Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

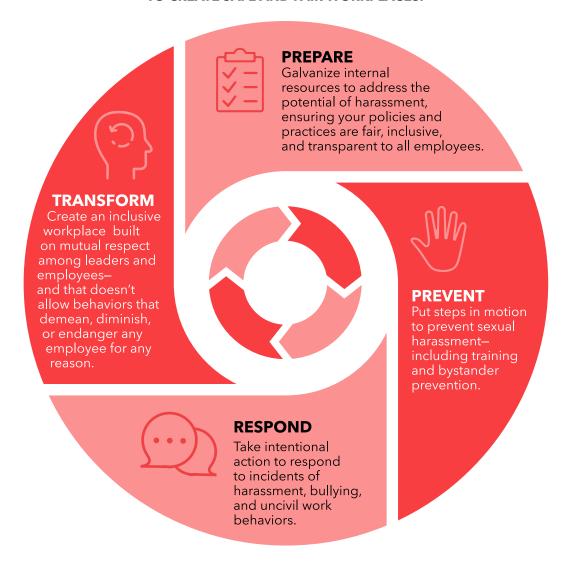## How Companies Can Prepare, Prevent, Respond, and Transform Their Culture

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WORKPLACES THAT WORK FOR WOMEN

Take Steps to Eradicate Sexual Harassment in Your Workplace

As many as 85% of women in the United States have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, yet the majority of these incidents go unreported, making it difficult to get an accurate count of how pervasive the problem truly is.[1] The wave of stories emerging as part of the #MeToo movement and Time's Up[2] initiative have inspired renewed calls for change within the workplace. The majority of men and women want to be part of the solution,[3] and this white paper provides a model with suggestions for organizations and leaders committed to making change.

THERE ARE FOUR IMPORTANT ACTIONS ORGANIZATIONS CAN TAKE TO CREATE SAFE AND FAIR WORKPLACES.

PREPARE
Galvanize internal resources to address the potential of harassment, ensuring your policies and practices are fair, inclusive, and transparent to all employees.

PREVENT
Put steps in motion to prevent sexual harassment—including training and bystander prevention.

RESPOND
Take intentional action to respond to incidents of harassment, bullying, and uncivil work behaviors.

TRANSFORM
Create an inclusive workplace built on mutual respect among leaders and employees—and that doesn't allow behaviors that demean, diminish, or endanger any employee for any reason.

PREPARE

1. Cultivate a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment. Take proactive steps to make this policy and your company's commitment visible.

> "Sexual harassment and other behaviors that contribute to a hostile work environment often exist in gray areas; thus, they are not clear-cut. This instability, lack of naming, and lack of clarity give them power."[4]

Make a clear and public statement that sexual harassment will not be tolerated in your organization and let all employees, regardless of their rank or status, know that sexual harassment is cause for termination.[5] Include this language in your executive, board, and employment agreements. Be mindful that sexual harassment can be experienced by and be perpetrated by all employees, regardless of gender and sexual orientation.

Create an inclusive culture that will not tolerate sexual harassment or discrimination in any form. Back it up with policies and procedures for reporting that are broad enough to protect all employees. Work with HR, IT, and other relevant departments to create and maintain a safe physical and digital environment for employees.

Also have a policy for covert sexism (e.g., telling sexist jokes, ignoring women's comments in meetings)—not just overt sexual harassment—as it is important for reducing the likelihood and impact of negative behaviors in the workplace.[6] Do not tolerate comments that may be perceived as sexual harassment but are stated in a way to allow "strategic ambiguity" as a defense.[7]

Organizations with clear intolerance for sexual harassment, well-defined policies *and* procedures, and transparently implemented practices can reduce the likelihood of sexual harassment behaviors.[8] Employees at organizations that are perceived to have permissive attitudes or tolerant climates for sexual harassment, even in the absence of actual harassing behaviors or events, can still experience negative impacts on their work attitudes.[9] This includes climates where targets are "punished for complaining, perpetrators are not appropriately punished for harassment, or complaints are not taken seriously."[10]

