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When pressure turns into violence

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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There are few workplace experiences that are so stressful as witnessing a sudden outburst of violence, even if it's not directed at you personally.

And as a UK-based stress consultant, I can tell you that Dubai is likely to see a disturbing rise in these incidents, because similar factors are increasingly at play in both countries.

The main factor is undoubtedly the accelerating pace of business and the pressure that it generates. Everything speeds up, including your temper. In the event of a disagreement, there is no time for simmering resentment. All the pressure is on you to get straight back to your work-station, and re-enter that crisis atmosphere that seems to dominate office life, even in the absence of any emergency. However, that is not conducive to good health or productivity.

If this atmosphere at work is continuous, then the sufferer may release all that frustration elsewhere - perhaps in response to slow service in a restaurant or waiting at the bank till. And then the waiters and tellers have to swallow their own dignity, which contributes to a whole new reservoir of stress... (That, of course, is quite apart from the possible effects on home and family life.)

This is, of course, ironic. The person whose tensions suddenly erupt into violence may not be the natural extrovert type at all. He may be just the opposite: the conformist who has simply had to restrain his feelings once too often. "Beware the fury of a patient man", someone said.

Recognised subject

Not surprisingly, Anger Management is now an officially recognised subject for study, and employers right across industry and government are seeing the benefit of training their HR department or line-managers in the relevant skills and drills.

The first step is preventative - identifying the types of environment where violence is most likely to happen, and which types of situations are liable to spark it.

Next, you need to know how to avoid the sort of dialogue and body-language that signals confrontation and challenge, however unintentionally.

Having rid yourself of these, you learn to adopt a positive attitude of openness and

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approachability that can prevent the build-up of conflict.

Defusing aggression

This has a lot to do with defusing aggression through Active Listening (which you may remember from an earlier edition of this column), a form of questioning that sounds less like an interrogation and more like an interview.

Active Listening is a widely-used intervention that has been shown to generate valuable trust and goodwill, and to keep up verbal momentum, so vital to the resolution of tense situations.

By adding Anger Management to your training agenda, you'll equip your organisation with a toolbox of effective strategies for dealing with angry individuals and keeping a handle on potentially violent incidents.

Key points: Violence at work

- Workplace culture in UAE is moving into the danger zone for violence
- In the absence of suitable outlets, stress may affect work and leisure
- Anger Management can be formally studied, with impressive results

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