



Enough is Enough: Taking a Proactive Approach to Identifying and Preventing Life-Threatening Risks in the Workplace

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276. That's the number of mass shootings that have been reported in the U.S. in this year alone, according to [Gun Violence Archive](#). As mass shootings across the country continue to rise, our nation has also witnessed a series of recent workplace shootings by employees who have gone rogue, whether at a bank in Kentucky this spring or at a Virginia hospital last month. Sadly, these types of incidents aren't isolated and will happen again; it's just a matter of when.

The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reports 392 U.S. workers were workplace homicide victims in 2020. Despite this tragic trend, [nearly half](#) of U.S. employers admit to being unprepared to prevent or respond to workplace violence incidents. That's not acceptable. It's time we proactively address people-based risk in the workplace before tragedy strikes first. I was elated to see California legislators stepping up to address workplace tragedies head on, introducing an extensive workplace violence prevention plan for employers across the state. On May 31st, the [California Senate passed Senate Bill No. 553](#), which would establish new workplace violence prevention standards in the Golden State. This legislation, being reviewed by policy committees in the State Assembly, would require every employer in the state to "establish, implement, and maintain...a workplace violence prevention plan" which would include a violent incident log, post-incident response and an investigation into the incident.

This proposed legislation is a breath of fresh air, as it's clear there is a critical need to improve workplace safety across the nation. Too often, employers overlook or completely miss warning signs. Fortunately, many companies, like California legislators, are now looking into ways to mitigate the potential harm workplace violence can cause to their employees, clients, and partners.

In many cases, employees exhibit concerning behavior before the breaking point, whether "leakage" on social media, or more discreetly through deviant financial activity. Ongoing continuous risk evaluation and early intervention can reduce these horrific incidents in our communities. It's all about protecting lives.

New proposed legislation is certainly a step in the right direction. But employers can step up as well. For proactive and effective people-risk management implementation, it's crucial that employers seek platforms that go beyond pre-hire background checks, some of which are no more than exercises in box checking and won't catch things that happen post-hire. In a 2019 survey, the [Society for Human Resource Management found](#) that 13% of employers only conduct background checks when triggered by an event – but this reactive approach comes too late, and ultimately fails employees and the organization. Annual background screening is expensive, takes too long and does not close any of the real-time information gaps that compromise workplace safety and security. Employees or third-party contractors may be participating in risky activities, breaking policies, or demonstrating threatening behavior that later exposes an organization to substantial risk.

Companies need to put in place continuous real-time, event-based alerts of criminal activity, internal incident reports, social media indicators and financial warning signs that may present a level of risk to an organization, its employees, and customers. These are a few of the evidence-based risk indicators the U.S. Department of Homeland Security identifies as warning signs on the ["Pathway to Violence."](#) An effective and compliant continuous evaluation program requires employee buy-in and complete transparency gaining their consent, so they are made aware of when and how their data is accessed and used. Now more than ever, this data is crucial so that staff and employers can work together to identify and prevent life-threatening risks before they occur.

Employers and employees have an obligation and duty of care to protect themselves, their organization, contractors, clients, and shareholders from harm caused by those working within their organizations. By identifying foreseeable acts of an employee through proactive continuous screening, threats can be identified in advance, saving lives.

As an added benefit, this proactive risk management and workplace improvement approach also helps create an environment where individuals want to work. More than seven years ago, I co-founded a company that protects organizations and employees through the continuous and automated discovery of employee misconduct or high-risk activities because I genuinely believe workplaces can be safer. By generating high-level analytics based on this data and revealing trends to relevant channels, company leadership is better able to intervene before tragedy strikes. With this approach, we have seen our clients' workforce undergo a transformation, including 20% higher productivity, 59% lower turnover and 41% lower absenteeism.

To develop a streamlined review process that also protects employee privacy, business leaders need to invest in continuous evaluation tools that address risks before they happen in a quick and efficient manner, avoiding the chances of being a part of the next mass shooting headline. This can be achieved by implementing automated risk discovery technologies that analyze pressure and stress, policy violations, criminal activity, financial triggers, and more, across internal and external silos of data, and ultimately connect key organizational risk stakeholders to support an integrated deterrence, detection, and mitigation strategy.

We have seen repeatedly what happens when employers do not know an employee is struggling until it's too late. We have the tools and technology to proactively tackle large potential risks head on, and it's time we use them.

Tom Miller is co-founder and CEO of [ClearForce](#), a people-risk technology company based in Vienna, VA. Tom has more than 25 years of analytic and risk management experience, having consulted for many of the top U.S. banks, advised large commercial and government agencies, published numerous articles, and presented topics at industry events and conferences related to risk management, insider threat, security, safety, trusted workforce, and the application of modern analytic technology and policy.

