

IN THIS

# together™



# Q & A

## **Employee Handbook**

**Difficult Questions and Practical Answers**

**\*IMPORTANT\*** Even though this handbook has been edited by a lot of very wise people, it's still just helpful suggestions. It's not the law.

**Have you ever been stuck for the right words to say in an uncomfortable situation?**

**Have you ever caught a co-worker staring at your body?**

**Have you ever been the target of ugly rumors or gossip?**

This handbook won't solve every problem for you, but it might help you find the right words to say, avoid some common pitfalls, or give you the courage to take action toward a kinder and more respectful workplace.

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# MOODS, PERSONAL ISSUES & ATTITUDES

## ***How do I leave my bad mood at the door?***

### **Decide that you're going to.**

It really is that simple—and that hard. But you're a strong person. And even when you can't change your emotions instantly, you can control the way you act. So before you come in the door, make a conscious decision not to take any of the stresses of your personal life out on the people you work with.

Here are a couple of tips that might help:

- Before you get out of the car or off the bus, write down the stuff in your personal life that you can't do anything about during work hours. Leave it there until you can give it the time it deserves—after work.
- Simply spend a few extra minutes in the parking lot before you come in. Listen to music or flip through a magazine.

If your bad mood is not about home, but work, and you really do have a problem that you need to address with a co-worker, don't just sabotage them with your attitude; talk to them about it.

## ***How do I deal with a grumpy co-worker?***

**Give them a break and don't assume that their grumpiness is about you.** Everyone has things going on outside of work, so if one of your co-workers has an occasional bad day, just let it go. If it looks like it's becoming an every day everyday thing or seriously affects the way you work together, you can check it out in a non threatening way by saying something like, *"It seems like you've been under some stress lately. I just want to make sure that if you're having a problem with me, you'll let me know, okay?"*

## ***How do I deal with an overly cheerful co-worker?***

### **Give them a break and be glad that you're not dealing with a grump.**

Maybe you're not a morning person. Maybe your peppy co-worker's cheerful greeting makes you want to scream. If that's your only problem, it's your problem, not theirs. Sometimes people annoy us, just because. So if it's not actually hurting you, just be polite and move on. After awhile, if someone continues to happily chat about things unrelated to work, you can always say, "*I really need to concentrate on this project right now.*"

### ***How do I deal with negative, sarcastic and whining co-workers?***

#### **Good luck.**

You need to realize that you can't change or fix people. They only change when they want to. The problem with these kind of co-workers is that they can drag you into the same rut that they are stuck in. Be careful. You might be tempted to be sarcastic back: "*That's what I like about you, you're always so positive.*" Or "*Would you like a little cheese with that whine?*" It won't work, but you might feel better.

### ***What should I do if somebody breaks down in front of me?***

#### **Be sympathetic and give them their privacy.**

It's a helpless feeling to see somebody crying. We often feel the obligation to do something that will help the person feel better. That's appropriate with friends and family. But in the workplace, you are not equipped or expected to be anyone's counselor. If somebody breaks down in front of you, you can acknowledge their situation by saying something like, "*I'm sorry you're so upset. Is there somebody you can talk to?*" or "*I'm sorry—I'll give you some privacy.*"

