



Checkbox Training Doesn't Fix Harassment

We've heard the stories about men who have been accused of sexually harassing women in the workplace. Every HR leader has likely told a manager that sleeping with a subordinate is a lawsuit waiting to happen, and that unwelcome sexual jokes and/or touching are inappropriate in the workplace. Your policy clearly articulates it, you have trained on it, and your leaders and employees have acknowledged it. *So why does harassment in the workplace still exist?*

Respect for all individuals cannot be learned by workplace training that is simply a check-the-box event. Do we really think that Kevin Spacey, Harvey Weinstein, and Matt Lauer just needed a little more training, or a copy of the policy? It's time to go beyond training as a quick fix, and look at company culture and employee behavior.

While many employers are providing regular harassment prevention training, it is also being recognized that the underlying culture needs to be reviewed. What support or resources do employees have when they express concerns? How are concerns addressed? What types of behavior is modeled by leaders and executives? How would you characterize the core value of your organization – is it one of openness, respect, and transparency? Are employees encouraged to speak up when they see or hear something that doesn't align with appropriate workplace conduct?

Employers wanting to make a concerted effort to inform, monitor, and change behavior can do the following:

- Write a clear policy outlining the expectations of appropriate, respectful behavior in the workplace, avenues available to report allegations, and a zero-tolerance for violations – regardless of role, tenure, how much money the individual brings in, and who he or she knows. Every employee – as a condition of employment – should attest in writing that he or she has read, understands, and will comply with the policy.
- Establish a consistent process for conducting harassment investigations. One of the biggest mistakes HR professionals make is not reviewing all complaints in a timely manner. Sometimes that may mean using a neutral third party, like MRA, to investigate harassment complaints.
- Use harassment prevention training as an opportunity to talk about company culture, respectful and inclusive behavior, and bystander intervention. Effective harassment prevention training should be reinforced and fully supported by leadership.
- Maintain accurate records to ensure history and patterns of behavior are easily identified and repeat offenders disciplined appropriately. This is especially important when individuals transfer to different departments or there is a management change.

There is too much at stake for companies to continue to excuse or condone workplace harassment. Aside from damage to your brand, legal fees, and settlements, allegations of sexual harassment can impact your ability to attract and retain key talent. Employees at every level of the organization must send a clear message that harassment in any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

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