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Faith at Work: What Does It Mean to Be a “Faith-Friendly” Company?

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Though in its early stages, the “faith-at-work movement” is beginning to demand serious attention from employers—and in some cases pose challenges. How companies frame their response will determine if the issue becomes a legal minefield or a source of competitive advantage.

Like the social issues that helped define earlier generations, the topic of faith at work has crept up on U.S. businesses. Along with more obvious signs, such as requests for religious affinity groups, prayer breakfasts, and even the introduction of corporate chaplains, there are more subtle ways for faith to penetrate corporate walls. E-mail signoffs that quote scripture, employee intranet postings inviting colleagues to a religious service, or even requests for (or the elimination of) specific foods in the company cafeteria are some common examples.

The interfaith dialogue has exploded and now goes beyond the traditional Christian-Jewish engagement to incorporate Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, as well as dozens of other traditions. Companies will have to accommodate these various religious identities in the workplace somehow. How they frame the issue can very well determine whether it becomes a source of employee irritation and litigation or a step on the road to becoming an employer of choice to a new generation of workers.

*(Editor's Note: This Executive Action is based on discussions and a presentation by David W. Miller, Ph.D., Executive Director, Yale Center for Faith & Culture and an Assistant Professor (Adjunct) of Business Ethics at a September 2006 meeting of The Conference Board Workforce Diversity Council. Miller is author of the new book, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2006))*

The Movement Grows

The evidence that faith at work is a growing issue is not just anecdotal. In 2005, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 2,340 charges of religious discrimination, an increase of more than 50 percent from a decade ago and up 30 percent from just five years earlier. Notably, most of the complaints were against employers who did not understand their obligations to accommodate the religious beliefs of their employees.

The “soul train” says Dr. David W. Miller, Executive Director, Yale Center for Faith & Culture and an Assistant Professor (Adjunct) of Business Ethics at the school, has left the station. He says the faith-at-work movement is still in its early stages and companies are uncertain how to respond. He observes that this is not unlike when the civil, women’s, and gay and lesbian rights movements were just emerging. Employers are uncertain how to deal with such emotional and potentially divisive topics. In many cases, companies try and avoid the issue entirely, an action that Miller says, is a mistake.

Regardless, certain geo-political and demographic factors will eventually force the issue for U.S. companies. Immigration is creating a more religiously (and ethnically) diverse workforce that will only grow in importance and number in coming years. Globalization means U.S. firms are coming in contact with cultures in which religion is deeply ingrained in the day-to-day workplace and the American emphasis on separation of “church and state” is antithetical. Take Islam, for example, which teaches very specific notions and laws that guide business terms and behaviors.

Today employees, especially those of younger generations who are more culturally diverse than previous ones, are less willing than those of past eras to compartmentalize their lives. They do not park their faith at the door, but rather they bring their whole selves to work — faith and all. “They want to be who they are 24/7, and not change,” says Yale’s Miller, “and they expect to be accepted for who they are and accommodated.”

At the same time, aging baby boomers are following the established trend that (at least in numerous surveys) faith becomes more important as people get older.

A thoughtful and progressive policy can serve as a recruitment and retention tool for both younger and older generation employees. A small number of large corporations already formally recognize faith-based groups, seeing distinct similarities between these groups and those founded in the 1980s around race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. These “diversity groups,” the early versions of today’s affinity groups, were a way for corporations to recruit and retain minorities and market to their communities.

For individuals, the office has become their community, their hub of life, and they want their faith to be part of it. Not demanding that one’s spiritual side be checked at the office door can provide employees with access to a tool to help deal with their emotional and spiritual needs. Strong moral and worker contentment often translates into higher productivity and more customer-friendly attitudes. The opposite is also true. Job performance can suffer if a worker’s emotional well-being is neglected. Caring for both the physical and spiritual health of your workforce is becoming a part of good business practice. Smart business leaders and corporate executives are realizing that the whole person matters. And the happier and healthier people are in their personal life, the happier, healthier, and more productive they will be in their corporate life.

Patricia Aburdene, futurist and author, cites the example of Hewlett-Packard’s VP and general manager of inkjet cartridge operations, Greg Merten managed 10,000 people and a multi-billion-dollar business. Following a personal tragedy, “Merten’s spiritual insight blossomed” and he learned to, “Let go, forgive and suspend judgment,” then applied these powerful truths at HP by encouraging his workforce to do the same. “I quit competing and starting to think of the other person first.” He “granted others ‘good intentions’ even in the face of contradictory evidence.” His team’s productivity exploded.

