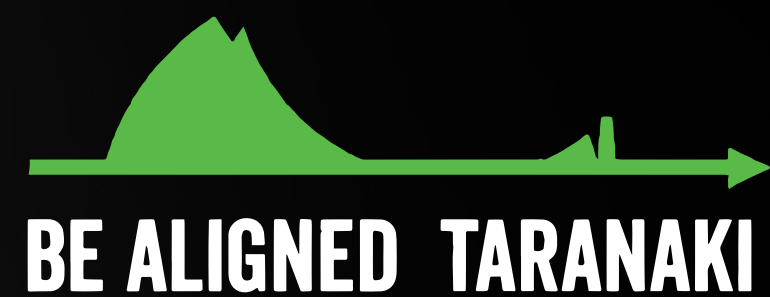


AGGRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE



WHAT IS AGGRESSION?

Whilst anger is a feeling/emotion; **aggression is the behaviour or action** taken that is hostile, destructive and or violent.

There are a few types of aggression:

Reactive – expressive

(verbal - physical)

Reactive - inexpressive

(hostility)

Proactive - relational aggression

(circulating malicious rumours)

Aggression can come from within an organisation – from its own people and/or, externally for customer facing organisations. It is important to note that the aggression in both of these scenarios can have the same effects on our people & work environments.

SOURCES OF AGGRESSION?

The causes behind aggressive behaviour can include (but are not limited to):

- ▶ Fear, anxiety, stress
- ▶ Traumatic experiences
- ▶ Pain
- ▶ Impaired communication skills
- ▶ Frustration
- ▶ Lack of dignity; not feeling respected

- ▶ Impaired cognitive ability (e.g a result of intellectual disability, mental illness or dementia)
- ▶ Lack or loss of choice, personal power

Though the factors that set a person off may seem minor, they are often the tip of an iceberg, with the primary cause lying just under the surface.

UNDERSTAND THE FACTORS BEHIND THE CAUSES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour is Communication.

Whether you're dealing with verbally aggressive behaviours (screaming, swearing, name calling), hostile body language (dirty looks, angry gestures), or physically aggressive behaviours (throwing, hitting, biting, kicking), the behaviour is an attempt to express something that's usually rooted in fear, frustration,

pain, or just an inability to make unmet needs known.

And the reality is that we've all been there. Maybe you know someone who's verbally lost it and kicked a few things as they try to care for a family member living with dementia or confronted a child after they were suspended from school.

WARNING SIGNS INSIDE THE WORKPLACE

- ▶ Damage or destruction of company property
- ▶ Poor workplace relationships
- ▶ Repeated direct or veiled threats
- ▶ Increased mood swings
- ▶ Paranoid, aggressive behavior
- ▶ Decreased productivity or inconsistent work performance



WHAT TO DO?

When faced with a hostile person, respect their personal space and be aware of your body language, movements, and tone of voice. Stay calm and diffuse the situation. Try to keep a barrier like a desk between yourself and the person, but don't block yourself into a corner.

Get training on recognizing and reporting the signs of a disturbed coworker, customer, or member of the public.

You should also seek training on handling hostile customers and diffusing violent situations. Immediately report violent incidents and threats to management; often, violent threats can escalate to become violent acts.



REDUCING INCREASED AGGRESSION

Rational Detachment

When you're rationally detached, you maintain control of your own behaviour by not taking negative comments or actions personally.

Without this ability, you might react defensively, which will only escalate a situation. Equipped with this skill, you're better able to be productively supportive, to defuse aggressive behaviour, and to encourage calm behaviour.

When faced with a hostile person, respect their personal space and be aware of your body language, movements, and tone of voice. Stay calm and diffuse the situation rather than trying to argue or inflame the situation. To them, their plight is real. Think of your personal safety at all time. Always try to keep a barrier like a desk between yourself and the person, don't block yourself into a corner and ensure you have an escape route via a doorway. If it is safe to do so, leave the situation completely, this includes personal belongings and company property – including vehicles. Nothing is more important than your safety!



3 DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

1.

Ignore the words

The first step is to ignore the angry words. It's just noise and means nothing. When you ignore the words, three things happen. First, you are less likely to be triggered by the insults because you are not paying attention to them. Second, you remain calm because the noise does not make you anxious. Third, you free up bandwidth in your brain to execute the next steps.

2.

Guess at the emotions

The second step is to guess at the emotions. This is super-simple in angry situations. The emotions are anger, frustration, anxiety, fear, and disrespect. Those emotions cover 95% of all anger.

3.

Reflect the emotions with a simple "You" statement

The third step is to reflect back those emotions to the angry person with a simple "you" statement. "You are angry." "You are frustrated." "You are anxious." "You are afraid." "You are disrespected." Keep your reflections short and straightforward. Keep reflecting until you get a verbal response like "Yeah!" or "Exactly!" Keep reflecting emotions for a few more seconds until you observe the speaker visibly relaxing.

WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO?

Reducing risk inside the workplace

All organisations should state their expectations when it comes to their workplace code of conduct.

If your business is customer facing, or works directly with customers (call centers) then it is helpful to:

Identify what aggressive behavior looks and sounds like; set and express the company's boundaries so that your employees know what the lines are and do not have to determine whether the behaviour is aggressive or not for themselves. This can include types of language used internally and from customers i.e the use of expletives, threatening words, yelling etc.

COMPANIES CAN HELP BY....

- ▶ offer employee training sessions to customer facing employees on how to deal with aggressive persons
- ▶ have an emergency or crisis plan & drill to the plan so you and your team know what to do
- ▶ have internal support mechanisms such as Mental health first aiders or nominated Support persons
- ▶ have internal whistleblower policy and method of internal reporting
- ▶ implement security measures such as good lighting & visibility along walkways and around buildings, CCTV cameras, door locks or security access, guards, having a reception area and a required sign in.
- ▶ If needed – remove branding from the building frontage to protect (this is actually done in many organisations)
- ▶ think about where employees park and need to walk, is it safe to get to their vehicles after hours?
- ▶ Have a company anti-harassment and bullying policy and procedure
- ▶ Promote a healthy culture and recognise the effects of mental health in the workplace





H&S.govt

➔ https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Good_Practice_Guide_-_Dealing_with_Customer-initiated_Aggression_and_Violence.pdf



Worksafe

➔ <https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/work-related-health/violence-at-work/violence-at-work-customer-service-areas/>



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➔ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/--act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_857915.pdf