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The Business Case for Prevention of Domestic Violence

By Steve Churm
Chief communications officer of FivePoint Holdings, longtime supporter of Human Options

Domestic violence. Hear those two words, and most of us immediately visualize a personal confrontation between two people behind closed doors far from the workplace. It is an emotional, often physical and almost always psychologically damaging encounter for the victim, who in most cases is female.

The devastating consequences of abusive relationships also affect employers. Like a life-threatening disease, domestic violence is debilitating for the victim and costly for the employer. Lost productivity, poor morale and even the need for heightened security impact the company's bottom line.

Statistics don't lie. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports victims of domestic violence lose a total of 8 million days of paid work each year. The total cost of domestic violence in the U.S. exceeds $8.3 billion annually (i.e., intervention, counseling services, medical treatment, legal and court fees, education programs and public awareness campaigns) and a portion of that huge number directly impacts businesses. Up to 60% of victims lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse, the coalition says.

> **"Up to 60% of victims lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse ..."**

Because of the shame, many victims often hide the abuse. In a busy work environment, it's not easy to spot a victim who is silent because of a constantly threatening partner. It's only when a co-worker senses trouble or the victim finally shares her horrific secret, does the story—and the cry for help—surface. When discovered, however, most companies are not prepared to support the employee. In fact, healthadvocate.com reports that nearly 70% of U.S. businesses do not have programs or policies in place to assist a domestic violence victim.

For more than two decades, I owned an Orange County-based media company that at times employed as many as 50, many of them women. I will never forget the day one of them stepped into my office and asked to talk privately. I assumed she was leaving the company or about to ask for a raise. I could have handled those two topics more easily than the one she slowly and uncomfortably unpacked over the next 30 minutes. She had come to me on behalf of a co-worker, someone who was fearful about going home at night because of her significant other. He was verbally abusing her and she was scared it would escalate. Fortunately, I knew where to turn—to Human Options, the Irvine-based nonprofit that my family has long supported. Within an hour the employee was connected with a specialist who provided the reassurance, security and legal assistance to rescue her from her deteriorating relationship.

There should be zero tolerance for abusing anyone, anywhere, anytime. That's why I agreed this year to serve as "honorary chair" of the 2017 Men in Motion campaign for Human Options. The money we raise helps fund programs that educate Orange County teens about the very real issue of dating abuse and gender respect. Several Orange County high schools now include this training in their curriculum, and tens of thousands of students have gone through special programs on the topic.

Domestic violence is preventable. More and more men in Orange County and across the country are stepping up to do their part. I'm proud to join dozens as we stand against domestic violence in this great community—but we need more for the Men in Motion campaign. Go to humanoptions.org to watch a short video of Human Options at work, and then donate to support our ongoing efforts. It's about making our community a safer and healthier place for your daughter, niece or granddaughter and all women who need our support.

ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL
18500 Von Karman Ave., Suite 150, Irvine, CA 92612
(949) 833-8373 • FAX (949) 833-8751 www.ocbj.com

PUBLISHER
RICHARD REISMAN reisman@ocbj.com | ext. 219

VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
LAURA GARRETT garrett@ocbj.com | ext. 210

EDITOR
JERRY SULLIVAN sullivan@ocbj.com | ext. 216

EDITOR AT LARGE
RICK REIFF reiff@ocbj.com | ext. 208

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COPY EDITOR
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EXECUTIVE DINING COLUMNIST
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LUXURY HOMES, PHILANTHROPY COLUMNIST
KIM HAMAN luxury@ocbj.com, philanthropy@ocbj.com

PHOTOGRAPHER
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EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
ELIZABETH HUMMER features@ocbj.com | ext. 205
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DIRECTOR OF AD OPERATIONS
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SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS DIRECTORS
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CIRCULATION COORDINATOR/AR SPECIALIST
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CIRCULATION SPECIALIST
ABBY MADAIN madain@ocbj.com | ext. 243

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
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GRAPHIC ARTISTS
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MARTIN NILCHIAN nilchian@ocbj.com | ext. 253

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION
JANET COX cox@ocbj.com | ext. 203

DIRECTOR OF ACCOUNTING & FINANCIAL REPORTING
LUIS MARTINEZ martinez@ocbj.com | ext. 204

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE PUBLISHER
CYNTHIA NEWCOMB newcomb@ocbj.com | ext. 218

RECEPTIONIST
SYLVIA PINKHAM moody@ocbj.com | ext. 200

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