### ***What do I say if someone loses a loved one?***

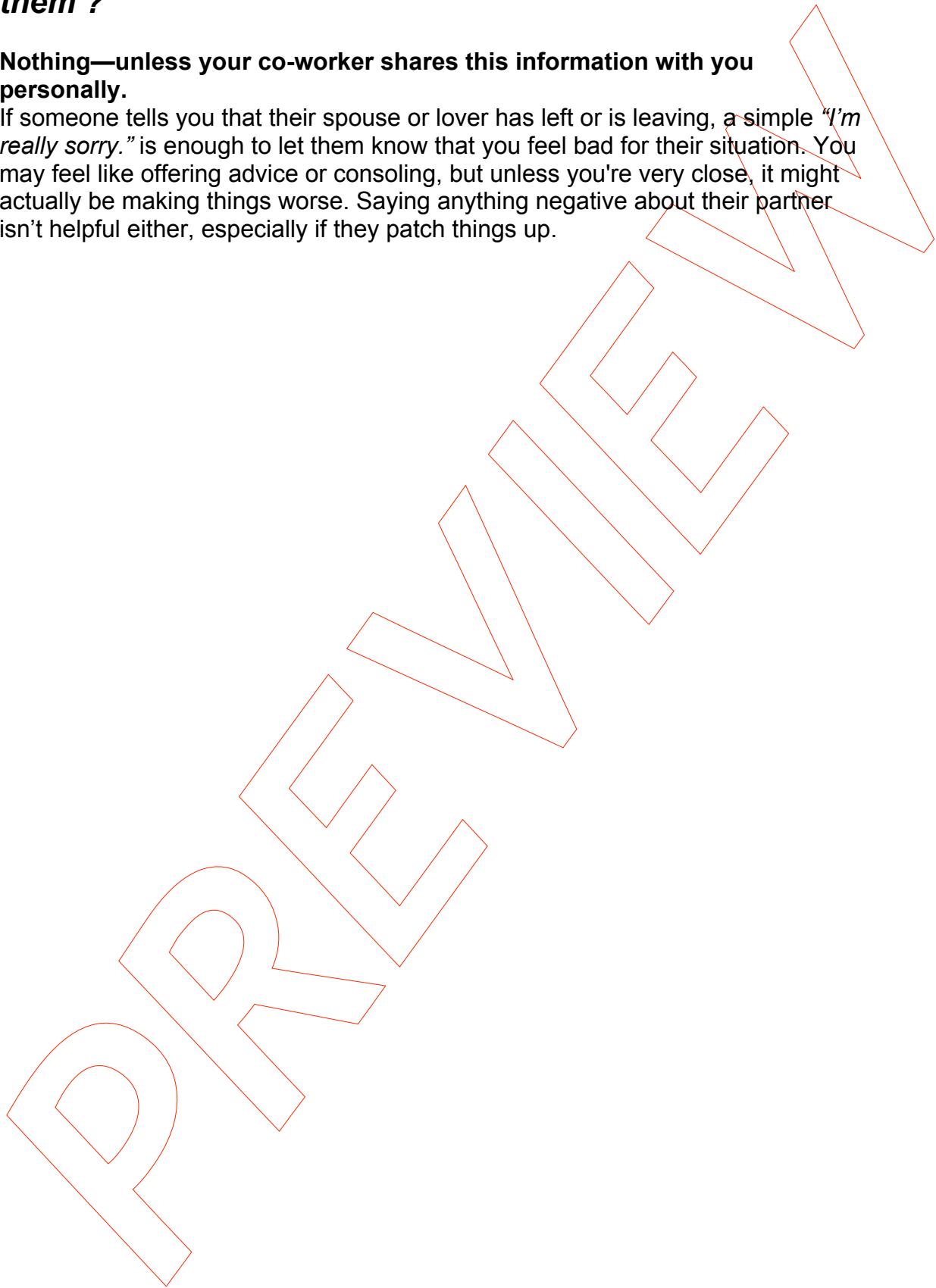
#### **“I’m sorry...”**

In situations like this, we sometimes find ourselves at a loss for words, thinking that we should have something profound to say. Sometimes we feel so awkward that we don't say anything at all. Do say something. It's human kindness to acknowledge such a profound event in someone's life. But it's OK to keep it simple: "*I'm really sorry to hear about your mom.*" That's all a co-worker needs to hear to let him or her know that you're sorry for their loss.

## ***What do I say if someone's "significant other" leaves them ?***

**Nothing—unless your co-worker shares this information with you personally.**

If someone tells you that their spouse or lover has left or is leaving, a simple “*I’m really sorry.*” is enough to let them know that you feel bad for their situation. You may feel like offering advice or consoling, but unless you’re very close, it might actually be making things worse. Saying anything negative about their partner isn’t helpful either, especially if they patch things up.





# GOSSIP, PRIVACY & NOSY CO-WORKERS

## ***How do I stop someone from telling me gossip?***

### **Stick your fingers in your ears and start singing.**

If that doesn't work, interrupt and say something like, "*You know what? I would never listen to something negative about you, and this is none of my business either.*" The real problem comes if you've been happy to gossip in the past and now seem "holier than thou." In that case you might need to say something like, "*You know what? I gossip too much and it's starting to bother me. It would help me a lot if you took me out of the loop, OK?*"

## ***What if I am the target of gossip?***

### **Ask the gossips to stop.**

Don't accuse. Don't try to get even. That only drags you down to their level. If you know that someone is talking about you behind your back, go directly to them that person and say something like, "*I hope you know that I would never talk about you to other people, and I hope I can expect the same in return. Can I?*" If it doesn't stop and it's affecting your work or the way others work with you, go to a supervisor and let him or her know what's going on. At that point it's not about you, it's about work.

## ***What if my boss is a gossip?***

### **Good luck.**

You might want to take this one in steps. The first step is to send a silent signal. The next time your boss gossips to you, don't join in. That takes all the fun out of gossiping. If that doesn't work, you might need to say something like, "*You know what? I need to work with Dave, and, true or not, that doesn't help me respect him.*" Yeah, right, you're thinking. Have any good job leads? Seriously—it doesn't have to be that big a deal. Your boss knows they shouldn't be gossiping, so just smile, make sure you don't lecture, and let them save face.

## ***What if it's not gossip, it's a fact?***

**If the fact is about someone else, it's still not yours to tell.**

Whether it's true or false, negative information of any kind about another person is not your business. Everyone should be entitled to share information about themselves when they want and to whom they want.

