Sexual Harassment In The Workplace

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**Abstract**

The sound of silence is part of an all too familiar culture of acceptability when addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Unwelcome advances at work are more likely to go unreported or swept under the rug than to have a complaint filed. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission estimates are between 23,000 and 27,000 sexual harassment claims per year. The majority of these victims are women.

**Industry Risks**

The EEOC tracks sexual harassment charges across industries. It is not much of a shock to see that low wage jobs, and jobs that have a high female employee count have the highest rate of reported sexual harassment. The top 4 industries that lead in reporting sexual harassment cases are the hospitality, retail, manufacturing, and health care industries.

**High Profile Allegations**

Many times, victims of sexual harassment, whether it be physical or verbal, fail to understand that it's a violation of their Civil Rights. Victims have legal remedies. More often than not, victims of sexual harassment do not report the incident for a whole myriad of reasons. Lack of faith in management or fear of ridicule and retaliation is an intimidating factor that many times squelches the victim's voice. Sexual harassment is a subject that has far too long been taboo with so many high-profile cases within the last few years, such as Steve Wynn, Matt Lauer, Charlie Rose, Al Franken, Brett Kavanaugh, and Harvey Weinstein. The #METOO movement has spawned from these allegations, in hopes that no longer will the victim remain silent.

**Victims Victimized As Intimidation**

Victims need to know that the silent voice does not get heard. Man, woman, black, white, straight, or gay; no one is immune to becoming a potential sexual harassment victim.

Myself as a male victim, it was highly embarrassing to lodge a complaint against a male supervisor. To come forward with a lack of evidence and witnesses refusing to come forward out of fear of retaliation is a lonely and sinking feeling of disgust. Victims many times are vilified by the very human resources departments that are there to protect this behavior from happening. Warning letters many times are sent as a bullying tactic, often informing the victim that any unfounded accusations will not be tolerated and may lead to termination. It is no wonder victims do not come forward.

**Defining Sexual Harassment**

The previous example is far too familiar in the workplace. It creates a "hostile environment of sexual harassment" when unwelcome sexual conduct unreasonably interferes with the victim's job performance, as stated earlier.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, is crystal clear on the legal definition of sexual harassment. It is defined as any unwelcome verbal, visual, or physical conduct of sexual nature that is severe or persuasive and affects working conditions or creates a hostile work environment. Sexual harassment can take many forms; unwanted advances, quid pro quo, as well as other verbal and physical conducts of sexual nature.

**Effects Of Sexual Harassment**

A hostile work environment is an unproductive work environment. This behavior can lead to unwanted stress, anxiety, and other mental and physical disorders. Victims many times have low morale and high rates of absenteeism. Often this will lead to poor work performance, and in many cases separation either voluntarily or involuntary

**Prevention**

Employers must impose a strict anti-harassment policy in the workplace. Harassment and sexual harassment policy should be clear and provide information precisely defining what it is, how to identify it, and how employees should report any harassment. It is also a best practice to ensure all employees understand the policy during the hiring process and provide all updates to employees periodically as a reminder. This should include, but not be limited to, training and retraining for everyone, including management. Maintain a ZERO tolerance policy and have a transparent process to investigate any complaints

**Conclusion**

Sexual harassment not only has a negative effect in the workplace, but in most cases, that trauma is carried over into the victim's private life. Outside of work, victims are still unwilling or afraid to report unwanted advances. Many times, this conflict leads to psychological and physical effects. Companies must encourage victims to report sexual harassment to put an end to this culture of acceptable silence and behavior.

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