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# Breaking the Habit of Violence

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## Abstract

*Bruce argues that physical violence in the work place is a manifestation of the spiritual and psychological violence created by downsizing, cost-cutting, supervisory ineptitude, and criticism of workers. The hearts and souls of the American worker are damaged by a violation of personhood as insidious as the physical acts which get reported in the national news. Violence begets violence. Violence is a habit that must be broken.*

*Bruce suggests that the work place can be recreated by an individual acknowledgement of a Power greater than one's self. She offers a Twelve Step Program, Violence Perpetrators Anonymous, as a way that this can happen.*

## Introduction

In this paper I argue that physical violence in the work place is a manifestation of the spiritual and psychological violence created by downsizing, cost-cutting, supervisory ineptitude, and criticism of workers. I argue that the hearts and souls of the American worker are damaged by a violation of personhood as insidious as the physical acts which get reported in the national news. Violence begets violence. Violence is a habit that must be broken.

In today's culture too little attention is given to the psychological and spiritual violence which precipitates physical acts of savagery. Thomas Aquinas explained "to live well is to work well" and that life and livelihood can be about joy and meaning, not violence and resisting violence. I claim that we are not condemned to a world of violence. Rather, we can and must re-create the world of work by connecting with one another in a collective search for values and meaning that includes a 12 step program of turning for help to a power greater than ourselves. To eliminate the violence, we must, in the words of Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (1995), "take God to work."

The next section defines violence as it is used in this paper. The section following describes societal attitudes about violence, and the third

section discusses how the habit of violence has developed. The fourth section summarizes the history of work-related violence, while the fifth portrays the violence in today's work places in both the private and public sectors. The next section suggests that the work place can be recreated by an individual acknowledgement of a Power greater than one's self and offers a Twelve Step Program, Violence Perpetrators Anonymous, as a way that this can happen. The paper ends with a summary and conclusions.

### Violence Defined

Violence is an act committed or caused by one or more persons that in some way harms another. Violence may also result from a condition that injures or causes damage to a person's body or emotions or spirit. Perpetrators of violence are "pathologically ignorant of compassion, loving kindness, joy in the joy of others, and equanimity" (*Spretnak, 1991, p. 46*). Typically violence is thought of as a physical act of brutality, characterized by intense and incensed emotions. If I say, "the work place is becoming violent," people will tend to think "someone has been roughed up, pushed around, hit, stabbed, shot, raped, or in some other way made the object of physical abuse" (*Brown, 1987, p. 6*). Work place statistics on violence are about these clear-cut, physical actions which can be empirically observed and counted.

The definition of violence is more complex than a single, physical act of brutality, however. It includes any covert deeds that violate or coerce another in any way. The concept of "violation" adds to an understanding of violence. "Whatever 'violates' another, in the sense of infringing upon or disregarding or abusing or denying that other, whether physical harm is involved or not, can be understood as an act of violence" (*Brown, 1987, p. 7*).

When the notions of "infringing," "disregarding," "abusing" and "denying" augment the physical dimensions of coercion, the definition of violence is expanded to include a *violation of personhood*.

The term *personhood is important*.  
When we talk about a `person' we are not talking about an object but about a subject. We are describing someone who is not quantifiable or interchangeable with another. Each person has unique worth. There is no

legitimate way to assert that one person is 'worth more' than another person, since the worth of each is infinite....And since personhood means the *totality* of the individual, we are reinforced in our notion that violation of personhood can take place even when no overt physical harm is being done. (*Brown, 1987, p. 7*)

Personhood emanates from the soul of a human being. Qualities typically associated with the soul are "meaning, memory, beauty, fragility, divinity, wildness, union (*Briskin, 1996, p. xiv*). The soul can be violated even when no overt physical harm occurs by psychological acts of coercion.