## ***Should I tell a co-worker if they are the target of gossip?***

**No. But in some cases you may want to tell your supervisor.**

Putting yourself into the middle of this could get really messy—and you probably have enough going on at work without stepping into that one. You could certainly do your part to stop the gossip by telling the gossips to lay off and that you don't want to hear it. But, if it continues and is undermining your co-worker's ability to do his or her job or it is affecting the way other team members are treating him or her, tell a supervisor what's going on.

## ***What if I find out that a co-worker is doing something unsafe or illegal at work?***

**That's not gossip. Let a supervisor know.**

Don't put yourself in the position of confronting a co-worker yourself when you see something like this going on. That's your supervisor's job. (And aren't you glad?) If someone's actions are unsafe or illegal, and you know about it, you could be considered an accessory. That person is putting everyone in the workplace at risk. By letting someone in leadership know, you're just doing your part to protect everyone's right to work safely.

## ***How do I get someone to stop asking me about something that I regret I ever shared?***

**Just let the person know in a nice way that you don't want to discuss it anymore.**

*"I'm sorry if I put you in an awkward position by telling you that. Thanks for being so concerned, but at this point I'd rather just move on and not talk about it anymore."*

## **What if a co-worker insists on telling me all of their troubles?**

**Kindly tell them that you don't want to be their counselor.**

If the troubles are about work, you can say something like, "*I'm sorry. It sounds like you're really frustrated. I don't want to be insensitive, but I need to concentrate on my work right now*". Maybe it would help to talk to (manager's name) about it."

If your co-worker's stories are about his or her personal life, you can say something like, "*I know you're not looking for answers from me, but I'm feeling uncomfortable talking so much about your personal life.*

## **What if a co-worker asks me what I get paid?**

**Ask them if they want to know about your love life too.**

Not really. Just smile and say something like, "*I consider that private information.*"



# PROMISES & BROKEN PROMISES

## ***How do I say "no" to a request without making someone mad?***

### **To a co-worker...carefully.**

If you are going to say "no" to a request, you need to make sure that the request is for something that is clearly not your responsibility. Even then, you need to say it carefully. Here are a couple of ideas:

To a co-worker, when the answer is just "no":

*"Sorry, but as far as I know, that's not my responsibility and I need to concentrate on my own work right now."*

To a co-worker, when the answer is "not right now":

*"I'm sorry, but I really don't have the time to do that for you right now. Can I get it to you by \_\_\_\_\_?"*

### **To a boss...very carefully.**

Obviously, it makes a difference who's doing the requesting. Your manager is not going to look too kindly on a friendly "no thanks, I'd rather not" response when he or she is asking for something. But you do need to take the lead in keeping requests realistic, so you can deliver what you say you will.

### **Discuss the request before you agree to it.**

You need to find out EXACTLY WHAT and EXACTLY WHEN the requested action or item is needed. If someone, even your boss, is asking for something that is unrealistic in the given amount of time, say something like, *"Can we talk about the time frame for this? I don't want to promise something that I can't deliver."*

## **What if I can't get something that I promised, done on time?**

### **Let people know, now.**

It happens sometimes. Time slips away, projects grow, we procrastinate ... whatever. The most important thing now is to take responsibility for it, let people know that it's not going to be on time. That may not be pleasant, but the bad news will go down more easily if you can tell them when they can expect it. And here's another tip - You'll come off looking a lot better if you don't blame, whine or make excuses—just get it done.

## **What if my boss doesn't do what they say they will?**

### **If it affects you negatively, talk to your boss.**

OK, this is tricky. After all, your boss is the boss and you don't want to be disrespectful. But if your work is suffering because he or she is dropping the ball, you could say something like, "Can I talk to you about something? Did I understand correctly when you promised to \_\_\_\_\_ by this Friday?"

Having said that, say no more. Don't push it. Your boss will get the message.

## **Should I cover for a co-worker who makes me look bad?**

**No. But talk to your co-worker about it first before you talk to anyone else.** If someone else's poor work is making you look bad, you need to be honest with that person and let him or her know that they need to do their part. You should also let them know in advance if you're forced to take the problem to your boss.

## **What do I say to a co-worker who always asks me for help on things that should be their responsibility?**

### **"I'm sorry—I can't."**

*"I'm sorry—I can't. I understand that you need help with this, but I'm having trouble getting my own work done. Maybe you should talk to manager's name about getting some help."*



## PICTURES, JOKES & LANGUAGE

### **What if someone complains about the language I use, and no one else cares?**

#### **Change the language you use.**

Not many of us like confrontation. So you can probably assume that this person is not complaining because they want to. Your language really offends them. And maybe it does bother other people but they just haven't said anything to you. Regardless, it's much easier to stop using a few words than to explain it all to your boss, which is probably the next step they'll take if you don't stop. So just make sure that the words you use at work are appropriate for work.

### **What if a co-worker makes a racial slur or joke?**

#### **Ask him or her to stop.**

Racist stories or comments are not only rude, but can bring serious legal consequences in the workplace. They should never be tolerated. So don't feel like you're being rude when you interrupt the storyteller to say, "*I don't want to hear that.*" Demeaning people because of their race is out of line and could get them fired. If they don't stop, make sure your supervisor knows.

