



"Have a point person assigned and trained to handle media inquiries," says Morgan.

Preparing for the Unexpected: How to Protect Your Business

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If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected. Having plans in place for every possible calamity prepares you and your business to “weather the storm,” so to speak.

I was recently reading about an active shooter situation in a tire dealership and it got me thinking. Is this type of thing one of those calamities you have planned for or have even considered? What if one of your employees is caught up in some type of high-profile criminal action? How will you deal with the fallout?

As I read more of that article, it became clear to me that the business involved had not prepared - not only from a safety standpoint, but also from a business perspective. As a result, the dealership is dealing with more problems.

With that in mind, I wanted to share some ideas that you should consider to protect your employees and your business. There are three key things that you should have in place:

Preparation. The greatest concern is that often these situations escalate quickly or come with no warning at all. This is why it is so important to have a plan in place and review it with your employees regularly. There will not be time to reference a manual or handbook if a dangerous situation occurs. Your people will need to know what to do and react quickly.

In the case of an active shooter situation in or around your business, it is a good idea to partner with a safety organization to create a training program for your employees. In most cases, your people will be taught some sort of variance of the “run-hide-fight” preparedness plan.

Calling 911 is certainly something that should be done, but only when it is safe to do so. In most cases, the best first action is simply to run away from the situation, if you can. You should have planned escape routes identified.

Employees should know how to get out quickly, where to go and that it is OK to leave everything behind, if necessary. If you have customers in a waiting room, having someone who can direct them on where to go is also important.

If running away is not a safe option, the next plan is to hide. Get to a location out of the view of the shooter, preferably behind a locked and/or barricaded door. Try not to hide somewhere that limits options for movement.

Proactively reviewing these options with employees could be vital to enhancing safety and reducing panic if something like this should happen.

Finally, the last option, and only as a last resort, is defending yourself with physical action. Use whatever means necessary to protect yourself and incapacitate the assailant. Your employees need to understand this is the last option.

Unfortunately, the desire to be a hero can often backfire - not only for employees, but for others, as well. Make sure that all know that this is a last resort option only - no exceptions.

Having these plans and protocols in place are great. However, it is very important to re-train employees on a regular basis. Just as you might review your operational processes with employees to maximize efficiencies, you should review these plans to maximize safety.

The better the plan is understood, reviewed and practiced, the greater the likelihood of it being followed effectively, should the unexpected happen.

Policies. There are certain things that need to be clear to employees, particularly when it comes to what is acceptable and not acceptable in the workplace. That is what policies help to spell out.

You should have policies in place that could impact these unexpected situations, as well. For example, a policy could revolve around mandatory completion of the training discussed previously. Not only does this help ensure completion and participation, but it also sends a strong message that this type of training is important.

Another policy that may be a bit controversial has to do with having firearms or other weapons in the workplace. Many, if not most, of the large tire dealership chains have policies in place dictating that no firearms are allowed on the premises. Some allow employees who are legally permitted to carry firearms to keep them locked in their personal vehicles. Some do not allow weapons on any company property at all.

While I am not going to tell you what to do, I do want you to understand the reasons why it is smart to consider such policies in your workplace.

First, if weapons are not accessible, they cannot be used. The argument is often made that weapons are for safety and defense. However, mistakes can be made.

If a situation erupts and escalates, a weapon could be used where it was not needed. Leverage the protocols shared earlier to protect employees and let the authorities deal with the assailant.

Second, emotions can be a powerful thing. How many times have you seen people in your employ get into arguments that grow into potentially more threatening situations?

Someone who is emotionally charged may react irrationally. While it is unlikely that this would lead to pulling a weapon, this could happen if a firearm, knife or other object was readily available. Do not allow a situation like this to exist. As I

mentioned, if a weapon is not accessible, it cannot be used.

This also highlights the need to have anti-violence policies in the workplace. Policies should be in place that clearly state that physical violence - and even the threat of violence - are strictly forbidden. These policies must be extremely clear and strictly enforced. Not only does this protect employees, it ultimately protects your business. Do not leave this to chance or multiple interpretations.

A point person. Another important thing to consider is establishing a point person who can speak on behalf of your business during unexpected situations. All employees should know that if they are approached for any information, particularly by the local news media, they should direct the inquiring party to this designated point person.

This person - whether you or an employee - will respond appropriately with respect to the situation and your business, sharing only facts that are relevant and needed. If you do not have this in place, you run the risk of putting your business' reputation on the line. Media inquiries will happen, particularly in high profile cases.

While an employee may have the best intentions when sharing what they witnessed, they may mistakenly say something or provide a personal interpretation or belief as fact. This could put your business in a very uncomfortable situation.

Let me give you an example. Let's say that an employee is involved in a violent crime that did not occur on your premises, yet the crime receives a lot of media attention. The local news media may approach that employee for a statement, who says something like, "I'm not surprised. It just seemed to be a matter of time before this happened."

While this statement is a complete opinion, it implies that this individual who is being referenced has displayed violent or inappropriate behavior in your workplace. This may not be true. But the damage to your business' reputation will have already been done.

Here's another example. Perhaps an employee is threatened at the workplace by an outsider approaching him. The employee, scared, pulls out a weapon and discharges it. The media comes to report on the incident and talks to employees. One employee is interviewed and says something like, "Well, I just heard some yelling. Then he just shot him."

This employee certainly did not have all the facts - only his limited observation. However, his narrative creates a completely different picture in the public's eye, with your business squarely in the center of the story.

Having a single point person that all employees refer inquiries to allows your business a single voice to share information, free from personal interpretations and conjectures. It allows you to make sure the information is accurate and does not incorrectly represent your business or what transpired. This will also ensure that the reputation of your business is protected.

If you have not done so already, make it a priority to protect your business and your employees by putting the aforementioned things into practice.

Prepare your team and your business for any situation in which their safety may be at risk.

Put policies in place and enforce them. Have a point person assigned and trained to handle media inquiries.

Don't wait until it is too late to realize the importance of planning and protection. Granted, the odds of some of these situations occurring and directly impacting your business are extremely miniscule. But who among us expected the occurrence of a global pandemic that created huge challenges for you and your business?

Get ahead of any potential situation through preparation and policies.

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