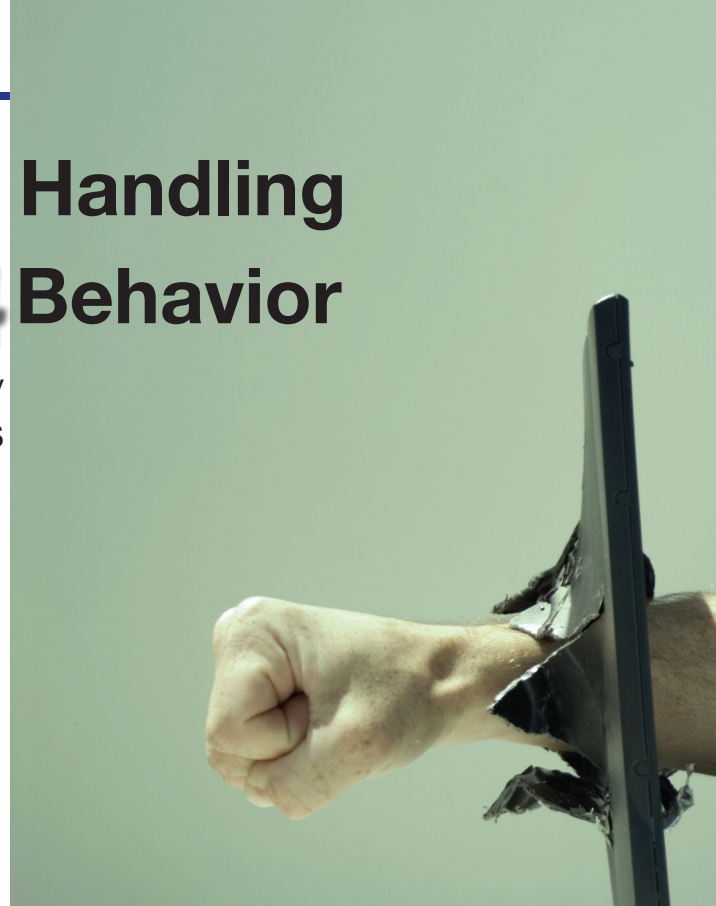


# Recognizing and Handling **THREATENING** Behavior

By  
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Once again, workplace violence has topped the news. With the recent rash of multiple homicides committed in the workplace, Talon has prepared a primer on recognizing the warning signs, which are always present prior to an act of violence in the workplace. In the wake of an incident of workplace violence, a common thread emerges; the warning signs were there, but nobody was paying attention; or, the warning signs were dismissed as harmless acting-out.

While the media readily reports on the most sensational incidents involving multiple deaths, workplace violence has been a persistent problem in this country for many years, with most incidents going unreported nationally. According to the Department of Labor, workplace homicides were second only to vehicular accidents as the leading cause of death at work for men and women.

Recognizing the warning signs leading up to potentially violent behavior is the first step in the prevention of a violent act. Many corporate, government, and school officials do not recognize the warning signs, or ignore them because they do not know what to do next. To recognize the warning signs, one must understand that violence is

not an event, it is a process. Unchecked, aberrant and dysfunctional behavior leads to an escalation of that behavior, and possibly to violence. Therefore, managers and supervisors must be aware of early stage aberrant and dysfunctional behaviors that could provide clues that a person has the propensity for violence.

### Three stages of violent behavior

There are three distinct recognized stages of behavior leading to potential violence: early potential, escalated potential, and if ignored, realized potential.

- **Stage 1 – early potential**

The characteristics of Stage 1 behavior are: objectifying and dehumanizing others (for example, using a derogatory or vulgar name to reduce a person to less than a human being), challenging authority; regularly becoming argumentative; alienating peers, customers, clients, and others; originating and spreading lies; swearing excessively or using sexually explicit language; and verbally abusing or sexually harassing others.

- **Stage 2 – escalated potential**

The characteristics of Stage 2 behavior are: arguing with increased frequency and inten-



sity; disregarding policies and procedures; setting traps for others; theft from the organization or an individual; making verbal threats; unwanted sexual attention or expressing violent intentions via letter, voicemail, or e-mail; and holding others responsible for his or her own actions or problems.


- **Stage 3 – realized potential**

The characteristics of Stage 3 behavior are: physical confrontations and altercations; a display of weapons, committing or attempting to commit assault, sexual assault, arson, or suicide.

### Warning signs

In addition to the three stages of violent behavior and the characteristics of each stage, there are several danger signals or warning signs associated with an increased risk for acting out violently. Common indicators of a potentially violent person include: a fascination with weapons; substance abuse; severe stress; a violent history; drastic changes in psychological functioning; decreased or inconsistent productivity; alienation, social isolation and poor peer relationships; poor personal hygiene; and significant changes in personality.

### Strategies to protect against violence

In addition to these behavioral indicators illuminating a potential for workplace violence, the following strategies will further help to protect against workplace, school, and other organizational violence. Adopt a zero tolerance policy for threats and violence, establish an employee/student confidential information hotline; establish an employee/student assistance program with counseling referral; develop a crisis management team; institute pre-employment screening; and have a professional facility security risk survey performed. For more information on preventing workplace violence, contact Talon Executive Services, Inc. 

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