### **What if a co-worker makes a sexual slur or joke?**

#### **Ask him or her to stop.**

It can also be illegal and is certainly disrespectful to make negative comments in the workplace about people based upon their gender—or, for that matter, their religion, their age, their physical disabilities or any other legally protected status. (See your company's Anti-Harassment Policy.) Putting those comments in the form of a joke doesn't make them any less illegal ... or rude for that matter. You have every right to say something like, "*That's not funny, it's rude. And it could even be illegal.*" If they don't stop, let a supervisor know.

## **What if a co-worker calls me an offensive name?**

### **Don't let it go. Tell him or her to stop.**

The old "sticks and stones" rhyme does not apply in the workplace. Words do harm people. Slurs, name-calling and bullying can be considered illegal. They should not be happening at work. Don't tolerate it. If it happens, say something like, "*Please don't call me that again. That's totally out of line and personally offensive.*"

If it continues, tell a supervisor.

## **What if someone gives me a nickname I hate?**

### **Don't let it slide.**

Your silence can be taken as permission, so say something to them the first time it happens. "*Please don't call me by that name. I really don't like it. OK?*" It's just that simple. It's your name. You don't have to put up with people calling you anything other than what you want to be called.

## **How do I tell someone to stop swearing?**

### **You don't—you ask them.**

This can be a tricky subject. Words that are very offensive to one person may just be words of emphasis to someone else. But if someone else's swearing is bothering you, respectfully ask him or her to stop. You might say something like, "*I hope you don't mean it, but there are times when your language offends me.*" If the person doesn't get the message say, "*Please don't swear when we're working together. It really bothers me.*"

## **What if my boss says demeaning things about people?**

### **If it bothers you, ask him or her to stop.**

Whether your boss is trying to be funny or doesn't even realize how rude he or she is, demeaning other people is inappropriate in the workplace. So even though what you really want to say is, "*What's wrong with you? Didn't your mother ever teach you any manners?*" it would probably be better to try something like, "*Even if you're only kidding, it makes me very uncomfortable to hear you make fun of other people.*"

If it doesn't stop, talk to another supervisor or someone in your human resources department about it.

## **What if someone displays an offensive or suggestive picture?**

### **Ask them to take it down.**

Similar to the old saying "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," the law says that "offensiveness is in the eye of the beholder." The legal standard that a judge will uphold is, "What would a reasonable person (or, specifically, a reasonable man or woman) find offensive?"

So if you consider a picture or cartoon more than just stupid or juvenile, if you really find it offensive, say something. Ask the owner to take it down. If it's anonymous, take it down yourself. If it persists, let your supervisor know.

## **What if someone sends me an offensive or suggestive e-mail?**

### **Tell him or her immediately to stop.**

Suggestive materials in any form can be considered illegal at work. Even if you're not the sender of the e-mail, you could be implicated in an investigation. So don't let it happen to you. Deal with it right away by replying with something like, "*Hey, I didn't appreciate that e-mail you sent me. Please don't send me anything like that again.*"



# SEXUAL ATTRACTION & SEXUAL HARASSMENT

## ***What if I want to ask a co-worker out?***

### **Think about it. Then think about it some more.**

Some companies have very specific rules against co-workers dating, and for good reason. They don't want to lose either of you, if love fades. Check out your company's specifics before you pop the question. There is no law that says you can't date co-workers (although some folks who have been through a work-turned-personal, turned-rotten relationship would tell you that there should be). Think about it. How would you feel if you had to go to work tomorrow with all your ex-girlfriends or ex-boyfriends? Doesn't it sound fun? So weigh the pros and cons carefully before you act.

The only idea that is worse is an employee/boss relationship. Now there's a lawsuit waiting to happen.

## ***What if a co-worker I'm no longer dating starts spreading rumors?***

### **Ask him or her to stop.**

Ain't love grand? This is what we meant in the last question about the potential for things getting messy when co-workers date. OK—no more lecturing. This situation is more sensitive, because you've had a relationship with this person, but the solution is the same as the one we discussed earlier about handling gossip. Ask the person to stop by saying something like, *"Can we agree to treat each other with respect at work? Please don't talk about me to other people and I'll make sure not to talk about you."* Or *"I know you might be really angry right now, but can we work this out on our own time? Please don't talk about me to people at work."* Hopefully the other person will agree to this level of respect, but if the rumors continue and are affecting your work, you need to let a manager help you deal with it.

