Case Incident 2

Workplace Violence

On Wednesday, January 26, 2005, 54-year-old Myles Meyers walked into DaimlerChrysler’s Toledo, Ohio, Assembly plant holding a double-barreled shotgun under his coat. Myers, a Jeep repairman, approached Yiesha Martin, a 27-year-old stock supervisor and stated his intentions. He was there to murder three supervisors: Mike Toney, 45, Roy Thacker, 50, and Carrie Woggerman, 24. Afterwards, he said, he would turn the gun on himself. “I was shaking and I started to cry,” said Martin. Meyers told her not to cry and to page Toney. Although he was usually eating lunch at his desk around this time, Toney was busy dealing with a problem on the production line. On Martin’s second attempt, Toney responded.

Thacker, however, was the first of Meyer’s intended victims to approach the former employee. When Thacker asked Meyers why he was at the office, “[Meyers] turned from the partition and just shot him,” Martin recalled. “I just saw the shells go. He reloaded in front of me.” Martin ran, grabbing a radio in the process. As she ran away, calling into her radio for help, she heard another gunshot. Mike Toney had just arrived and was now the second victim. Carrie Woggerman was able to flee after the first shot, but Paul Medlen, 41, while attempting to come to the aid of Toney, was shot in the chest by Meyers just before Meyers turned the gun on himself, taking his own life. Of the three employees shot by Meyers, two survived. Unfortunately, Thacker died from his wounds.

Regrettably, the shooting at the Toledo Assembly plant was not an isolated incident. Just two years earlier, Doug Williams, an employee at Lockheed Martin, left in the middle of an ethics meeting, went to his car, and came back with several guns. He then shot six coworkers to death and wounded eight others before committing suicide. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18,104 assaults and 609 homicides occurred at workplaces throughout the United States in 2002. Such violence prompted the Centers for Disease Control to label workplace violence a “national epidemic.”

In addition to the obvious devastation workplace violence causes victims and their families, businesses often experience serious repercussions, including legal action. Lockheed Martin is still embroiled in a legal battle over whether the company should assume part of the responsibility for the shooting that took place at its plant. And Paul Medlen has just filed suit against DaimlerChrysler and the plant’s security firm, Wackenhut Corp., alleging that both failed to provide adequate security. Given the tremendous damage that companies and employees face following violent episodes, why aren’t businesses doing more to curtail workplace violence? According to a recent study by the American Society of Safety Engineers, only 1 percent of U.S. businesses have a formal antiviolence policy.

Advice on how to reduce workplace violence abounds. According to former FBI agent Doug Kane, people who behave violently often announce or hint at their intentions before the violence occurs. Managers, then, need to be aware of at-risk employees who may commit violent acts and should encourage employees to report any threatening or suspicious behavior. Some employees of the DaimlerChrysler plant are even suggesting that metal detectors be installed to prevent future violence. Whatever measures are taken, it is clear that workplace violence is an issue that needs to be addressed for employees to feel safe at work.

**Questions**

**1.** How liable should companies be for violent acts that are committed during work by their own employees?

**Answer:** Workplaces should be “safe environments” for organizational members. The companies should be fully liable for the welfare of all organizational members. Proactive measures should be in place to ensure as safe an environment that is possible.

**2.** Can companies completely prevent workplace violence? If not, what steps can they take to reduce it?

**Answer:** While companies may not be able to completely prevent workplace violence, they can have measures in place that evaluate the environment for signs that are dysfunctional. Additionally, companies can take precautionary measures through the use of more thorough screening policies at the point of hire.

**3.** Why do you think only 1 percent of companies have a formal antiviolence policy?

**Answer:** Perhaps it is due to the fact that so few companies have directly experienced organizational violence in their workplaces.

**4.** Some companies are considering the installation of metal detectors to prevent workplace violence. Do you think these measures infringe too much on individual privacy? In other words, can a company take prevention too far?

**Answer:** This is a debate question. You may want to have students take both perspectives and present their findings. You can suggest that they find policies from companies that are too lax and/or too stringent as they prepare for their side of the debate.

**5.** What factors might lead to violent acts in the workplace? Are these acts committed by only a few “sick” individuals, or are many individuals capable of committing acts given certain circumstances?

**Answer:** As the text shows, elements of stress and other factors do contribute to this malaise. The environment can also be a contributing factor. Again, students can take a variety of points of view. Be sure to require students to defend their positions empirically.

*Source:* Based on A. K. Fisher, “How to Prevent Violence at Work,” *Fortune*, February 21, 2005, pp. 42, and C. Hall, “Witness Recounts Moments of Horror and Heartbreak,” *The Toledo Blade*, January 29, 2005 (toledoblade.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050129/NEWS03/501290378).