



## ***From Bullying to Beating: Reducing Risk Along the Spectrum of Workplace Violence***

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*Stephen White, PhD, President*

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## **Acknowledgements**

**On the shoulders of giants. . .**

- Jolee J. Brunton, PhD
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- Stephen W. Weston
- Stephen G. White, PhD



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## Introductory Remarks

- We live in difficult times
- We fear violence in our workplaces
- Horrific tragedies do occur
- No workplace is immune from this possibility



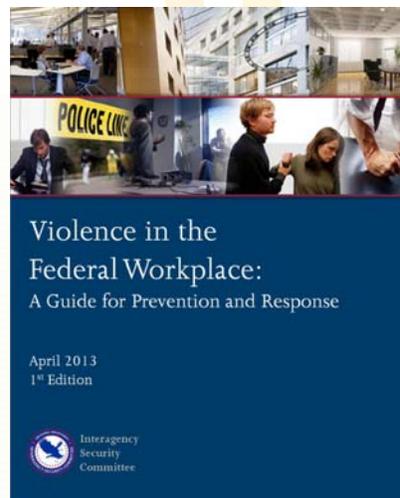
<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/workplace-violence>

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## On the Brighter Side

- Statistically rare
- Increased awareness
- We have learned a great deal
- Reasonably foreseeable



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## On the Brighter Side

*Violence risk is complex and comprehensible*

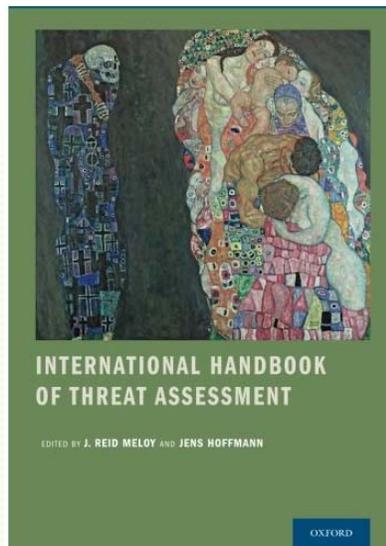
*Rational informed processes exist for managing the range of scenarios that employers face*



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## Challenges



<http://www.specializedtraining.com/c-1-books-manuals.aspx>

- Reducing risk along the entire workplace violence spectrum
- Managing movement along the Pathway to Workplace Targeted or Intended Violence
- Not making “Needle in the Haystack” Errors
- Addressing the Intervention Dilemma

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## Workplace Violence Spectrum



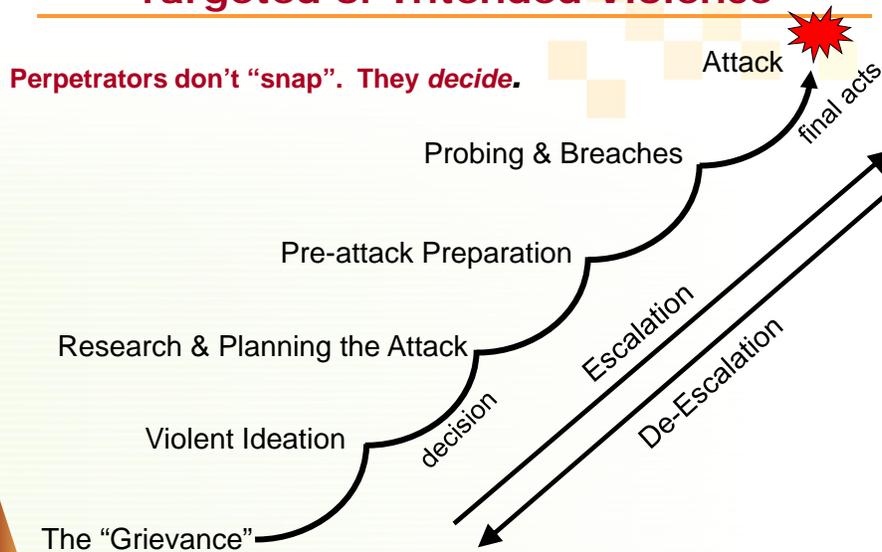
The "Middle Zone" may consist of any of a number of "incidents of concern," including:

- Bullying
- Threats
- Violent talk
- Loss of temper
- Bizarre behavior
- Uninvited contact
- Suicidal communication
- Stalking
- Boundary crossing
- Assaults
- Alarming cyber activity
- Property destruction
- Inappropriate weapons talk or bringing to workplace

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## Pathway to Workplace Targeted or Intended Violence



Perpetrators don't "snap". They decide.

Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). *Contemporary threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing and managing individuals of violent intent.*  
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## **“Needle in the Haystack” Errors**

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Missing a hot one -  
targeted violence



Over-responding to  
low risk scenarios

*If an incident or issue of concern is referred to  
someone with adequate knowledge, then you  
are half way home*

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## **The Intervention Dilemma**

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*External controls have their limits*

Any intervention has the potential to

- Prevent violence
- Have no effect on whether someone chooses violence or not
- Exacerbate a risk for violence

*This emphasizes the role of  
assessment  
and that it is dynamic and ongoing*

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## Our Primary Focus for Today



The "Middle Zone" may consist of any of a number of "incidents of concern," including:

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## "Bully" Bob

Bob is a middle administrator. Complaints are emerging from his work group that you had heard a few years ago. You thought you'd successfully resolved them. Yesterday, a subordinate who had a close and positive working relationship with Bob stepped forward to tell you that, since the subordinate had returned from a medical leave, Bob had become unfairly and angrily critical, dismissive, unsupportive, and adversarial towards her. For the first time, Bob had given the employee an unfavorable performance evaluation, greatly distressing the employee.

Prompted by that complaint, you discreetly spoke with a few of Bob's other subordinates. They describe him as "very effective" in reaching the department's goals. He is fiercely loyal to the institution and "knows all the key players who can help our department." However, these employees also said that Bob is hypercritical, unsupportive, undermining, and untrustworthy. He "throws people under the bus." He is very ambitious and will lie in order to cast blame on others. He "turns on" people, for no apparent reason. He "hoards" critical information. He plays favorites and likes to keep himself in the limelight. You are greatly discouraged by this news.

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## Bullying: Topics We'll Cover

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- **Definition**
  - Bullying Behaviors
  - Mobbing
- **Impact of Bullying**
  - Systems
  - Individuals
- **Characteristics of Bullies**
- **Managing Bullying**
- **Organizational Issues**

## Bullying

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- **Repeated, intimidating and demeaning mistreatment of other individuals**
- **Used to increase control over the targeted co-worker, subordinate, manager, or others**
- **Motivated by personal gratification and/or to protect or advance the bully's job conditions, career, or desired public image**



## Examples Of Bullying Behavior (cont.)

- Blocking career opportunities
- Scapegoating
- Shouting
- Physically intimidating actions
- Threats of harm, violent & non-violent
- "Making life difficult"
- More than 50% of the time it's a person in a position of authority: abuse of power

*Irrespective of "technical" performance, a pattern of intimidating, hostile, insubordinate, denigrating, or other abusive behavior*

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## Mobbing: Bullying by a Group

- "Ganging up" by several individuals, to so distress someone that they are coerced out of the workplace by various means
- Accomplished through rumor, innuendo, intimidation, unethical criticism, isolation, threats, and thus humiliation
- There is often a ringleader of the group
- It is systematic and enduring

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## Mobbing and Bullying as an Interpersonal System: Players & Enablers



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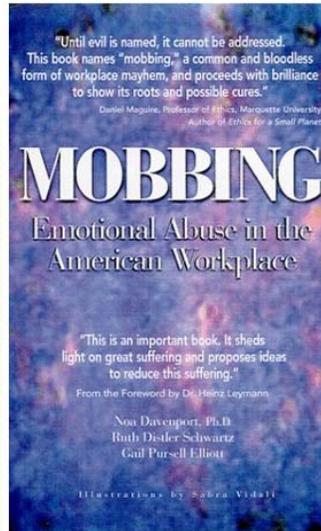
## Mobbing and Bullying as an Interpersonal System: Players & Enablers

- The bully or ringleader
- Targets
- Avoidant or hood-winked managers
- Allies and favorites of the bully
  - Henchmen
  - Patrons
  - Spies
  - Pawns
- Resentful onlookers or target allies
- "Know nothings"
- Backdrop of system-wide denial

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## Bullying and Mobbing



- Bullying and mobbing have roughly similar impact
- Both are intentional
- Targeted workers are unable to defend themselves or are otherwise unable to stop the abuse

<http://www.mobbing-usa.com/>

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## Impact & Costs of Bullying: Overview