## **What if a co-worker uses sexual innuendoes as a joke?**

### **Tell him or her to stop.**

The dictionary defines an innuendo as "a hint." This technique is safer than overt harassment because the harasser can claim they never said anything about sex or they were only joking. But in a court of law, "intent" doesn't matter and "funny" doesn't matter. So don't feel like you have to laugh or ignore it when someone tries to make sexual comments cute. Just say something like, "*I don't think that's funny and it isn't appropriate at work. Please don't talk like that around me.*"

## **What if a co-worker always gets too close or touches me?**

### **Let them know you don't like it.**

People differ on the amount of personal space they need to feel comfortable when they are talking or working with others. Some people are perfectly fine with less space and might not realize that they are making you feel uncomfortable by standing so close. So if you like a little more space around you, just let people know. "*Can you back up a couple of steps? I feel uncomfortable when you stand so close to me.*"

When it comes to others touching you, it's your call. But be clear with others as to what you like or don't like. Remember, your silence can be confused with permission. If you feel a person is touching you in a harassing way, say, "*I don't like it when you touch me, so please don't.*" If you feel the person is touching you in a friendly way, but it still makes you uncomfortable, just smile and say, "*I'd rather you didn't touch me. Thanks.*"

If for any reason the person doesn't stop, talk to your supervisor immediately. If your supervisor is doing the touching, talk to his or her supervisor or call the human resources department.

## **What if a co-worker is always looking at my body?**

### **Tell him or her to stop, or talk to a supervisor if you feel too intimidated.**

OK. How awkward is this? What do you say? "*Hey, get your eyes off my body.*" Maybe some of us could say that, but most of us couldn't. However, you can say it in a different way—and, yes, you have every right to say it. In fact, you need to say it. No matter what words you choose, it's going to be uncomfortable, but, then, not as uncomfortable as their unwelcome gawking at you, right? So try saying something like, "*I'm really uncomfortable with the way that you seem to be looking at my body when we're talking.*" If the offending co-worker plays innocent,

you could follow up with, “*Well, you might not be aware of it, but it really bothers me, so could you keep your eyes on my eyes when we talk?*”

Some of you might be thinking, “Right. I would never be able to say that to one of my co-workers.” That’s OK. If you feel intimidated by your co-worker or just don’t have the courage to talk face to face with her or him, tell a manager what’s going on. But *do* something about it. It’s not going to go away on its own.

## ***What if my boss is always looking at my body?***

### **Tell someone else in management about it.**

We’ve all heard people say, “What can I do? He’s my boss.” Or “She’s my boss.” But this isn’t just something you put up with. If your boss is looking at you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, it’s sexual harassment and it needs to stop. It’s understandable that you may not want to confront your boss yourself, but you need to tell somebody. So go to another manager or to someone in human resources in your company and let that person help you deal with the problem.

## ***What if a co-worker comes on to me outside of work?***

### **It's up to you.**

The answer here all depends upon the type of come-on, and how you feel toward the co-worker. If it happens outside of work and it’s not at a work-related function, then a come-on isn’t automatically harassment (even though it might be unwelcome). So if you are not interested in seeing this co-worker socially, you need to tell him or her straight-out, *“I’m sorry, but we work together and I’m not interested in seeing you personally.”* If the come-on is offensive to you, let the other person know that too. *“Please don’t talk to me like that. I don’t appreciate it. And I’m not interested in seeing you socially.”* If the co-worker continues to pursue you in any way (whether at work or outside of work), let a manager know what’s going on.

## ***What if a customer comes on to me?***

### **Tell him or her to stop and then tell your manager.**

Customers should give you the same amount of respect that your company expects you to give them. So if any of your customers step over the line, you have every right to say something like, *“I don’t appreciate you talking to me like that. It isn’t OK and I need to ask you to stop.”* Then let your manager know what happened, for two reasons. One, your manager is responsible for talking to the customer, to make sure that it doesn’t happen to you again. And Two, none of your co-workers should have to put up with what you just experienced.



# TOLERANCE & DIFFERENCES

## **What if someone asks me if I'm gay?**

### **Don't even address the question.**

This question or any question about your sex life, personal relationships or private life is out of line. Don't say anything, verbally or by your reaction. The person asking this is either clueless, mentally challenged or incredibly rude or possibly prejudiced. The best way to respond is to calmly say something like, "*I'm not going to respond to that or any other question about my private life. Please don't ask me about my personal life again.*" If the person continues, walk away and let your manager know.

## **What if someone makes fun of my English or my accent?**

### **Ask him or her to stop.**

Ridiculing anyone for the way he or she speaks is unacceptable in the workplace. If it's directed at your ethnic origin it could be legally considered harassment. Go directly to the person and ask him or her to stop by saying something like, "*Please don't make fun of the way I speak. I'm trying my best, so please stop.*" If the person continues, let your manager know it's happening.

## **What if I can't understand a co-worker's English?**

### **Ask him or her to repeat what they said—more slowly.**

If you have a hard time understanding one of your co-workers, don't just walk away without a clue as to what that person was saying because you felt too awkward to ask them to repeat themselves. The person wants to be understood, you want to understand, so smile and politely ask, "*I'm sorry, I didn't understand. Could you please repeat that more slowly?*" And one more hint: Just because you have trouble understanding someone doesn't mean that they have trouble understanding you. So unless someone asks you to, don't assume that you should speak slower and certainly not louder.

