

More Effective Sexual Harassment Trainings Needed

By Mary-Ellen Sposato Rogers and Patricia Herlihy

Employees need to be educated about the legal, ethical, and business issues regarding sexual conduct in the workplace. However, many researchers are questioning the effectiveness of current sexual harassment training programs. Few studies have found post-training reductions in sexual harassment behaviors and none have identified effective trainings. This *Brown Bagger* focuses on a potential shift in these trainings from a concentration on information to *behavioral* issues.

First, a basic definition of sexual harassment is in order. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) sexual harassment includes:

- Unwelcome sexual advances;
- Requests for sexual favors; and
- Verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature, including the existence of a hostile work environment that encourages or allows for this type of behavior.

Statistics

The following statistics from the EEOC highlight the extent of these issues while keeping in mind that most related incidents are *under-reported*:

- 88% of women have been harassed at some point.
- 79% of victims are female; 21% are male.
- 50% of transgender individuals report being harassed at work.
- 27% of those who are sexually harassed are harassed by a peer or co-worker.
- 17% of those who are sexually harassed are harassed by a supervisor
- 66.6% of those harassed are not aware of workplace reporting policies
- 50.4% are not aware of what department or person should be contacted at work regarding sexual harassment.

Many Factors Affect Sexual Harassment

When examining sexual harassment in the workplace one needs to consider many factors, including corporate culture, diversity, the age and attitudes of the workforce, and any incidents of sexual harassment in the company's recent history. In addition, regardless if facilitators are outside consultants or internal staff, they need to clearly understand the motivation for the training and the organization's written policy. *One way to engage an audience in a training event is to begin with a warm up exercise:*

Suggested Warm-Up Exercise

See page two for an exercise in determining if behaviors are appropriate.

As can be seen from this exercise, there are several options available when evaluating if someone's behavior is inappropriate. There is a continuum of behavior from young employees telling "raunchy" jokes in the breakroom to the Harvey Weinstein's of the world using their power to intimidate and coerce young women.

Case Study

The following brief case study is a good example of identifying inappropriate behavior and then evaluating how to address the issue to help move towards a healthier work environment.

XYZ, a large construction company, has recently had multiple reports to Human Resources Department (HR). Two of them were about Joe, a long-time employee and master electrician who supervised 28 male plumbers and 3 female schedulers.

The complaints regarding Joe included constant and relentless vulgarity, suggestively brushing up against women and often "accidentally" groping them, calling a female employee a "prostitute" when she failed to deliver a schedule on time and other generally insensitive comments.

One female victim finally lodged a complaint to HR. Joe was stunned by the accusation and



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emphatically denied any wrong doing. He states that “he is simply a vulgar guy who has never asked for sex but simply is a guy’s guy!”

Joe’s behavior is so firmly ingrained that he appears to have little awareness of how he impacts others. The question becomes what type of training, education, communication, policy, and cultural change would help? Joe’s only concern during and after the trainings/coaching was fear of being sued. He never showed awareness or concern that his behavior was hurtful to others.

Clearly, in this instance, the presentation of legal facts had minimal impact on his long-held behavioral biases and beliefs. Although most sexual harassment trainings include legal implications, many trainers are learning that there needs to be a larger focus on behavioral change.

Shifting the Training Paradigm - Behavioral Model vs. Informational Model

An EEOC study in 2016 recommended that sexual harassment training be a part of a sustained and holistic effort that includes enhanced leadership participa-

tion and accountability. The key question is how to develop training programs that actually impact behavior, are sustainable, and prevent future incidents?

In these trainings, behavioral change should not only be focused on the perpetrator. It is also crucial to simultaneously provide support and education to bystanders. Bystander empowerment seeks to encourage both men and women to come forward to interrupt unacceptable workplace behavior – with a goal of changing workplace social attitudes.

Finally, it is important to be aware of any current or past victims in the training session, and use any and all opportunities to support them to come forward and regain their self-esteem while setting boundaries with co-workers.

In a report earlier this year, Mark Sangor emphasized the importance of tailoring training sessions to the particular organization’s workforce. When attempting to assess the organization consider its culture.

Quid Pro Quo Harassment

Is this a “buttoned-up” corporate setting where Quid Pro Quo Harassment is present? *In this type of harassment, something is exchanged for something else, such as sexual favors for a promotion.*

Situation – Consider each scenario and think about whether it’s OK, Not OK, or you’re not sure.	Ok	Not Ok	Unsure
Working late on a proposal you give your exhausted colleague a shoulder rub.			
A colleague has a picture of her boyfriend on her desk completely in the buff, with only his genitals covered with a facecloth.			
Your colleague looks great today, so you give her an appreciative whistle.			
You sympathetically ask your pregnant co-worker if her breasts hurt.			
You ask a co-worker to dance at the local watering hole.			
A lesbian supervisor playfully yanks on the ponytail of a female subordinate.			
The deliveryman whistles at you and flirts relentlessly, even though you’ve said you’re not interested.			
You don’t support sexual harassment, but as a guy you don’t worry about it – it’s only for women.			
You work in an open office environment and call your wife to thank her for “action” the night before...with explicit details...			
You return from your honeymoon and, as a joke, you give your male co-workers penis-shaped bottle openers.			