Not only is sexual harassment illegal in some countries, it harms your employees *and* your bottom line. Targets of sexual harassment report that harassment impacts their health and their ability to thrive in their workplace or field.[11] Many cases go unreported, with targets often finding it easier to quit their job or leave their industry,[12] creating a serious potential for loss of talent and productivity.[13] As evidenced in recent high-profile cases, tolerating sexual harassment from anyone in the organization can harm your stock prices, affect your shareholders, impact your brand value with your customer base, and potentially cost millions of dollars in settlements.[14]

2. Set guidelines to help employees understand appropriate norms for human interaction and affection in the workplace.

Organizations need to help employees understand what's acceptable and what's not for human interaction, affection, and positive touch in the workplace (e.g., shaking hands to welcome a new coworker, or hugging a colleague in a time of grief).

It is natural and normal for people to talk to and support one another in the workplace. Reacting with strict rules such as outlawing all closed-door meetings or physical touch of any kind might unintentionally serve to stop inclusive human interactions. That, in turn, could lead to employees feeling less of a sense of belongingness on their work teams or receiving fewer opportunities for mentorship and sponsorship, particularly for women.

Understandably, setting guidelines for positive human interaction within a zero-tolerance culture can be a delicate balance for companies. Work with your legal counsel to create reasonable guidelines and avoid the trap of "touch paranoia," which perpetuates a culture of fear.[15] Then, clearly communicate the guidelines to your employees so they can differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate contact in person, online, and in social media interactions.[16] Encourage leaders to model appropriate behavior.

3. Create processes to consider how sexual harassment affects women of color and other marginalized groups in your organization.

Sexual harassment for women of color is influenced by power dynamics[17] across intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender.[18] Organizational and legal policies aimed at preventing sexual harassment should address this intersectionality. For example, research suggests that women of color may be more likely targets of sexual harassment, but may be less often *perceived* as targets, making reporting more challenging for women of color and thus perpetuating a cycle of harassment.[19]

This is a result of the historical context of racialized violence, structural inequality, prejudice, and discrimination of marginalized groups.[20] The stereotypes that have sprung up to support this history are insidious and potent.

"From these historical roots, stereotypes of women of color were formed, which in some ways rationalized sexual violence. [For example, in the United States], Latinas have dealt with overly sexualized stereotypes, being characterized as promiscuous or lusty women…. Similarly, Asian women have been fetishized, exoticized, and sexualized as geishas, china dolls, lotus blossoms, or dragon ladies. Black women have been stereotyped as hypersexual, stemming from their treatment by slave owners as well as norms of slavery commerce in which slaves were often stripped naked and physically examined before being purchased."[21]

Based on these stereotypes, sexual harassment claims may not be taken seriously.[22]

Organizations must create policies that acknowledge that racial and sexual harassment can occur at the same time for women of color.[23] To achieve this goal, organizations must start by having tough conversations about who may be overlooked, undervalued, and unsupported across multiple dimensions of difference—assessing varying forms of discrimination and/or bullying related to "race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, or other dimensions of unequal social status, position, and power."[24]

4. Educate yourself about your organization's policies and procedures for when the board should be involved with or notified of sexual harassment complaints.

Consult with your HR, legal, and finance teams to understand the current policies about if, when, and how the company's board of directors is involved with and/or responsible for resolving sexual harassment complaints.[25] As appropriate, board members should review[26] to determine whether the board should be involved sooner than current policy stipulates.[27] Review and discuss policies and procedures with the entire board to ensure all members understand their duties. The board should also advise on any changes to create a more inclusive workplace culture where sexual harassment is not tolerated at any level.

5. Galvanize across functions to help employees have quick access to resources.

Two actions will help employees have quick access to internal resources to prevent and address sexual harassment:

- Put all of your company's resources, policies, and guidelines on harassment—including anti-retaliation, reporting, and bystander policies and procedures[28]—together in one easy-to-find place that is accessible to all employees.

- Make sure EAP (Employee Assistance Program) providers and community referrals are ready and available to offer assistance to those who have been impacted by sexual harassment. Engage with your local communities to understand the range of appropriate service providers and external resources that can help employees who have endured harassment at work.[29]

PREVENT

1. Accelerate parity in representation of women at all levels, including your board of directors.

Power differentials and job gender composition are connected to the likelihood of sexual harassment occurring within organizations (and not only in industries led mostly by men).