On a macro scale, being viewed as “faith-friendly,” which carries implications of trust and ethical behavior, can even have a powerful positive influence on consumer perceptions of a corporate brand.

Like Miller, Aburdene co-author of the 1990 best-seller *Megatrends 2000*, sees faith at work as an important trend in business. In her new book, *Megatrends 2010*, she identifies “spirituality in business” as one of the top seven megatrends of the coming decade. Aburdene sees this as a positive development, with the potential to transform organizations at both the personal and organizational level. She concludes that to treat spirituality as merely a personal matter is to miss out on the vast organizational potential that accompanies the holistic treatment of people and the creation of faith-friendly workplace.

The benefits are similar to those that come to corporations who acknowledge diversity such as race, gender, culture and sexual orientation. As Aburdene mentions, enlightened business precepts have changed how things get done internally and externally in a corporation. They inspire people to trust themselves and others and grow in their appreciation of differences, a perspective that has opened up new opportunities to working better.

The Need for Guidelines

Less than one-third of 550 human resources professionals surveyed in 2001 by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding and the Society for Human Resource Management, said they had a written policy on religion in the workplace. Yet the same number said there were more religions represented in their workforce than five years earlier. And while 77 percent of the respondents said their companies include religion in their standard harassment policy, only 16 percent said they offered training on religious accommodation.

Making Policy Work

Consistency Is Important

Companies face two basic choices: Be *proactive* by developing a policy in advance that goes beyond mere accommodation and compliance to embrace a “faith-friendly” culture or be *reactive* and make decisions as specific issues or complaints arise—a potentially risky strategy in a highly regulated area of employment law.

When dealing with the issue of faith in the workplace, perhaps the most important policy guideline is: *be consistent*. It is vital that companies do not deal with the issue in a piecemeal fashion. As with many other evolving workplace issues, it is important to anticipate scenarios and possible policy consequences.

Request for such things as affinity groups need to be handled in a consistent manner with the decision based on compatibility with overall company values. There should also be a formal process that will allow for a review of any decision dealing with such faith-based requests.

When drafting policy guidelines, Dr. Miller advises that it is important to take into consideration these basic questions.

- Is our policy exclusionary or inclusionary?
- Does it create organizational chaos or creative potential?
- Will it cause or prevent lawsuits?
- Will it promote intra-group infighting or understanding?
- Is it likely to scare off or attract and retain top talent?
- Does it disempower or empower minority traditions?
- Will emotional or rational dialogue be the outcome?
- Is the language neutral? Language can shut down or open up dialogue.

Language is Critical

Although discussion about religion is still rare in many parts of the United States in a work context, it plays an important role in most peoples' lives. How a company discusses the topic and the language that it uses determines how employees will view and ultimately respond to a company's actions and policies. There are three basic terms that come up in most discussions and frameworks — *religion*, *spirituality*, and *faith*. Of the three, the term *religion* is the most likely to trigger an emotional response.

Religion: To some it has a pejorative sense of being a very narrow-minded framework for discussion, while for others it offers a systematic reflection and articulation of a specific belief system, often involving rituals and a code of conduct. The term religion introduces the potential for a dogmatic approach and one-dimensional arguments over whose religion is better or right or whether a particular employee is “saved” or not, though such caricatures are often overly simplistic and inaccurate.

Spirituality: To many, this term is generally seen as a more welcoming, inclusive, and non-threatening than *religion*. Though it, too, has pejorative caricatures, of being self-centered and even in some cases intolerant of other belief systems. It is a more personal and less dogmatic term and implies a more pluralistic approach than the faiths of established religions.

Faith: Some recommend *faith* as the preferred term because it is general and inclusive, and at the same time allows for specificity and particularity without the pejorative freight sometimes associated with *religion* or *spirituality*. *Faith* is more of an over-arching umbrella term that can incorporate a truly broad range of beliefs, ranging from fundamental Christianity or Islam to personal meditation or secular humanism. Indeed, all people have faith in something — be it some deity or in human reason — and the term *faith* allows for a wide ranges of worldviews, including atheism.

What Is A “Faith-Friendly” Company?

