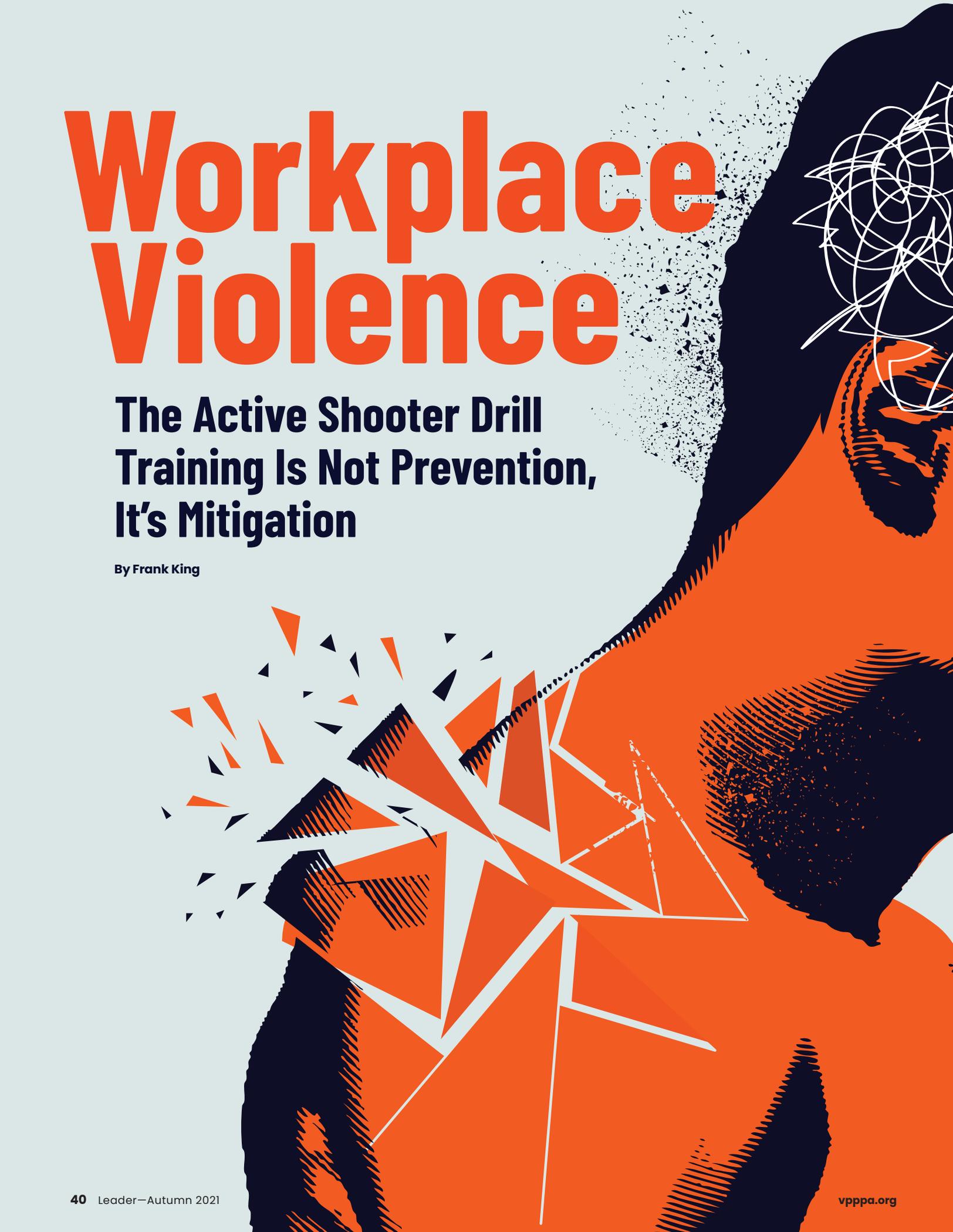


# Workplace Violence



**The Active Shooter Drill  
Training Is Not Prevention,  
It's Mitigation**

By Frank King



**“ There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.” –Desmond Tutu**

**W**e need to start up stream to stem the tide of workplace violence. I’m not saying that training isn’t a good idea, I’m just saying that it doesn’t prevent the problem of workplace violence, it just keeps the body count down.

First, some context.

According to an article published by NPR earlier this year, “workplace mass shootings are rare, but the killing of nine people by a fellow employee at a Northern California rail yard on Wednesday marks the third such rampage in under two months.”<sup>1</sup>

That could foreshadow a rise in this type of violence after the nationwide shutdown of businesses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, says Jaclyn Schildkraut, associate professor of criminal justice at the State University of New York at Oswego.