Violence must be seen as the coercion itself, the control exerted by someone over the will, intellect, or limbs of another. Such control is itself a violation of the other's freedom, whether the control is physical force or a more subtle limiting of the possibilities confronting the other. (*Bell, 1993, p. 161*)

Interviews with postal employees in installations where violence had occurred illustrate psychological acts of coercion which lead to physical violence. The interviews indicate that the postal service work place condoned "bosses who brutally oppressed subordinates." Horstein, who did the interviews, calls these people "dirty-work specialists" who are expected to "fix a situation without sentimentality, by bull-doing, screaming, knocking heads, if necessary: (*Horstein, 1996, p. 103*).

These psychological assaults are as barbarous as physical acts of violence and generate the stress that leads readily to them. People who feel high levels of stress on the job are two times more likely to become violent than unstressed workers (*Capozzoli & McVey, 1996, p. 77*).

The modern world takes a lot of care that the worker's body should not accidentally be damaged. If it *is* damaged, the worker may claim compensation. But his soul and his spirit? If his work damages *him (sic)* by reducing him (*sic*) to a robot --that is just too

bad (*italics in original*) (*Schumacher in Fox, 1995*)

As a representative of one of the historic peace churches pointed out:

I think physical violence tends to come when violence of other kinds have preceded it. That is, I define violence as treating people like things and one can have various states of treating people like things which culminate in physical violence (*Arnett, 1980, p. 31*).

Thus violence is a more complex concept than statistics would have us believe. It is physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual coercion which violates the personhood of anyone who falls victim to it. It is alive in our work places not just as rape, murder, and assault. Work place violation of personhood is an epidemic, as evidenced by a national study in which 42 percent of respondents were victims of downsizing, 28 percent had seen management cutbacks, and 20 percent feared being fired (*Giacalone, 1997, p. 51*). The stress that these conditions foster was not reported, but can be imagined. Long-term consequences of this victimization may be overwhelming psychological stress which can lead to hostility, outbursts, even bizarre behavior (*Denenberg, et al, 1996*).

This section has defined violence as both physical acts of brutality and any covert deeds that violate or coerce another in any way. The next section addresses societal attitudes about violence. It points out that violence has been a part of the American culture since the country began and suggests that habits of violence are difficult to break.

### **America is a Violent Society**

Violence is a part of the tradition in Western culture (*Whitmer, 1997*). Although research by the International Society for the Study of Aggression shows "no evolutionary or genetic basis to violence" (*McLaughlin and Davidson, 1994, p. 147*), violence has been a part of the very fabric of the history of this United States. In the words of H. Rap Brown, 1960s civil rights radical activist, "violence is as American as cherry pie" (*Capozzoli & McVey, 1996, p. 46*).

Readers don't need an account of the Boston Tea Party or the Revolutionary War to remember that this United States was born by violence and led by men who committed acts of treason against the British crown. Even then, habits of violence were entrenched.

Writers of the U.S. Constitution sought to control what they believed to be the violent nature of humankind as described in the philosophy of Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Hobbes (1588-1679). Machiavelli insists that we must "start with assuming that all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature" (*Machiavelli, in Somerville & Santoni, 1963, p. 137*). This notion that the nature of mankind is bad and vicious, and, therefore, violent, was further elaborated on by Hobbes:

So, that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First competition; second, diffidence; thirdly glory.

The first maketh men invade for gain; the second for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue.... (*Hobbes, in Somerville & Santoni, 1963, p. 143*).

The discussions that led to the founding of this United States focused on the grand problems of establishing and maintaining civil society. Violence was a concern, but it was accepted as a part of the nature of mankind. The work place, as it is known today, did not exist. This was a time when

most did not anticipate the impact of political, social, and economic modernization in creating the need for a complex administrative state, thus there is little attention to bureaucracy, much less the more delimited topic of proper conduct" (*Burke, 1994, p. 460*).

Violence and fears of violence appear to have been taken for granted. In the more than 200 years since the founding of America, not much seems to have changed. Violence has become a habit that still permeates this culture, still is part of the nature of humankind, and still affects its social and economic institutions.