> "Power differentials stemming from workers' relative significance in the labor process may protect some employees from sexual harassment while rendering others more vulnerable. The dominant theory posits that women's subordinated organizational positions lessen their power in relation to potential harassers, rendering them vulnerable to sexual harassment."[30]

Even when women are on equal footing with men in high-powered positions, researchers caution that their power position and level of autonomy can "provoke resentment" and increase vulnerability to sexual harassment.[31] In this case, having a top-level position does not protect an employee from sexual harassment.

Job gender composition and context can make a difference. Research suggests that when women work in male-dominated industries or workplaces, incidents of sexual harassment may be more likely,[32] especially if women are perceived by men to be threatening (consciously or unconsciously) men's status and opportunities.[33] Additionally, women working in service occupations with a high proportion of women (e.g., waitresses, maids) may have increased exposure to or be at risk of sexual harassment due to power differentials.[34] Moving toward equal levels of representation at all levels may mitigate harassment,[35] particularly as more women might introduce a tipping point and demonstrate that the organization values and models inclusion and respect.

When building preventive strategies, it is important to be mindful of gender composition *and* power dynamics, which both reinforce gender bias as well as perpetuate sexual harassment.

2. Educate and train leaders on forms of sexual harassment—including how to escalate.

"There is no [globally] accepted definition of sexual harassment."[36] However, there are legal definitions in some countries. For example, in the United States, sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome behavior targeted to individuals because of their sex leading to a *quid pro quo* situation or hostile work environment.[37] However, policies based strictly on legal definitions may not establish environments that can prevent sexual harassment *before* it becomes illegal.[38]

Understanding the different forms of sexual harassment can be useful in creating practical solutions within organizations. Characterizing different behaviors allows leaders, HR professionals, teams, and individuals to intervene and address unwelcome, inappropriate and harmful behaviors directly. It is important to note that there are three forms of sexual harassment:[39]

- **Patronizing:** "Sexist but nonsexual comments, gestures, or condescension."
- **Taunting:** "Sexual gestures, physical displays, and overly personal comments and queries producing a sexually hostile environment."
- **Predatory:** "Even more threatening, encompassing sexual solicitation, promises or threats, touching, and forced sexual contact."

Although more serious infractions of sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention are traumatic and more likely to be reported, they tend to be infrequent events.[40] Focusing the majority of attention and policies on traumatic sexual harassment can lead managers to mistakenly believe they have solved the issue of employees' mistreatment at work.[41] It is important to attend to *all* forms of sexual harassment,[42] as research indicates that lower intensity but more frequent harassment may have a larger negative impact on women's work attitudes.[43]

3. Focus on effective anti-sexual harassment training.

Providing anti-sexual harassment training is often a first step for organizations trying to prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the workplace. Not all trainings are created equally, however. Effective anti-sexual harassment training does not just restate your company's policies and reporting procedures. Rather, it is mandatory for all staff and should be updated to keep up with best practices and current issues. It should also include a focus on increasing empathy and perceptual accuracy, so participants can better understand the real-life consequences for people who are sexually harassed. Finally, effective training should show employees how they can intervene as empowered bystanders; corresponding bystander reporting policies and procedures should also be enacted and shared.

- **Update** your anti-sexual harassment training and make it mandatory for all employees. Everyone—including your board of directors and senior leaders, managers, frontline employees, and temporary workers—must attend anti-sexual harassment training. Mandating training for all can help increase awareness around what behaviors will not be tolerated in the workplace, who has responsibility to report, and how coworkers can support one another. Make sure that updated training and policies address digital forms of communication such as email, chat rooms, discussion boards, and social media, as sexual harassment can occur in these forms of employee interaction both in and outside of the workplace.[44]
- **Challenge** your thinking on who is affected by sexual harassment and how it's perpetuated. This will help ensure *all* employees are protected. For example, although many conversations on sexual harassment focus on cross-gender, man-to-woman sexual harassment,[45] it is important to remember that *all* genders and LGBTQI workers can be targeted and affected by these harmful interactions.

