

# Is Your Company A Hotbed of Harassment?

## 3 Signs That Your Organization Is Far From Harassment-Proof

### BY SECOND CITY WORKS

The phrase “workplace harassment” carries old-school connotations of Mad Men, creepy bosses, and overt discrimination. Everyone knows the ‘black and white’ of workplace harassment: Of course we can’t slap someone on the backside! Obviously we should never taunt a colleague for being different! Clearly we would report it if our boss kept asking us out on a date! Most of us understand these rules, right? *We get it.*

Or do we? True workplace harassment and bullying is much more nuanced, much more complex, and much more common than we think. And, without the right training and awareness, your company could be swimming in dangerous, grey, harassment waters.



### 1. Your company’s values aren’t defined beyond “like, be cool, OK?”

Corporate culture is critically important. It affects employee engagement, retention and productivity. Employees look to upper management to show (and tell) them what is and what is not acceptable. Who are you as an organization? What are you willing to overlook? What are the ramifications of reporting something? It is imperative that there be ongoing conversations about how your culture behaves and why you behave that way. And most importantly—that these

behaviors are seen being modeled by those in charge. After all, discussions about sex, lifestyles, and recreational choices are less taboo in the workplace today... but that doesn’t mean everyone is open to a “TMI” conversation. Having an awareness of how to balance an authentic culture with respect for others is critical to navigating the grey areas of the workplace.

## 2. Talk about “speak up culture” is just lip service.

A lot of companies say they want a “speak up culture,” but a closer look at how those who report are treated shows otherwise. First things first: Do your employees know how and where to report something they see or hear? You’d be surprised how many employees aren’t aware of this information. And if you only have one way of reporting (i.e. in person to HR or management), a lot of employees will simply choose to look the other way.

Having multiple ways to report greatly increases the chances that they will do so. Do you have a clear history of supporting those who speak up and keeping an eye on retaliation against those people? If management isn’t willing to walk their talk, trust in the system erodes quickly and suddenly it gets very quiet. Too quiet.

## 3. Your training happened once...a long time ago.... in a book

Harassment happens between human beings and it isn’t always cut and dry. So employees need to learn to actually talk to each other—and you can’t learn that in a manual. Training your team to not only know the ways in which they can report, but also the ways in which they can respond empowers them to handle the occasional issue on their own. Repeated training, like with any skill, improves the chances that in the moment, they will maintain a clear head and respond in the way that works best for them.

The conversations that occur when harassment is taking place are unlike our everyday conversations and require a different set of skills. Those skills include things like enhanced listening, employing empathy, and utilizing clarity—skills that need to be practiced often. The confidence that comes from knowing how to have these conversations encourages more employees to move from bystander behavior to upstanding behavior—reporting on behalf of someone being harassed or even taking the reins in the moment to de-escalate a situation.

At True Office Learning and the Second City, we believe in scenario-based education (like **this digital short**) combined with skills based practice. We help train workforces towards awareness of behavior and mindfulness of the grey areas. We can’t ever expect all employees to memorize a list of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ situations or reactions, but we can prepare them to navigate and use good judgment as new situations arise.

Also, for the record, we still shouldn’t be slapping anyone on the backside. Just.... don’t.