Miller makes a clear distinction between being “faith-based” and “faith-friendly.” The former he finds inappropriate for most large organizations, particularly if they are publicly-traded companies, as faith-based implies privileging one tradition over another. However, he concludes that a “faith-friendly” company is welcoming of all traditions where all are treated on an even playing field. The goal of a faith-friendly company is to recognize the centrality of faith in many employees, and their desire to live an integrated holistic life. And a faith-friendly company does this in a way that is respectful of all faith traditions by creating a culture of respect, diversity, inclusion, and tolerance. The minimum standard is, of course, to obey the relevant laws on religious discrimination, but being truly faith-friendly goes beyond a compliance attitude. This is consistent with other diversity and inclusion initiatives that see value in holistic treatment of people. According to Miller a faith-friendly company is:

- Welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all traditions
- Recognizes a worldview grounded in faith as common to humankind throughout the globe
- Considers the needs of various religious practices and sensitivities, while respecting privacy
- Welcomes and values the whole person at work—body, mind, and spirit

It is NOT:

- Favoring one tradition over others
- Exclusionary
- A Trojan horse for proselytizing
- Turning a company into a “house of worship”

Affinity Groups

Being a “faith-friendly” company raises the questions of affinity groups; should some or all religious groups be permitted and allowed to form an affinity group? The answer depends partly on your philosophy of affinity

Table 1

A Truly Diverse Nation

Self-described Religion Identification of U.S. Adult Population 2001*

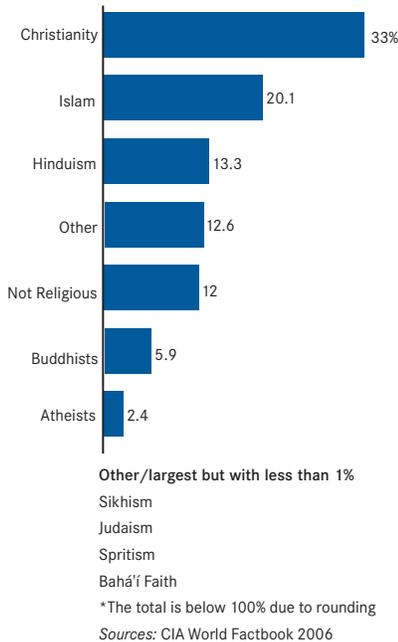
	1990	2001	Change in % point
Total Christian	88.30%	79.80%	-8.50%
Catholic	26.80%	25.90%	-0.90%
Baptist	19.80%	17.20%	-2.60%
Methodist	8.30%	7.20%	-1.10%
Christian - no denomination reported	4.70%	7.20%	2.50%
Lutheran	5.30%	4.90%	-0.40%
Presbyterian	2.90%	2.80%	-0.10%
Protestant - no denomination reported	10.00%	2.40%	-7.70%
Pentecostal/Charismatic	1.90%	2.20%	0.40%
Episcopalian/Anglican	1.80%	1.80%	-
Mormon/Latter Day Saints	1.50%	1.40%	-0.10%
Churches of Christ	1.00%	1.30%	0.30%
Congregational/United Church of Christ	0.30%	0.70%	0.40%
Jehovah's Witnesses	0.80%	0.70%	-0.10%
Assemblies of God	0.40%	0.60%	0.20%
Evangelical	0.10%	0.50%	0.40%
Church of God	0.30%	0.50%	0.20%
Seventh Day Adventist	0.40%	0.40%	-
Eastern Orthodox	0.30%	0.30%	-
Other Christian (less than 0.3% each)	1.60%	1.90%	0.30%
Total other religions	3.50%	5.20%	1.70%
Jewish	1.80%	1.40%	-0.40%
Non-denominational	0.10%	1.30%	1.20%
Muslim	0.30%	0.60%	0.3
Buddhist	0.20%	0.50%	0.30%
Hindu	0.10%	0.40%	0.30%
Unitarian Universalist	0.30%	0.30%	-
Others (less than 0.07% each)	0.60%	0.70%	0.10%
No Religion/Atheist/Agnostic	8.40%	15.00%	6.60%

*All figures after adjusting for refusals to reply, which jumped from 2.3% in 1990 to 5.4% in 2001

The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2001 is based on a random digit-dialed telephone survey of 50,281 American residential households in the continental U.S.A (48 states). Respondents were asked to describe themselves in terms of religion with an open-ended question. Interviewers did not prompt or offer a suggested list of potential answers. The primary question of the interview was: What is your religion, if any? The religion of the spouse/partner was also asked. If the initial answer was 'Protestant' or 'Christian' further questions were asked to probe which particular denomination.

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006

Chart 1
Major Religions of the World
 (Percentage of World Population*)



groups and how they have functioned or ought to function in an organization. Some companies have formed an umbrella interfaith affinity group, under which faith-specific employees might gather to pray or have fellowship, others have allowed each religion to form its own group, and yet others do not grant people of faith the same standing as they do around other primary attributes of identity.

