

Recent Violence & Helpful Insights

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Just a few words from me to help clarify what seems to some as random and unpredictable violence occurring in our society and what you can do to identify pre-incident indicators to prevent violence where you work, worship, play, and in your families.

The Three Myths of Violence

1. It will never happen to me
2. There is no way to predict it
3. There is no way to prevent it

These three myths are just that... myths and untruths. Quickly, I will share some insights gained through my many years in law enforcement and corporate security during which I protected companies and high-risk persons and investigated thousands of threats, interviewed stalkers in the middle of the night, assessed and managed workplace violence, domestic violence, and violent criminals.

Grievance

People don't just snap and buy a car... and people don't just snap and commit violence. Violence always starts with a grievance. That grievance may be motivated by unmet expectations in a variety of areas of life including politics, religious beliefs, work matters, family relationships, how one receives medical care for themselves or a dying family member, or general courtesy between people. And for some, that grievance is not just a passing thought... it's one that gets under a person's skin and becomes embedded in their daily thinking, you can hear it in their words, and you may see that grievance become validated and grow even stronger by the people or groups of people with whom they associate.

Coping Skills & Mental Illness

Most people with whom you work and live with on a daily basis are presented with devastating challenges to deal with at some point in life. Sometimes even multiple difficulties negatively impact a person all at once. I bet you can name more than one

person who has had to uproot their family to move for a job, has been fired or displaced from their dream career, seen a family member suffer and die from a disease, or whose life was devastated by divorce, or a business partnership that ended in an ugly battle. Honestly, these things happen to most people... and may have even happened to you. Think about the people who accepted one or more of these terrible events, who became sad or dismayed for a short time, but then over a period of time you could see them learning to adjust to their new realities in life. They may not have been happy about their new realities... but they dealt with it and got on with life.

Now think about people you know who had an extremely difficult time accepting the truth. They remained in denial. And for a long period of time dwelled on that one specific event, never truly getting over it. They did not seek help in dealing with their troubles. They may have even coupled several negative events together and turned sour against friendships, work relationships, the government, etc., and you saw how they were either in a downward spiral or simply not fun to be around anymore.

There are those of us who are able to bounce back, seek help to learn new coping skills, and adjust to shifting sand. Then there are those of us who do not have those same abilities to cope. Now, almost everyone has some type of *personality disorder*... me, I'm a little OCD... I like my things clean and organized. But, according to the American Medical Association, 1 in 5 American adults experience a *mental illness*. 1 in 25 (10 million) American adults live with a *serious mental illness*. 6.9% (15 million) live with major depression, 2.6% (6.1 million) live with bipolar disorder, and 1 in 100 (2.4 million) American adults live with schizophrenia. Mental Illness or the lack of coping skills play a major role in domestic abuse, workplace violence, and what appears to be random mass casualty violence.

I Can Predict Tomorrow's News Headlines

Immediately after an act of violence occurs, new articles quote sources including family members, neighbors, and friends who claim that the perpetrator was a "great guy", that they "didn't see it coming", and that there was "nothing out of the ordinary". Then slowly, but within a few days, the quotes begin to change with statements such as: "he kept to himself and was recluse and a loner", "he blamed (_____place a name or title here... his spouse, his brother, his boss, the government) for all of his problems", "he never got over... (_____place a grievance here... the divorce, losing his job, etc.), and maybe that he was associated with a group of people who hold some type of anti-social or radical beliefs. You will see that the elements of life which are foundational to happiness and stability in us all, things like a home for shelter, family relationships, steady work and income, dignity, self-esteem, and hope for a better tomorrow were seriously eroded or non-existent in the life of the perpetrator.

What This Means for You

We all deal with stress. It is inevitable. So, when you see someone around you who is struggling... offer a helping hand. Be a good friend by listening and pointing those who are hurting in the right direction. Free counseling is often offered by employers through Employee Assistance Programs and free pastoral counseling is available through most churches.

But when you see a co-worker, acquaintance, family member or friend who is not making progress towards a better tomorrow, and especially when you see any of the signs / pre-incident indicators outlined earlier, it's time to bring in an expert who can professionally and objectively assess the risk and help you to better manage outcomes.

If you are an employer or leader of an organization, a professional can help evaluate your policies, provide training to employees, and support management in making the best decisions to create a safe environment and keep your organization out of the headlines.

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