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Unpacking New York anti-sexual harassment training needs

by Jennifer Farthing

Jennifer Farthing (jennifer.farthing@lrn.com) is Global Content and Learning Leader at LRN in New York City.

New York City and New York State legislation will require companies, even very small ones, to provide sexual harassment prevention training to all employees, including interns and seasonal workers. This probably has a lot of business leaders wondering: How can I get the most out of my anti-harassment initiatives, and how can I make sure that the message sticks?

It's important for anti-sexual harassment initiatives to build trust and respect in the workplace. Simple dos and don'ts conveyed in many training programs aren't enough to accomplish that. Workforce education must be clear, but must also reinforce the specific, values-driven behaviors that your organization aspires to in order to be successful.

Harassment prevention training

Here are a few proven components of workplace education on harassment prevention that we've found to be effective.

Gray areas

Exploring gray areas can help employees gain a deeper understanding of the issues being addressed. Show perspectives of different employees with contradictory points of view on various incidences of misconduct. Their ambiguous vantage points paint a realistic portrait of harassment, leaving employees better able to identify and respond to real issues in your organization.

Stories

Telling an evocative story in a creative way can convey the importance of this urgent topic, making the material more memorable. One of our courses, for example, depicts a victim of workplace bullying who develops physical injuries as the verbal bullying he's subjected to becomes more and more hurtful. This brings to life the emotional cost of the subject matter in a way that simple exposition couldn't.

Interactive feedback

Using interactive elements in training, such as guided questioning, drag and drop activities, infographics, and short quizzes, ensures that employees are retaining the content presented through e-learning. Although employees may absorb some of what they've learned by simply watching a video or listening to someone speak, it's difficult to measure whether the content is sticking.

Speaking up

Bystander training means an end to simply walking away from bad behavior and filing such incidents under

“none of my business.” Gone are the days of the innocent bystander. More than ever, reputation and credibility are everything. As an employee, it is everyone’s responsibility to speak up, whether observing an improper remark, an ethically questionable alliance, or an illegal bribe. Reinforce this message alongside your topical trainings.

Still, training alone won’t change behavior or prevent misconduct. Your overall goal should be a respectful workplace where difficult conversations can be had and where disrespectful behavior won’t be tolerated. There is no substitute for a culture of trust and respect, where employees feel comfortable speaking up and raising issues.

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