



Threat Assessment and  
Management Associates Inc.  
Workplace Violence Specialist

## Threat Assessment Not Just for Celebrities Anymore!

by HEATHER GRAY

### RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES.....

- Spurned hubby comes to work and shoots wife, kills rival, then self
- Woman stalked for 20 years finally gets reprieve
- Father in murder-suicide subject of restraining order
- Slain woman wanted police escort to work/home days before her death
- Police to review B.C. woman's murder; Workplace reviewing policy
- Workplace shooter kills two, commits suicide
- Wife-killer subject of peace bond
- Workplace incidents on the rise – is there a “disgruntled employee” in your office?

We've all been drawn to the headlines.....they've mesmerized us. We can't help but read the story that follows. We want to know what happened.....what went wrong. Who's to blame? Where did the system fail? Who didn't do their job well or intervene properly? What could have been done differently? Could this happen to me? What if something like this happened in my office?

Some of us may shrug our shoulders and come away believing that there's not really anything that could reasonably have been done differently, that if there were, then it would have been done. Some of us may possess a fatalistic mentality and believe that if someone is out to get us then nothing we might do would alter the course of destiny.

But then there are those of us reading the same headlines, who understand that, given the right information, along with the right tools, analytical background and theoretical information, we will be able to conduct a proper and thorough threat assessment, implement appropriate contingency planning and then move into a case management mode. Clearly, we can't

all be threat assessment professionals. But, there are tangible ways to mitigate that risk....ways to evaluate and conduct case management such that these tragic outcomes can be avoided. Threat management is just beginning to be discussed in Canada.

As a threat assessment and workplace violence specialist, with a law enforcement background, I can confidently state that it is highly beneficial to look at these issues in a new way. Merely having a workplace violence policy or waiting until there's an incident and then responding in a supportive way to any involved staff is simply not adequate. There is so much more, from a preventive aspect that can be done. We just have to know what to look for and what to do when we see it. And it is do-able. That's the good news!

Now, for the bad news.....nearly all of us, at some point in our lives, are likely to be affected one way or another, by some form of workplace abuse – from threatening and intimidating behavior, abuse of power/authority, bullying, race and gender harassment or just downright bad treatment.

### JACK – A CASE IN POINT

Let's look at a real case involving Jack\*\*. Jack was a maintenance worker in a venue operation that had approximately 60 full-time employees and another 30 part-time employees. Jack had worked there for about 12 years and had been an average employee. However, his work had been slipping in the previous few months, prior to my involvement, and Jack's manager and senior management of the company had had to discipline him for various things.

\*\* Jack is not the subject's real name. His real name is withheld in order to protect the identity of both the real subject and the company involved.

Jack had been doing some troubling things, from pointing his fingers, in the shape of a gun, at co-workers heads and saying, “bang, you're dead!”; tying ropes into the shape of a noose and then slinging it over a door frame; working with toxic chemicals and not taking normal safety precautions for himself; petty theft from employees and clients, too. Over time, Jack was disciplined for these infractions. He did not take the discipline well.

One day, at a coffee break with two co-workers, he made the statement, “I'm going to come in here with a gun and kill management because I'm sick and tired of the way they're treating me!” A female co-worker (a peer to Jack) said, “Oh



**Threat Assessment and  
Management Associates Inc.**  
Workplace Violence Specialist

Jack, you can't do that! You'll go to jail for the rest of your life!" His response was, "No I wouldn't because I would die too".

This one statement of Jack's is very revealing. What we can glean from it is that Jack has thought through his plan enough that he's determined the possible outcomes and he's reconciled that one outcome is more preferable to him than another. Jack believes that jail is not okay with him but death is fine! That's an important clue!

Jack subsequently went on several days off and upon his return he was confronted by management, regarding his statement. His reply? "Yes, I said that.....and I still mean it!" The company called the police but they wouldn't arrest him. Rather they asked him if he wanted to go for a voluntary psychiatric evaluation. He said yes!!!

After Jack went on a voluntary mental health commitment to a local hospital for several weeks and got his medication straightened out, we managed to get him released from work and transitioned out on a disability pension.

In the final analysis, Jack was pleased with the outcome, it allowed him to save face and the other employees were able to withdraw their threatened resignations. It was win/win for all involved. In all that occurred, Jack did not ever discover that nearly one quarter of the employees had threatened to quit if he came back. Neither did he know that a threat assessment practitioner was involved in the case.

