Confusion Over Workplace Etiquette Makes Employees Unsure How to Act, Survey Says

HR Dive | Kathryn Moody | June 18, 2024

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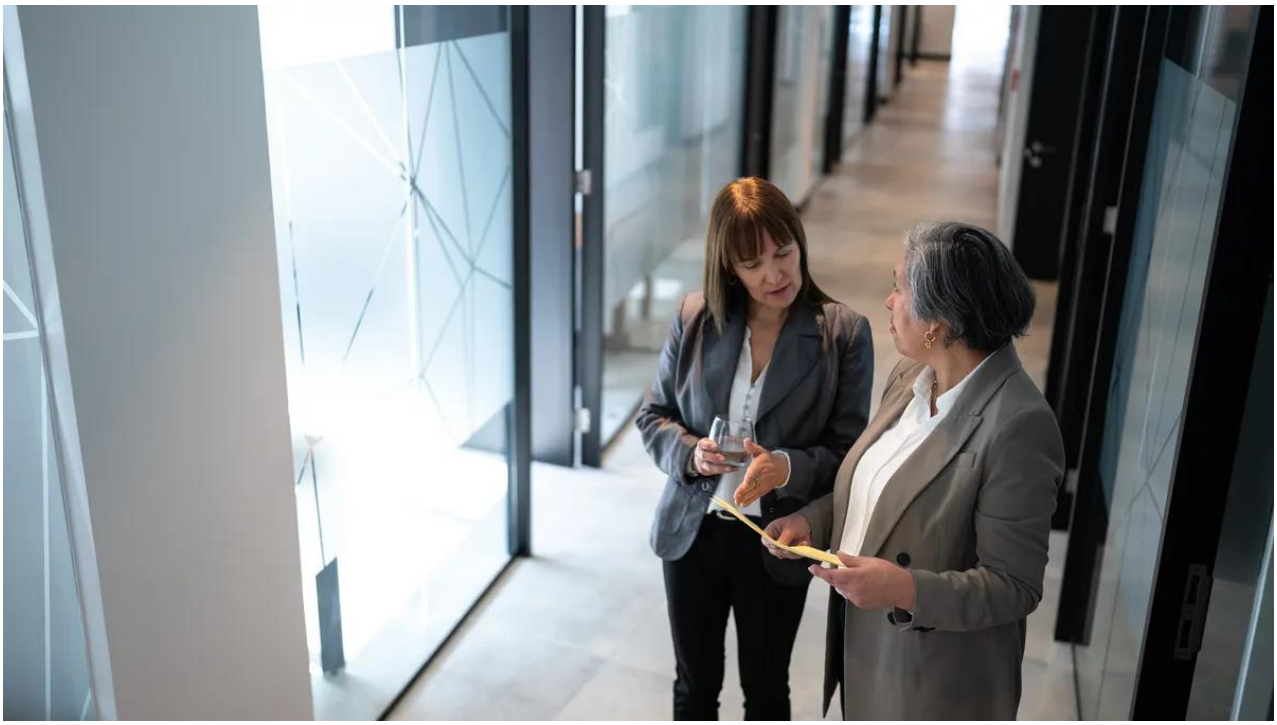

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Dive Brief:

Despite company culture becoming more "casual," 41% of job seekers said they aren't comfortable being themselves at work — in part because a vast majority of them believe employees are discouraged from talking about certain topics, according to survey results from Express Employment Professionals, released June 12.

Part of the issue is confusion over workplace etiquette. More than half of job seekers surveyed said it is hard to know what is and isn't acceptable at work because of recent changes, and 86% said they prefer to keep their home and work lives separate.

While more than three quarters of hiring managers said their company places at least a moderate amount of priority on encouraging authenticity, only 39% said their company places a "great deal" of priority on it, "perhaps leaving room for improvement," the report said.

Dive Insight:

The workplace has been inching toward a more casual approach for years now, even prior to the pandemic, but the sudden shift to a hybrid culture has also pushed employers into relaxing certain workplace expectations.

Authenticity, or allowing employees to bring their full selves to work, remains a key part of building a strong workplace culture, various reports have shown. However, some topics remain fraught — most especially politics, the Express Employment Professionals survey noted.

"Several company environments now lean toward a more laid-back atmosphere in the post-pandemic era; however, some sensitive conversations are not appropriate for the workplace," Bill Stoller, Express Employment International CEO, said in a statement. "While people should be comfortable being themselves at work, employees should respect the beliefs of their colleagues, creating a safe space for everyone. A healthy company culture is an inclusive and supportive one, no matter the personal differences."

Workers have said in other surveys that they are unlikely to quit over politics, but those same workers often said they are more hesitant to share their political views with colleagues this year.

And while three in five workers told Glassdoor in 2023 that they discussed politics with colleagues in the past year, workers are split on whether employers should openly take stances on political issues, including abortion, immigration or LGBTQ+ rights.

In answer, employers can address policy on political discussions at work proactively to keep workers on the same page — but employers will also need to be aware of various state and federal laws that affect and protect political speech, one attorney previously wrote for HR Dive. HR leaders can also ensure workers have the tools to manage conversations in such a way to keep them respectful of each other's situations, one Society for Human Resource Management expert told HR Dive.