

## ***Okay, your company doesn't have a Harvey Weinstein issue, but...***

As sexual harassment allegations spread to more individuals and industries, the sad facts are coming out regarding treatment of women at work that many have known about for decades. It's easy to point to more "glamorous" endeavors like entertainment, investment, culinary, tech, politics, fashion, and think that these "ego-head" movers, shakers, and superstars are getting their due. In the days to come #MeToo will certainly spread to less glamorous industries and less prominent transgressors, and every industry and locality will have unfortunate and distressing sexual harassment accounts to deal with.

But all harassment is not sexual and all arrogant egos aren't big-business superstars and owners. We can anticipate increased reports of the screamers, the verbal and psychological abusers, and emotional intimidation and disrespect that occurs across all industries and all levels of an organization. It's no longer an "old school" world and #MeToo is a strong signal that more and more forms of abusive behavior will be less and less tolerated at work.

Business leaders, please don't think this is an HR issue that your HR managers should be handling. This is a leadership issue and reflects behavior that starts at the top. When I first heard the phrase "the fish stinks from the head down," I thought truer words about organizations were never spoken. So let's be real about this issue and recognize that being a business leader, or owner, or having integrity as a senior professional means at a minimum taking responsibility for having a civilized workplace.

So what should you be looking for at your company—not just to avoid accusations and a law suit, but to make your company a respectful, constructive, and a desirable place to work? It is very clear that the basics of having a respectful and dignified workplace are often overlooked and dismissed in service of the arrogant, entitled, and privileged. And let's not forget that "lower level" employees will engage in inappropriate behavior unless someone chooses to do something about it. Here are a few good places to look:

*Walk the Talk* – Whether or not clearly articulated, every company has expectations, values, guidelines, "unspoken" norms, etc., regarding acceptable behavior. Take a step back, note what your guidelines are regarding appropriate behavior, and assess whether or not your team "walks the talk." It boils down to the real and actual behavior taking place—not what your handbook says. The bigger the gap between what you say and what you do, the more likely you are to have issues and a not-so-great environment.

*"It's kind of crazy around here"* – Rapid growth and/or significant change are common in today's workplace and often create stress and uncertainty that are frequently accompanied by tight deadlines, frustration, short tempers, and differences of opinion. These become a great excuse for accepting various unsavory behaviors. When the boss goes off it raises the tension level and becomes a lot easier for others to think, "It's okay for me to be that way." This is the time for leaders to be the adult and role model in the room and make demanding situations better, not worse.

*Are you surrounded by "yes" men?* – Research shows that one of the signs of a bully is they surround themselves with "yes" men. Whether you've chosen them or cowed them into submission, if no one is willing to question you, getting accurate feedback on yours and likely your inner circle's bad behavior is unlikely. Rather than getting input from your typical supporters again and again, go to others that you don't typically get input from. If you think you might be on thin ice, find a peer you respect and trust (or your employment attorney) and ask for their perspective. If you really want to get a pulse check, discuss this article with your team, and where it makes sense, have your team talk about it with their teams. If your first thought is, "That may not be a good idea," why is it not a good idea? You want this type of discussion to be constructive, candid, and as objective as possible. And if you think it too risky or too many issues may come up, you may have your answer.

Perhaps the biggest issue with nonphysical harassment is since it is not as tangible as physical harassment, it's harder to identify and easier to dismiss. As we are coming to see almost daily, good intentions or "I should have said something about that" is not an effective deterrent to harassment problems. We've reached the tipping point regarding the importance and experience of a safe psychological and respectful environment and culture. Having an accurate moral compass, actively making decisions, and demonstrating behaviors that show what is expected and not acceptable is what is called for.

As a leader, having a dignified and desirable workplace experience is not magic or coincidence—it's your choice.

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