Majority of Companies Require Staff to Take Sexual Harassment Prevention Training

Average training length is just two hours per year.

BY MEGAN COLE

Sexual harassment has made its rounds in the media lately. From Time’s Up to the #MeToo movement, awareness of this issue is at an all-time high. Clearly, organizations must deal with it, but what exactly is sexual harassment and how can talent development professionals help?

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines sexual harassment as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.” The EEOC also states that prevention is the best way to combat such unwanted behavior. Therefore, talent development practitioners are uniquely suited to help organizations avoid such issues through training.

ATD Research recently conducted an online poll of 955 organizational learning, training, and human resources professionals to determine the existence of sexual harassment prevention programs. The results of this poll yielded several interesting findings. First, ATD Research found that 88 percent of organizations have a formal, written sexual harassment policy in place, yet only 71 percent said that they offer sexual harassment prevention training. It’s worth noting that such training is not federally mandated in the United States; instead, it’s up to states to decide whether to require the training.

There are other key questions when it comes to sexual harassment prevention training that need to be considered, too: Who receives the training? What should its focus be? Asked the former question, 77 percent of those who provide sexual harassment prevention training require all staff to participate. Asked the latter question, 91 percent of respondents reported that training covers peer-to-peer harassment, while 90 percent said it covers supervisor harassment of direct reports. Meanwhile, 73 percent of participants said that the training covers harassment of reports “down the line”—meaning down the chain of command or reporting structure.

Given these findings, it seems likely that the talent development function can help tackle the sexual harassment problems companies face. By implementing sexual harassment prevention training, organizations can create awareness of the problem and help employees avoid it.

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