Five Ways to Jump Start Your Harassment Prevention Training Program
More than ever, workplace leaders are being asked to step up efforts to prevent harassment and other forms of workplace misconduct.

Many leaders are asking themselves whether designing a robust training program will help them with their prevention efforts. This is especially true given recent news stories that say workplace training isn't effective. Digging deeper into the data and research on this topic, what is clear is that poorly designed and poorly executed training is ineffective. The secret, therefore, is to design and deploy training that actually works.

What are some of the best practices that will ensure training becomes an effective piece of the prevention puzzle? Here are five ways you can develop and deliver a winning harassment prevention program.

1. Make it a program

Research points to the fact that harassment prevention training has been largely fruitless because too many entities see it as a one-time, check-the-box activity that is simply done to meet legal mandates. Employees and managers know when a company doesn't care about the workplace culture and understand that this type of compliance-only training isn't designed to move the needle when it comes to behavior. Instead of taking this approach, establish a robust training program that includes subject matters that are known to move the needle when it comes to preventing (and resolving) harassment and other workplace misconduct. Include learning lessons for targets, those accused, and bystanders/witnesses. Teach your entire workforce, not just your managers. Make sure you include vital topics such as unconscious bias, diversity and inclusion, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and effective communication skills.

2. Combine methodologies

As a companion to the best practice of making the harassment prevention training a program rather than a course, your training will be most effective if it combines methodologies. If you'd like to conduct live training for certain populations, do so. But at some companies, live training for all is simply not feasible. If that's the case, you should incorporate high-quality online training modules into your program. These e-learning options should include formal training sessions, micro burst lessons to reinforce what is learned in formal training, and an ability to ask questions and have them answered by experts (and that provide real life guidance rather than legalistic answers). Also incorporate other ways of learning. Buy your team a book or a subscription to a magazine that covers these issues. Forward interesting articles on these important topics. Forward an email with a short video that drives home a particular point. Bottom line, keep the issue of harassment prevention top of mind for everyone.

3. Ensure Design Expertise

Make sure the training content (whether live or online training) is designed by experts who understand the nuances of the workplace. That means that, at a minimum, they must have an understanding of legal requirements (although this does not mean the course designer needs to be an attorney). But an expert in the design and delivery of effective harassment prevention training has to know more than the law – s/he must also be well-versed in the development and enforcement of workplace policies, must have experience investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct, and must include scenarios that are nuanced and realistic, not obvious and tacky. The content developers should have the requisite compassion and communication skills to develop training that will keep the learner engaged and interested, and that has a takeaway learning lesson that can and will be applied in the workplace.
4. Make sure the training is interactive

A skilled trainer will incorporate activities and time for Q&A into live training sessions. But how do you make online training interactive? We can look to the detailed regulations drafted by California’s Fair Employment and Housing Council to find guidance (the regulations can be found at 2 CCR §11024). According to these regulations, there are at least three ways you can accomplish interactivity in online modules. First, make sure your online training solution includes a way for learners to ask questions and get them answered by the expert course designers. Next, make sure you publish this Q&A in the training so that the learner can not only interact with the trainer, but can also interact with other learners (by seeing other questions that have been asked and answered). Finally, make sure the training is designed to actually be interactive – meaning that the training isn’t a simple “plug-and-play” model, but instead includes tools such as workplace scenarios, pop-up boxes with definitions and additional information, learning and polling questions, etc.

5. Collect, analyze and use data

Prior to launching a training program, collect and analyze data that will guide you to what is right for your company. It’s vital that prior to implementing a training program, you define the goal of the training. If, for example, the information you collect shows weaknesses in certain areas, focus on those. Review feedback you’ve received from prior training sessions to make necessary tweaks. Talk with your employees to find out what will resonate. A question I ask when I design training is “what do you want participants to say as they are walking out of the session?” Answering this question makes it easier to design an effective training session and program. Use a similar methodology after training – use information from the sessions to uncover potential blind spots (perhaps you were surprised to hear how many questions were asked on a particular issue, for example). And finally, to the extent you incorporate online training resources, make sure you use the data included in those courses for preparation and learning lessons. This might include use of data related to tracking engagement (where are your employees spending their time, what sections are engaging, what video scenes garner the most questions, etc.? and you should use this data on the back end as well (data collected will help you identify trending topics or possible blind spots, and provides a road map for what to do in the future).

By following these five simple steps, you’ll be well on your way to using training as one tool to prevent workplace harassment.