

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, October 3, 2008

Domestic violence often bleeds over into workplace

Birmingham Business Journal - by [Sandy Capps](#) Special

It is 8:45 on a Monday morning, the phones are already ringing off the hook and Jill in the customer service department has not arrived at work. This is the fourth time this month she has been over an hour late. When Jill has been at work, she has been distracted and irritable causing her performance to decline. She has also been receiving numerous personal calls from her boyfriend which seem to distract her even more and she is heard crying frequently in her office.

Jill's manager is frustrated and tired of dealing with her; he has made the fateful decision to fire Jill.

Unfortunately, Jill's company does not have an Employee Assistance Program and her manager and coworkers have not received training on how to recognize the signs of domestic violence. If they did, they may have been able to save a valuable employee and Jill may have received the help that she really needed and keep her job and income.

It is crucial that all employers large and small take a serious look at the impact of domestic violence and ways to deal with it. Consider these facts:

Domestic violence is the single greatest risk and cause of injuries to women in the workplace.

While domestic violence affects men as well, women are at much greater risk of being victims. One in four women will experience some form of abuse in their lifetime. The **Bureau of Justice** reports that women in the United States are more likely to be victims of violence from a male partner than any other type of assault.

The threat of domestic violence extends to the workplace. Control is the root cause of domestic abuse, and abusers often seek out their partners in the workplace (where a woman is independent of her partner) in order to exhibit their control.

Homicide is the leading cause of occupational death for women in the workplace, according to the **Bureau of Labor and Statistics**. On average, 20 percent of those women were killed in the workplace by their partner.

Because domestic violence does not stay at home, businesses can no longer ignore its threat in

the workplace. Domestic violence costs businesses nationwide upwards of \$5 billion annually in medical costs, according to the **Bureau of National Affairs**, and hundreds of millions more in lost productivity, turnover and absenteeism.

Domestic violence is a safety threat for your entire work force, particularly when violence follows the victim to the workplace. A survey of corporate security directors by the **National Safe Workplace Institute** found that 94 percent considered domestic violence to be a high security concern.

Those of us who follow the news likely remember the shooting at the **CNN Center** in Atlanta last year. The gunman shot and killed a female employee at the complex, after dragging her by her hair through the building. His rampage ended before he could harm anyone else when he was shot down by a security guard. According to CNN, police described the incident as a “domestic situation.”

Are employers prepared to deal with domestic violence? According to a 2006 survey by the **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health**, less than 4 percent of employers offer domestic violence training.

Because October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, now is the ideal time for employers to review their own policies and make domestic violence prevention a greater human resources priority. There are three main steps that every company should take to prevent domestic violence:

- 1) Establish a domestic violence policy. For companies that have workplace violence policies (and every company should), adding a domestic violence to the policy is imperative. In doing so, the company will have a procedure in place to handle domestic situations, such as when an employee has a protective order against a partner or spouse.
- 2) Training. Education of managers and supervisors is essential in preventing domestic violence. Through training from your EAP provider, managers and supervisors will be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of domestic violence, such as bruises, unusual absences/tardiness, changes in work performance and mood swings. Without training, employers run the risk of having a domestic situation continue unnoticed or dismissed altogether. Training of employees regarding the company’s domestic violence policy should also occur so that all are aware of what to do in the case of a domestic situation.
- 3) Provide resources to women. An EAP is an ideal resource to determine avenues for counseling and assistance to female employees who find themselves in abusive situations. Likewise, numerous nonprofit organizations provide legal assistance, shelter and protection for women.

Prevention is the key to combating domestic violence. By creating policies, educating your work force and providing resources to victims, businesses can be a catalyst in thwarting domestic violence before it becomes deadly and reducing the risk to other employees.

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