- **Engage** men and women as partners in eradicating sexual harassment. People may not agree on what constitutes sexual harassment; men and women may differ on their experiences with and perceptions of harassing behaviors—and differences may also exist based on race.[46] Understand that malicious intent does not need to be present for a behavior to be harmful. The impact of a sexually harassing behavior may be very different than the intent, especially if employees hold mistaken beliefs about sexual harassment (e.g., that a target is inviting attention by wearing a particular skirt).[47] Research shows that men may not recognize how painful sexual harassment can be, and learning about the negative impact may be important to raise awareness and lead to behavioral change.[48] Catalyst research finds that men with a strong sense of fair play—that is, an understanding of how fairness and inequality impacts others in society—are more aware of gender bias, more likely to be committed to gender-equality initiatives, and more likely to be champions in the workplace.[49] Encourage all genders to build partnership through your training programs by helping people work together to discuss, problem solve, and provide feedback around videos and workplace case studies that incorporate elements of fair play, identify harassing behaviors, and distinguish between intent versus impact.

- **Incorporate** elements related to empathic accuracy, perspective taking, and the emotions of targets into training prevention programs. Empathy—the ability to understand the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of someone else—is an often overlooked but important leadership skill.[50] Workplace cultures that lack empathy are often cultures that will tolerate gender inequality and sexual harassment.[51] Additionally, evidence shows that employees prone to sexually harassing behaviors may actively tune out, ignore, or misinterpret an individual's reactions or perspectives, making inaccurate judgments about the negative impact of these behaviors.[52] Increasing empathy and taking the perspective of someone who has experienced sexual harassment are linked to a reduction in harassing behaviors in the workplace.[53] Being able to accurately understand another's perspective and emotional reaction is a critical skill for developing empathy.[54]

  One way of helping your board, senior leadership, managers, and staff better understand how their actions impact their colleagues and curb the likelihood of inappropriate behaviors is to include training that aims to increase empathy in your workplace. This training should provide motivating reasons, feedback, and explanations for people to more accurately interpret the impact of their behaviors on others; videos and case studies with realistic situations and effects can be discussed to interpret the emotional and cognitive expressions of targets.[55] To increase empathy leadership skills, include exercises that focus on developing inclusive communication skills (e.g., humble listening, communicating feelings using "I statements," not making assumptions, being vulnerable and courageous).[56] Also use storytelling and encourage others to use their imagination to understand how someone may be reacting or feeling.[57]

- **Provide** training for bystander intervention, particularly for supervisors, and role model your desired behavior and expectations. We know that organizational climate strongly influences whether companies can create workplaces free of harassment. One way to create a culture that is intolerant to sexual harassment is to train and encourage bystander reporting and intervention, so that "if you see something, say something."[58] In the United States, companies require their managers to report sexual harassment because companies can be legally liable for the actions and oversights of their managers.[59] Going beyond the legal requirements by creating a culture of accountability free from retaliation[60] and implementing bystander intervention are two keys for effective anti-sexual harassment training programs.

Train bystanders[61] on how to interrupt sexist language and intervene when witnessing harassment. One simple way people can intervene if they are unclear as to whether it is warranted is to ask the person targeted about it afterward: "I witnessed this. Are you okay? How are you feeling?"[62]

Doing so showcases their allyship and demonstrates that all employees are expected to support and enforce an inclusive culture where harassment is not tolerated. Bystander intervention trainings have been shown to change attitudes about sexual violence and increase bystander efficacy in the long term.[63] Research finds that people witnessing sexual harassment are more likely to intervene if they "perceived [a] social consensus that the conduct [described] was sexual harassment, if they perceived the consequences to the victim as severe, and if they recognized the incident as an ethical issue."[64] Research in non-corporate settings finds that training bystanders can reduce violent behaviors.[65]

For bystanders to intervene, they must notice the event, identify the event as a problem, take responsibility for intervening, decide how best to help, and then act.[66] Barriers preventing bystanders from fully moving through this process can occur at any one of the steps.[67] Bystanders can intervene with the four Ds:
> Direct: Directly confront the situation.
> Distract: Create a distraction.
> Delegate: Get help.
> Delay: Touch base with the target later.[68]

Good bystander intervention anti-sexual harassment training should consist of teaching your workers to recognize when they may feel reluctant to intervene (barriers), when to intervene (five-step process), what behaviors to intervene on (defining sexual harassment), and how to intervene (the four Ds, policies, reporting mechanisms). Your workplace sexual harassment policies and training may need to include real-life examples, case studies, robust informal reporting mechanisms, and assurance that there will not be retaliation to encourage bystander intervention.