Regardless of the approach you decide, a good guiding principle is to differentiate between beliefs and behaviors. All faith-based affinity groups must behave in a way that is respectful of other groups, even if they personally disagree with aspects of that group's agenda or purpose. And vice versa, as some existing affinity groups risk acting in exclusive and disrespectful ways toward people of faith.

While supporting employees with similar interests helps build a strong sense of community, develop internal networks, and aid in recruitment and retention, sometimes it is OK to say "no" especially when requests for such things as affinity groups butt heads with a company's core values and accepted behaviors.

Employer Obligations under Federal Law

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment. Title VII covers employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the federal government.

Employers are generally required to accommodate religious expression, but only to the point that it doesn't cause undue hardship for the employer or co-workers. Where to draw the line, though, is often difficult to define. Under Title VII, employers:

- May not treat employees or job applicants more or less favorably because of their religious beliefs.
- May not force employees to participate in a religious activity.
- Must reasonably accommodate employees' sincerely held religious beliefs or practices, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. For example, employers might provide flexible scheduling or modify policies to accommodate an employee's beliefs.
- Are not required to accommodate employees' religious beliefs and practices if doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employers' legitimate business interests.
- Must permit employees to engage in religious expression if employees are permitted to engage in other personal expression at work, unless the religious expression would impose an undue hardship to the employer.
- Must take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees.

Concerning work schedules the EEOC suggests employers:

- Facilitate voluntary substitutes or swaps where they worker seeking accommodation is responsible for finding a fill-in.
- Provide flexible work schedules and breaks
- All a worker to make up time missed because of a religious observance
- Offer lateral transfers and change of job assignments

For more examples of how the law works in this area, see *"What Must an Employer Do?"*

Source: EEOC

Take-Aways

Like it or not, the issue of faith in the workplace is here to stay and sooner or later companies, regardless of their size or geographic location, will be faced with the challenge. Yale's Miller offers these thoughts:

- The topic merits serious reflection, regardless of where you stand on matters of faith.
- The issue is coming to the work place no matter your stance, so the question may really be "How do I steer and manage it?"
- There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution; be consistent but flexible.
- You can learn lessons from other diversity groups that were once considered too explosive.
- You will make mistakes.
- Remember that great leaders do not shy from great challenges.

Appendix

What Must an Employer Do?

EEOC Case Examples: Handling Discrimination Against Arabs, Muslims or Sikhs

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the EEOC and state and local fair employment practices agencies have recorded a significant increase in the number of charges alleging discrimination based on religion and/or national origin. Many of the charges have been filed by individuals who are or are perceived to be Muslim, Arab, South Asian, or Sikh. These charges most commonly allege harassment and discharge. These examples answer some questions about what steps employers can take to meet their responsibilities.

Harassment

Muhammad, who is Arab American, works for XYZ Motors, a large used car business. Muhammad meets with his manager and complains that Bill, one of his coworkers, regularly calls him names like "camel jockey," "the local terrorist," and "the ayatollah," and has intentionally embarrassed him in front of customers by claiming that he is incompetent. How should the supervisor respond?

Managers and supervisors who learn about objectionable workplace conduct based on religion or national origin are responsible for taking steps to correct the conduct by anyone under their control. Muhammad's manager should relay Muhammad's complaint to the appropriate manager if he does not supervise Bill. If XYZ Motors then determines that Bill has harassed Muhammad, it should take disciplinary action against Bill that is significant enough to ensure that the harassment does not continue.

Religious accommodation

Three of the 10 Muslim employees in XYZ's 30-person template design division approach their supervisor and ask that they be allowed to use a conference room in an adjacent building for prayer. Until making the request, those employees prayed at their work stations. What should XYZ do?

XYZ should work closely with the employees to find an appropriate accommodation that meets their religious needs without causing an undue hardship for XYZ. Whether a reasonable accommodation would impose undue hardship and therefore not be required depends on the particulars of the business and the requested accommodation.

When the room is needed for business purposes, XYZ can deny its use for personal religious purposes. However, allowing the employees to use the conference room for prayers likely would not impose an undue hardship on XYZ in many other circumstances.

Similarly, prayer often can be performed during breaks, so that providing sufficient time during work hours for prayer would not result in an undue hardship. If going to another building for prayer takes longer than the allotted break periods, the employees still can be accommodated if the nature of the template design division's work makes flexible scheduling feasible. XYZ can require employees to make up any work time missed for religious observance.

