



## ***Build Your Business***

An eNewsletter for  
CEOs looking to  
grow their companies.

High-value, "how-to" articles on customer-attraction, sales development, leadership, and best-practices in HR, IT, product development, communication, financial operations, engineering and M&A/value creation.

# ***How to Avoid Your Murder (or Your Employees')***

Workplace Violence Affects More Than Two Million  
Workers Every Year in the United States.

Can you recognize the warning signs? Do you know what  
to do when someone pulls out a knife or gun?

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# He Never Knew What Hit Him..

## How to Reduce Violence in *Your* Company

**"CEO of Silicon Valley High Tech Company was allegedly shot dead by a former employee".**

**--CNET News**

When you see an article about violence in the workplace do you:

- Know that it would never happen in *your* organization?
- Figure you'll deal with it if it happens?
- Believe these occurrences are rare?
- Know there is nothing you (or anyone in the company) can do?

If you answered yes to *any* of those questions, you and your employees' risk of violence increased *significantly*.

We're all drawn to statistics, aren't we? They seem to *validate* written data. So, here are some statistics which hopefully make *you* sit up and take notice. Yes, it is meant to scare you -- at least enough to plan for the worst and manage for the best.

- Although most workplace violence is not fatal, an average of 500 homicides occur in U.S. workplaces each year, costing society approximately \$800,000 for each death – nearly *half a billion* dollars.
- More than three-quarters of workplace homicides are committed with guns.
- About two-thirds of workplace homicides are related to robbery.
- The remainder result from conflicts between workers and clients, co-workers, acquaintances, or family members.

--CRISP Report 2008

A couple anecdotes may also drive home the point:

"Angered about a salary dispute and his failure to win a promotion, a Connecticut Lottery accountant reported promptly to his job this morning, hung up his coat and then methodically stabbed and gunned down four of his bosses, one of whom he chased through a parking lot, before turning the gun on himself." --*New York Times*

"A 58-year-old businessman and founder of an Adams County software company was arrested Friday on murder charges in a bizarre office shooting at the end of the year that left him injured and another man dead.

Adams County District Attorney Don Quick filed charges against William Rex Fowler in the shooting death of 42-year-old Thomas Ciancio, his former business partner at Fowler Software Design. Investigators say Fowler shot Ciancio three times in the head with a 9mm Glock handgun when Ciancio came to Fowler Software Design to collect \$9,900 in severance pay." --*Denver Post*

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### **Does it take a gun or a knife to be violent?**

Workplace violence is typically defined as verbal and physical assault, regardless of its reason -- even if its source is unrelated to the work environment (e.g., self-directed assault such as suicide, or domestic problems).

Do not assume violent behavior comes only out of low-paid or "questionable" people. It comes from every walk of life and any kind of home.

### **What can you do to prevent it?**

To avoid violence in your company – and the potential financial costs of doing so - you and your HR Leader need to work very closely together. You both need to understand the risks involved with every negative performance review, every employee warning, every employee termination, every employee suspension. You also need to understand that violence often comes from a hidden place within a person and no amount of "reading" for clues will stop what is about to happen.

In the past thirty years, I have had first-hand experience with violence in the workplace and read about workplace violence, extensively. If there is one common theme, it is: It happens in an instant.

While there are no guarantees, there are precautions you, your HR Leader and the rest of your staff can take:

- ✓ Create/distribute the company's workplace violence policy. (HR Leader)
- ✓ Encourage employees to report incidents and the procedures to do so. (All Managers)
- ✓ Provide ways of preventing or defusing volatile situations or aggressive behavior. (Ensure that all manager and employees know they have a safe place to discuss issues – *before* they become a problem.) HR Leader + External Resources)
- ✓ Provide Conflict Resolution classes – as needed. (HR Leader + External Resources)
- ✓ Be sure all employees know security procedures - location and operation of safety devices such as alarm systems, who/when to call for help. (All Managers)
- ✓ If at all possible, provide an Employee Assistance program. (CEO/HR Leader)
- ✓ As CEO, be a *visible* supporter of workplace safety and personally speak about workplace violence with employees (typically in a training setting, such as New Employee Orientation).
- ✓ Institute a “Zero-Tolerance” policy toward workplace violence: And ensure it is defined appropriately.

Due to conflicts you likely do not even know about, it is urgent that you and your staff know how to provide feedback to employees (performance reviews, discipline, terminations), in a humane, respectful and legal manner. Work with your HR Leader to make sure your staff is trained!

Emphasize to your HR Leader that you know that it isn't just what happens once an employee is in the workforce that matters, but *who the company chooses to hire*. Institute background checks. Doing otherwise actually puts your company at risk: It's what you "knew or should have known" that can make your company liable.

- Pay attention to the angry employee and take him/her aside to a quiet location (within yelling distance), and use quiet tones to determine the problem and the best resolution. Don't act too quickly! Suspension of the employee will buy you some time to think the situation through and make the best next move.
- Pay attention to the loner.
- Pay attention to specific threats ("Oh, he's not serious" can get you are your employees killed.)
- Have your HR Department fully investigate any reports of irate, out of control behavior.
- Delineate unacceptable behavior in your employee handbook; however, always add a sentence about "and other hostile behavior" to cover all possibilities for which immediate termination is a possible outcome.
- This is a critical aspect of successfully avoiding violence: Practice what you say and do not allow other "bullies" within your management or leadership get away with it. Their bad behavior could cost you your company. Why? Guess how many employees are taking 'contemporaneous notes' - that during discovery - will point to your lack of leadership as well as your culpability. (How many excellent people have quit - but won't tell you, unless forced to do so?)

