



Village of Pleasantville

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TO: All Village Employees
FROM: Patricia Dwyer, Village Administrator *PD*
SUBJECT: Emerging Issues in Workplace Harassment- Advisory Memorandum

We have welcomed many new people to our Village workforce over the past several years, and certainly more new people will be joining us along the way. While each new person brings fresh new ideas, energy, and effort, they also will bring individualism and uniqueness.

Together, we have a collective responsibility to maintain a socially mature and professional work environment, one that fosters respect for each other and constructive productivity. Therefore, I am issuing this updated, advisory memorandum to share with you some emerging workplace issues involving Workplace Harassment.

While earlier Workplace Harassment policies focused exclusively on Sexual Harassment, there are other malicious behaviors that constitute harassment and are also prohibited.

So please be advised of the following:

There are essentially two different categories of harassment. The first, which is often used interchangeably with the term "bullying", is personal harassment that is *directed* at a particular employee or group of employees by other employees and includes the following:

- any conduct which, to a reasonable person would be, or ought reasonably known to be, unwelcome, offensive or intimidating; and
- includes objectionable or derogatory comments or conduct that demean, belittle or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment.

The second type of workplace harassment is *indirect*. This involves conduct that is not directed at a particular individual but results in an overall “poisoned” atmosphere.

This can include:

- demeaning nick-names, sexist or racist remarks, stories or emails, unwelcome jokes and cartoons, nude pictures, displaying of racist or bigoted pictures or materials; and
- exclusive behavior and social isolation of one employee by others; and
- any other pattern of unwelcome conduct that creates an uncomfortable or hostile work environment for one or more employees; and
- malicious workplace gossip and spreading of rumors.

Workplace gossip is gossip about an employee that is not directed at him or her at the time it is spoken (it occurs “behind one’s back”). In other words, it is any conversation about a co-worker in which you lack first-hand knowledge, or a conversation about a co-worker conducted in his/her absence. If the subject employee becomes aware of any demeaning remarks, malicious workplace gossip or rumors, and is adversely affected as a result, then such indirect comments may constitute **workplace harassment**.

Workplace gossip is a seemingly harmless pastime that provides fodder for lunchtime conversations and breaks by the water cooler. *But the truth is that gossip about co-workers is often destructive to the workplace atmosphere and to morale.* It can hurt feelings, damage reputations, and even end in legal action. It can undermine productivity and create animosity among co-workers. The message to all employees is simply this: Do not initiate or participate in such conversations.

All employees of the Village of Pleasantville are entitled to a harassment free work environment. As a Village employee, you have a leading role to play in maintaining a professional work place culture. Strict adherence to the Village’s anti-harassment policies are expected. The Village of Pleasantville is committed to maintaining a harassment-free environment in which to work. It has “zero-tolerance” for policy violations. Failure to comply with the Village’s work place policies will result in immediate disciplinary action, up to and including termination from employment with the Village of Pleasantville.

Some Final Thoughts: Did you know ...

- Workplace Harassment can occur on or off-site and can take place at off-duty social functions;
- Workplace Harassment can involve misconduct or inappropriate statements by clients, patients, customers, members of the public and contractors;
- Employees or managers who retaliate against employees who file personal harassment/bullying complaints can be the subject of a separate complaint based solely on the indirect or direct retaliation; and
- Employees who intentionally and/or repeatedly file personal harassment/bullying complaints against coworkers or supervisors for an improper motive or purpose may find themselves facing discipline for filing a malicious complaint.

I welcome any questions about this advisory memorandum or any other Village workplace policy currently in effect. Thanks for your attention and cooperation!