In evaluating undue hardship, XYZ should consider only whether it can accommodate the three employees who made the request. If XYZ can accommodate three employees, it should do so. Because individual religious practices vary among members of the same religion, XYZ should not deny the requested accommodation based on speculation that the other Muslim employees may seek the same accommodation. If other employees subsequently request the same accommodation and granting it to all of the requesters would cause undue hardship, XYZ can make an appropriate adjustment at that time. For example, if accommodating five employees would not cause an undue hardship but accommodating six would impose such hardship, the sixth request could be denied.

Like employees of other religions, Muslim employees may need accommodations such as time off for religious holidays or exceptions to dress and grooming codes.

Temporary assignments

Susan is an experienced clerical worker who wears a hijab (head scarf) in conformance with her Muslim beliefs. XYZ Temps places Susan in a long-term assignment with one of its clients. The client contacts XYZ and requests that it notify Susan that she must remove her hijab while working at the front desk, or that XYZ assign another person to Susan's position. According to the client, Susan's religious attire violates its dress code and presents the "wrong image." Should XYZ comply with its client's request?

XYZ Temps may not comply with this client request without violating Title VII. The client would also violate Title VII if it made Susan remove her hijab or changed her duties to keep her out of public view. Therefore, XYZ should strongly advise against this course of action. Notions about customer preference real or perceived do not establish undue hardship, so the client should make an exception to its dress code to let Susan wear her hijab during front desk duty as a religious accommodation. If the client does not withdraw the request, XYZ should place Susan in another assignment at the same rate of pay and decline to assign another worker to the client.

More Case Examples: Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Expression in the Federal Workplace

In 1997, the Clinton White House issued a set of guidelines addressing religious exercise and expression that apply to all civilian executive branch agencies, officials, and employees in the Federal workplace. The guidelines, including the examples cited in them, were designed to answer the most frequently encountered questions in the Federal workplace. They also can serve as basic guidelines in the business world, although actual cases sometimes will be complicated by additional facts and circumstances that may require a different result from the one the guidelines indicate.

Expression in Private Work Areas. Employees should be permitted to engage in private religious expression in personal work areas not regularly open to the public to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious private expression, subject to reasonable content—and viewpoint—neutral standards and restrictions: such religious expression must be permitted so long as it does not interfere with the agency carrying out its official responsibilities.

Examples

- An employee may keep a Bible or Koran on her private desk and read it during breaks.
- An agency may restrict all posters, or posters of a certain size, in private work areas, or require that such posters be displayed facing the employee, and not on common walls; but the employer typically cannot single out religious or anti-religious posters for harsher or preferential treatment.

Expression Among Fellow Employees. Employees should be permitted to engage in religious expression with fellow employees, to the same extent that they may engage in comparable nonreligious private expression, subject to reasonable and content-neutral standards and restrictions: such expression should not be restricted so long as it does not interfere with workplace efficiency. Though agencies are entitled to regulate such employee speech based on reasonable predictions of disruption, they should not restrict speech based on merely hypothetical concerns, having little basis in fact, that the speech will have a deleterious effect on workplace efficiency.

Examples

- In informal settings, such as cafeterias and hallways, employees are entitled to discuss their religious views with one another, subject only to the same rules of order as apply to other employee expression. If an agency permits unrestricted nonreligious expression of a controversial nature, it must likewise permit equally controversial religious expression.
- Employees are entitled to display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent that they are permitted to display other comparable messages. So long as they do not convey any governmental endorsement of religion, religious messages may not typically be singled out for suppression.
- Employees generally may wear religious medallions over their clothes or so that they are otherwise visible. Typically, this alone will not affect workplace efficiency, and therefore is protected.

Expression Directed at Fellow Employees. Employees are permitted to engage in religious expression directed at fellow employees, and may even attempt to persuade fellow employees of the correctness of their religious views, to the same extent as those employees may engage in comparable speech not involving religion. Some religions encourage adherents to spread the faith at every opportunity, a duty that can encompass the adherent's workplace. As a general matter, proselytizing is as entitled to constitutional protection as any other form of speech — as long as a reasonable observer would not interpret the expression as government endorsement of religion. Employees may urge a colleague to participate or not to participate in religious activities to the same extent that, consistent with concerns of workplace efficiency, they may urge their colleagues to engage in or refrain from other personal endeavors. But employees must refrain from such expression when a fellow employee asks that it stop or otherwise demonstrates that it is unwelcome.

