



IV. AVOIDING THE TRAPS OF HARASSMENT

A. Your Own Personal Behavior

Just how important is your personal behavior: how you act, how you dress, your communication with co-workers, your personal demeanor? It is critical. Not only in the process of ending sexual harassment, but to your being seen as a professional in the workplace. Personal behavior ("attitude") will control just how far you will go in life itself. The phrase "Your attitude controls your altitude." is used by aircraft pilot instructors. It means that the higher the nose of the aircraft is to the horizon, the higher the airplane will go. There are behaviorists who have used the same phrase. It is one of the major truths of life. How you are viewed by others is not only the value you place upon your contribution to your workplace but your contribution to your life itself.

Your demeanor contributes to whether or not you will become the victim of the ugly act of harassment. Make a personal behavioral assessment of yourself with a little test. This booklet is yours to keep, so no one else will look at how you view yourself. The topics are not exhaustive, but they will give you a look at your interpersonal direction and how susceptible you may be to an act of sexual harassment.

Use the four behavior classifications that you read earlier in this booklet (confrontational, sociable, rational, and agreeable) to complete the following blanks.

Behavior Assessment Quiz

Your personal behavior. How would you classify your behavior styles?

I am more _____ than I am _____.

Others see me as _____ rather than _____.

I want to be more _____ and less _____.

How do you act around co-workers? I am mostly _____, followed by _____, and I can be _____. But I am hardly ever _____.

When you are at work, your attire can be described by others as:

- [] Conservative
[] Professional
[] Playful or contemporary
[] Loud or flamboyant

What behavioral choice do you think best matches the type of dress you have identified? [] Confrontational; [] Rational; [] Social; or [] Agreeable.

What about your communication with co-workers?

Most of the time I am more _____ times I am _____. I am almost never: _____.

Using each of the four behavioral styles rate your personal behavior from most likely to least likely and indicate a percentage by each of your selections. The total must add up to 100%.

I am most likely to act _____ (%)

I'm next most likely to act _____ (%)

I'm next most likely to act _____ (%)

I'm least likely to act _____ (%)

It's okay to have a zero percentage in the last box.

Most of us have several behavior styles that we operate within. If your preferred style is one particu-



lar behavior, it is possible that others see you as that behavior type. If you vary between behavior styles you could be viewed by others in different ways. You might have even heard the phrase "...you are often unpredictable..." or words to that effect, said by others.

This test may give you an insight into how others view you and how you view yourself.

At this point, let's ask some questions that may help you understand your vulnerability toward being the victim of harassment. Does your personality and dress make you a target for harassment? Are you insecure? Do you dress provocatively to get attention? Are you flirtatious? Do you need to be the center of attention? Are you secretive? Are you an introvert as opposed to outgoing? How easy is it to tell someone you do not want to be confronted by unacceptable behavior? Do others know that when you make a statement that you are serious and not "just kidding around?"

B. Steps to Take to Stop Unwanted Behavior or Comments

In general, people do not want others to think poorly of them. They do not want to be rejected by their co-workers or made to feel different. Most people simply want to keep their jobs and not be seen as either a doormat or a troublemaker. This type of workplace behavior can be described as "getting along." However, when a violent or embarrassing act such as sexual harassment happens to you, you must be psychologically ready to tell the harasser to "Stop it!" and mean it. You must be willing to set aside your "getting along" behavior, and be more demonstrative. Remember to focus your statements on the behavior and the specific act. ("Randy, don't you ever pinch me again. I don't like it, and I'll report you if you do!") Do not smile—even as a reaction of embarrassment. Do not be argumentative or loud. The only issue is that the person understand clearly how you have perceived the action and how you can be expected to react in the future if the action is repeated. You may want your last words to be "Do you understand?"

Be careful to direct your comments at the specific action, not at the individual. After this exchange you will still have to work together, and statements that are a personal attack on the other person may make further cooperation as co-workers impossible. Also, angry, accusatory attacks stated so others can



overhear may be considered legally slanderous or libelous. ("Randy, I would expect a scummy low-life like you to do that. You're such a degenerate slimeball. All you think about is sex. You pervert!") Get the picture?

If you are bothered by the unacceptable and disturbing behavior of co-workers or supervisors, your best defense is to make it very clear that you do not and will not tolerate any verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Also, indicate clearly that you expect those around you to be professional at all times. Just say "No! I don't want to be exposed to that type of conduct, and I do not want to participate in it."

If "No." doesn't work, and your employer has established a comprehensive complaint process to identify unlawful workplace issues, use the complaint process. Generally, that process can be found in your employee handbook. It is there to protect you and to bring to management's attention behavior that is against the law or that violates company policies.

Most employers have charged the human resource representative with the responsibility of identifying improper employment practices that violate state and federal laws. Those individuals who are assigned to that responsibility take their obligations seriously. Most employer representatives want to know what is going on with those who work for the company. The company is especially concerned when the matter is causing you concern or possibly violating your civil rights. In the first instance, your productivity is being affected, and perhaps the productivity of others as well. This is not good for business. In the latter instance, a law suit dealing with a civil rights issue, especially one that can become a class-action suit,

can be extraordinarily costly in both legal judgments and bad publicity. This is also very bad for business. So take advantage of your employer's complaint process if necessary. If it is not written in the employee handbook, ask the human resource representative to explain the complaint process to you.

Your employer went to the expense to purchase this booklet and give it to you and other employees where you work, indicating a concern about avoiding sexual harassment. Your employer will take all of the necessary steps to identify and stop harassment at your place of employment. The best course of action is to let your employer handle the problem, should it come up. However, since state and Federal laws are involved, you should know that your employer is not the ultimate authority in deciding the nature of resolving action to be taken following a complaint.



C. Outside Vendors and Service Providers

We talked about third party harassment in a previous section. The same rules apply to reporting the actions of a outside contractor, vendor, agent, or other service provider that apply to reporting a co-worker. Your first step is to say "No." If the sexual practice or behavior doesn't stop, then you have an obligation to report the behavior.

It is up to your employer to provide a workplace that is free of harassment, and that includes conduct by non-employees in your workplace.

Use the company's internal reporting system. It is there for your protection and security.

D. Supervisors and Others in Management

If harassment involves a member of the management team or your direct supervisor, then you have a significantly greater problem than if the harasser is a co-worker. Your supervisor or manager can use his/

her power to manipulate your work environment and has the opportunity to retaliate against you for rebuffing sexual overtures.

What are the options: Change your position within the organization? Talk to co-workers? Report your supervisor to the personnel office or the owner? Seek government assistance? Seek legal help? All these have their share of risk for emotional stress and negative personal impact. The only option that does not present such a risk is to change jobs completely. This option has all the inherent risk of starting a career over and nullifies benefits of seniority you may have built up with your present employer. A significant number of attorneys and others in the field of human resources would disagree with this last option.

Remember that if your company is willing to distribute this booklet to you, then they are going to take a firm stand when it comes to investigating any reported incident of sexual harassment.

What is the answer when the harasser is your supervisor or manager? Make sure you have a witness that can support the events you are reporting. In the case of Quid Pro Quo (this-for-that) harassment, a witness may be impractical. However, if the harassment involves the creation of a hostile and abusive work environment, then there is a good chance that someone else has suffered the same experience.

In Section VI. "What to Do if You Are a Victim," there are suggested options that others have used when confronting issues of sexual harassment.