• **Develop** post-training activities and audits to maximize training success. Some research has indicated that post-training follow-up activities—such as trainings to refresh employee familiarity with policies, conducting training audits, or offering incentives for implementing the training into the workplace—are linked to a reduced frequency of sexual harassment complaints and a perception of greater training success.[69] This is particularly salient for organizations that use their anti-sexual harassment training programs not only to protect the organization from liability, but to create a more inclusive culture, where both pre-training and post-training activities have a greater impact on effectiveness than the training activities themselves.[70]

RESPOND

1. Reinforce your company's zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and retaliation.

Continue to declare that sexual harassment will not be tolerated in your organization—and, if substantiated, may be a cause for termination.[71] Reinforce by revaluating your policies and procedures, updating your training and prevention efforts, and encouraging leaders to take responsibility for creating a safer and fairer workplace.

Look for *any and all* gaps in how your company's policy is executed. This approach will help ensure your company's execution of its policies is consistent with its commitment.

Fear of retaliation is one reason sexual harassment may go unreported. Acknowledge that although retaliating against individuals who report sexual harassment is illegal, it does occur. Encourage your employees to report sexual harassment by creating an organizational climate that is intolerant to sexual harassment and is supportive of individuals who report (i.e., taking claims seriously, protecting complainants from retaliation, and holding perpetrators accountable).[72]

Keep in mind the unique position of HR professionals as well. Individuals who work in HR have an obligation to both employees and the organization. Laws regarding retaliation do *not* always extend to those in HR.[73] Organizational support for these employees may aid in preventing harassment and discrimination.

2. Investigate all claims promptly and fairly.

Establish guidelines for investigating claims fairly.[74] Be sure to clearly communicate these guidelines to employees at all levels. Understanding the process of an investigation may alleviate some reticence or stress among employees reporting harassment.

Protect complainants from retaliation and disclosure. Taking claims of harassment or assault seriously and investigating them fairly can create a culture intolerant of sexual harassment and may ultimately serve as a deterrent to that behavior.[75]

Protect the complainant and other employees by taking action to ensure that the harassment does not continue. This may be done by making changes to employee schedules, keeping in mind that the complainant should not face any adverse measures.[76]

Once the board becomes aware of a harassment or assault complaint, whether through formal or informal channels, the board should move to ensure the organization properly and fully addresses it. Consider convening a response team of key senior partners (e.g., HR, Legal, Compliance, PR) to work toward resolution and keep the board informed. Communications or PR teams may respond with key messages, especially in high-profile cases, for the media or other requests for comments.[77]

3. Honor the target of sexual harassment and follow up accordingly.

It is stressful to make an informal or formal complaint about sexual harassment in the workplace. Some research finds that many targets quit their jobs instead of filing a complaint.[78] This is particularly salient for women of color, who may report sexual harassment less frequently, concerned that their race or ethnicity may lead to less favorable outcomes from investigations.[79]

Fear of retaliation, whether formal or informal, also adds to the difficulty in filing a complaint.[80] If sexual harassment or assault is occurring in your organization, but targets are leaving their positions instead of reporting, the culture, climate, behavior, and ultimately, risk for talent loss and liability, will not improve.

Many people who have experienced sexual harassment may find it difficult to go through their company's formal reporting process. Research supports that knowing there are policies and processes in place, and that the workplace has a strong reputation for fair resolution of claims, may increase the likelihood of making an informal or formal complaint.[81]

Reporting channels must allow for *informal, formal, confidential,* and *anonymous* complaints. Work with those targeted to determine what the best method for them may be regarding the investigation, and provide detailed information about the possible and appropriate consequences to the accused harasser.[82] Use humble listening and other inclusive leadership skills[83] to support your employees through the complaint and investigation process. Ensure you have appropriate measures and resources to follow up with the target of sexual harassment –creating an ongoing feedback loop to build a sense of security during this process. Also, look for opportunities to follow up with or reach out to those indirectly affected by sexual harassment (e.g., team members, co-workers).

