Recession Layoffs
Workplace Stability
Workplace violence during a severe economic downturn

Heart-stopping stock market plunges. Global credit paralysis. Mortgage industry collapse.

The economic tumult of recent weeks dwarfs anything witnessed since the Great Depression. And now come the ripple effects. Some 1.2 million jobs have been lost across America so far this year — more than half of them in the past three months alone, according to numbers newly released by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Mass layoffs are at levels not seen since immediately after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

The stakes are high and workplace liabilities very real. More than ever, companies are looking for flexible, effective strategies to minimize the emotional and physical risks associated with all the stunning economic contractions. While contending with an increase in disgruntled employees and concerned shareholders and attempting to instill corporate confidence, businesses are also juggling the reality of increased security threats to managers and executives. Does your company have a plan?

Studies conducted after the relatively mild recession of the early 1990’s found that a mere one point rise in the unemployment rate increased the incidence of workplace deaths due to violent crime by 3.4 percent. That economic downturn was nothing to compare with the perfect economic storm currently rocking businesses worldwide.

Newspapers and business publications read like a veritable roll call of layoffs — 20,000 here, 1,000 there, 80 there. Tens of thousands are now losing their jobs across all industry sectors and the forecast is for more of the same.

Even in the best of times, workplace violence is a pervasive problem that affects the lives of some 1.7 million Americans a year. How recently have you examined your company’s workplace violence and incident management policies and updated them to reflect changing circumstances and best practices? Do you have an established relationship with a professional security firm to assist you in the planning, coordination and execution of employee terminations and downsizings?

Managers are often trained on hiring new employees, but most are not trained to recognize the telltale precursor signs of workplace violence, and rarely are they taught how to properly terminate an employee so as to minimize a backlash.

“With so much stress and uncertainty regarding our economic futures, anxiety naturally is on the rise. Employee conduct will often reflect that and anybody can be pushed to a point at which they no longer can control their emotions and actions,” said Greg Pearson, chief operating officer at FirstCall CSS “In many cases people’s retirements have been decimated and layoffs are imminent and a ‘survival of the fittest' ethic can prevail, with employees competing more fiercely and feeling the pressure to perform daily. This correlates to increased levels of job dissatisfaction, fatigue, depression and becoming disgruntled.”

And those increased stresses belong only to the lucky ones those who still have a job at all. For many, pink slips will be the order of the day in coming weeks and months as the country sorts through the fallout of the upheaval both on Wall Street and on Main Street.
Promoting workplace stability doesn’t have to be costly or onerous. FirstCall CSS has developed a methodology for assessing and managing threats at a tactical and strategic level. FirstCall helps companies in the planning stages of a downsizing as well as in responding to an incident or concern about violence in the workplace. For the last 20 years, FirstCall has helped define best practices as they relate to any aberrant behavior manifested in a work setting; determine the critical risks, how best to reduce exposure and, where necessary, manage incident response. FirstCall approach includes:

- Working with you to validate your existing workplace violence program.
- Assessing the dangerousness of specific threats, such as aberrant communication sent directly to the Company or its executives, indirect threats to managers, or other unusual behavior.
- Ensuring managers are properly trained in best practices when terminating an employee so to best avoid an aberrant or violent response.
- Identifying and assessing both physical and psychological workplace exposures.
- Implementing measures necessary to minimize risk exposure and safeguard employees and assets.
- When appropriate, providing professional security personnel at your workplace to instill peace of mind among those employees continuing their work and to create a professional deterrence for those who may contemplate acting out.

In responding to fluid circumstances such as those experienced in the global economy over recent weeks, corporate leadership frequently is unclear about what constitutes a balanced, effective workplace stability program. FirstCall CSS works with managers to clarify concerns and develop appropriate levels of internal training, readiness and response protocols.
Many studies have indicated a clear link between stress and workplace violence. And yet, according to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration:

- More than 70 percent of United States workplaces do not have a formal program or policy that addresses workplace violence.
- Only 20 percent of businesses provide violence prevention training. Only four percent provided training on domestic violence and its impact on the workplace.

“Workplace violence is responsible daily for tremendous losses through workflow interruption, productivity loss and legal exposure. But at the end of the day, we recognize that protection is about far more than numbers. It’s about people. We involve all stakeholders in evolving the optimal risk management plan. The process involves close collaboration, detailed understanding and a total commitment to tailoring the right solution to a company’s specific corporate culture, needs and vulnerabilities.”

