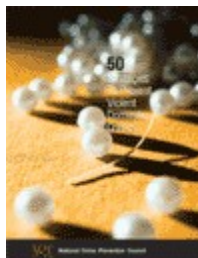




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**SOURCE...50 Strategies to Prevent Violent Domestic Crimes**

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### Strategy: Teaching Employers and Employees About Domestic Violence

#### STRATEGY

Train employers to implement a workplace policy against domestic violence, creating a supportive environment for battered workers while minimizing the financial effects and legal exposure associated with abuse perpetrated on the job.

#### COMMUNITY PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The corporate cost of domestic violence in the workplace has been conservatively estimated at up to five billion dollars annually in a 1995 report to the National Institute of Justice. Battered employees experience residual effects of the abuse they endure at home. Lost productivity on the job, increased absenteeism and use of sick days, fear and distraction, and poor customer service are just a few of the costs associated with battered workers. The threat of a batterer stalking his victim and bringing weapons into the office puts other employees in danger. Courts across America are holding employers and co-workers liable for failing to protect victims of domestic violence. In fact, seven-figure wrongful-death suits are not uncommon.

In today's climate of creating violence-free workplaces and schools, it is increasingly urgent for employers to recognize the signs of domestic violence and take some of the responsibility to prevent it.

#### KEY COMPONENTS

In 1998 the American Institute of Domestic Violence developed a training curriculum to fill what they considered to be a gap in programming. According to owner Coleen Widell, "[The Institute's] goal is to create a supportive work environment for battered workers, to assist employers trying to comply with numerous statutes and regulations that require the provision of a safe workplace to their employees, and to help employers reduce the financial losses associated with the corporate cost of domestic violence." Upon request by a company, the Institute brings prevention tools on site, provides training to staff to recognize the signs of abuse, and outlines the methods of proper intervention. Trainers point to countless cases where employers did not properly intervene when warned of a potential attack and ended up paying for it in court. Human resource staff, security, and management-level employees are given enhanced training that deals with the legal obligations and liability facing the company as well as appropriate procedural interventions. The Institute also provides a sample policy for the employer to adapt and implement in support of victims in the workplace.

#### KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Trainers work with already-established Employee Assistance Programs to incorporate this topical training curriculum into their support services. Generic workplace violence prevention programs addressing violence that originates in the workplace became very popular in the 1990s and are on the verge of being mandated by Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The Institute often works with the administrators of these programs to supplement their training with domestic violence detection and intervention strategies.

#### POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

Employers have to be convinced they are losing money and facing substantial lawsuits if they do not address domestic violence in their workplace. Once this is accomplished, most employers readily participate. However, as is true with workplace violence prevention in general, many employers have a tendency to deny that an incident could ever occur on their site, amongst their employees.

#### SIGNS OF SUCCESS

The American Institute on Domestic Violence has trained over 100,000 employers and employees since 1998. The Institute trains at least 12 large national and multi-national corporations each year and brings the training program to many national trade association and human resources conferences. Many companies report a substantial decrease in the use of paid absenteeism. Productivity and employee morale have reportedly skyrocketed in a majority of the companies that have applied the Institute's strategies.

#### TIPS FOR APPLYING THE STRATEGY



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#### Contact Info

American Institute on  
Domestic Violence  
2116 Rover Drive  
Lake Havasu City, AZ  
86403  
928-453-9015  
[info@aidv-usa.com](mailto:info@aidv-usa.com)  
[www.aidv-usa.com](http://www.aidv-usa.com)

Population Served:  
Employees and Employers

#### STRATEGY IN ACTION

Karen had been employed for the past eight years as an office manager in a very successful firm in Seattle. She was well liked and had a solid reputation for being very efficient at her job. Karen was respected by her employers, who knew she was capable of running the entire business on her own. After months of trying to hide her abuse, Karen saw her job performance slipping and the effects of the abuse began to quietly surface at work. It was so quiet, in fact, that no one seemed to really notice what was going on with her at first. Her co-workers were quick to make excuses for her. Even though they knew something was wrong, no one wanted to pry into her personal life. After all, Karen was the one who always took care of everyone else.

Karen's supervisor knew something was askew. She and Karen had worked together almost 12 years with this company. Karen became withdrawn and emotional. She was distracted from her work. She was struggling with attendance and tardiness problems. The supervisor did what her co-workers were afraid to do: she shared her observations with Karen. She told Karen her job performance had always been exceptional until lately and wondered if there was anything either she or the company could do to help. She reaffirmed how valuable Karen was to the company.

Karen finally disclosed the ongoing abuse at the hands of her ex-husband. She spoke of her concern for

- | The key to successful implementation of this strategy is to get a commitment from management and corporate leadership to establish a workplace that is intolerant of domestic violence.
- | This message must be heard loud and clear--and from the top--before it will be effective. Battered employees must know they are in a supportive and understanding environment before they will discuss violence in their lives.
- | Encourage management to work closely with unions to develop reasonable paid leave and benefits that recognize needs of its battered employees.
- | Rewrite the company's current EAP package to be responsive to battered workers.

her safety at work as well as the safety of her co-workers. She told her supervisor that just days after the divorce was final, her ex-husband began harassing her at work. He made up to 20 calls a day threatening to harm her children and not allow her any form of visitation. He threatened to burn down her parents' home as "punishment" for her leaving him. Consequently, Karen's job performance plummeted as she attempted to balance the demands of the job she loved and the domestic violence that followed her to work.



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With consultation from the American Institute on Domestic Violence, Karen's company immediately adopted a domestic violence policy for their workplace. The institute set up three training seminars to educate the employees about domestic violence and its effects in the workplace and trained the supervisory and management staff to properly identify and intervene in the case of a battered worker. With her supervisor's support, Karen contacted the local police department and filed a complaint against her ex-husband. A Protection Order was issued by the Court that protected Karen at home as well as at the office. Karen agreed to have her ex-husband's picture circulated to select people so they could help protect her at work. After the company took this bold stance against domestic violence on behalf of its workers, two other workers came forward and disclosed their abuse to their supervisors. Knowing the company was supportive was the key for these battered workers.