

It's The New Millennium and They Still Don't Get It?!" The Hostile Work Environment

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Are you are a routine victim of sexual harassment? Do you work in a hostile work environment where the mere thought of going to work brings on a migraine headache? Are you a supervisor or manager trying desperately to find out what to do to professionalize your organization? Read on, this article is for YOU.

I have worked in predominantly male professions, otherwise known today as the "non traditional" work environments (I hate that term!) such as the moving industry, military, sales and in law enforcement. For as long as I have been of legal age to work, I have worked for and with men in male dominated occupations. I have been in the policing profession for over 20 years. I take pride in the fact that I have managed to successfully dissuade gender biased language and work place behavior for many years. I quickly promoted to a reasonably high rank and hold one of the most challenging yet, rewarding and unique assignments this profession has to offer. I am the Women's Coordinator for the Los Angeles Police Department, a position appointed to by the Chief of Police.

This article is about the continuing annoying problems associated with gender relations, gender discrimination, gender harassment and gender equity in the workplace. But, I will not cover these issues as separate topics. Instead, I plan to take you on a journey into the hostile work environment. It is not my intention to fill these pages with unintelligible legal mumbo jumbo or organizational policy mumbo jumbo that is not only hard to understand, but hard to interpret as well. This is a "down to earth" assessment, based on my personal experience and interviews of why employees and employers alike are fed up with trying to answer that never ending question, "why don't they get it?"

Let us first begin by identifying that proverbial "They". **They** are the men and women who refuse to accept the dynamics of gender differences in the workplace. **They** are the men and women who use gender harassment as a way of demonstrating personal or professional power. **They** are the supervisors who continue to ask employee victims what the best resolution should be to a complaint of sexual harassment. **They** are the employers who refuse to accept the fact that their employees are the true "bottom line". **They** are the men and women who continue to view sexual horseplay in the workplace as "fun". **They** are the men and women who refuse to respect the personal boundaries of others. **They** are the supervisors who turn a blind eye to workplace hostility and disparate treatment of others. **They** are the co-workers who know and witness the biased, unprofessional and inappropriate actions of others but who refuse to get involved.

They are the men and women employees who perpetuate the six figure lawsuit settlements. **They** are power hungry supervisors who indiscriminately treat employees with disdain and disrespect. **They** are the supervisors who suggest that you should have a stiff upper lip, stop whining, be strong, or worse, "handle your complaint yourself". **They** are the men and women who have labeled themselves as invincible to organizational discipline. **They** are the men and women who think that gender bias, discrimination and or harassment does not exist. **They** are the men and women who refuse to report allegations to their supervisors in fear of being ostracized. **They** are the supervisors that hate dealing with these issues. **They** are all these descriptions and more!

Who could imagine ten years ago that the work environment would be as complicated as it is today. Today, in the year 2000, we are more diversified than any period in history. Discrimination laws have been on the books for almost 30 years now and managers continue to look for the line that reads "treat your employees with respect and professionalism" because "it's the right thing to do". Absent that line in law books or organizational policies and procedures, no one seems to "get it". We still find ourselves questioning and defining, challenging and arguing, acquiescing and tolerating, ignoring, humiliating, justifying and blaming the innocuous laws and policies for not "getting it". Somewhere in our adult lives, many of us have forgotten our lessons in values, principles and ethics. Where did we forget the age-old value of kindness to our fellow human being?

Organizations today spend millions of dollars in diversity training programs, in the creation of employee relations departments, ombudsman offices and women's issues units in their feeble attempts to pretend that they "get it". Organizations with and without these programs continue to pay out six figure court settlements because juries all over the country are demonstrating the fact that they still don't "get it". Why isn't anyone wising up to the fact that men and women of all races, religions, ages, national origins, physical abilities, sexual orientations, to name a few, all want the same thing. Employees just want to be treated like they are productive, valued members of the organization the work for without being belittled, embarrassed, harassed, inappropriately touched, laughed at, or just plain devalued by co-workers or supervisors in the work place.

You are probably reading this and wondering why this is not the "how to" manual you were hoping to find. I said this was a different journey into the basics of human interaction. STOP trying to interpret laws regarding discrimination as if it were a foreign language. STOP trying to design organizational policy by listing "do's and don'ts" of everyday office behavior as if you were running a kindergarten class. STOP giving training to your employees at a level that is full of legal mumbo jumbo. STOP insulting your employees and co-workers by demanding workplace professionalism but demonstrating the opposite. STOP designing divisions, units or specialty offices without the power or authority needed to make a difference.

STOP using the belittling of others as a demonstration of power. STOP supervisors from going out of their way to discredit the whistleblowers of inappropriate workplace conduct. STOP re-victimizing reporters of sexual harassment by using interrogating interview tactics.

DO have policies that make sense. DO put on quality employee training sessions that allow for open honest dialog, are interactive and provide for the identification of proactive ways for establishing professional work environments for all employees. DO whatever it takes as an employee, co-worker, peer, supervisor, manager or leader to professionalize workplace behavior – COURAGE.