—Kenneth Kurtz, President and Chief Executive

The yearly cost of violence in the workplace in the United States amounts to $35.4 billion. A recent International Labour Organisation report estimates the combined burden of workplace stress and violence at 0.5 to 3.5 per cent of national GDP per year. The consequences often translate to compensatory burden, loss of productivity and personal tragedy. As these costs have been quantified, there has been recognition of workplace violence as a valid issue and major health and safety liability for enterprises, the elimination of which is necessary for success.

That’s why it’s critical for corporations to develop methods for identifying factors that may lead to violence and implement controls to reduce the risks and respond appropriately should an incident occur.

The benefits are clear
- Risk reduction
- Improved employee morale
- Increased feelings of security
- Enhanced supervisory skills
- Early identification of issues
- Business cost reduction
- Improved capability to resolve conflicts in positive manner
- Reduced legal liability
- Preservation of reputation and investor relations
- OSHA compliance
Violence doesn’t just happen. It develops like a storm. Why not be prepared?

Preparing and keeping up to date a basic workplace violence prevention program is the responsibility of every employer, charged with protecting the interests and guarding against risks on behalf of employees across the enterprise. Doing this involves a multidisciplined, systemic approach to address physical security, pre-employment screening, termination procedures, employee assistance programs, out-placement strategies and a range of on-the-ground crisis management strategies.

There are a variety of reasons an executive team might consider putting in place such a comprehensive program:

• Preparation for termination(s)
• Anticipation of a company restructuring or downsizing
• Response to issues among and threats to remaining employees after a termination
• Desire to develop baseline awareness of potential aggression in the workplace
• Need to meet various compliance issues or mitigate liability exposure
• Evaluation of aberrant communication
• Management of an existing threat
• Response to domestic violence
• Contingency planning for a strike or similar anticipated or unanticipated actions/events

Even the most thorough risk management and security planning will be challenged by catastrophic circumstances such as the recent jolts to our economy and subsequent waves of layoffs and domestic stress. There are predictable and unpredictable events that must be taken into account in the execution of a comprehensive system including contingencies for rapid communication and response when the unexpected occurs.

FirstCall approaches the task of risk management planning at a modular level, addressing ways in which both to avert incidents and rapidly respond when unanticipated events occur. Our workplace strategy includes three related practices, some or all of which will provide corporate leadership a consistent platform for stability and safety across departments, industries and geographies.

Assessment. Our baseline assessment defines circumstances and levels of threat. Rather than relying on non-human indicators, FirstCall utilizes a team of top forensic behavioral experts who provide workplace stability assessments and strategy based on scientific indicators supported by forensic experience. These are key to establishing how best to intervene with staff and provide support for calm and continuity on the job in the face of layoffs and other disturbing office developments.
Training and Education. The most effective crisis intervention strategy lies in acting before such an incident actually arises. We believe that proactive intervention and education is the key to preventing a crisis from occurring or in minimizing its affects. Crisis management training is a necessary element to a well-balanced crisis intervention program. This advanced, multidisciplinary training is intended for your company's Crisis Responders (usually consisting of Human Resources, Legal, EAP and Security representatives), who coordinate the management of reported threats and/or high-stress circumstances such as the distribution of pink slips.

FirstCall faculty is experienced in behavioral casework and skilled practitioners in mediation conflict resolution, crisis counseling, security and safety matters, best practices and threat assessment.

FirstCall will promote the acceptance and administration of your company's workplace strategy policy throughout your organization through training and education. We present modules for management/supervisors and employees. The training curriculum is tailored to fit the specific needs of each group in accordance with your corporate philosophy and culture. Participants are normally provided with an introduction and overview of the problems associated with workplace aggression. Participants are given a historical overview of the increase in workplace aggression; are introduced to the most common behavioral problems in the workplace; and are exposed to measures on how to manage such behavior.

Physical/Strategic Security. Our physical security component provides the final leg of workplace stability program. It reinforces employees' sense of security and peace of mind and helps to maintain a normal working environment during the challenging times of downsizing, corporate restructuring or a threat in the workplace.