Violence has always been endemic in the United States, but national statistics suggest we are entering a new era. In 1990 violent crime in America hit a record high...prompting Delaware Senator Joseph Biden to dub it the "bloodiest year in American history" (*Derber, 1996, p. 106*).

As the new millennium approaches, people fear that violence is worsening and that a "wilding of America" is underway (*Derber, 1996*). Wilding is both random violence and an assault on society which is self-oriented, hurts others, and damages the social fabric. Derber (*p. 8*) lists three types of wilding:

1. **Economic wilding** - the morally uninhibited pursuit of money by individuals and businesses at the expense of others;
2. **Political wilding** - the abuse of political office to benefit one's self or one's class and the wielding of political authority to inflict morally unacceptable suffering on citizens;
3. **Social wilding** - personal and family acts of violence, as well as collective forms of selfishness such as wealthy suburbs turning their backs on suffering inner-cities.

Wilding results in fear, and Americans today are afraid.

The Figgie Report, a national survey on fear of crime, indicates that four out of five Americans are afraid of being assaulted, robbed, raped, or murdered, an estimated 90

percent of Americans lock their doors, and more than half "dress plainly" to avoid attracting the attention of violent criminals. Over 50 million households stock guns...to ward off attack (*Derber, 1996, p. 106*).

Fear results in Americans spending more and more time in self-defense.

The personal meaning of the wilding crisis is that we each have to spend more and more time simply defending our lives, defending our property, defending our livelihood, defending our health, defending our physical safety, defending our ego (*Derber, 1996, p. 163*).

Daily media reports exacerbate the fear by their focus on violence. The fact is from 1993 to 1996 homicides in the United States decreased by 20 percent, but media coverage of murders increased by 721 percent! (*Washington Post, 1997*). While blaming the reporters would be erroneous, the fact is media coverage makes Americans more aware of incidents of violence. It also indicates that Americans are *interested* in violence.

This is a society that condones aggression. The average seventh grader in 1997 has witnessed over 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence. When this violence appears on television, perpetrators go unpunished 73% of time. It seems that "violence and aggression have been transformed into an acceptable form of entertainment" (*Kelleher, 1997, p. 110*). People only get upset when violence happens to them or someone they know.

Since the first national census of fatal occupational injuries was not undertaken by the Bureau of Labor Statistics until 1993 (*Little, 1994, p. 5*), there's sometimes the impression that work place violence is new to this last decade of the twentieth century. That is not the case. Violence has permeated the culture of work for many generations. It has become an American work habit. How this habit manifests itself in the work place is the subject of the next section.

## **Work Place Violence in Labor History**

Violence in and around the work place has been a part of the process of industrial development. The work place, as it is defined today, has only existed since the middle of the nineteenth century. "As late as 1850, as many as nine in ten white, male citizens worked for themselves as farmers, merchants, or craftsmen. Even 'manufacturers', as the census labeled them, averaged only three to four workers each" (*Jacques, 1996, p. 25*). There were no "employers" as we think of them today. There was no work place in which workers gathered to produce. Rather the culture of production was one of self-employed craftsman and farmers.

In the decade between 1868 and 1879, although the number of work places had only increased marginally, work place violence increased exponentially. Workers began to be referred to as an "hostile, aggregate class" (*Jacques, 1996, p. 44*) who were kept working by what Andrew Carnegie called foremen "who could knock down a man now and then as a lesson" (*1920, p. 174*).

Jacques calls the activity in and around the work place in the period of 1870 to 1900 "a total war." This was "the most violent and bloody period in U.S. industrial relations" (*1996, p. 53*) and a period of "terror" (*p. 60*). Government troops were called out almost 500 times between 1875 and 1910 to calm labor unrest (*Laurie, 1989, p. 136*). That figure does not include the Pinkerton Guards who were private mercenaries employed by industry and railroads, nor the times employees who were loyal to the company fought on the side of officials against workers.

