

ADDITIONAL TIPS ON HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING

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There have been several studies analyzing different training methods for harassment prevention. We do not know the whole picture of what works and what doesn't because there are so many variables. What do we know? We know from the research that training can change attitudes. (Antecol, H. & Cobb-Clark, D. *Does sexual harassment change attitudes? A view from the federal level*. Social Science Quarterly 84(4) 826-842 (2003) (2003)). The goal is to shift attitudes towards avoiding problem behaviors. Here are some other things we do know:

1. The training method can make a difference. Many organizations, to save cost, moved to requiring employees to watch a video, sometimes online, with little critical analysis of the content. Often these videos are compliance based. Compliance based training - where the training is offered merely to check the box to show that the legal requirement to train has been completed - may do little to incite behavioral change. The research shows that a combination of methods works best in forming change habits that will work better to prevent harassment. For example, even combining a videotape showing incidents of harassment with live case analysis is more effective than some other training methods.
2. Training must be directed towards some organizational goal, and thus tied to the organization's values and culture. The policy statement outlining the organization's culture and strong value against harassment is center stage, and the goal must be to help everyone understand how the culture demands and supports harassment prevention.
3. Good training programs are comprehensive and may include multiple methods such as: live interactive lecture, behavior modeling and role playing.
4. Good training programs are designed with an understanding that how an employee reacts in certain situations is a complex interweaving of an employee's own attitudes, prejudices, training and behavioral characteristics juxtaposed against the organizational culture, leadership and environment. Good training programs will attempt to acknowledge factors such as implicit bias, without judgment, and help learners understand how their own approach may be different from what the organizational culture would demand. Another example might be the prevalence of attribution bias in our assessment of situations. Attribution theory indicates that people tend to see their own behavior as situationally-determined, while they attribute the behavior of others to the other's personality. When assessing for attribution bias, researchers have found that subjects tended to believe that the likely victims of sexual harassment are attractive women between 16 and 30 years old. They also would assess that the victims were likely women who were weak, quiet or shy, thus unintentionally blaming the behavior on the personality of the victim. Acknowledging these kinds of implicit biases in training can help learners become more aware of the possibilities and help them to overcome their own biases.
5. Good training will include opportunities for the learners to actively practice what is taught. This is one of the reasons why including case studies or role play is more effective than passive viewing of a video. Case study analysis, in groups of employees, allows the learners to apply the principles, and this type of training thus has more chance of affecting future behavior.

6. Good training will acknowledge that there are explicit and implicit differences in how demographic groups will view harassment situations. Many studies have shown that there is likelihood that women will view harassment situations differently from men. Different demographic groups may have different approaches, such as Baby Boomers vs. millennials. A good training model can acknowledge these differences and help all employees understand what the organizational culture demands in terms of harassment prevention.

Please contact a Gjording Fouser lawyer at 208.336.9777 if you would like any additional information about this topic or any other employment issues facing your company.