



**SCARY STUFF:**  
Stephen Hart tries  
to stop psychos  
before they strike

## Stalking walking time bombs

Over the past 20 years, Stephen Hart's career in violence risk assessment has taken him into some pretty dark places. He has interviewed rapists at California's 1,000-bed Atascadero State Hospital – the world's largest facility for the criminally insane – and murderers at England's 140-year-old Broadmoor Hospital – the first asylum custom-built for criminals. He has co-authored tests and manuals such as *The Sexual Violence Risk Assessment Guide* and *The Robert Hare Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version* not to mention providing psycho-legal consulting in all kinds of high profile cases. (Hart reviewed spousal abuse evaluations for the prosecution during the O.J. Simpson trial.) But it's only in the past three years that this SFU clinical-forensic psychologist has teamed up with his lawyer bro and biz-whiz sis to form ProActive Resolutions – a

Vancouver firm that helps companies prevent workplace violence – or if someone's already gone postal, clean up the mess.

"Big companies in the U.S. have threat assessment professionals on staff," says Hart, "but in Canada, when situations become pressured and someone makes a threatening comment,

then no one knows whether to take it seriously. All of a sudden we have a Kamloops shooting."

So what can a man who keeps a letter from Clifford Olson taped to his office wall do for, say, a fitness club that's being soured by an oddball?

ProActive starts clients off with a workplace safety audit and

works with HR managers to implement good conflict resolution procedures. "Most of the time, if you want to prevent violence from occurring," says Hart, "you need to respond to bad behavior before it becomes violent." He's referring to the fact that many testosterone-charged venues, like busy loading docks, have in the past been willing to tolerate the odd shoving match. But that, Hart says, is like leaving oily rags beside the furnace.

In the case of the gym, ProActive worked with the owner to try to limit her legal liability, to show her steps to document things properly – proof that she was trying to handle the situation well. They informed the police of the situation and helped her get legal representation to try and deal with the guy. When his odd behavior crossed over the line into harassing clients and staff, police investigated him and he voluntarily entered into a no-contact agreement. But it took both the threat of criminal and civil action to make him back down. Hart sighs: "what you never see in the papers is the headline, 'death averted!'" □