- [Narrator] You are listening to today, HR Mixtape, your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel well, like work. Now your host, Shari Simpson.

- Joining me today is Josh Shelton, Threat Assessment Manager at FedEx. Josh has worked with FedEx for almost 10 years, and with the Fayette County Sheriff's Office, Georgia as a detective, 13 years prior to that. He currently chairs the Georgia DFCS region for board, and seeks to spread the word of violence prevention. Josh is a certified threat manager and serves on the Southeastern Regional Board of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, an organization of law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health professionals, and corporate security practitioners in the field of assessing and managing threats of violence lens. Josh, thanks so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

- Thanks for having me. I'm really excited to be here. It's my first trip to the conference at Sherman.

- How have you enjoyed it so far?

- It's busy.

- Yes.

- It's a lot to take in. So I've been walking down there on the exposition floor and definitely getting my steps in.

- Yeah, oh, for sure, for sure. Lots of steps here at Sherman. So you have a really unique background and this is a topic we haven't covered a lot and so I'm really excited to have you on the podcast to talk about this. And I'll start with not an easy question. You know, can you explain the difference between effective and predatory violence and why it's important for HR professionals to understand that distinction?

- I use an analogy that is common in the behavioral threat assessment space, and that's with a cat. Think about a cat in its house, it's sunny, you know having a good time, and a strange dog comes into the room, it's gonna have a pretty predictable response. It's gonna get excited, it's gonna stand up and try to make itself look bigger. It's gonna make a lot of noise, it's gonna show its weapons, it's gonna show its claws, and its teeth and it's gonna basically let that dog know don't mess with me. And that effective violence reaction is something that you listeners hear and see every single day. This is the, "I heard you were talking about me." "Let's take this outside and settle it like men." "He's using my piece of equipment." You know, it's emotional, it's really mostly posturing but it's common and and it doesn't you usually end up in, you know, a disaster. Now, predatory

violence, if we think about that same cat in the backyard looking for a squirrel or a bird, it's not emotional. It's not making any noise. In fact, it's really calculated in thinking about, you know, what's coming next. When humans decide to engage in that kind of behavior, they can be really bad news for us because there's no better predator on the earth than humans.

— Yeah, I hear that for sure. You know, as you think about, you know helping HR professionals understand this, what are some of the key elements of the the science behind those pathways to violence that we should really be understanding of to help identify potential threats?

— Yeah, it's crucial that our HR Pros recognize that there's no set profile. You know, there's no profile of an attacker right now, but there is a well validated pathway to violence that these attackers, you know, that they follow. It starts with something that we see again every single day. This is when our employees are aggrieved, when something's wrong, when they're having some issue, some problem. Of course, just because someone's aggrieved doesn't mean they're gonna carry out some attack.

— Yeah.

— But it's when they don't feel like they're getting a hearing, when they become so frustrated, so angry, that they move to the next stage, which is ideation. This is when they decide that taking matters into their own hands and attacking their coworkers or their workplace is what's gonna relieve them of this pain and breathe them some justice or satisfaction. Things typically kind of pick up from there in speed. They start to plan and prepare the who, what, when, where. Where they're gonna do this. They gather the tools they're gonna use, in America, this is typically firearms and ammunition. And then the last two things on the pathway to violence typically happen simultaneously, the breach of the physical security around the target and the actual attack itself. So knowing that there is a pathway in place that we understand, you know, how they behave, knowing when those behaviors exhibit themselves we should be doing something about them is crucial for HR because this is no longer a single silo job. It's not a corporate security job, it's not an HR job. It is a job that we have to do together to make sure that we are protecting our folks at work.

— How do we know the warning signs? And the reason I ask that is, you know, I have been in plenty of situations in my HR career where you have an employee in your office with heightening motions, and they might be yelling and you learn deescalation tactics, you know obviously throughout your career. I don't know, in those moments if I've had an intentional thought of where does this go next? How do we think about that? Or what are the things that we should be thinking about the triggers for us for warning signs?

— Well, there is a bit of a paradigm shift on how we should think about these and how we should think about what to do when we see those behaviors. Like I said, it's not a single silo job, so we need to have a multidisciplinary response team in place. This means it's a group of people who come together on a regular basis and talk about concerning employee behaviors. The time that these people come together should be frequently, you know, we don't want them to just meet each other when it's a disaster. So I would say that's the first kind of paradigm shift that we need to consider is that, you shouldn't be considering what to do next on your own. You know, we should be meeting with people on a regular basis. The minimum group that should be together is HR, corporate security if available, someone from our legal department. And I always like to include someone from the operation because I don't feel like anyone has a better view of our folks than the people in the operation. So, you know, having that team in place and having them as a resource to call upon when you need help and when you need to consider what those next steps would be, that's important.

— As you think about implementing a team like that, implementing, you know behavioral threat assessments and intervention strategies, what are some of the common challenges HR professionals are gonna face?

— Well, it's gonna be mostly just not doing things the way they've always been done. You know, we're creatures of habit, so we like to kind of push this off on whoever's done it in the past, but I think that when we bring in other subject matter experts, we're gonna have such better perspective, you know over the problem and what to do about it. So I would say that's probably the biggest problem that we have, not just HR, but security as well. Just really kind of changing the way that we're gonna to do these things and intervene going forward. It's not some single person's job.

— What about training? And the reason I ask this is, you know I think we've gone through phases when it comes to training with different types of threats. I remember earlier in my career, we did a lot of bomb threat training. I don't know why, but we did. And then, you know, we've gone through a lot of active shooter training and things like that, and there's repetition that, you know when you have repetitive training, it sticks in your brain. But I think about things as simple as like a fire drill. I mean, still employees don't know where I'm supposed to go, when I'm supposed to be there. How should we shift our mindset with this specifically and how we approach training?

— Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up because I think everybody listening probably has had that run hide fight style, active threat training. It seems to be almost exclusively where the focus is right now with this problem. We are completely focused on response, and the problem with that is when we focus on response and we only do run hide fight training, you know you can't respond to something like that until it occurs. You know, action's always gonna be faster than

reaction. And when you look at, like, for instance the case in Nashville, the Nashville attacker at that school, we're talking about eight minutes from the first cell phone call to the moment they were on scene, made their way to the bad guy, neutralized the bad guy and everyone agrees they did everything perfectly. They couldn't have trained better to do better, you know they couldn't have trained more to do better. And as perfectly a job as they did, six people still died, including three children. So we have got to give some focus, and I'm not saying we've taken anything away from the law enforcement response obviously, but we have got to give some focus to the prevention efforts that go into this. Because there's some some great science that backs this up and I think educating first and foremost our HR Pros, our Security Pros, our Legal Pros is where that should start. And that's really where the education should I think, start.

— Do you have in all the work that you've done, some success stories you can share where, you know implementing this type of education and behavioral threat assessments have helped prevent targeted violence?

— Well, that's a tough thing to measure, because it's almost impossible to measure what didn't occur.

— Right.

— And there's certainly been, you know, stories and anecdotes about people intervening in those moments where someone's preparing for an attack and, you know they're gathering the materials and you know someone drops a dime on 'em and the police come in and save the day. That does happen, but it's probably really difficult to measure the the cases that were intervened at that grievance stage early on, where HR Pros are doing exactly what they're really, really good at. You know, that's tough to measure but that's what it takes. HR Pros doing what they do, being good listeners, making sure that our folks feel like they have got a hearing, promoting a robust reporting system, you know in our companies to make sure folks know they can report it, they can report anonymously if they need to. There's lots of different ways they can report, and when they do report, something will happen. As long as we can push that message out there, I think we're gonna get more information back and have the ability to work on those cases and kind of, you know, look through that information they give us.

— Your comment about reporting is interesting 'cause I think if you work in a larger organization, sometimes this stuff doesn't make it to HR, and it ends up in a manager's lap, or ends up in operations like you've talked about. Is there tips that you've helped, or you've talked about to help create a culture where that communication is happening? That's, it's bringing things to light, to HR and not in a inflammatory way, but really in the idea of education and of sharing of knowledge.

— Yeah, that's interesting you say that 'cause just, I think it was
two weeks ago the Secret Service came out with a reporting document or
how to better, you know enhance your reporting system for K through
12. It's not just applicable to K through 12. I think it's very
applicable to, you know companies as well, but it's making sure that
people know that they can get something done if they have concerns.
And the other piece of that is making sure that people are educated on
the fact that they can report anonymously. The biggest, one of the
biggest problems we have in behavioral threat assessment is what we
call the bystander effect, which is where people see something that's
concerning but they don't say anything because they think, "Ah, I
don't want to get someone in trouble." And, you know we deal with this
every day, right? "I don't want to get 'em fired." "I know if I report
this, someone's gonna get fired." That's one of the reasons that, you
know having an anonymous reporting method is really important so that
you lower that barrier for those folks. Give them the opportunity to
report, you know should they see something that they are concerned
about.

— And I think for those listening have it really be anonymous. There
are so many times in HR where we have quote unquote anonymous stuff
and then we do that. Okay, but who are they really? Can we figure it
out? I think you're absolutely right. Like we have to create a culture
of transparency where it truly is anonymous, so that people feel safe
to report it. In that safety aspect, how do we manage that idea
between creating an inclusive work environment but also addressing
things like this? You know, I guess my concern is on the flip side of
it, all this education and knowledge, do we then end up over-reporting
and creating this culture that we don't want?

— Yeah, I think that's possible. Maybe we're nowhere near that right
now. You know, we would prefer to have over-reporting than under-
reporting. Right now we're definitely at an under-reporting phase, I
think. But to your point, I think that one of the things we need to
make sure that we do is these teams that are evaluating these
behaviors and looking into these problems, they need to be, they need
to look like our workforce, right? We need to try to remove as much
implicit bias as we can by making sure the folks who are reviewing
these behaviors in these cases look like the workforce that they're
investigating. That's gonna help, you know, bring down some of that
implicit bias.

— As you think forward what are some emerging trends and advancements
you're seeing in the behavioral threat assessment field?

— Yeah the field itself is emerging, and I find it fascinating. You
know, I've not found anything as interesting as this, you know, in my
corporate security career so far. And I think that the more of our HR
Pros that learn about it, they're gonna be interested in it and wanna
get involved because there's such a crucial part too. It's gonna be

important that they do. I would highly recommend that anybody take the time to go to the United States Secret Service website and download some of these documents that talk about how to build a team, you know, how to start a team in in your workplace. All the documents that are on their website are just brilliant and free and everybody should be checking them out. Also, it's really important that our HR Pros are paying attention to the SHRM as is Workplace Violence Prevention Standard. You know, this is a really, really great document that most of our workplace violence prevention policies are based on. So having a good familiarity with that I think is really important.

– This is such an important topic so I'm glad I was able to grab you for a few minutes. Is there any other tips that we haven't talked about that you wanna make sure our listeners know?

– Well, just that, you know, I think that we need to acknowledge that prevention is possible. And like I said before, the response focus right now is, I just don't think it's the, the full picture. You know, we have got to spend some time thinking about prevention and that is not a law enforcement problem. You know, those officers, they do a great job every day. It's not their responsibility to prevent it. It's our responsibility to step up and see what we can do to prevent these attacks from happening.

– Well, thank you so much for your insight and taking a few minutes of your time.

– Thanks so much, appreciate it.

– [Narrator] I hope you enjoy today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtapes.com, come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.