- **Prevalence: Most rigorous US study to date\*:**
  - 41.4% of respondents reported experiencing psychological aggression at work in the past year = 47 million U.S. workers
  - 13% (nearly 15 million workers) reported experiencing psychological aggression on a weekly basis
- **The impact of bullying is underestimated:**
  - Physical and psychological impact
  - Lost productivity
  - Increased absenteeism
  - Diminished employee morale
  - Turnover

\*(Schat, Frone & Kelloway, 2006)

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## Effects Of Bullying On Targets

### Psychological Effects

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Depression
- Physical effects
  - Headaches
  - Neck & back pain
  - Sleep disorders
  - Other physical sx's



### Organizational Effects

- Lowered productivity
- Absenteeism
- Avoidant supervision
- Disillusionment with management by targeted coworkers & onlookers
- Passive-aggressive coping



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## Characteristics of Bullies

- Difficulty trusting others
- Defensive about own shortcomings
- Feelings of entitlement and envy to unhealthy degrees, expressed or not
- Threatened by others' success and competence
- May be competitive to a destructive degree
- Gains satisfaction from bullying impact
- Perceived as trying to impress others with own importance
- Difficulty forming collaborative relationships, or is selective in a calculating manner to serve selfish purposes
- Their personal history: aggression works for them
- For some, simple ignorance and poor social skills
- Very rarely homicidal; possibly assaultive
  - *Refer to risk assessment criteria and resources*

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## Unique (?) Characteristics of Female Bullies

- Not much empirical research, but considerable anecdotal observations
- Women bullies, compared to men, are more likely to target other women
  - Target: unassertiveness, powerlessness, and low self-esteem
- Peggy Klaus, Executive Coach\*
  - “We can be our own worst enemies at work.”
  - Possible motives
    - Scarcity/competition: Too few positions at the top
    - Bootstrap Theory: “No one helped me. Why should I help you?”
  - Under-reported by women targets:
    - Fear of stereotyping: being labeled over-emotional, backstabber

*“It’s like we’re back in high school.”*

\*New York Times  
January 11, 2009

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## Bullies Detect Weak Spots

- Sense who & what can be manipulated
- Will detect inconsistencies, inattention
- They will take advantage of due process proceedings, e.g., grievance and arbitrations
- If a manager is not “civil” and professional in communications and conduct, bullies will take advantage of and/or expose him or her in various ways

*Bullies thrive in enabling environments*

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## The Bully's Tactics When in Trouble

He or she goes into "high gear":

- Gets very defensive, indignant, intimidating
- Blames others, obfuscates/distorts
- Presents as a victim of foul-play
- Threatens litigation
- Interrogates alleged "accusers"
- Tries to derail interviewers' confidence in various ways
- Appeals to possible higher-up allies
- Or tries to charm and appear shocked and innocent

*Get ready for fireworks, boundary crossing, political moves, and a heavy counter-attack*

## Managing the Bully: Overview

- Avoidance is a major culprit
  - Addressing bullying is anxiety-provoking and difficult work
- The bully just has more time & energy
- So who will lead and make sure the problem is addressed & resolved?

*Must be savvy, muster up, & join forces.  
Small victories send a message*

## Managing Bullying: Details

- Management, Supervision, and HR approach must be linked together
  - coordinated
  - consistent
  - firm
  - progressive
- Targets will not report & reveal unless they observe these above practices
- Involved, affected supervisors & managers need to be educated & made aware
- Union(s) may be a strong ally

## Managing Bullying: More Details

### Performance and Conduct Management Process

- Identify specific observable bullying behaviors as misconduct
- Identify targets and the details of impact on them
- Obtain Reports of Contact from targets
- Identify the organizational & business impact
- Develop & present clear behavioral expectations
- Monitor closely with regularly scheduled meetings
- Frequent check-in with targets

### *Progressive Management*

## Barriers to Effective Management

- Supervisors and managers at all levels:
  - Deny or minimize the problem
  - Do not know what to do
  - Embarrassed, reluctant, or fearful to escalate issues
  - Impediments in first-line reporting
- Perceived value of the employee
- Loyalty towards the employee
- Time and effort required to manage
- Work culture that affords wide latitude to problem behavior
- Wishful thinking
- And, bullies often “manage up” well

### *Avoidance*

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## Seven Strategies For Effective Performance (Behavior) Management

1. **Proper foundation**  
Core expectation: respectful conduct, consistently enforced
2. **Proper investigation of incidents**  
Good decisions depend on good facts
3. **Evaluation & planning**  
Match the response to the seriousness of the problem
4. **Advice**  
Consider: legal, behavioral, threat assessment
5. **Effective meeting(s) with employee**  
Issues, expectations, plan, timeline, consequences
6. **Benchmarking and monitoring**  
Follow-up and limit-setting is necessary with bullying
7. **Documentation**  
PIP, memos, objective observations