The notable thing about this situation was that it came just several weeks after a shooting at another company in the same city and about one-fourth of the employees in Jack's company threatened to quit if they were to return Jack to the workplace, after they learned of his blatant threat.

It was clear he could not cope well with it and he had a number of issues in his personal life with which he wasn't contending well. In fact, he was a low functioning individual anyway and he'd lived with his mother his whole adult life. It turned out that, prior to the appearance of his aberrant behavior his mother had died in their home. We discovered that Jack had stayed with her body several days before he called police to report her death. Jack also did not much of a social network.

Not all cases will resolve so easily but we need to evaluate each case, on its own merit. There is always a solution or a resolution for every situation; we just have to find what the best outcome is for all involved.

## YOUR COMPANY'S RESPONSE

Imagine that a workplace violence event, something with fairly big potential for the sake of this discussion, has come to your attention in your workplace. What would be your likely response? Is there immediate skepticism? Do you size up the complainant for loyalty (to the company, to you)? Do you agree to disagree and be okay with that? Would you welcome the complaint?

If you were the HR Manager or the Security Manager or the VP in charge of either of those business units, what would you determine as the right steps from outset of the complaint? How does one manage to begin to peel away the layers of this situation and get to the crux of the problem?

There are several ways that violence impacts the workplace. When many of us hear the term 'workplace violence', most of us conjure up an image of a 'disgruntled former employee' coming back to seek revenge at their previous workplace and committing a mass shooting. While that may be true in some of the cases, there are certainly a great number that do not fall into that category. The University of Iowa did a study and released their results in 2000, describing how there were basically four (4) main areas where all violence incidents could be categorized.

- Type 1 Criminal Intent (robbery, theft)
- Type 2 Customer, Client (dissatisfied)
- Type 3 Worker on Worker (boss/subordinate, peer/peer; termination gone awry)
- Type 4 Personal Relationship (domestic violence, stalking)

Threat assessment got its start in southern California, mainly around Los Angeles, largely because of the stalking of celebrities, and took hold when practitioners realized that it had many other applications. It wasn't long before there was enlightenment that it could be utilized for other stalking cases, domestic violence cases and, of course workplace violence issues of all sorts.

Threat assessment has applications for a multitude of workplace and other situations. It is primarily used for:

- difficult terminations
- threatening or concerning employees (current or former)
- outside relationships that impact the workplace (former/current husbands/boyfriends who are threatening or the relationship is extremely volatile)



**Threat Assessment and Management Associates Inc.**  
Workplace Violence Specialist

with abuse already present or the couple is going through a separation/divorce)

- domestic violence issues
- stalking
- customer/client threats or concerning behavior
- inappropriate communications (letters, emails, etc)
- school violence (educational facilities).

### THREAT ASSESSMENT - DEFINITION

Threat Assessment.....evaluating and managing the threat (or threatening situation) involves developing a plan of action that moves the instigator (the perpetrator) away from regarding violence as an option.

### THREAT ASSESSMENT PROFESSIONAL - MISSION

The mission of a threat assessment professional is to analyze the level of the threat, or the risk, in that particular situation and then, along with others involved in the situation, to manage the case so that a tragic result does not occur. The most common denominator in these situations, which we've seen lately throughout Alberta and western Canada, has been that there were a multitude of warning signs and situational context in those tragic situations that would give a skilled threat assessment practitioner key clues that would likely have provided many opportunities to intervene appropriately.

Unfortunately, in those instances, there wasn't anyone in a position to coordinate an appropriate response and so those key clues, possibly from various agencies, wasn't collated and evaluated on a case by case basis. That's often how victims 'slip through the cracks'. When a multi-disciplinary approach is conducted, with information funneled through the threat assessment practitioner, all of the information is included, properly evaluated and interventions applied, thereby nothing is overlooked. All agencies, organizations and companies ultimately share information, making for an ideal case management model.

Threat assessment practitioners acquire a multitude of clues, which can often be easily acquired once we know what to look for, that are needed to complete a comprehensive threat assessment of the current situation. Threat assessment professionals can put to use various tools that will assist them in their process. The overarching goal is to prevent a violent outcome not merely predict one.

One of the most remarkable tools to show up in this field is MOSAIC®, a threat analysis software program, developed by Gavin de Becker. Gavin de Becker is one of the world's most renowned experts in the area of threat assessment and stalking. He has many celebrity clients and he is the pioneer in the industry who has set the parameters of much of what we know about threat assessment theory today.

