

May 2007



The McKenzie Mailer

## McKenzie HR Services

- HR Audits
- Compliant recordkeeping systems
- New employee orientation
- Customized handbooks
- Safety and accident prevention programs
- Assistance with payroll administration
- Benefit plan design recommendations and open enrollment
- Recruitment
- Job descriptions
- Compensation administration
- Unemployment compensation hearings
- Assistance with discipline and termination issues
- Coaching and counseling
- Implementation of performance management systems
- *Peace of Mind*

This newsletter is provided as a service to our clients and friends with the premise that informed clients are better clients. If you like it, feel free to pass it along to others. Do not hesitate to contact us for more information on this or any other human resources related subject.

If you would like to remove your name from our email list, please follow the instructions at the bottom of this newsletter.

### Is It Really a Hostile Work Environment?

You have done a good job of communicating your policy against harassment and discrimination to all of your employees. Everyone knows that your company will not tolerate harassment or discrimination of any kind. So why are so many employees still confused about what the term “hostile work environment” means? Human resources professionals will tell you that they are receiving more and more complaints of hostile work environment that have nothing to do with discrimination, but everything to do with the way the employees are being treated by their supervisor or co-workers.

The EEOC describes a hostile work environment as “unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when such conduct has the purpose or effect of **unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance** or creating an **intimidating, hostile or offensive** working environment.” This definition applies to harassment based on sex (with or without sexual conduct), race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, and protected activity (i.e., opposition to prohibited discrimination or participation in the statutory complaint process). This prohibition should cover harassment by anyone in the workplace – supervisors, co-workers, or non-employees.

Many employees are legitimately confused by the definition of a hostile work environment. For example, the manager who belittles, embarrasses and demeans employees is acting in an **“intimidating, hostile and offensive”** manner. But such behavior may not rise to the EEOC definition of a hostile work environment because the tirades are targeted at all employees and not one particular protected class.

Likewise, the definition of a hostile work environment does not apply to professional disagreements or personality conflicts. While, many people feel that these differences of opinion **“unreasonably interfere with their work performance”**, these types of conflicts are not covered under federal discrimination laws.

In the last few years, business climates have changed dramatically. The era of the

**Ask Bob about cost effective recruitment options.**

[Check out our current client openings.](#)

**ASK Bob**

**A New and Improved ASK BOB**

For no charge you have the opportunity to ask human resources related questions of Bob McKenzie, President of McKenzie**HR**

[To ASK Bob click here](#)

type "A" personality boss is going the way of the dinosaur. So, when the boss manages through bullying or humiliation, or co-workers trade insults via e-mail, some naturally think this behavior is illegal harassment. This type of conduct may not be illegal, however it may be a violation of company policy.

Many harassment and discrimination policies include a statement that all employees will be treated with respect and dignity. If this is the case, ensure it is followed by all employees – especially managers. Conflicts in the workplace are inevitable and, depending on how they are handled, can be beneficial.

Encourage employees to handle their differences in a constructive manner.

One more thing. Whenever reviewing your harassment and discrimination policies with employees, be sure to explain the difference between illegal harassment and the type of behavior that is a violation of your policy and how you expect individuals to handle both types of situations. This might reduce the number of complaints and greatly enhance the potential of your people.

Bob McKenzie, President, McKenzie**HR**

**Contact Information**

4905 Belfort Road, Suite 110  
Jacksonville, FL 32256

Phone: (904) 861-2903

[potential@mckenziehr.com](mailto:potential@mckenziehr.com)

<http://www.mckenziehr.com>

**Past Issues**

April 2007 - [What happens after a new employee is hired?](#)

March 2007 - [SHIFT HAPPENS](#)

February 2007 - [Imagine](#)

January 2007 - [Discrimination & Harassment](#)

December 2006 - [IT'S BEEN A HECK OF A YEAR](#)

October 2006 - [The Why Label Generation Y?](#)

September 2006 - [The World of Recruitment Has Changed](#)

August 2006 - [Keep Your "A" Players](#)

July 2006 - [Traits of a High Performance Workplace](#)

June 2006 - [Is a Mediocre Employee Better Than No Employee?](#)

May 2006 - [The Compliance Vultures are Circling – Are You Prepared?](#)

April 2006 - [Is Administrivia Keeping HR from Getting a Seat at the Table?](#)

March 2006 - [Agreeing to Disagree or Avoiding the Subject](#)

February 2006 - [Happy Valentine's Day](#)

January 2006 - [Be a Talent Magnet and a Talent Utilizer](#)

**Tell a friend**

Friend's Name:

Friend's Email:

Beware of the slowing economy.



[click here to view all](#)

[Click here](#) to download this month's article in Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF).

 [click here to view archives](#)

You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view this file. [Click here](#) to download the reader now.