4. Allow space for support, understanding, and, ultimately, compassion–particularly during times of trauma.

Tolerating sexism and sexual harassment, even unwittingly, can create a toxic culture of suffering at work.[84] For those who have been harassed, the perception of unsupportive responses by others has been shown to lead to decreased job satisfaction.[85]

By promoting a culture that allows space for support and understanding through compassion, you can create an environment that empowers employees, creates a sense of psychological safety, fosters respect, and encourages resiliency when negative events occur.

A culture of compassion benefits individuals within the organization and the organization itself. Compassion allows those who experience grief or trauma to recover both physically and psychologically, while those who give compassion may be judged more positively by their peers.[86] Organizations benefit from creating and maintaining a culture of compassion because those who experience compassion in the workplace often become more committed to the organization.[87]

Creating and maintaining a culture of compassion in the workplace can occur through instituting formal policies, but also through informal cultural norms.

- Leverage EAPs or peer support programs as examples of effective institutional programs.

- Encourage quality but appropriate relationships between employees, allowing space for individuals to express deep feelings, especially after traumatic experiences.

- Foster inclusive leadership behaviors.[88] Encourage all employees to hold one another accountable and take intentional action to respond to incidents of harassment, bullying, or uncivil work behaviors. This approach requires leaders to step up and create an empowering work culture where targets of harassment are not villainized or penalized, but rather treated fairly and honorably.

TRANSFORM

1. Build a climate of respect and accountability.

> "Although sociocultural realities are vital to understanding the social backdrop for sexual harassment, organizational attributes are crucial determinants of its incidence and form. In other words, patriarchy and gender socialization help explain the cultural foundations underlying sexual harassment and victims' responses, but organizational context governs whether and how sexual harassment actually transpires in a given workplace."[89]

Policies to address sexual harassment are necessary, but not foolproof. In addition to establishing the appropriate set of policies and procedures, companies must establish and ensure a climate of respect and accountability across all levels of the organization and in all settings[90]—including decentralized locations and client sites.

- **Leadership accountability:** Organizational-wide messages about expectations and fair treatment practices must "start from the top."[91] Be wary about inadvertently sending mixed messages about what is acceptable behavior and what is not.[92] Day-to-day instances of exclusion experienced by employees— including bias, microaggressions, bullying, and mistreatment—may send different messages from those touted by top leaders.[93] Senior leaders, including the company's board of directors, need to report and talk about the actions taken to prevent and address harassment. HR and others responsible for talent management must also ensure that performance review systems and grievance mechanisms are fair, timely, and respectful.[94]

- **Coworker accountability:** Collectively, teams can create norms and daily practices where individuals are invested in the outcomes and well-being of their co-workers, and are willing to intervene when harassment occurs. Teams may include not only your immediate departmental or functional colleagues, but anyone with whom you work, including project teams or employee groups. Supportive co- workers are less likely to engage in harassment.[95] Creating a "not in our house" mindset by having each other's backs, affirming each other's experiences, and intervening as bystanders when uncivil or harassing behaviors occur can go a long way toward building a climate of respect and accountability. To ensure accountability, companies must assess informal and formal team norms to confirm that team environments are not demeaning, diminishing, or endangering any employee for any reason.

- **Personal accountability:** *All* employees are responsible for speaking up and reporting if they witness inappropriate behaviors in the workplace. Formalize this expectation to make it clear that discriminatory and harassing behaviors will not be tolerated, and to remove some of the reporting burden from those who have been targeted.[96] In creating a truly inclusive and respectful workplace, we *all* have a responsibility to stop the messages and behaviors that support bullying, uncivil behaviors, exclusion, and gender inequities, which may be reinforced and internalized by *all* genders.