While the presence of physical security can often affect the atmosphere in your company, FirstCall provides an extremely highly discreet --yet assertive and highly skilled-- corporate security presence, either armed or unarmed, depending on the threat level and corporate environment. We recognize that in a corporate setting being discreet and unobtrusive is paramount. Our agents have good common sense and are well versed in corporate etiquette. We pride ourselves on our ability to understand the dynamics of our customers' corporate culture and nuanced workplace challenges.
Our security professionals are familiar with the responsibilities of corporate security and recognize and respect the nature of the assignment. We value each relationship and are diligent in protecting the confidential nature of the association. In the private sector where resources may be limited, FirstCall CSS is skilled in maximizing available assets. Our organization offers innovative and flexible corporate security applications that will minimize change in the workplace. We are able to provide an unmatched level of continuity and experience upon which your organization can depend, regardless of location or culture.

The FirstCall proposition:  
A 360° approach to workplace stability planning

FirstCalls’ s 360° approach to Workplace Stability Planning combines the academic and hands-on experience of our industry-leading workplace violence consultants and specialists, Behavioral Sciences experts, corporate investigators and -- when determined necessary -- highly trained physical security response personnel.

Our global footprint allows for an immediate response, often within hours, with strategic and defined objectives that will mitigate liability, protect company investment and minimize adverse exposure. Each of our offices possess proven experience and continuity in providing a full scope of enterprise risk management solutions.

With its 360° approach FirstCall will tailor a solution specific to your company’s corporate culture and goals utilizing, when necessary, workplace violence prevention resources within the following core services:

- Threat Management, Behavioral Analysis & Assessments
- Facility Security Vulnerability Assessments
- Employee Fitness for Duty Evaluations
- Workforce Training and Education
- Investigative solutions including employee background and misconduct investigations
- Program Design & Policy Development Physical security measures including facility, employee and executive protection
- Crisis Management and Business recovery

The process evolves with the formation of a team that brings stakeholders together to assess current internal conditions and vulnerabilities. Policies that require implementation or updating are identified and a procedure for collecting confidential information is established. Training programs, review of pre-screening processes and review of termination and lay-off procedures may also be undertaken.

Finally, as has been demonstrated with deadly time lapses in implementing communications and emergency response in instances such as the shootings at Virginia Tech shootings last year, it’s also critical to put in place – and keep refreshed – a well-organized, demonstrably effective incident response plan.
Putting these plans together includes:

• A thorough assessment and threat profile, including an analysis of physical operations and security;

• Creation of a Confidential Information Collection and Evaluation Center (CICEC), a place within the company where employees can, anonymously and without fear of retribution, report abnormal behavioral changes or violations of the company’s zero-tolerance anti-violence policy; and

• Multi-pronged training targeted at all levels of the business: the executive ranks (whose interests may include financial and legal issues related to WPV); the managerial and supervisory ranks (whose concerns may include protection of the workforce, worker communications and stress reduction); and a company-wide session to brief the entire rank-and-file on what constitutes threat and harassment, warning signs surrounding intimidation and other signs of potentially violent activity and appropriate response and mobilization against an action.

Nearly all fatal workplace violence incidents have been followed by lawsuits brought by the aggrieved families of the victims – and during the litigation that ensues organizations are legally compelled to provide information about the measures that were or were not in place with regard to the issue of violence prevention. Was an adequate risk assessment conducted? Was a well-considered plan in place and training implemented to support it? Often management is forced to reveal its negligence and agree to multi-million dollar restitutions in order to settle quietly and protect their public reputation.

Your company can do better.

With today’s pervasive economic pressures and large-scale layoffs, companies of all sizes cannot afford to maintain a climate of complacency. Both your company’s well-being and the lives of valued employees and customers hang in the balance.

“Taking a proactive stance is incumbent upon business decision-makers when it comes to worker safety,” said FirstCall Chief Executive Officer Kenneth Kurtz. “There are ways to mitigate these risks and support your enterprise through trying times.”
ABOUT FirstCall CSS

FirstCall Corporate Security and Advisory Services is a global business advisory and risk management company providing personal protection, workplace stability, and crisis advisory services to Fortune 1000 corporate security departments and family offices. With 25 years of experience in emerging and high-risk markets plus regional offices in 16 strategic locations around the world, FirstCall delivers confidence and peace of mind by providing experienced and trusted security professionals. FirstCall provides highly personalized solutions in response to the challenges of doing business in today’s fluid, global marketplace.

- 25+ years of experience solving complex security problems on a global scale.
- Global capability built through an international presence.
- More than half the Fortune 100 served.
- In-depth understanding of social, political, and economic conditions in each market we serve.
- Proven ability to attract, train, and promote the most talented professionals in our industry.

Interested in learning how FirstCall can help you mitigate your security risks?
Contact us today at:

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