## ***What if someone is always mean to me?***

### **Bullies don't stop until they're confronted.**

If someone is always mean to you and you have absolutely no idea why, they may just be a mean person. It's a sad fact of life, but no matter where you go, you're going to find bullies. Bullies are basically cowards, so the nicer you are, the meaner they get, and the meaner you are, the nicer they get. If you can deal with it, ignore them, but if it's affecting your work, you may want to say something like, "*I can't think of why you should be so rude to me, can you? If we have something to fix, let's fix it. Otherwise, why don't you pretend I don't exist, and I'll do the same for you?*" If that statement sounds like a little more than you can pull off, let your manager help you solve the problem.

## ***What if someone is always trying to get me into a political or religious discussion?***

### **Tell them you're not interested.**

Some people sincerely believe that they have discovered truths that will make your life or the world better. Other people just love a good debate and the sound of their own voice. They'll bait you with questions and comments until they can get you into a discussion. It's best just to say something like, "*You're obviously very sincere in your beliefs, but I'm not interested in hearing them right now. If that changes, I'll come and talk to you. Alright?*"

## ***What if someone makes fun of my personal style?***

### **Ask him or her to stop.**

Your personal style is just that—personal. With the exception of your supervisor mentioning that some element of your style is particularly inappropriate for work, no one else has any right to make jokes or negative comments about it. So regardless of whether it's a comment about your hair, your clothes, your jewelry or anything else, just tell the person (whose own personal style of communication could be classified as rude) to stop. "*My personal style is my own business. I find your comments offensive, so please stop.*"



# COURTESY & SMALL KINDNESSES

## ***What if someone never says "good morning"?***

**Don't take it personally and don't let it stop you from being courteous.**

There could be a lot of reasons. Maybe they're shy. Maybe their mind is elsewhere. Maybe this person is so grumpy in the morning that you don't want them near you, anyway. There's really no excuse for not being able to muster up enough courtesy to say "good morning." But if someone you work with can't manage it, just let it go. Don't assume that it has anything to do with you.

But don't stop saying "good morning" to them every day. That will really bug them. Who knows, maybe it will rub off?

## ***What if someone never says "thank you"?***

**Don't take it personally and don't let it stop you from being courteous.**

It is irritating when someone you work with doesn't acknowledge something you've done for them by saying "thank you." In fact, it's just plain bad manners. So if you work with this person a lot and it really bothers you, you could talk with him or her about it: *"You rarely say thank you. Is that intentional?"* Otherwise, just let it go, but make sure that you continue treating him or her with the same respect you would like others to show you. Like we said, maybe it will rub off.

## ***What if there's no time to say "please" and "thank you"?***

**Come on ...**

OK. Here's a test. Keep your eye on your watch and say "thank you." How long did that take? One-fifth of a second? Maybe you can shorten it to "thanks"—now that's even quicker. So unless you're a drag racer or you're a member of a bobsled team, you can probably give up the extra fifth of a second it takes to say "please" or "thank you" to the people you work with. Now, granted, maybe there are instances in which time is critical; let's say you're involved in a shootout with bank robbers: In that case, you can always go back when the dust settles and hand out the thank-yous.

## **What if my boss is abrupt and rude?**

### **This one is tricky.**

First of all, you need to ask yourself a couple of questions. Does your boss treat all of your co-workers the same, or do you feel singled out in receiving this negative treatment? If he or she treats everyone poorly and it really bothers you, you could talk to your boss about it. But only talk about how it affects you personally. Don't go in as an advocate for the whole group. Not only is that not your job, but it is pretty certain to backfire on you.

And here's another hint: Don't start out your conversation with "you" statements like, "**You** have no right ..." or "**You** never treat us with any respect!" Depending on your tone, those can be fighting words. It's always better to use "I feel" statements; for example, "... when that happens, **I feel** unappreciated." Or "... when I hear that, **I feel** very disrespected."

If you feel that you are being singled out and the rude behavior is directed toward you personally, if it's abusive, and if it's affecting your work, you need to talk to someone else in management or your human resources department about it. It may be closer to harassment than just a grouchy personality. And if you do speak up about harassment, your company has an obligation to make sure that your boss does not retaliate in any form.

## **What if a co-worker acts like they are my boss?**

### **Bring it up softly.**

Maybe this person has worked there longer, maybe they've been asked to train you, or maybe they're just pushy and they wish they were your boss. As insulting as it is, to be ordered around by a co-worker, the best way to solve it is with subtlety. The challenge here is to talk to your co-worker without being defensive or making them defensive. You might try saying something like, "*I hope you don't mean it, but there are times when some of your requests sound more like demands.*" or "*Sometimes I feel like you're giving me orders when we're equal co-workers, right?*" If that doesn't work, check in with your supervisor about it.