Early in my career, an employee, his manager and I were in a conference room. We were going to terminate an employee due to carrying a knife (he had been warned). When he heard the words "we have no choice but to terminate your employment", the knife was out and facing me in an instant. I honestly wondered if either one of us would walk out alive.

From some deep part of me came a calm that allowed me to "talk him down". His manager had quietly left the room to call security. The employee was still standing with the knife when security arrived.

I still breathe quickly when recalling those moments. He was big and he was tall, and he jumped up and loomed over me with that blade catching the overhead light. He entered my dreams for months. He was around every corner of every street, until finally, I began a journal. I moved the fear and the memories onto paper. It was then, the nightmare was over.

*Processes you and your HR Leader put in place today can minimize such an event in your future.*

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### **Author's Biography**

Iris Sasaki has over twenty years of progressive Human Resources experience, in both large companies such as Tektronix, Inc. and Fluor Corp, and startups such as Chemica and ClearEdge Power, Inc.

It is rare to find, in one person, both the soft skills and the analytical capability to handle human resources issues. Iris has the compassion and integrity to work through problems with employees; and, she has the knowledge and strength to recognize and deal with critical situations.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), respects Iris' work enough to include her training modules in their library. The Oregon Employment Division asked her to provide training. Additionally, she has provided training for Oregon Graduate Institute, Lake Oswego Business Alliance, Open Technology Business Center, Society of Women Engineers, etc.

Whether your business is well-established or you are now launching, Iris' deep expertise can be of great help. If you are a very small company, you may be asking why you need HR assistance. The moment you bring one employee onto your payroll, at least five employment laws come into play.



**We are here to support you and your business. We will provide:**

- **HR Office Setup**

Set up the basics of an HR function, including employee files, legal postings, forms, etc. If needed, we will work the requisite hours needed to maintain the department; we provide HR department assessment.

- **Staffing**

We will either provide your company with recruiting and onboarding services, or will find another excellent resource to do the recruiting. Onboarding includes the offer letter, confidentiality agreement, background check, I-9, W-4, and any other necessary documents mandated by the State/Federal government or insurance companies.

- **Training**

Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment training, Performance Management, Interviewing Techniques, and tailored classes.

- **Internal Investigation**

Investigations to provide response papers for local, State or Federal charges.  
Investigations to provide the company data.

- **Employee Relations/Information**

Respond to informational and/or problem solving calls.



*March's eNewsletter summaries are provided below. If you would like to receive the three trial issues, please go to: [www.synergy-usa.com/eNews.html](http://www.synergy-usa.com/eNews.html).*

**How a \$3 million/yr Company was Acquired for nearly \$20 million: in 6 Months**     **Mark Paul**

Are you looking for ways to increase the value of your company? As one CEO found out: Attracting significantly more "A" customers, while decreasing expenses is the surest way.

**How to Improve Your Company's Cash Flow**

**Patrick Wheeler**

Do you need extra cash? Are you searching for new sources of capital to help you survive & thrive? This article is for nonfinancial CEOs and discusses the different "levers" you can pull to improve your cash flow.

**Using HR to Boost Company Performance**

**Iris Sasaki**

If you are interested in dramatically increasing your employees' and managers' performance, there is a little-known secret that will leverage your strengths - and those around you - to accomplish far more.

**Simplifying the Sales and Channel Strategy**

**Bill Etheredge**

Is your sales and channel strategy defined? Have you assessed the effectiveness of existing strategies? Are changes in market conditions causing chaos in your strategy? This article defines what to do to boost effectiveness.

**How to Really Get Things Done**

**Alexander Stein**

Are you always short on time? Does your To-Do list only get longer? Are you at the end of your rope with trying to get ahead? In this article, learn how to get you and your business ticking.

**How to maximize the value of IT in your business - IT Outsourcing**

**Manoj Garg**

You know that you spend a lot of money on IT and that you need to maximize the value of your investments in IT. Do you know if you have made the right decisions on make vs. buy on IT functions and services?

**Are You Jumping on the Lean Bandwagon?**

**Rick Pay**

Are you trying to reduce operations cost - and considering Lean Manufacturing? Companies are climbing on the Lean bandwagon in droves, but how do you know if Lean is the right approach for your organization?

**Got Heart?**

**Dan Duggan**

Is morale an issue at your company? Do employees act listless? Is absenteeism beginning to be a problem? Learn how to recognize and transform "lost heart" into "loving your work".

**Ten Reasons to go International**

**Richard Biggs**

If you are pondering whether to go global, recognize the fact that you are already "global", in that you very likely have global competitors. You are in a competitive global marketplace.

**Engineering Resources: Captive or Consultant?**

**Mike Miles**

Too many projects and too little staff? Can't afford to hire anyone full-time? This article outlines how CEOs can clarify what is important in choosing to hire technical staff or to retain an outside consultant.

**Can you do it in 6:40?**

**Dave Yewman**

Chances are your presentations are too long. Why? Because everyone's presentations are too long. So how do you fix that? Here's one option, a radical option. Are you feeling brave?

**How to Find & Attract Capital to Grow Your Company**

**Brent Freeman**

If you have ever had to find capital to grow your company, this article will show you how prepare critical documents required to find capital from non-traditional sources.

This is the third edition of a three-month trial of the Build Your Business eNewsletter. We are interested in your thoughts via a survey. To receive past months' articles and to take the survey, please 'subscribe' at [www.synergy-usa.com/eNews.html](http://www.synergy-usa.com/eNews.html). Thank you.