SEWICKLEY -- She works for you, and with you. She depends on you, as you depend on her. You connect every day. You walk the same path, face the same challenges, share the same goals, suffer the same losses, celebrate the same gains.

You are her boss, but she's being abused, or threatened, at home.

Do you, as employer or manager, address her distress? Do you sense an opportunity, an obligation, to help?

Monster question. Look away, or look for solutions?

"Partner violence happens at home, but it walks through your doors at work," Susan Nitzberg, associate director of Standing Firm, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit group that coaches businesses to deal with domestic violence, said Tuesday morning to the Sewickley Chamber of Commerce.

"Wouldn't it be cool if we got the whole village (of Sewickley) to stand firm against this violence?"

On the weekend of May 2-3, more than 20 "silent witness" silhouettes will stand in Sewickley. The wooden figures have no faces, but, against their hearts, each carries the story of a life lost. Jamee Q. Young for The Times
of an abused person.

“They are faceless because it could be anyone,” Nitzberg said.

Domestic violence spills. It spreads. It contaminates.

“We all bring our personal issues, our personal struggles, to the workplace,” said Barbara Penner, also an associate director with Standing Firm. “When partner violence comes to work, it puts that employee at risk, it puts co-workers at risk, it puts clients and customers, as well as people on the street, at risk as well.”

Business owners and managers need to be aware and alert to the presence of partner violence in their work community, according to Standing Firm.

“Every day in our region, people are going to work wondering, ‘What did I do wrong? What’s going to happen when I get home?’” Penner said. “People are afraid of getting phone calls, afraid of getting threatened in text messages. And there are people who go to work sending threatening calls and text messages.”

For every victim, there is a violator, and both go to work in the morning. Is each workplace compromised? Is the manager challenged?

“You don’t have to be a counselor. You don’t have to be a friend. You have to be useful,” Penner said.

Be subtle, Penner said. Don’t say, “What did you do to deserve this?” Say, “Can I help? Can we talk?”

A 2013 Standing Firm survey revealed that 38 percent of respondents have known at least one co-worker in the past five years who was abused, 24 percent said they have been abused, 65 percent said their involvement in an abusive relationship impacted their work, and 83 percent said it was important to address abuse as a workplace issue.

“People involved in an abusive relationship are not doing the best job, they are carrying that distraction to work,” Penner said.

Penner quoted a line from a short video she played.

“To me, the most chilling line, was, ‘I may not know where you are sleeping tonight, but I know where you work.’”

You work in the same place. You arrive at the same time. You park in the same spot.

“How hard would it be for you to be found by an abusive partner?” Penner asked.

Penner said employers and managers have to be sensitive to bruises, crying, withdrawal and anxiety, and be flexible with job schedules and time away from the workplace.

And keep a list of assisting agencies in a top drawer.
Recognize, respond and refer is the Standing Firm path.

“You can’t predict when it is going to happen,” Penner said. “But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have a plan. You need a plan because it’s going to happen, and you need to be able to respond.”
Expert: Domestic violence can spill into workplace - Timesonline.com: Local News

4/18/2014

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