Examples

- During a coffee break, one employee engages another in a polite discussion of why his faith should be embraced. The other employee disagrees with the first employee's religious exhortations, but does not ask that the conversation stop. Under these circumstances, agencies should not restrict or interfere with such speech.
- One employee invites another employee to attend worship services at her church, though she knows that the invitee is a devout adherent of another faith. The invitee is shocked, and asks that the invitation not be repeated. The original invitation is protected, but the employee should honor the request that no further invitations be issued.
- In a parking lot, a non-supervisory employee hands another employee a religious tract urging that she convert to another religion lest she be condemned to eternal damnation. The proselytizing employee says nothing further and does not inquire of his colleague whether she followed the pamphlet's urging. This speech typically should not be restricted.

Coercion of Employee's Participation or Nonparticipation in Religious Activities. A person holding supervisory authority over an employee may not, explicitly or implicitly, insist that the employee participate in religious activities as a condition of continued employment, promotion, salary increases, preferred job assignments, or any other incidents of employment. Nor may a supervisor insist that an employee refrain from participating in religious activities outside the workplace. Where a supervisor's religious expression is not coercive and is understood as his or her personal view, that expression is protected in the Federal workplace in the same way and to the same extent as other constitutionally valued speech. But because supervisors have the power to hire, fire, or promote, employees may reasonably perceive their supervisors' religious expression as coercive, even if it was not intended as such.

Examples

- A supervisor may invite coworkers to a son's confirmation in a church, a daughter's bat mitzvah in a synagogue, or to his own wedding at a temple. But a supervisor should not say to an employee: "I didn't see you in church this week. I expect to see you there this Sunday."
- On a bulletin board on which personal notices unrelated to work regularly are permitted, a supervisor may post a flyer announcing an Easter musical service at her church, with a handwritten notice inviting co-workers to attend. But a supervisor should not circulate a memo announcing that he will be leading a lunch-hour Talmud class that employees should attend in order to participate in a discussion of career advancement that will convene at the conclusion of the class.

Hostile Work Environment and Harassment. The law against workplace discrimination protects Federal employees from being subjected to a hostile environment, or religious harassment, in the form of religiously discriminatory intimidation, or pervasive or severe religious ridicule or insult, whether by supervisors or fellow workers. Whether particular conduct gives rise to a hostile environment, or constitutes impermissible religious harassment, will usually depend upon its frequency or repetitiveness, as well as its severity.

Examples

- A group of employees that share a common faith decides that they want to work exclusively with people who share their views. They engage in a pattern of verbal attacks on other employees who do not share their views, calling them heathens, sinners, and the like. This conduct should not be tolerated.
- During lunch, certain employees gather on their own time for prayer and Bible study in an empty conference room that employees are generally free to use on a first-come, first-served basis. Such a gathering does not constitute religious harassment even if other employees with different views on how to pray might feel excluded or ask that the group be disbanded.

Accommodation of Religious Exercise. Federal law requires an agency to accommodate employees' exercise of their religion unless such accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the conduct of the agency's operations.

Examples

- An agency must adjust work schedules to accommodate an employee's religious observance – for example, Sabbath or religious holiday observance – if an adequate substitute is available, or if the employee's absence would not otherwise impose an undue burden on the agency.
- An employee must be permitted to wear religious garb, such as a crucifix, a yarmulke, or a head scarf or hijab, if wearing such attire during the work day is part of the employee's religious practice or expression, so long as the wearing of such garb does not unduly interfere with the functioning of the workplace.
- An employee should be excused from a particular assignment if performance of that assignment would contravene the employee's religious beliefs and the agency would not suffer undue hardship in reassigning the employee to another detail.
- During lunch, certain employees gather on their own time for prayer and Bible study in an empty conference room that employees are generally free to use on a first-come, first-served basis. Such a gathering may not be subject to discriminatory restrictions because of its religious content.

About the author

Charles Mitchell is the Executive Director of Publishing at The Conference Board and publisher of *The Conference Board Review* magazine. A former journalist and foreign correspondent based in South Africa, Kenya, and the Soviet Union, he is the author of several books dealing with international business travel, cultures, customs and etiquette.

About The Conference Board Diversity Councils

For over a decade, The Conference Board's Diversity & Inclusion Councils have been tackling the critical issues from race and gender to religion and culture that face organizations operating in today's diverse world. The Conference Board's Diversity & Inclusion Councils meet three times per year to discuss business practices and strategies aimed at making their employees and organizations to be the most productive that they can be. For more information on Council membership, contact Marcel Bucsescu at marcel.bucsescu@conference-board.org.