

Fighting Harassment & Improving Inclusion

Preventing sexual harassment goes hand in hand with increasing inclusion. Both offer great benefits (while staving off costly lawsuits).

By Jim Annis

Why do the female-inspired #MeToo and male-led counterpart #AskMoreOfHim movements keep making headlines? It isn't big brazen things in the news that shock today. Those – sickly – are expected. Instead, it's the micro incidences that have chipped away at the patience level of people who have had negative experiences. The prevalence of harassment and lack of uniformity in recognizing and punishing it have eaten away at people's confidence, patience, and dignity like a flesh-eating disease. Awareness and education play a part in managing the risk of this "illness" spreading throughout your own workplace.

Harassment will always be an issue because people are fallible. Those in leadership positions may have trouble "listening" and reacting constructively to feedback.

Conditioning needs to happen by changing the voice and reaction of the receiving end.

This frenzy of headlines is upsetting, but good things are coming out of it. More people, including nonprofit leaders, are studying their workplaces with eyes attuned to harassment and bias. What's needed is an unflinching look at how much discrimination exists along with an attitude that leads us to act rather than despair.

What are the next steps? First, acknowledgment. Recognize you're not immune to being the victim or the accused.

Empower your managers to recognize issues before they blow up. Review policies, conduct trainings, and create "safe" spaces or nonthreatening environments where you can have discussions with workers so they feel supported by leadership.

Other ideas include anonymous suggestion boxes, info@emails, and a formal hotline or other confidential communication tool like a chat group. When someone tells you to keep something confidential, then ensure that happens as long as it meets compliance aspects and the law.

Harassment creates a hostile work environment. Something as seemingly innocent as a nickname, like "Sunshine," can be seen as inappropriate and condescending. The person who utters those words loses credibility and causes resentment.

Being Inclusive, Mitigating Harassment, Avoiding Lawsuits, & Creating a Positive Culture

Take steps to bypass harassment, add diversity, and prevent lawsuits. If your organization's culture needs to change, then that's the place to start. These articles (NonprofitWorld.org) will help:

Diversity and Inclusion – Why Now? (Vol. 29, No. 1)

How to Conduct Discipline Interviews (Vol. 24, No. 6)

What You Need to Know about Sexual Harassment (Vol. 30, No. 5)

The Failure of Diversity Training (Vol. 18, No. 3)

How to Write Effective Anti-Bias Policies (Vol. 30, No. 4)

Creating an Inclusive Workforce (Vol. 24, No. 4)

Is Your Organization Culturally Competent? (Vol. 26, No. 6)

Board Diversity: Your Biggest Challenge (Vol. 27, No. 3)

Where to Find Free Legal Assistance (Vol. 26, No. 2)

Create a Powerful Culture: Wisdom from the Greats (Vol. 35, No. 2)

How to Avoid Retaliation Claims (Vol. 21, No. 6)



When such micro-issues happen, call them out immediately. A simple, “Hey – let’s just stick to people’s first names, not give pet names,” should do the trick.

Conduct a salary review in which you compare salaries across races and genders and tenure in comparison to job responsibilities. Report your findings. If you need to make adjustments, do so openly and with immediate action.

When you cultivate an environment of inclusion, respect, and professionalism, it diminishes the opportunity for harassment. What better way to train employees on what’s appropriate than to model that behavior yourself? There’s no substitute for showing the way by being respectful to others. Be sure your messages – and expectations – are clear so that when presented with inappropriate behavior, people’s resolve is strong. Don’t hide these issues away in a policy that you look at only when you hear a complaint. Don’t look the other way if you hear an inappropriate joke or a belittling comment. Your role is to establish and support a culture of constant diligence in making inclusion your priority in everything you do.

Good Steps to Take

Avoid sexual harassment problems with these tips:

Prevent harassment by creating a positive work climate. Be sure the ambiance doesn’t devalue any group of people. For instance, a calendar of scantily clad women can be evidence of a culture that devalues females.

Establish zero-tolerance policies that prohibit harassment, discrimination, and bias in any form. Review these policies regularly, along with your lawyer.

Give all employees copies of your discrimination policies. Ask them to sign acknowledgments that they’ve read the policies and understand them. Provide ongoing communication to keep your discrimination policies highly visible.

Conduct discipline interviews whenever you hear the slightest hint of inappropriate behavior. Take detailed notes of these interviews. Such notes will document your good-faith efforts in case you later need to fire the perpetrator and are then hit with a wrongful-termination lawsuit.

Be sure the person who conducts these interviews is well-trained in interviewing techniques. The interviewer should ask for the employee’s perceptions, draw out details, and listen carefully. The interviewer and employee should together agree on what the problem is and what the best solutions might be. Make it clear how you expect the employee’s behavior to change. Together, plan corrective action, being certain that the employee has plenty of input into the plan. Follow up to assure that the employee is taking the agreed-upon action steps, and document those follow-

What People Are Saying: Statistics from Survey of Fundraisers (full results on p. 38)

- **1/4 of all female fundraisers** have been sexually harassed during their careers.
- **Donors account** for nearly 2/3 of the harassers.
- **In 71% of reported cases of harassment**, no action was taken.
- **35% have felt a negative effect on their careers** because they reported harassment.
- **92% want a zero tolerance policy** enacted in every workplace.

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ups. Termination may become necessary, but first give the employee the chance to change and support in doing so.

Train employees about your anti-discrimination, harassment, and retaliation policies. Be sure they know that discrimination and harassment are illegal under state and federal law and won’t be tolerated at your organization. Give examples of the types of behavior prohibited. Emphasize that all complaints will be investigated promptly and thoroughly, and anyone found guilty will be disciplined accordingly. Spell out discipline procedures. Make it clear exactly what will happen to those who break the rules. The important thing to remember is that such training won’t work in a vacuum. It must occur in combination with a culture of diversity and openness. Training will backfire unless leaders model the behaviors they want to see.

Put a complaint system in place. Make it easy to report unacceptable behavior formally and informally. Be sure your complaint procedure protects both the person who complains and the person who is accused.

Create an anti-discrimination mission statement. Post this statement prominently.

Remember that none of these approaches will be effective unless your organization’s culture is one of inclusion and respect for all diverse groups of people and unless your organization’s leaders show their commitment. **S**

—adapted from “Sexual Harassment: Don’t Let It Destroy Your Organization” (Vol. 10, No. 2), “How to Conduct Discipline Interviews” (Vol. 24, No. 6), & “The Failure of Diversity Training” (Vol. 24, No. 6), NonprofitWorld.org