

CEP Magazine – April 2019 Creating an ethical corporate culture in the #MeToo era

By Norman Ford

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With the rise of the #MeToo movement, organizations everywhere are continuously looking for ways to prevent instances of harassment in the workplace. Sexual harassment can have a disastrous impact on victims, offenders, and the company in which the offenses occur. Although it's obvious to note the incalculable cost to those whose lives and careers were irrevocably damaged, the costs faced by businesses are often overlooked.

To make a real difference, an organization must take a comprehensive approach that starts with leadership. Leaders must be engaged and committed to the prevention of harassment. Leaders must show by example through their communication and action that they believe in fair treatment and that harassment will not be tolerated. Leaders can use training as a forum to communicate this message and deliver it in a more comprehensive way by:

- Supporting regular, multi-modal training that includes the company's anti-harassment policy and complaint system.
- Performing surveys to monitor culture, progress, and effectiveness.
- Incorporating a video of the CEO clearly and unequivocally stating that harassment is prohibited.

A strong and comprehensive harassment policy is an absolute must and should be part of the training program. There must also be a trusted and accessible complaint system, one with multiple avenues for employees to make complaints, that should include a way to report on even the most senior leaders. The organization must also ensure that any discipline is prompt, consistent, and proportionate to the severity of the conduct.

Leaders should view training as an opportunity to directly communicate expectations of what is and is not acceptable employee behavior. It is where employees become aware of what their organization expects from them, how they will be held accountable, what the company policy is on harassment, and the various ways to report harassment. To be effective, training must be relevant, meaningful, and emotionally impactful. It must be interactive. And it must be provided to managers, supervisors, and employees.

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