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## Lasting Success

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- Total commitment of top-level leadership
- Involvement of human resources
- Involvement of middle-management
- Engagement of employees
- Cooperation of Unions

*Everyone*

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## An Organization-Wide Issue

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- Short term solutions such as identifying individual perpetrators only go so far
- Ignoring the organizational issues will fail to produce lasting, meaningful change
- Where are the weaknesses?
  - in policy
  - in support from the top
  - in awareness
  - in enforcement

*It won't stop unless everyone knows we mean it!*

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## Toxic or Vulnerable Organizations

- **Work culture that affords wide latitude to problem behavior:**
  - Minimizing the impact
  - Implicit permission to harass
  - Coupling of aggression and success
- **Inadequate funding**
- **Limited access to resources**
- **Few staffing options**
  - Incompetence
  - Hiring Freeze
- **Topography**
  - Remote location
  - Inadequate supervision

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## Organizational Contributors: Research

- **Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel (2003)**
  - prolonged group conflict predicts bullying
  - intensity of the conflict predicts bullying
  - group leader is the culprit over 50% of the time
- **Glendinning (2001)**
  - organizational culture may encourage bullying by excusing or ignoring bad behavior
  - bullies at the top
  - significant producers, rain makers
  - long seniority
- **Other Findings: Contributors to Bullying**
  - job insecurity
  - organizational "chaos" or incoherent procedures
  - organizational change
  - lack of transparency and accountability

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## Organizational Remedies

- Policies
- The right kind of people to drive the program
- Surveys
  - aggressive behaviors
  - impact
  - positive interactions/behaviors
- Awareness training
- Defined protocol
  - Definitions, expectations, consequences, protocol
- Monitoring and evaluation of remedies
- Stakeholders: maintain a consistent approach to problems

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## The Civil Workplace

- Respect at and among all levels
- Cooperation
- Justice
- Heightened sense of community
- Employees must have a *voice*
- Supervisors must understand that good interpersonal skills are part of their job
  - Training
  - Performance Adherence

*Changing organizational culture is hard work*

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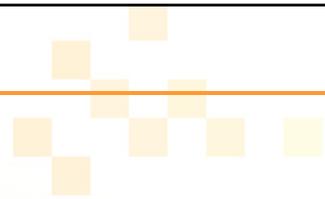
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## Back to "Bully" Bob

- Is Bob a Bully?
  - How can you tell?
  - What do you need to know to determine?
- What are the effects of Bob's behavior?
  - On the organization?
  - On his supervisors?
  - On his peers?
  - On his subordinates?
- What can be done about Bob's behavior?
  - At the System level?
  - At the Workgroup level?
  - At the Individual level?
- What are the possible consequences of interventions/strategies?
  - Who should implement strategies?
  - Who should not implement strategies?



# ***QUESTIONS?***

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**Work Trauma Services Inc.**

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***Stephen White, PhD, President***

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# LYNN M. VAN MALE, PhD

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## **Biographical Statement**

Dr. Lynn Van Male is an associate of Work Trauma Services, Inc. She holds an academic appointment at Oregon Health and Sciences University as an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Van Male is the national Director of the US Veterans Health Administration's Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVPP) and is a past Vice-President of the Northwest Chapter of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals. Across her different roles, Dr. Van Male provides training and support in assessing and managing patient- and employee-generated threats and violence in health care settings; assesses and evaluates existing practices in threat management in public and private organizations; and generates policy recommendations regarding workplace violence prevention.

Dr. Van Male earned her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Davis, in 1993, graduating Cum Laude. She holds a Master of Arts degree (1997) and a Doctorate in Philosophy (2000), both awarded in Clinical Psychology from the University of Missouri – Columbia. She completed her American Psychological Association-accredited Clinical Psychology Internship at the Portland VA Medical Center in 2000.

Dr. Van Male has an extensive history of working to prevent violence in the workplace, serving on numerous federal interagency task forces and work groups addressing domestic violence/intimate partner violence prevention, sexual assault prevention, and bullying reduction. Over the course of the last fifteen years, she has received numerous awards for service in the areas of Violence Risk and Threat Assessment and service to Returning Soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan. Dr. Van Male is widely sought after as an educator and speaker at the international, national, regional, and local levels.