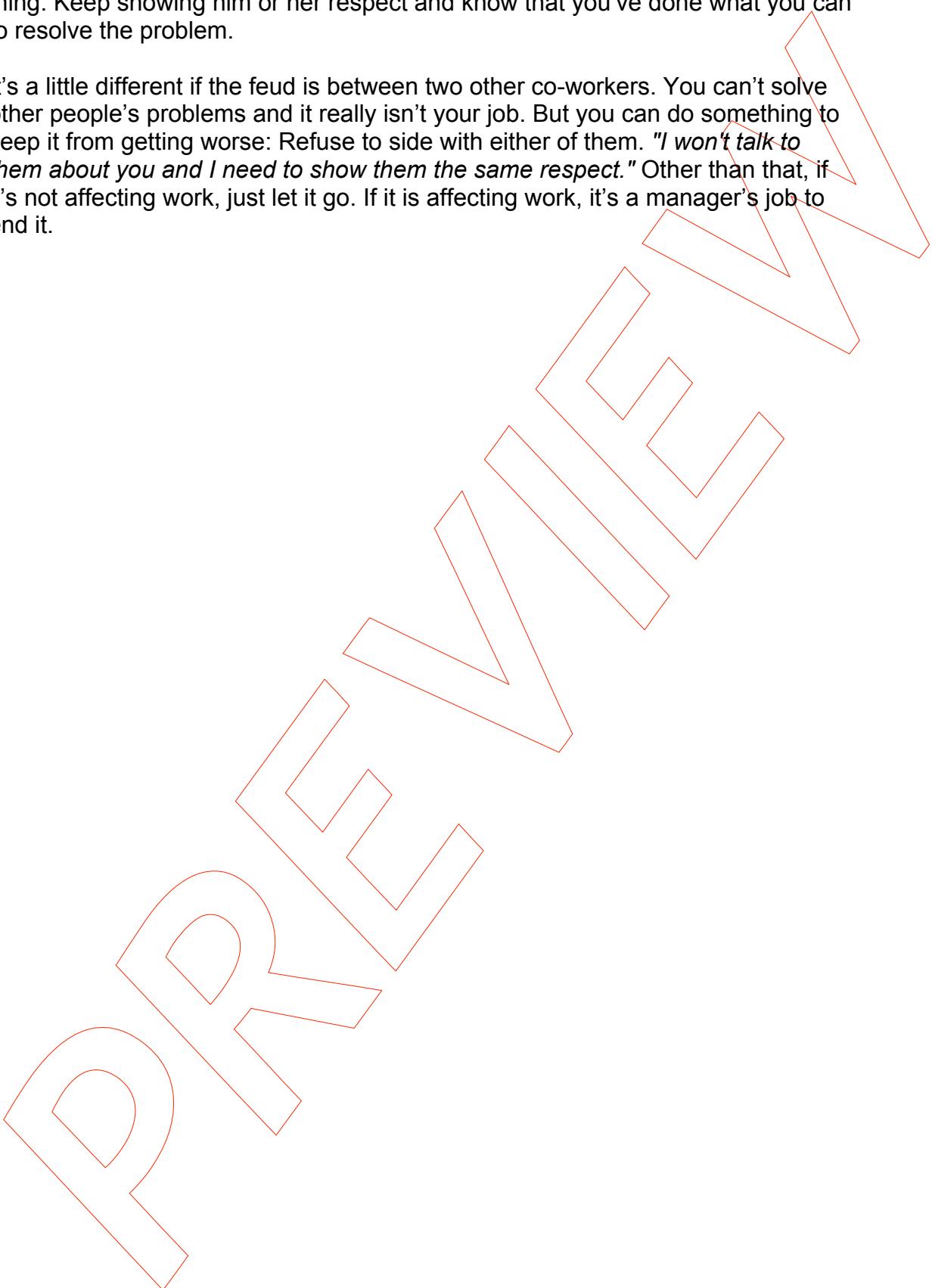
## **How do I stop a feud?**

### **Stop being part of it.**

It's about that straightforward. If there's an ongoing problem between you and a co-worker, do your part to end it. Maybe you need to apologize: "*Look, I acted like a jerk earlier. I'm sorry.*" If you're not ready to do that, maybe you just need to take one small step by saying "goodnight" at the end of the day or "good morning" if you left on bad terms the day before. No matter how rough things get, those are the small kindnesses that can build bridges between people again. And

what if the other person doesn't respond right away? Just keep doing the right thing. Keep showing him or her respect and know that you've done what you can to resolve the problem.

It's a little different if the feud is between two other co-workers. You can't solve other people's problems and it really isn't your job. But you can do something to keep it from getting worse: Refuse to side with either of them. "*I won't talk to them about you and I need to show them the same respect.*" Other than that, if it's not affecting work, just let it go. If it is affecting work, it's a manager's job to end it.





# HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS & POLICIES

***Am I responsible if I just witness harassment, but I'm not part of it?***

**Yes.**

As a fellow human being and a respectful co-worker, you are very responsible for trying to stop harassment. Wouldn't you want someone to help you or a member of your family if they were being harassed? And, yes, from a legal standpoint, you may very well be held responsible for your knowledge and witnessing of an illegal act. You don't need to step into the middle of it yourself, but you certainly need to tell your supervisor or someone else in authority.