In his 1909 book called Social Engineering, Tolman told company officials to get and retain power. "Do not bend when you can demand. Do not say "trust me" when you can insist. Do not ask for loyalty when you can require subordination" (*Briskin, 1996, p. 107*). In the struggle between the tyranny of work place bosses and the personhood of the workers, the habit of violence continued.

Violence in the work place of the nineteenth century was frequently resisted or initiated by workers collectively. They were not just protesting the physical acts of coercion they experienced at the hands of foremen; they were battling for a fading way of life in which they had been craftsmen in control of their personhood. They were fighting for the right to have some say in their own destiny, as well as for the terms and conditions of their employment. They were fighting for their souls! (*Briskin, 1996, 91-108*).

In most cases they lost the battle and the work place was left "without core human values about collective purpose and individual meaning" (*Briskin, 1996, p. 158*). The work place became "hell!" (*Briskin, p. 120*). A list of violent events in early U.S. labor history can be found on the world wide web (*Lutens, 1997*). Figure 1 illustrates the kinds and extent of the violence that occurred in and around work. It demonstrates that violence has historically been a part and parcel of the American work place.

This section has summarized the history of violence in the U.S. work place. The next section describes the violence in today's organizations in both the private and public sectors.

### **Violence in the Modern Work Place**

Today, the habits of violence continue and "hell" exists in any work place where the personhood of workers is ignored.

The hell constituted in the work place of this century has an obsession with speed, is infused with surveillance, controls all behaviors, and distorts emotions. The shadow of a fantasized perfect work place is the curtailment of all individual fantasy, where individuals must make themselves over into mechanisms of production. (*Briskin, 1996, p. 120*).

The numbers that tell about violence in today's work place are not about armed contests between labor and management. They, are, however, as depressing as the statistics of the nineteenth century. Workers are still brutalized and coerced. Their personhoods are still violated. The habits of violence have shifted and taken on new characteristics. Their results are as devastating.

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics collected between 1987 and 1992 and reported in 1997, almost one million crimes occur in the work place each year. Women are disproportionately victimized, for 40 percent of women who die from a job related injury die of murder (*Little, 1994, p. 5*), and 58 percent of the nonfatal assaults are inflicted upon women (*US Bureau of Labor Standards, "Study on Injuries," 1997*).

Violence in the public work place is more prevalent than in the private sector. Although government workers only makeup about 18 percent of the total United States workforce, they account for 30 percent of all work place victims of physical violence (*U.S. Dept of Justice, 1997*). They receive only 10 percent of the fatal occupational injuries, however, so are not as likely to get killed at work as are their private sector counterparts. (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Standards, "Safety and Health Statistics," 1997*).

## Figure 1

### Historical Examples of Worker Violence

#### January 13, 1874

##### *Tompkins Square Riot in New York City*

As unemployed workers demonstrated, a detachment of mounted police rode into the crowd, hitting men, women, and children with billing clubs and leaving hundreds of casualties in their wake. Abram Duryee stated, "It was the most glorious site I ever saw..."

#### July 14, 1877

##### *Battle of the Viaduct in Chicago*

A general strike halted the movement of railroads. Federal troops were called out and at a viaduct in Chicago, they killed 30 workers and wounded over 100.

#### May 4, 1875

##### *Haymarket Square Massacre in Chicago*

Armed workers gathered in a protest demonstration. Someone threw a bomb that killed seven policemen and injured 67 others. Eight anarchists were arrested and although no one proved that anyone of them threw the bomb, four of them were executed.

#### September 10, 1897

*Lattimer, Pennsylvania*

Nineteen striking miners were shot in the back and 40 wounded by the sheriff and his deputies.

**April 29, 1899***Wardner, Idaho*

Miners dynamited the \$250,000 mill of the Bunker Hill Mining Company, destroying it completely.

Many blame public employees for social and economic problems completely beyond their control. The tension between demeaning government while at the same time being dependent on it has been called "an intimate, perhaps suicidal, wilding dance between leaders and voters" (*Derber, 1996, p. 120*). Since public employees are the representatives of government to the ordinary citizen, they are powerfully affected by the "wilding dance."

