pay.

The third preventive category deals with essential security measures, such as access controls, surveillance cameras, alarm systems, lighting and fencing.

The fourth preventive category is being alert to situations and being able to adjust to them. If you are terminating a volatile employee, an employee who has drug problems for instance, you may want to take extra security precautions and have a well-trained, armed security person fairly close by. Chances are, he may have to neutralize an incident. Or, if you know an employee is in the middle of a traumatic domestic situation and is being stalked or threatened, you need to take the situation seriously. About 20% of all workplace violence involves some kind of romantic entanglement.

Q. Is the increase in crime and violence in the workplace a reflection of what is happening in society in general or is there a disproportionate increase?

A. It reflects the growth of violence in society in general.

Q. What do you attribute the increase in workplace violence to?

A. There are five basic causes for workplace violence: company downsizing and widespread layoffs; increase in drug and alcohol abuse; the glamorization of violence in the news and information media; the availability of guns in our society; and today's high divorce rate. There are more than 2 million guns owned in our country and each week there are 20,000 gun permits issued.

Those are frightening numbers when you consider the number of nuts and crazies out there. But the leading cause of violence in the workplace stems from drug and alcohol abuse. The fact is we are not winning the war against drugs. According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, there were 4.2 million people using cocaine in 1982. In 1990 that number skyrocketed to 27 million.



The increase is due in large part to the use of crack cocaine. And the impact on the workplace is formidable.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 18-20% of all employees nationwide are substance abusers. They are two-and-a-half times more likely to be absent than non-users. They are five times more likely to have an accident at work and file a worker's comp claim. They are three times more likely to file a health insurance claim. And they are one-third less productive. When you add several of the five basic causes of violence together, you get a very explosive situation. In other words, it's not hard to imagine that someone who is going through a divorce may also lose his job. If he or she abuses drugs or alcohol on top of that, you can have a potentially violent incident waiting to happen.

Q. How does the rate of violence in the workplace in Atlanta compare to that in other cities?

A. Many experts and studies suggest that Atlanta is the most violent city in the world. You read about terrorist attacks in the Middle East, but those are the incidents that are making the headlines. The majority of incidents do not receive any significant media coverage. The statistics show that on a continual basis, Atlanta has more murders per capita than any city in the world, and within my industry, it is widely recognized that the U.S. is the most violent country in the world.

The National Safety Workplace Institute reports that the risk of being murdered in the U.S. is seven times higher than in the average European country.

Q. Do you think the increase in workplace violence reflects a failure of management to manage employees effectively?

A. I don't think it's a failure of management in any way at this point. I think it is a reflection of today's social ills. But if management doesn't do anything about it now, in the future it could very well be a failure of management. Ten years ago violence in the workplace was not a subject that merited much attention. It is now just coming to the forefront. So if in five years, company managers don't have a program in place, then we can look to them. But it doesn't matter what I think about the future. Courts today are holding companies responsible for violent acts that occur on their premises. So if, as an employer, you become proactive in the fight to prevent violence, you are not just protecting your employees, you are protecting yourself from legal liability.

Q. What does workplace violence cost American business every year?

A. The National Safe Workplace Institute reports that 90% of cost stemming from violent acts range from \$10,000 to \$250,000. These costs are composed of security fees, legal fees, judgments, loss of productivity, property damage and loss of market share from negative image, all incurred in the aftermath of a violent incident. The total cost to U.S. business in a year for these after-the-fact expenses is more than \$4 billion. By contrast, it doesn't cost anything to print up anti-violence policies and post them on a bulletin board. It's as simple as saying, "We don't tolerate threats or violence. They will be severely punished. If you have any complaints or concerns, call this number." It sounds elementary, but this can be an important first step in creating a corporate culture that has a zero tolerance for violence.

Q. Do you think most employers know they can be held liable for worker's compensation, negligent hiring and negligent security claims in situations where violent crimes have occurred on their premises?

A. Yes, I think they are aware of the liability they face, especially human resources people.

They know that if there is an incidence of violence on their premises, they are going to get sued. Yet, dealing with security issues is still being delegated to the back burner at many companies. It is just beginning to get more widespread attention now. Basically, those that have had incidents got an alarming wake-up call and have become proactive. Those that have not had incidents are slow to pay attention to the issue or are completely unresponsive to it.

Q. What is an employer's responsibility when it comes to pre-employment screening?

A. From the biggest company to the smallest, every company needs to check out its employees thoroughly. You need to know who you are hiring. You also, of course, need to know how the person performs. An employer can be found liable of negligent retention if an employee who has been a bully, has started fights and has had outbursts, finally commits a violent act, and the company ignored the questionable behavior before the incident.

Q. What are the warning signs that violence may be brewing?

A. It's important to look for a trigger and for employees who are subject to one or more of the five basic causes of violence that we discussed before. Someone who has just lost his job and is also going through a divorce, for instance. Someone who has financial problems, who is a loner, who has no outside interest - no family, no friends, no hobbies. Someone who is fascinated with guns and weapons, frequently a former military man. Someone who is cruel to women and animals. The typical profile of someone who commits a violent act in the workplace is a white male between the ages of 35 and 45, who is a loner, a gun fanatic and is suffering from stress. In general, when it comes to warnings, do not ignore threats. They usually are made before an act of violence is committed. The more specific the threat, the more seriously it should be taken. "I'm going to get you," is very different from "I'm going to come in here with an AK47 and blow your head off."

Q. Not all workplace crime is violent. What are the most common causes of employee theft?

A. The biggest reason is justification. The employee who says, "I work hard, and I'm not paid enough." There will always be a certain percentage of people who feel that way. Generally, you can break employees down into

three groups: One-third of the people you hire will steal from you. They will always be looking for ways to steal. One-third will not steal no matter what happens. They are honest, period. The remaining third will respond depending on how you manage them and treat them. The culture you create in your company will influence their behavior. The first third should be screened out with pre-employment background checks. Keep in mind that drugs and theft go hand in hand. And that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce says that employee theft is responsible for 30% to 50% of all business failures.

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