***What if I'm threatened about "squealing?"***

**The penalty for threatening can be worse than harassing.**

A harasser risks losing their job if an investigation proves they were guilty, but it rarely becomes a police matter. On the other hand, threatening bodily harm to you or anyone else is a criminal offense as well as grounds for immediate termination in most cases. (See your company's harassment policy). It is illegal to retaliate in any way against someone who reports harassment or who cooperates in a harassment investigation.

***Can I remain anonymous if I file a complaint or help with a harassment investigation?***

**Maybe, but it all depends.**

Each investigation is different. Your company is going to be very sensitive to protect the identity and reputation of everyone involved in a complaint until all the facts are known and proven. But there are no guarantees of anonymity. If you were suddenly charged with harassment, wouldn't you feel you had the right to know who was making the charges? It takes courage to file a complaint and it takes the same courage to stand with someone who's been hurt by harassment.

## ***What exactly happens when a complaint is filed?***

**Your company may do things differently but...**

... for most companies, the process looks like this:

### **Investigation**

- There will be an immediate investigation including interviews with the person filing the complaint, the alleged harasser, and any witnesses.
- Both the complainant and the alleged harasser will be asked to complete a signed, written statement detailing their recollections of the event(s).

### **Evaluation**

- The investigation team will consider the evidence and come to a timely decision.

### **Action**

- Both parties will be notified immediately as to whether harassment has been found or not. If there is proof of harassment, discipline will be given to the harasser, ranging from a warning, to unpaid suspension, to termination.

## ***What is the definition of harassment?***

Harassment is not always intentional and doesn't have to be intentional to be illegal. Men can harass men, women can harass women, women can harass men, and men can harass women. It's the behavior that counts, not the gender of the participants. A person can feel harassed even if he or she is not the intended target of the behavior. While not all harassing behavior meets the standard of illegal conduct, any workplace harassment is inappropriate and should not be tolerated. If you feel harassed at work or you are aware of incidents of workplace harassment, you have a right and responsibility to address the situation. You may confront the harasser if you feel comfortable doing so, or report the harassment to your manager or an appropriate human resources manager. If you report an incident of harassment, the organization will conduct a fair, discreet investigation and appropriate corrective action will be taken. It is illegal to retaliate in any way against an employee for complaining about or reporting workplace harassment.

## ***What is my company's policy on harassment?***

Your company is committed to maintaining a work environment that is free from discrimination. In keeping with this commitment, we will not tolerate harassment of our employees by any supervisor, co-worker, vendor or customer of this company.

Harassment consists of unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical or visual, that is based on a person's protected status, such as sex, color, race, religion, national origin, age, physical or mental disability or other protected group status. The company will not tolerate harassing behavior that affects tangible job benefits, that interferes unreasonably with an individual's work performance, or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Such harassment may include, for example, jokes about another person's protected status, kidding, teasing or practical jokes directed at a person based upon his or her protected status.

All employees are responsible to help assure that we avoid harassment. If you feel that you have experienced or witnessed workplace harassment, you are to notify the human resources manager, your department head or your supervisor. The company forbids retaliation against anyone for reporting harassment, assisting in making a harassment compliant or co-operating in a harassment investigation. If you feel you have been retaliated against, you are to notify the human resources manager, your department head or your supervisor.

Your company's policy is to investigate all such complaints thoroughly and promptly. To the fullest extent practicable, the company will keep complaints and the terms of their resolution confidential. If an investigation confirms that a violation of the policy has occurred, the company will take corrective action, including discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment.

### ***What is my company's policy on sexual harassment?***

Your company fully supports laws and regulations designed to prevent sexual harassment within the work environment. Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual conduct, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other visual, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is a term or condition of employment. It is sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions, such as hiring, scheduling or continued employment. It is also sexual harassment when such conduct unreasonably interferes with an individual's job performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action, including possible termination. If you feel that you are being subjected to sexual harassment, promptly contact your immediate supervisor, your supervisor's supervisor, the human resources manager or any appropriate corporate officer or company representative.

## About this Book

Disrespect is at the root of all harassment. This book is a simple and very basic handbook about the ways in which we can show respect toward the people we work with.

This handbook is designed to provide employees with quick and practical advice, from common courtesy and greetings to refraining from gossip and rude remarks, on showing and getting respect at work. Topics include:

- MOODS, PERSONAL ISSUES & ATTITUDES
- GOSSIP, PRIVACY & NOSEY CO-WORKERS
- PROMISES & BROKEN PROMISES
- PICTURES, JOKES & LANGUAGE
- SEXUAL ATTRACTION & SEXUAL HARASSMENT
- TOLERANCE & DIFFERENCES
- COURTESY & SMALL KINDNESSES
- HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS & POLICIES

We're proud of this handbook. We hope that every employee in your organization can have one.

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