



Best Practices

A Guide to Violence Avoidance During Employee Terminations



The Problem

The termination of employees in the workplace is an unpleasant task. Employers like to think they have done their hiring due diligence through background and reference checks and have made the very best decision in selecting a candidate for a specific position on the team. There are a number of reasons, however, that cause the employee/employer relationship to go sideways and just not work out. Some

terminations, depending upon the employee and the seriousness of the reason leading to termination, can potentially put the company, its managers, and employees at risk causing the termination to turn hostile. Hostility or anger that leads to workplace aggression can be the driving force behind taking action in retaliation against supervisors/managers, HR personnel, or other employees, especially when a person's livelihood is threatened and he or she feels there is no way out of the ramifications associated with losing their job.

Things to Consider

Most employee terminations do not result in elevated levels of hostility and can be described as more emotional in nature. For the purpose of this discussion, we are referring to terminations that rise to the level of hostility that could potentially result in harm to the employer, manager, and other employees. Considering risks and determining what managers and HR specialists should do when confronted with a potentially hostile termination should be a team effort. Likewise, this effort should begin well before the employee is terminated and continue for a period of time after the termination. Pre-planning is essential to being prepared if and when a hostile termination takes place in the workplace.

We recommend the following for sound best practices and a termination strategy that identifies and effectively manages potential risks to managers and employees in the workplace environment:

1. **Develop a Code of Conduct** that clearly outlines workplace behavior standards and enforces those standards. Most companies make a practice of ensuring new employees are aware of and have a general understanding of these standards during the on-boarding process. However, developing a culture of civility in the workplace where everyone is mutually respected is an ongoing process and often lies with managers and supervisors to continually enforce these standards.
2. **Identify key stakeholders and form a Threat Assessment/Management Team (TAMT)** to assess, manage, and mitigate risks to the business, management team, and employees. TAMTs usually consists of the Manager/Supervisor of the terminated employee, HR Manager, Legal and Security personnel at a minimum. The collective experience in dealing with employment issues and site personnel serves in the fair collection and analysis of facts around the employee and the reason for termination. The TAMT also makes recommendations as to a strategy and necessary actions to mitigate any potential risks as a result of the termination action.
3. **Assess existing site security and be prepared to increase security** around the business based upon the assessment and recommendations of the TAMT. Depending on the level of risk involved, it is always a good idea to add security personnel or guards as a first line of defense. Off-duty, armed law enforcement officers serve as a great asset to deter retaliation on site. Creating a culture of security awareness where all employees are owners of security is a must. Encourage employees to observe and report potential threats to the business and its personnel.



Dealing with Hostile Terminations and Reducing Potential Threats of Violence

Consider these steps that Managers along with the TAMT's should take when dealing with hostile terminations:

1. Gather Information and assess risk of violence before the termination.

Interview direct supervisors and stakeholders with direct knowledge of the employee's behavior and attitude to identify pre-incident indicators of violence that an employee has exhibited. The presence of these factors elevates the risk for retaliation that could lead to violence. Pre-incident indicators of violence include:

- Threats or verbal abuse toward co-workers and supervisors
- Bullying behavior toward others
- Explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation
- Increased use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs
- Unexplained increase in absenteeism
- Noticeable decrease in attention to appearance and hygiene
- Depression and withdrawal

- Inability to get along with fellow employees
- Repeated comments that indicate suicidal tendencies
- Paranoid behavior
- Preoccupation with previous incidents of violence
- Increased mood swings
- Has a plan to "solve all problems"
- Resistance and over-reaction to changes in procedures
- Increase of unsolicited comments about firearms and other dangerous weapons
- Empathy with individuals who have committed violence
- Repeated violations of company policies
- Fascination with violent and/or sexually explicit movies or publications
- Escalation of domestic problems
- Evidence of large withdrawals from or closing of his/her account

2. Actions to take when terminating an employee who exhibits pre-incident indicators of violence:

- **Consider hiring off-duty police officers** or contract security officers to remain nearby during the termination. Maintain this presence until the TAMT has determined the threat has subsided to a manageable comfort level.
- **If possible, do the termination by telephone** while the employee is offsite. Sometimes HR HQ teams participate by phone in terminations while the employee is present with a member of the management team or his/her supervisor, leaving the supervisor at risk. In this case, a security officer or off-duty law enforcement officer should be present inside the office location or standing outside to respond if the situation turns hostile toward the supervisor.
- **Use Neutral Parties.** Do not let managers who have been threatened participate in the termination. This will only heighten the hostility and place the manager or direct supervisor at greater risk.
- **Have a credible, neutral manager participate as a witness.** This is important should the termination be challenged in court and avoids a he-said/she-said situation where the account of the termination meeting is in question.
- **Have all the documentation at hand** relating to the termination. Don't provide an opportunity for tensions to rise by stopping to print, copy, or collect something you forgot. Keep the meeting moving.
- **Be direct.** It's important to be upfront and specific. Resist providing a laundry list of reasons to terminate. Narrow the focus to three reasons or less.
- **Provide clear instructions.** Explain next steps for the terminated employee, as well as the company. Be prepared and take the time to answer any and all questions the terminated employee may have.
- **Don't let the meeting drag out.** When you've said all that you can say, end the meeting. Be empathetic but stand strong about the discussion being over.
- **Do not take a break.** There are numerous instances of an employee asking for a bathroom break or time to compose him or herself and using the break to retrieve a weapon, vandalize the workspace, steal proprietary information, or retaliate against other employees.

- **Wait until the end of the workday to terminate**, if possible. This protects the dignity of the terminated employee and minimizes the number of employees on hand should a situation escalate.
- **Control the environment.** Do not let the employee clean out his or her locker or work station. Have a manager collect the belongings for shipment later.
- **Eliminate return visits.** Minimize any reasons why the employee would have to revisit the workplace. Mail a check and have uncollected belongings sent from the person's home via a delivery service.
- **Don't argue or debate decisions.** Allow the person as much dignity as possible but be brief and to the point.
- **Emphasize any severance benefits and outsourcing help** that may be available.
- **Consider not contesting unemployment** or offering the option of resignation over termination.
- **Assign a point of contact.** Appoint one person within the business that the terminated employee can contact with questions.

3. If an angry employee has made threats and you feel genuine fear, do not hesitate to call the police. Call 911 if exigent circumstances arise. Document the information in a report that clearly explains the nature of the threat, what was said, the date, the time, and names of witnesses. Preserve any evidence to include photos, video, or audio recordings that may be helpful to the police or in the event of a civil action.

Call 1-800 421-0614 or visit us at www.rampartgroup.com for further ideas on protection and security. Thanks for reading!



Kathy Leodler
Chief Executive Officer
kathy.l@rampartgroup.com
(360) 981-2703



Paul Leodler
Executive Vice President
paul.l@rampartgroup.com
(360) 981-3397

Email: info@rampartgroup.com | Website: www.rampartgroup.com | Tel: (800) 421-0614