Hostile Environment Harassment

Or is this organization's culture one that has a history and tolerance for Hostile Environment Harassment? This type of environment is one in which the following may occur: *unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal sexual conduct is so unrelenting and severe that it meaningfully obstructs an employee's work performance, or creates an atmosphere that is hostile, threatening or offensive.*

Behavioral Sexual Harassment Training

In some organizations, sexual harassment can be so pervasive and ingrained in the culture that it requires a dedicated, well-coordinated, behaviorally based mitigation approach for change to begin. The following steps summarize a model of behavioral sexual harassment training that has evolved from over 35 years' experience in the EAP field. These steps can act as a guide to developing and implementing a tailored service plan across a multitude of organizations.

- ❖ Remember the key to success is committed and engaged leadership who consistently demonstrate personal accountability and encourage complaint procedures that are trusted and accessible. You must understand if this exists in the specific client organization.

- ❖ Training materials should consider principals of adult learning and multiple intelligences. (*Seven principles of adult learning are described on the page 4 Handout section of this month's "Brown Bagger."*)

- ❖ Use an icebreaker activity that will reveal insights to diversity of experiences, unconscious biases, and the values of participants, but will still protect those who may have been victims. (The warm-up exercise provided earlier is one such example.)

- ❖ The training must incorporate the customary legal elements such as:

- *Definition of sexual harassment and description of federal and state statutes prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace.*
- *Description of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the jurisdiction and role of the EEOC and any appropriate state agencies.*
- *In-depth discussion of types of conduct that constitute sexual harassment, that the victim may be a man or a woman and can involve same sex or opposite sex harassment.*

- *Statement that individuals who commit sexual harassment in the workplace may be subject to both civil and criminal penalties.*

- ❖ *Behavioral training must incorporate role play, group case study exercises, and sensitivity training aimed at eliminating unconscious bias.*

- ❖ *An inventory of feelings should be included that includes all three perspectives: perpetrator, victim, and bystander.*

- ❖ *It is important to support and encourage empowerment for both victims and bystanders to feel comfortable in coming forward and reporting inappropriate behavior.*

- ❖ *Behavioral training cannot be a "once and out" approach but must be sustained. Consider ongoing group or individual coaching for perpetrators, victims, and bystanders who may feel traumatized.*

- ❖ *Follow up with both the organization and the employees involved when possible as well as a built-in program to evaluate the effectiveness of your intervention.*

Summary

This *Brown Bagger* article advocates for a paradigm shift in harassment training programs to a primary focus on behavioral change. Adding behavioral components to training sessions appears to demonstrate a more favorable and sustainable response. Employee assistance professionals are known for their expertise in understanding workplace behavioral issues. Therefore, it seems appropriate that the EAP profession may be able to lead the way in this shift to a behavioral focus for more effective sexual harassment trainings.

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Editor's note: *For more information on this topic, see this month's cover story in EAR.*

Seven Principles of Adult Learning



1. Adults must want to learn. They learn effectively only when they have a strong inner motivation to develop a new skill or acquire a particular type of knowledge.

Obtaining continuing education credit is a strong motivator for adults.

2. Adults will learn only what they feel they need to learn. Adults are practical in their approach to learning; they want to know, “How is this going to help me right now?”

Be practical, be direct.

3. Adults learn by doing. Children learn by doing, but active participation is more important among adults.

Adults need to be able to use these skills immediately so that they see their relevance.

4. Adult learning focuses on problems and the problems must be realistic. Children learn skills sequentially. Adults start with a problem and then work to find a solution.

Begin by identifying what the learner can do, what the learner wants to do and then address the gaps and develop practical activities to teach specific skills.

5. Experience affects adult learning. Adults have more experience than children. This can be an asset and a liability.

Use the learners' experience (negative or positive) to build a positive future by making sure that negative experiences are not part of their experience in your program.

6. Adults learn best in an informal situation. Children have to follow a curriculum. Often, adults learn only what they feel they need to know.

Involve adults in the learning process. Let them discuss issues and decide on possible solutions. Make the environment relaxed, informal and inviting.

7. Adults want guidance. Adults want information that will help them improve their situation. They do not want to be told what to do. They want to choose options based on their individual needs.

Present choices, not instructions.

Source: Canadian Literacy and Learning Network.

**Watch for the upcoming
Sexual Harassment webinar
on November 15th!** Contact the
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