



Sexual Harassment: A Frank Discussion

Over the past decade, the problem of sexual harassment has captured the attention of all managers and employees. While it is widely known that sexual harassment is both unethical and illegal, the incidents of sexual harassment continue to plague business. Unfortunately, when these cases arise, they cause morale problems among employees, embarrassment to the organization, and costly legal damages. Consequently, all managers and supervisors play a central role in preventing sexual harassment complaints. It is important that managers understand the definition of sexual harassment, who is covered by sexual harassment guidelines, and how to prevent its occurrence. This skill-building exercise will provide you with knowledge in each of these areas.

Assignment

1. Working in teams of female and male members, develop a list of behaviors that could be classified as quid pro quo harassment or hostile environment. Explore the possibility that some sexual harassing

behaviors might be viewed differently by female and male employees. Give examples.

2. Many sexual harassment incidents go unreported. Fully discuss why this can occur and what might be done to reduce this problem.
3. The cornerstone to addressing sexual harassment is achieving organizational awareness through training. Develop a sexual harassment training program for a company of 250 employees that covers, at a minimum, the following: (1) who should attend the training sessions, (2) the content outline for the training program (the list of materials your team wants to teach), (3) specific examples to illustrate the training materials, and (4) how to investigate sexual harassment complaints.
4. This chapter will assist you with this assignment. You can obtain additional materials from EEOC offices and from various HR magazines.
5. Be prepared to present your training outline to other class members.

It can be challenging, however, for employers to know where to draw the line. Take the case of Elizabeth Booth, a quadriplegic hired by Case Services Corporation as an accountant in the billing department. Booth, who uses a wheelchair for mobility, has trained her small, well-behaved dog to pick up small items that Booth has dropped. Along with a formal request to be allowed to bring her dog to work to assist her, Booth submitted to her employer a letter from her doctor stating that the dog would also help relieve Booth's stress. When Case Services's HR director denied the request, Booth immediately filed a discrimination charge with the EEOC, claiming the company did not provide a reasonable accommodation to her disability or her health needs.

When it comes to establishing a pet policy, as is so often the case, balancing the employer's needs and responsibilities with the employees' needs and wants presents something of a dilemma.

Questions

1. What is your position on this issue? Provide two or three reasons to support your argument.
2. If you were an HR manager of a company, what pet policy would you set and how would you implement it?
3. How would you decide the case of Elizabeth Booth, and which laws would you base your decision on? Explain.

Sources: James J. McDonald, Jr., "Take Your Dog to Work Every Day," *Employee Relations Law Journal* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 86; "Has Your Organization Gone to the Dogs?" http://www.hrwebcafe.com/2007/06/has_your_organization_gone_to.html; Ethan A. Winning, "Pets at the Corporate Zoo," <http://www.ewin.com/arch/pets.htm>; "About Take Your Dog to Work Day," <http://www.takeyourdog.com/About/>; "Take Your Dog to Work Every Day," <http://www.dogfriendly.com/server/general/workplace/>.