

## Techniques for Assessing Threats Before They Escalate

**T**he workplace environment has changed: There is more diversity and stress on the job, there's a lot more anger and organizations need to know how to handle situations that may arise before there's an unfortunate workplace crisis.

That was the gist of the message from the Interviewing and Techniques for Handling Risk, Evaluation, Analysis Teams ("I" T.H.R.E.A.T.) session. Jill Jacquin, president of Head Shrink Consulting, and Brett Ward, certified forensic interviewer with Wicklander-Zulawski and Associates, outlined how "I" T.H.R.E.A.T. can be an effective tool for assessing a workplace threat before it escalates into an event where there's a loss of life or other abuses to company employees.

What loss prevention professionals are facing today is an environment where the workplace violence includes approximately 18,000 assaults annually. That violence ranges from employee fighting, abusive spouses, and harassing phone calls to threats of bringing weapons into the workplace. "The norms of the workplace have changed and we need to be prepared for it," Jacquin said.

"I" T.H.R.E.A.T. was put together by Head Shrink Consulting and Wicklander-Zulawski after a deadly 1991 workplace incident at Jacquin's former company. Through it, organizations have a tool to help recognize and assess a threat before it leads to a crisis management situation. "I" T.H.R.E.A.T. looks at the im-

pact on the potential victim, identifying the individual making the threat and the organization. Through assessments and interviewing, threats can be handled properly before the person making a threat acts out.

Threat assessments are a team effort, Jacquin said. Loss prevention, human resources, operations and medical all should be involved when assessing a threat: Each can bring something to the table to help determine the identification of a threatening employee.

But it is in the interviewing process where "I" T.H.R.E.A.T. can narrow the field of suspects and lead to identifying the threat maker.

The first thing is to establish some type of parameter for determining whether the interviewee is telling the truth or not, said Ward. "Look for physical and verbal characteristics," he said.

Once parameters are set, there are 10 selective questions "I" T.H.R.E.A.T. utilizes in the interviewing process. The answers to those questions are marked as positive, negative or neutral, and those answers can help identify a threatening employee or an employee who may have sent a threatening letter.

The first question asks the interviewer to get to know the suspect. That question could be "Do you know who sent that threatening letter to the company?" The follow-up questions focus on vouching, directly asking about the



threat, motive, feelings about the investigation and what should happen to the threat maker and enticement.

After the interviewing process, an organization should do some or all of the following: initiate a threat-assessment process, conduct further behavioral interviews, interrogation or bring in the police.

"A lot of organizations have a plan in place, but it's reactionary," Jacquin said. "Threat assessment is to take care of things before it becomes crisis management."

*Head Shrink Consulting's Jill Jacquin*