The public employees union, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), has pointed out, "public sector employees, especially those who deliver social services in this era of fiscal restraint, are quite vulnerable to outbursts of anger." This vulnerability is due, in part, to the fact that "more depressed, unstable, and desperate people are waiting in longer lines to talk to fewer workers who have less time to dispense dwindling services and reduced benefits" (*Denenberg, 1996, p. 10*).

In addition, public employees are doing violence to one another. Between 1983 and 1993, for example, "ten postal employees went on homicidal rampages, murdering thirty-four supervisors and co-workers" (*Hornstein, 1996, p. 81*). Hornstein believes that work itself is not capable of generating such violence. Rather, based on interviews with postal employees, he suggests that it is the way that post office work is managed that "caused such horrific explosions."

The reported acts of work place violence are atrocious and appalling. Just as tragic, however, are the insidious acts of covert personal violence that occur when one person threatens, manipulates, harasses, or otherwise causes psychological or emotional damage to another. These acts

do not get reported in any centralized place, yet evidence exists to suggest that they are ubiquitous.

A striking difference exists between the earliest work place violence and that of today. In the 1800s supervisors maintained discipline with physical violence. Today's supervisors often use psychological or systemic violence. An estimated 90 percent of workers will suffer "boss abuse" at some point in their career and as many as one out of five workers report to bosses from whom they expect harmful mistreatment (*Hornstein, 1996, p. xiii*).

A hundred years ago acts of violence seem to have been perpetrated against workers by company officials and their hirelings. Workers responded by banding together in self-defense and collective acts of desperation. Workers were struggling to preserve a way of life in which they had not been subservient to their employer (*Jacques, 1996, pp. 70-71*). They wanted some measure of freedom in their work and some sense that they would not be taken advantage of nor abused. Alone, any one worker was powerless. Together they had hope.

Workers today seem hope-less. Labor laws protect their right to unionize and to strike, thus ending the collective violence that created the reign of terror in the early history of the work place. But the habits of violence remain. The insidious violation of personhood continues. The habits of violence entrenched in the American culture are manifest in the ways bosses continue to violate the personhood of their workers, thus breeding unrest, dis-ease, resentment, and fear.

Violence erupts now for the very reasons that it did in the nineteenth century. Emotional violence is inflicted upon workers when their job security is threatened; when an autocratic, centralized power structure creates frustration and resentment among employees; or when personality conflicts arise (*Capozzoli & McVey, 1996, p. 31-32*). Emotional violence has been imposed when workers feel oppressed (*Bell, 1993, p. 193*) and when they are downsized (*Giacalone, 1997, p. 50*). Physical violence erupts in a work place where there is stress, perceived or real danger, inadequate communication, and no covenant between employee and employer (*Kelleher, 1997, pp. 116-122*).

While violence in the work place may be nothing new, it is still tragic. According to the Report of Northwestern National Life Insurance

Company, one out of every 4 workers had been harassed, threatened, or physically attacked on the job in the previous 12 months (*Denenberg, 1996, p. 7*).

Today's workers, however, do not often experience the solidarity that was part of the beginning labor movement when they banded together to resist work place violence. Rather, they seem to be solitary and isolated from one another. Downsizing and competition today is not unlike that which occurred with the implementation of scientific management in the early twentieth century. Again worker has been pitted against worker. Today, however, violence seems more insidious.

Family issues which once were left at home now spill over into work place time; and domestic violence has become a work place problem as well as a societal one. A 1994 article in the *Boston Globe* stated that domestic violence costs employers \$3 to \$5 billion annually due to absenteeism, increased health care costs, higher turnover, and lower productivity. In addition, in the United States, every year, between 150 and 180 women are murdered at work for two reasons: retaliation from disgruntled employees and domestic violence. (*Littler, 1994*).