2. Evaluate your company's dominant business culture for norms and practices that promote shaming and silence.

"Fear is a powerful emotion that shapes many aspects of our lives. Nearly every day, we are bombarded by news media, television shows, movies, commercials, billboards, books, and magazines with new reasons to fear for our physical and psychological well-being."[97]

Sexual harassment and uncivil work behaviors breed in silence. Organizational silence occurs when employees feel they cannot voice concerns or complaints because they fear repercussions either personally or professionally, or both.[98] Individuals or groups who experience some level of job insecurity (e.g., female temporary workers) may also remain silent to protect their employment status[99] and economic stability.[100]

Business suffers and women's progress is stifled when employees lack the support needed to speak up and interrupt or report harmful behaviors. Both fear and shame can contribute to a culture of silence in the workplace.

Fear: Employees may not speak up because they fear negative consequences from supervisors, damaging a relationship with co-workers, real or perceived threats to their employment status, or being ostracized.[101] Companies can assuage employee fears in several ways:

• **Provide** ways for employees to anonymously disclose their experiences. The National Women's Law Center recommends conducting anonymous surveys that allow employees to disclose workplace harassment, assess employee comfort with intervening or reporting harassment, and measure employee comprehension of the company's policies and complaint procedures. These results can then be used to inform necessary action and training.[102]

• **Foster** employees' sense of psychological safety. Psychological safety plays an instrumental role in whether or not employees speak up at work. When employees don't feel safe, they have a greater propensity to remain silent.[103] However, when they feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to speak up freely about problems and issues.

• **Encourage** tough conversations. Employees stand to benefit from witnessing or participating in courageous conversations at work—including discussions of events that are difficult or traumatic, but not necessarily focused on harassment. Through these opportunities, organizational leaders can model a culture where individual voices are respected, heard, and valued, and employees can learn how to speak up in spite of fear. Although these conversations may not directly address sexual harassment, these types of experiences allow employees to participate in a positive and supportive work culture where harassment, bullying, and uncivil behaviors are not tolerated.

Shame: Shame also encourages silence, and may be particularly relevant for those targeted by harassment.[104] One of the ways shame perpetuates sexual harassment is through social exclusion and power differentials. Being excluded and subjected to an unsupportive workplace can be "shaming to the individual and experienced as harassment."[105] A shaming culture can be reinforced by power differentials, particularly when the voices of marginalized groups are, intentionally or unintentionally, stifled or suppressed. All of these dynamics can lead people to not speak up or remain silent.[106]

- **Find out** if shaming is prevalent in your workplace. Assess employee experiences of psychological safety, job fears, and everyday experiences of bias and exclusion to understand whether a culture of silence and shaming exist and create a plan to address it.

3. Address heavy alcohol consumption at work functions.

Alcohol impairs judgment and can lessen inhibitions.[107] Organizational climates that normalize heavy alcohol consumption at work or work-related functions—including after-hours events with coworkers and/or clients—have been linked to increased risk of sexual harassment.[108] However, remember that while drinking is linked to a higher risk of sexual harassment, it is not a direct cause of harassment, nor is it a reason to excuse the behavior or to blame the person targeted.[109]

Make it clear that:[110]

- Sexual harassment is a serious offense, no matter the setting or conditions.

- Managers have a responsibility to report if they observe sexual harassment at work functions with alcohol present.

- Colleagues should intervene if they witness inappropriate behavior from employees, clients, or customers at work events where alcohol is served.

Creating a climate of respect for employees of all identities is important for reducing the negative impact of sexism and sexual harassment in your workplaces.[111] This includes holding leaders, team members, and employees accountable for behaviors and conditions that put individuals at risk (such as normalizing heavy alcohol consumption at work functions). A positive organizational climate is associated with decreased rates of sexual harassment, reduced retaliation against individuals who confront and report harassment, and better work and psychological outcomes for those who have experienced harassment. Companies can and should take a proactive role in creating cultural change, recognizing that organizational climate plays a critical role in preventing or promoting sexual harassment.[112]

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Catalyst is a global nonprofit working with some of the world's most powerful CEOs and leading companies to help build workplaces that work for women. Founded in 1962, Catalyst drives change with pioneering research, practical tools, and proven solutions to accelerate and advance women into leadership—because progress for women is progress for everyone.

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