

Disgruntled Ex-Employee Kills Former Co-Workers During Live TV Broadcast



We've written far too often about workplace violence, especially worker-on-worker violence. And sadly, yet another tragic workplace shooting reminds us of the all too real risk of violence erupting on the job.

On Aug. 26, 2015, Allison Parker, a reporter with a Virginia TV station, and her cameraman Adam Ward were filming a live interview with Vicki Gardner when former colleague Vester Flanagan suddenly appeared and started shooting. He killed Parker and Ward; Gardner was shot in the back and is in the hospital. She's expected to fully recover.

The beginning of the shooting was broadcast live until the station realized what was happening and cut back to the shocked anchor. But Flanagan was also filming the incident himself, posting a video of the shootings on Facebook where it was viewed and shared by hundreds until the site removed it.

After being pursued by police, Flanagan shot himself and later died from his injuries.

Before he died, he sent a long, rambling manifesto to ABC News, claiming to have suffered a history of discrimination and sexual harassment as a gay black man.

We've since learned that Flanagan had been fired from the station in Feb. 2013 for 'anger management issues,' among other things. And he'd been let go from prior employers for similar reasons.

Could the TV station done something to have prevented this tragedy'

It doesn't seem so. In fact, it appears that the station took appropriate steps in handling Flanagan when he was an employee:

- When he complained that co-workers were making racial comments, the station investigated his claims and found them to be baseless, concluding that he'd fabricated them;
- Management documented Flanagan's misconduct, which included angry and threatening behavior that made co-workers uncomfortable;
- It gave him opportunities to improve his behavior and required him to seek

- help through the station's employee assistance program; and
- When it ultimately decided to fire Flanagan, it had police escort him from the workplace out of concern for the safety of the other employees. In fact, scared co-workers hid in a locked office until he was removed. And an off-duty police officer was posted at the station every day from 6:00 a.m. to midnight for two days after his termination.

This outburst of violence occurred *two years* after Flanagan was fired. How could the station have foreseen that he still posed such a threat so long after he'd left its employment'

To try to prevent similar incidents involving your employees, establish an effective threat assessment team to evaluate the risk of violence in your workplace in general and in circumstances such as the firing of a worker with a history of angry or violent behavior.

The OHS Insider has additional resources on workplace violence in the Workplace Violence Compliance Centre, including how to train workers on responding to an active shooter and a workplace violence threat assessment checklist.