How an employee is finally driven to an act of violence or homicide is a complex and much-debated issue.... However, given the unwholesome fact that Americans have created and accepted an aggressive society, the need to understand why its citizens are so frequently violent remains a fundamental issue. The American work place, which is an essential and integral component in the lives of most citizens, has evolved into an arena for violence and murder in lock step with the general increase in societal violence. (*Kelleher, 1997, p. 109*)

The habit of violence must be replaced with habits of connection and care. Civil society has been described as "the underlying antidote to the wilding virus," if it can provide "a culture of love, morality, and trust that leads people to care for one another and for the larger community" (*Derber, 1996, p. 145*). Work place culture can also be an antidote to the violence

and violation taking place in both the public and private sectors. Recreating the work place is the subject of the next section.

### Recreating the Work Place

Readers of this journal can and must recreate the American work place. It should be a haven that contains "more justice, dignity, service, trustworthiness, and love" (*Marcic, 1997, pp. 113.*) The problem is most people don't know how to build a fundamentally different work place and "all the strategies, slogans, and training programs in the world will not help" until we are able to "change the mindset of workers" and bring about "systemic changes in values and spirit -- and love" (*Marcic, 1997, p. 114.*) No one likes the violence and workers and managers alike want to bring values and meaning into their work but they're not sure how.

To stop the violence each of us must change; for a spark of violence lies inside all of humankind. Anyone who doubts that need only think about the last time he or she felt fear, hatred, anger, resentment, or frustration. Without doubt, "there is a legitimate place for anger...like what Aristotle might call righteous indignation, an anger that fuels both reformist action and revolutionary consciousness" (*Bell, 1993, p. 159.*) The key to breaking the habit of violence is a transformation of fear and anger so that they mobilize change without harming others in the process (*Schmidt, 1995, p. 74.*)

Our work is a place to start to change habits of violence. How that change might take place lies, I believe, in two related areas: the deep wisdom of the religions traditions and conscious application of a 12 step recovery program.

The wisdom of religious traditions calls us to choose honesty, service, and care over violence and strife. Whether one draws from the Old and New Testaments of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Buddhist Dhammapada, the Hindu Apastamba Darma Sutra and Bhagavad Gita, or from the Baha'i tradition, the advice on how to live is similar: "Be trustworthy," "Do not live in anger," "Live in service," "Love others" (*Marcic, 1997, p. 4.*) Such behavior is the antithesis of violence and the beginning of peace.

In the words of early labor activist, Dorothy Day, "The greatest challenge of the day is to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution

which has to start with each one of us" (*Schmidt, 1995, p. i*). Knowing what is needed and figuring out how to do it are very different things. Clearly a revolution of individual hearts must occur if the habits of violence are to be broken and our work place culture become an antidote to violence.

Recognizing the problems with giving advice and answers, I am going to suggest one way to break the habits of violence. It is not a way I've tried, nor can I promise it will work. It is, however, a proven and validated way of precipitating and sustaining individual heart change. It is a way of facing together what none of us can face alone. It is a way of offering a peace testimony and a declaration of desire to end the violence in ourselves and in our work.

The Twelve Step Program used by Alcoholics Anonymous provides a way to recreate the work place which can turn it away from violence and toward a place where life and livelihood can be about joy and meaning. That program and its potential for changing the habits of violence are the subject of the next section.

### **A 12 Step Program for Change**

The 12 Step Programs were first developed in the 1930s as a framework for the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group. Now, almost sixty years later, the success of the steps coupled with the moral support provided in community is indisputable as a way to break a devastating and destructive habit. In addition to AA, Twelve Step programs are used in Al-Anon groups for families of alcoholics, and by participants in Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and Emotions Anonymous, to name a few groups. In all cases a support system of meetings and people to call enhances a person's ability to stick with the program. With the expanded usage of the Internet, these groups also meet in chat rooms on the world wide web, contribute testimonials, and offer prayers for one another.

A key component of the Twelve Step programs is belief in a transcendent power greater than humankind, which many call "God," and others call "Goddess," "Great Spirit," "Allah," or "The Ancestors."

