

HR TIP OF THE WEEK



TOPIC: Impactful Anti-Harassment Training

Ah-ha Moment: Last week, as I was leaving a meeting with a colleague, a stranger complimented my dress. “I like your dress, ma’am.” My colleague took the statement as sweet. I focused on the “ma’am” (apparently, I have graduated from a younger miss to an older ma’am). His compliment had a different impact than intended. What does my encounter have to do with anti-harassment training? When training employees, we teach that impact matters, even when the speaker’s intent is innocent. Whether a comment violates the law or company policy requires context and reasonableness. Explanations of, “I didn’t mean to offend you;” “I wasn’t trying to harass you;” or “You took it the wrong way” are not excuses in the workplace. Returning to my scenario, was calling me ma’am harassment? Of course not. But it reminded me that what a speaker intends and what a listener hears are not always the same thing. Could ma’am be interpreted in any way in this scenario that is undermining? Does context matter (what if this is someone who wants my job and constantly makes comments that incorporate my age)? Have I gone too far or are we just starting to unpack it? Impactful training should spark these discussions.

HR TIP: Training cannot be approached as a check the box exercise on the HR To Do List. HR can transform training into a meaningful exercise by offering real-world examples like mine, where employees can relate, question, or disagree. Effective training improves workplace culture, minimizes workplace conflicts, and provides a defense in litigation. It’s time to revisit your training materials to ensure that they have kept up with our modern workforce and spark discussion.

Brigette N. Eagan, Esq.

973.535.7114

beagan@genovaburns.com

ABOUT ME

I work with HR and legal on the types of workplace issues that make you do a double take. I've been counseling employers and tackling their employment issues for two decades and going strong. I'm a Partner at Genova Burns and Chair of the Human Resources, Law and Compliance Practice Group.



The content of this material is intended for informational purposes only. It is not intended to solicit business or to provide legal advice. Your use of this material does not create an attorney-client relationship between you and Genova Burns LLC or any of the Firm’s attorneys.