

The McKenzie Mailer

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GIVE YOUR EMPLOYEES THE POWER TO SUCCEED

Last month, we highlighted the need to set the foundation for a positive work environment through communicating your mission and values as well as developing policies and procedures that complement them. Once this is established, the behaviors your company desires from employees should be continually reinforced. A healthy work environment actually encourages differences of opinions and opposing views. A climate that respects and supports different ways of thinking and effective ways of dealing with the various ideas of its employees makes for a more energized workforce.

As a foundation for this respect, every company should develop Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policies. The reasons to implement, communicate and train your employees on these policies are numerous. The first reason is to create an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. Wouldn't it be nice to go to work every day knowing that your workplace does not tolerate behavior that is demeaning or humiliating? This applies to companies of all sizes.

A second reason is financial. Discrimination complaints can turn into lawsuits if not properly handled. Even if the company prevails in court, these lawsuits are expensive and embarrassing to the organization. The Employment Law Information Network recently published information on smaller companies with sizable settlements. Articles about these companies were printed in the local newspapers. These include:

- A family restaurant in Palmer Township, Pennsylvania who settled a sexual harassment lawsuit for \$40,000.
- A small company in Immokalee, Florida recently settled a national origin lawsuit for nearly \$400,000.
- A 200 employee company in Illinois agreed to pay \$1,825,000 to settle a racial harassment lawsuit.

These settlements do not include the amount of money paid to attorneys.

Minimize your risks of paying a lot of money later by taking preventative measures now.

Train your employees. Let them know the behaviors that are acceptable and those that you will not tolerate. Train them on the technical aspects of their jobs, teambuilding, supervisory skills, empowerment, customer service skills and conflict resolution. During these training sessions, review your mission and values to reinforce it with the training participants. This will also add more meaning to your training programs.

Make sure your managers know their duties and responsibilities under the alphabet soup of federal employment legislation such as EEO, AAP, ADA, ADEA, OWBPA, WARN, FMLA, FCRA, OSHA, etc. On top of these, there are state and local ordinances that affect the workplace. Know these as well.

Knowledge is power.

McKenzie & Company is a human resources management firm specializing in effective employment practices and management development programs.

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