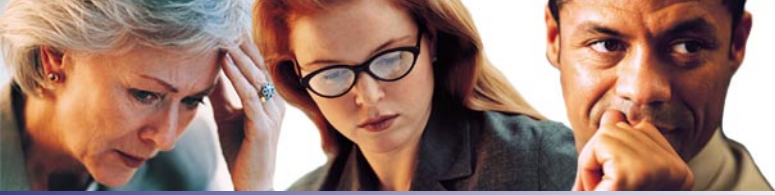
Gavin de Becker's MOSAIC® program is utilized by U.S. federal court judges, the CIA, the FBI and many U.S. police agencies. I've been extremely fortunate to be the first independent consultant ever licensed to use MOSAIC®. It is a highly valuable tool that serves to examine 48 areas of inquiry about a situation, including both context and pre-incident indicators. From that, the assessor obtains two scores. One is the risk level involved in the situation, which is a whole number score out of 10 and the other is an IQ score (information quotient) which indicates the amount of information provided, indicated by a score out of 200.

The MOSAIC® system was specifically designed to enhance the safety and well-being of victims, to discourage overreaction to threats, to encourage fair and consistent assessments and to bring attention to factors and combinations of factors that might otherwise go unnoticed. MOSAIC® is a threat assessment method that organizes details about a case and aids the assessor in comparing the present situation to past cases, with similar elements, where the outcome is known. MOSAIC® software contains in excess of 24,000 cases.

I've had the good fortune, not only to train with Gavin de Becker in Los Angeles but also to be mentored by Gavin's VP of MOSAIC® and Threat Assessment, Robert Martin (formerly the founding commander of LAPD's\* Threat Management Unit). I now serve on Gavin de Becker's faculty at the Advanced Threat Management Academy, held twice annually. The Advanced TA Academy teaches the latest techniques in threat management practice to those in the industry who are focusing in this specialized area of expertise.

There doesn't have to be a specific or stated threat in order for a threat assessment to be indicated and conducted. Rather, the mere fact that a situation is concerning and a subject has been exhibiting threatening or aberrant behaviors, or has introduced intimidations or manipulations into the equation, is enough to warrant some further assessment and case management.

\* LAPD - Los Angeles Police Department



**Threat Assessment and  
Management Associates Inc.**  
Workplace Violence Specialist

## **PRE-INCIDENT INDICATORS and CONTEXT**

There are no short-cuts for high-stakes predictions. Adults typically do not communicate their violent intentions as often as teenagers who act out similarly. Adults are more likely to 'hold their cards close to their vest'. With adults, there may only be the utterance of a threat, even a veiled or indirect threat or what appear to be merely passing comments. All threats and concerning comments or aberrant behavior should be taken seriously. From there, we need to delve deeper and examine what is going on in the person's life at that moment (context) as well as looking for any plans or preparations they've made towards a violent outcome (pre-incident indicators of homicide and/or suicide).

## **THE NATURE OF THREATS**

Threats are almost always issued from a position of weakness. They are introduced as intimidations, manipulations and escalation of a situation in which the person feels they have little or no power. Threats are the currency of a very desperate person. Threats are an attempt to take back power in some fashion negative though it may be.

The threatener must then continue on to carry out the threat or find a way to retreat from the threat and save face at the same time. This is why many threats amongst intimates are minimized and dismissed, both by the victim herself and by police responders. The way we respond to threats and manipulations is exceedingly important to the outcome.

## **IN SUMMARY**

Gauging risk is a difficult process and, although there are no absolutes, there have been significant strides made in the last 25 years and most profoundly in the last 10 years. We have seen workplace and family violence issues come to the forefront and take centre stage in North America. It is absolutely imperative that we not ignore warning signs that point to instability and volatility in a subject. We can reduce lethality. To this end, we can commit certain resources and find ways to mitigate negative outcomes.

Situations that have escalated to overt violence, injury or death have typically been those where the subject felt s/he had no further alternatives, that s/he was justified in taking action, that the consequences of that action were acceptable (to him/her)

and that the subject possessed the mental and physical ability to carry out the violent act.

This has provided an enlightening view into the fundamentals of threat assessment and how important it is to examine and assess a subject's behavior and contextual situation in order to appreciate the level of risk and determine where intervention may be possible. It doesn't make sense not to use this cutting edge science when it has been developed to a level that will save lives and prevent tragic outcomes. At the very least it forms the framework for sensible safety planning based on sound, tried and true practice, that being threat assessment, as well as quantifiable tools (ie: MOSAIC®).