

TIPS FOR A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT



As we've seen in the recent news, sexual harassment is an issue that negatively impacts employees, it destroys careers, and it can put your organization's credibility into question.

By preparing a proactive approach, you can prevent issues before they arise and before the damage is done.

"It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature."

- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1. DEFINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR YOUR WORKFORCE

An important part of preventing sexual harassment is actively communicating what type of behavior won't be tolerated and quickly acting on reports or notices of non-compliance.

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

Make sure you have an anti-harassment and anti-retaliation policies in place, as well as an established process for reporting incidents or issues. Refer to these policies and reporting procedures in your organization's employee handbook and related company communications.

2. REMAIN IMPARTIAL TO PREVENT SERIOUS BUSINESS RAMIFICATIONS

HR professionals must remain impartial, act with reasonable urgency, and do the right thing to protect the company against inappropriate behavior, regardless of who is involved and what personal ramifications may result.

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

One way for HR teams to remain impartial is to solicit support from outside legal counsel or to hire an HR consultant who can conduct sexual harassment investigations on behalf of the organization. Not only is it wise to have expert attention to these matters, it also relieves the in-house HR team of any misperceptions about how they handle the case.

3. EDUCATE EMPLOYEES SO THEY CAN CONFIDENTLY AVOID SEXUAL HARASSMENT ISSUES

Every organization should offer basic training about what constitutes sexual harassment on an annual basis; in some states, such as California, this is required by law. There's also great value in providing training for bystanders to empower them if they observe inappropriate behaviors or conversations.

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

Helping employees avoid sexual harassment requires providing educational opportunities that resonate with them and also recognizing them for their positive workplace behaviors. Whether it's through training, or informal manager conversations, in our experience organizations that set the tone from the top and openly talk about workplace issues are more successful in avoiding them or in addressing them immediately.

“Ignoring claims, whispers, or “open secrets” about bullying, sexual harassment and other predatory conduct will (not may) have severe ramifications for any company. In addition to legal and financial consequences, dismissing or even discounting employee complaints will have a domino effect inside an organization.”

- *Society for Human Resource Management*