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Communicating For **SUCCESS**

Use New Technology
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Inside:

- HR Uses Change Management Skills to Meet New Challenges
- Sexual Harassment is Alive and Well in The Workplace
- Organizational Change: Management's 3 Key Ingredients

What Were They Thinking?

Sexual Harassment is Alive and Thriving in the Workplace!

By Audrey Nelson PhD



Sexual harassment has been around for ages; just ask Samson and Delilah or Anthony and Cleopatra. Each workday we encounter challenges on the job: sexual harassment should not be one of them.

No laughing matter! Recent events and studies reveal that many women - and an increasing number of men - have been sexually harassed in their work lives. Experts conservatively estimate that at least **50% of U.S. women will experience sexual harassment** during their careers. A typical **Fortune 500 company loses \$6.7 million per year** in absenteeism, low productivity and employee turnover due to sexual harassment. A study of **Federal Employees reported that those who have been harassed lose 4.4 million in wages and 973,000 hours of unpaid leave each year.** California AB 1825 requires all organizations with 50 or more employees to provide all supervisory personnel with a minimum of two hours of sexual harassment training by January 1, 2006. Additional training must occur once every two years. Can't you take a joke? Sexual harassment is misunderstood and mischaracterized. It's dehumanizing and divisive. Here are practical answers outlining the "what, where, when, why and how" to stop harassment. Learn zero tolerance approaches both women and men can live with!

How would you answer these questions?

- When Tom makes unwanted sexual advances to Bob, is that sexual harassment?
- Everyone at work hugs each other. Could an employee claim sexual harassment?
- Two employees are sharing the graphic sexual details of a recent episode of Sex in the City. They engage in this conversation routinely after every episode. Can an employee who walks by and hears the interaction file a sexual harassment complaint?
- During lunch several employees share a Victoria's Secrets catalog picking out lingerie for an employee's honeymoon. Does the employee in the next cubicle have grounds for sexual harassment?

If you've answered yes to any of these, you've been ambushed by sexual harassment. Now imagine the following scenario: You've been in a meeting, It began with light banter among three men about who was going to "score" and "who was in bed with whom" on the last deal. Getting the biggest "bang for your buck" got smirks and people poking each other. When she spoke you observed one of the men doing "elevator eyes" to her body. Then she dropped her pen and bent over to retrieve it only to have one of the men bend down to see if he could see anything. Well, what was sexual harassment?

Some of the above? All of it? Perhaps you could add to this list. Never mind. . . join the crowd. We have all engaged in interactions in which we felt that much more was going on than was actually said. Much of sexual harassment are "off record" acts. Not what was said, but the unspoken nonverbal exchanges. Welcome to another challenge of what to do with these off record behaviors and put them on record!

Some guidelines on preventing sexual harassment:

- Compliment: Harassment or not? Would you give that compliment to a man as well as a woman?
- Intent versus Impact: Well, I didn't mean anything by it! Ask yourself: How did the person react to what I just said or did? Did they appear uncomfortable? Take the cue! Don't do it again.
- No is still NO in any Language. It is a complete sentence!
- The dating game dilemma. Is the relationship reciprocal? Does the other person also initiate?
- Would you say that to your mother, wife, daughter or sister? 

For 20 years Audrey Nelson PhD has helped Fortune 500 companies and government agencies navigate the minefield of sexual harassment at work. She has served as a consultant and expert witness in sexual harassment cases.