

How can I create a culture of respect?



BUILDING A CULTURE OF RESPECT: PREVENTING HARRASSMENT AND WORK RAGE

We spend a significant amount of time in the workplace and negativity in this environment can have a detrimental impact on you, your employees and the wider organization. Negativity can take many forms at work, an especially harmful aspect being bullying, harassment and work rage.

Addressing harassment when it happens is imperative to keeping your workplace safe and your organization healthy. A complaint ignored or stifled often festers into something that can damage workplace morale, productivity, health and job satisfaction. Read on to discover work rage and harassment warning signs and what you can do to create an open, secure environment where concerns about adversarial attitudes are dealt with before they become more serious.

What is Harassment?

The Canadian Human Rights Commission defines harassment as “unwelcome behaviour that demeans, humiliates or embarrasses.” This can include comments (jokes, name-calling or sexually suggestive language), displays or actions (touching, pushing, etc.). Harassment can also include unwanted sexual behaviour or an abuse of power or authority that’s often labelled as workplace bullying.

What are the Signs of a Troubled Workplace?

While you may intuitively know whether a workplace culture is positive or negative, experts point to several key signs that suggest that harassment may be taking place in an organization.

These include:

- A high turnover rate
- Decreased productivity
- High level of sick days
- Team breakdown
- Poor morale, commitment and loyalty
- Absenteeism or ‘presenteesim’

Fostering an atmosphere where open communication is embraced and promoted reinforces respect amongst colleagues and can help employees avoid getting caught up in the petty politics that can lead to disrespect, bullying and harassment.



A Respectful Culture

Creating a culture of respect is something that really needs to be promoted and reinforced at every level of the organization. As a people leader, you can play a pivotal role in doing this. Lead by example and remember to:

Mind your manners. How you carry yourself cues your staff on how to behave. Maybe you are not the one dishing out the gossip or inappropriate joke, but are you laughing? Do you look the other way when someone is being bullied in the lunchroom? Get to know your employees one-on-one. Be the first to object to inappropriate behaviour. Let the message you send be one of non-tolerance for workplace gossip and questionable jokes.

Keep an ear to the ground. Spend time with your colleagues and employees. The lunchroom is very telling for office dynamics. Those who control the conversation are often in control of office politics as well. Get others to open up and soon there may be a different tone at work. Is there a worker whose performance has changed drastically? Take the time to meet with him or her one-on-one to touch base and learn more about what other issues may be interfering with getting the job done right.

Practice the art of positive reinforcement. Look for opportunities to build your team’s self esteem whenever possible. Make sure others get a chance to lead during team-building exercises so that everyone gets to show off their strengths.

As a people leader, it's easy to take negative events personally and to feel sad and upset by them. Give yourself a lift by doing all you can to address the situation properly.

These tips will help me prevent workplace harassment.



An Open Door Policy

If one of your employees comes to you to report an incident of workplace harassment or bullying, make the time to have the conversation immediately as he or she will likely not ask again. If you have to be somewhere, take a few minutes to clear your schedule later that day. This situation needs your complete attention.

Make notes. If appropriate, let the employee know you will have to take notes—so you can ensure facts are straight and so you can recall the conversation. If he or she is still uncomfortable, take down notes right after the worker leaves the room.

Inform the worker of next steps. Let the person with the complaint know you will have to speak with Human Resources or the appropriate person assigned about the matter. While you shouldn't promise to keep it confidential you can assure your employee that you'll only speak to people on a "need-to-know" basis. Make sure you're educated about office procedures so you can act accordingly and answer any questions.

Hold off on passing judgment. Let the worker tell the entire story—without interruption—and be sure to maintain eye contact and focus. Recalling the complaint verbatim is vital, so make sure you write down all you can. When the conversation is over, let the employee know what the next steps are and thank him or her for coming to you. If you suspect the worker might benefit from counselling, offer contact information for your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Your EAP can provide workers struggling with employee relationships with useful and relevant tools, tactics and resources to better cope with the situation.

Next Steps

After the meeting review your notes and add any additional details you may have missed. If the employee wants to pursue a formal written complaint, encourage it, but also write your own report. If your policy states to report the matter to HR or another body set up to deal with these issues, then follow protocol. Stepping in and trying to solve the issue yourself—when this clearly goes against policy—can further complicate the situation and may even sabotage your good intentions.

If your organization has vague guidelines around workplace harassment, connect with your Human Resources team to find out more about the policies in place. Issues can bubble under the surface for years—damaging staff morale and your organization—if employees feel powerless to change the situation because no processes are in place to formally resolve issues around harassment and work rage.

If you project calm, you can expect calm. Projecting a level-headed attitude will entice others to follow. A healthy workplace is one where people leaders and employees are easily able to identify negative behaviour. Make sure you are well-educated about your company's policies around harassment and work rage so you know exactly what to do when it happens. Remember, having a good relationship with your colleagues and employees can not only improve on-the-job communication and foster a productive work environment; it can also go a long way in preventing harassment and incidents of rage.

Workplace Rage

With more people feeling more stressed about increasing workloads and job uncertainty, work rage is on the rise. A trigger could be something as random as a dirty cup of coffee, or a jammed printer. Regardless of where the outburst is really coming from, it needs to be addressed as soon as it happens. Here are some tactics that will help you diffuse the situation if you are a witness to workplace rage:

Speak softly. Raising your voice to match the raging person's level of noise will only serve to raise the level of stress. If the person needs to quiet down just to hear what you are saying, you will soon have control over the outburst. Approach the situation with an understanding ear as this is someone desperate to be heard, who won't stop until listened to.

Telling someone to calm down usually has the reverse effect. Let the 'rager' finish what he or she is saying. Most people who rage are looking for a reaction and when they don't get it they are eventually forced to take a calmer approach.

Lose the audience. Much like any schoolyard brawl, this person will draw a crowd. Quietly encourage people to disperse and keep them from jumping in. When you have the situation under control, politely ask this person to come to your office to speak about what happened. If he or she asks for the rest of the day off, allow it. Then write down everything that happened as you best remember it for Human Resources or the person/group you need to report the matter to.

Get outside help. If at any time, you're concerned that the person raging may be a security threat to co-workers or him or herself, contact the appropriate authorities right away.