However, Schildkraut stresses that while such shootings “are increasing incrementally in frequency, they’re still extremely statistically rare.”<sup>2</sup>

More recently in San Jose, authorities stated a public transit employee opened fire on co-workers at the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, fatally shooting at least nine people and then taking his own life. The suspect was identified as a 57-year-old current employee. The motive for the attack remains unclear.

The attack comes on the heels of a similar shooting in Indianapolis on April 15, in which a former FedEx worker killed eight people before killing himself.<sup>2</sup> That was reported to be the deadliest workplace massacre since a brewery employee gunned down five people at the Molson Coors campus in Milwaukee in February 2020, shortly before the pandemic shutdown.<sup>3</sup>

About a week before the Indiana shooting, a gunman killed one person and wounded five others in an ambush at a cabinet manufacturing facility in Bryan, Texas, where he worked. He survived and was arrested.



### More people are returning to work

A database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University found that between 2006 and February 2020, there had been 13 mass workplace shootings carried out by a current or former employee—that’s roughly one per year.<sup>4</sup>

“The reason they seem more frequent right now is because we haven’t had them really for the last year because of COVID,” Schildkraut says. Such restrictions have also served to limit opportunities for potential shooters “because it reduces the available targets for a person,” she says.

“Now that much of the country is returning to work, we’re seeing an uptick in these events in the sense that they’re now out there because people are back out there,” she says.

### Shooters may have had time to plan

Another reason we may see more workplace attacks is that potential perpetrators, who’ve likely been in isolation over the past year, have had time to plan, Schildkraut notes. “One of the things that we know about shooters, especially those who target schools or other specific public spaces, is that they don’t usually wake up and snap.”

The notion that shooters don’t wake up and snap leads me to my next point. Which is that the solution is not downstream using active shooter drill skills, but up stream, with suicide prevention and conflict resolution training, and other programs suggested and supported by OSHA.

So how does one start upstream? You make suicide prevention a health and safety

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**Simply starting the conversation on suicide has the power to save lives, since 8 out of 10 people who are considering suicide are ambivalent, and 9 out of 10 will give hints in the 7 days leading to an attempt, in an effort to get someone to take notice, and... wait for it... start that conversation.**

priority at work. Let’s put out a call to action to all workplaces and professional associations—now is the time to implement the National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention.<sup>5</sup>

So, what are the upstream solutions?

You bring in someone, like me, who does suicide prevention training, who can teach everyone in the company, from the C-Suite on down, how to spot the signs and symptoms of depression and suicide, what to say, what not to say, what to do, what not to do, and how to find resources.

Even though 47,000 people die by suicide every year, that’s 146 per day, one every nine minutes, hardly anyone talks about. Unless you bring it up.

My clients often tell me, “We just brought you in to start the conversation on suicide.”

And simply starting the conversation on suicide has the power to save lives, since 8 out of 10 people who are considering suicide are ambivalent, and 9 out of 10 will give hints in the 7 days leading to an attempt, in an effort to get someone to take notice, and... wait for it... start that conversation.

That’s my job, and now, yours as well.

Then follow it with three things that OSHA suggests and supports.

- OSHA offers *Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)*—This program is most effective in resolving disputes when a conflict has been identified early and one of the following techniques is used: ombudspersons, facilitation, mediation, interest-based problem solving, and peer review.

- *Threat Assessment Team*—This interdisciplinary team will work with management to assess the potential for workplace violence and, as appropriate, develop and execute a plan to address it.
- *Agency Work and Family Life Programs* (such as flexiplace, childcare, maxiflex, etc.)—An agency should identify and modify, if possible, self-imposed policies and procedures which cause negative effects on the workplace climate

I’m not saying that active shooter drill training shouldn’t be taught, or isn’t useful, I’m just saying, to paraphrase Desmond Tutu, if you’re counting shooting victims downstream, you need to go upstream and solve the problem that is causing them to be shooting victims, in the first place. That’s prevention. 🍎

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<sup>5</sup> Workplace Suicide Prevention. (2021). Retrieved from Workplace Suicide Prevention: <https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/>

**Frank King**, Suicide Prevention speaker and Trainer was a writer for The Tonight Show for 20 years.

He’s fought a lifetime battle with Major Depressive Disorder and Chronic Suicidality, turning that long dark journey of the soul into 6 TEDx Talks and sharing his lifesaving insights on Mental Health Awareness with associations, corporations, and colleges.

Depression and suicide run in his family. He’s thought about killing himself more times than he can count.

A Motivational Public Speaker who uses his life lessons to start the conversation giving people permission to give voice to their feelings and experiences surrounding depression and suicide.

And doing it by coming out, as it were, and standing in his truth, and doing it with humor.

He believes that where there is humor there is hope, where there is laughter there is life, nobody dies laughing. The right person, at the right time, with the right information, can save a life.