The first three Steps suggest that our human resources, such as intelligence, knowledge, strength, and even hope are not enough to solve our problems. As others have

done, we need to accept the help of a Power greater than our own to guide our thoughts and actions. These three steps show us how to bring that Power into our lives in an active, workable partnership. (*Al-Anon, 1986, p. 5*)

Step Four challenges participants in the Twelve Steps to take a moral inventory, examining personal propensity for violence and identifying the ways their own behaviors have been violent as well as how their acts have contributed to the violence of others. Steps Five, Six and Seven are opportunities to involve God in healing, while Steps Eight and Nine require a commitment to make specific behavior changes. Step Ten continues the efforts made in all the previous Steps. Step Eleven urges us to establish a conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves through prayer and meditation; Step Twelve suggests the need to practice these principals in all our affairs, and to share our spiritual growth with others. (*Al-Anon, 1986, p. 6*).

The U.S. culture has traditionally managed to keep acknowledgement of the presence and power of God out of most work places. Yet, George Gallup confirms that "Ninety-five percent of Americans believe in some form of supreme being or higher power and more than ever before we are feeling the need to reach beyond *self-help* to find *spiritual help*" (*Eyre, 1997*). Americans can, in the words of Rabbi Salkin (*1995*) "take God to work."

The 12 Step Programs encourage us to do just that, then to work with and through God to change the habits of violence in the work place. Figure 2 presents an adaptation of the 12 Step Program so that it focuses on breaking the habit of violence. The steps are deliberately written in the past tense to show their history of effectiveness and solidarity with those who have gone before on the path to recovery and health.

Whether used by those who have serious problems or those who are affected by those problems, the Twelve Step programs have demonstrated success. Anyone can participate. If the model is adapted to ridding the work place of violence, one could conceive of several groups. One group might be for bosses who have violated the personhood of their employees or feel threatened by them. Another might be for employees trying to survive the traumas of downsizing or the frustration and stress of job pressures. Another might be for victims of harassment, and still another might be for

those whose work is affected by a violent home situation. To retain anonymity, these groups could, as with AA, be sponsored by local churches or civic groups. They could also be established on the Internet.

### Figure 2

#### A Twelve Step Program for Violence Perpetrators Anonymous\*

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1. We admitted we were powerless over violence -- that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of that Power *we understand as God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for

knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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**\* Adapted from the Twelve Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous**

All the Twelve Step programs facilitate personal change. To understand that personal change can break the habits of violence, it's important to recognize that "Liberation of self and transformation of society are not separate events...We need to take care, as we engage in healing ourselves and the world, that one is recognized as necessary to the other" (*Schmidt, 1995, p. 79*). If anyone doubts the power of one person, think about standing in a dark room, unable to see. Then remember what it's like to light one candle and recall that it is indeed better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

## Summary and Conclusions

People in the United States share the heritage of violence. Over the years we have created, accepted, and sanctioned violence, so that the "American work place, which is an essential and integral component in the lives of most citizens, has evolved into an arena for violence and murder" (*Kelleher, 1997, p. 109*). Our work places are also filled with oppressive structures where "emotional tension at work, of pain, of an ultimate challenge to the humanity of people lies" (*Hummel, p. 9*), where people are pitted against one another in competition for diminishing jobs and degraded socially and morally (*Derber, 1996, p. 68-69*). This paper has argued that these habits of work place violence can and must be changed.

Two related approaches to change have been offered: the deep wisdom of the world's religions traditions and adaptation of the AA Twelve Step recovery program. The wisdom of the religious traditions calls us to choose to act with honesty, service, and care rather than violence and strife. The Twelve Steps provide a method for doing that.

Much work in this area is yet to be done. Pilot programs of Violence Perpetrators Anonymous must be established and research into their

viability conducted. The Internet is a safe place to begin, and a chat group is an easy practice to start. Readers of this Internet journal who are concerned or affected in any way by work place violence are challenged to take the next steps.

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