

HR INSIGHTS

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5 Ways to Prevent Workplace Harassment

Harassment is a form of employment discrimination that may violate federal laws like Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a list of best practices for employers to use in their workplaces to prevent harassment. According to the EEOC, the following five core principles have generally proven effective in preventing and addressing harassment.

Leadership

According to the EEOC, employers should consistently demonstrate a commitment to creating and maintaining a workplace culture in which harassment is not tolerated. This should be part of an overall strategy that promotes diversity, inclusion and a belief that all employees in a workplace deserve to be respected, regardless of their race, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation or gender identity), age, disability or genetic information.

Accountability

Because a workplace culture is manifested by which behaviors are formally and informally rewarded or punished, employers should demonstrate to their employees that they take workplace harassment issues seriously through appropriate responses to harassment and complaints. For example, employers should encourage employees to report harassing behavior and should acknowledge employees' efforts to help maintain a harassment-free workplace. In addition, employers should ensure that individuals who engage in harassment receive prompt, consistent discipline that is proportional to the severity of the harassment.

Written Harassment Policies

Employers should establish a written harassment policy and communicate it to employees in a clear, easy-to-understand style and format. In addition, employers should make sure that they do the following with their written anti-discrimination policies:

- Translate any policies into all languages commonly used by employees
- Provide all policies to employees upon hire and during harassment trainings

Commitment to a harassment-free workplace should be part of an overall strategy of diversity and inclusion.

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- Post policies centrally, such as on the company's internal website, in the company handbook, near time clocks, in break rooms and in other commonly used areas or locations
- Review policies periodically and update them as needed

Harassment Complaint Systems

Effective reporting systems for allegations of harassment are among the most critical elements of an employer's overall anti-harassment efforts. An employer's system should include both a means by which individuals who have experienced harassment can report the harassment and file a complaint, as well as a means by which employees who have observed harassment can report that to the employer.

Employees who are responsible for receiving, investigating and resolving harassment complaints, or for otherwise implementing an employer's harassment complaint system, play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of a complaint system. Thus, employers should ensure that these individuals are well-trained, objective and neutral, and that they have the authority, independence and resources required to receive, investigate and resolve complaints appropriately. Employers should also take steps to ensure that these individuals consistently do the following:

- Take all questions, concerns and complaints seriously, and respond promptly and appropriately
- Create and maintain an environment in which employees feel comfortable reporting harassment
- Appropriately document every complaint from initial intake to investigation to resolution
- Use guidelines to weigh the credibility of all relevant parties to a complaint and
- Prepare written reports documenting their investigations, findings, recommendations, any disciplinary actions imposed, and any corrective and preventive actions taken

Harassment Training Programs

Leadership, accountability, and strong harassment policies and complaint systems are essential components of a successful harassment prevention strategy, but only if employees are aware of them. Regular, interactive and comprehensive training of all employees may help ensure that employees understand an employer's rules, policies, procedures and expectations, as well as the consequences of misconduct.

Because supervisors and managers often have greater responsibilities than other employees, employers may benefit from providing additional training to these individuals. Employers may also find it helpful to include other employees who exercise authority, such as team leaders, in additional training.

Summary

Commitment to a harassment-free workplace should be part of an overall strategy of diversity and inclusion. For more information on practices to prevent workplace harassment, contact Bouchey & Clarke Benefits, Inc., review the EEOC's [Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment](#) or visit the EEOC's Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace's [website](#).

