

Good practice, good business



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

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Eliminating discrimination and harassment from your workplace

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A PRODUCTIVE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

An efficient and cohesive workplace is all about building the morale and productivity of your employees and minimising complaints, disruptions and legal wrangles, so everyone can get on with their work. This adds to your bottom line and builds your reputation in the business community.

Following are a range of **best practice guidelines** for induction, appraisal, promotion, staff development and training, positive work environment and grievance procedures to help you build and maintain a workplace free from discrimination and harassment.

Best practice guidelines for the workplace environment checklist to use as a guide is included at the end of this section.

Induction

Induction aims to provide new employees with information about the organisation which will help them to be effective in their job. Employers should try to:

- give balanced (job specific and social) information that is directly related to their role and back this up with extra information at a later stage
- provide a 'mentor' who can provide additional information and answer questions; and / or provide formal follow-up after a few weeks
- ensure people with disabilities (visual impairment, reading disorder, etc) have information presented to them in an acceptable format
- introduce new employees to their colleagues, explaining the role of key people, including those they will be working closely with

- encourage new employees to ask questions
- ensure new employees know where to go for help or with a complaint on any issue
- (if employing a person of a different sex, race, person with a disability, etc to the majority of the workforce) ensure other employees understand appropriate behaviour and communication expected of them
- undertake any reasonable adjustments necessary, prior to the employee commencing work.

Appraisal

Good appraisal systems meet the needs of both employer and employees. Employers should try to:

- ensure all employees fully understand the appraisal system
- have employee records, including appraisals, accessible to them
- be specific in the performance assessment rather than use generalities such as 'poor attitude'
- include positive feedback about what the employee does well
- train staff involved in giving appraisals
- not make irrelevant remarks on an employees file (eg, about ethnicity, age, disability, etc).

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productive workplace environment – page 2**

Promotion

Employers should advertise vacancies widely throughout their workforce, giving all staff members the opportunity to consider applying and to increase the pool of applicants. Employers should try to:

- ensure all procedures are fair and unbiased
- review each position as it becomes vacant and select on the real requirements of the job, not on who previously filled it
- provide constructive post-selection counselling to unsuccessful applicants.

Staff development and training

Employers should examine how training is given across the organisation, particularly looking at breakdowns such as sex, disability, occupational grouping, as well as types of training; internal vs external, skill specific vs broad-based skill, etc.

Employers should try to:

- institute planned and on-going strategies for increasing the skills of the workforce
- allocate sufficient funds for training of first line supervisors who can deal with many issues before they reach crisis stage
- ensure access and reasonable adjustments are made, if required, to allow staff with disabilities to attend a broad range of training
- avoid training after hours and on weekends or consider provision of child care at such training
- consider cross-cultural training / awareness raising for staff (as this can assist customer relations, as well as employee relations).

Positive work environment

Employers should consider the family responsibilities of staff and consider the possibility of implementing flexible work practices; job sharing; leave for carers of family members who are sick, older or who have

disabilities; child care provision, etc. Research shows that such structures improve loyalty and productivity of an organisation. Employers should also:

- examine whether or not the work environment is hostile (eg, are there 'initiation rites' for apprentices, discriminatory graffiti, offensive posters? Are there opposing 'cliques' in the organisation which create friction?)
- develop and implement policies on the prevention of discrimination and harassment
- provide senior management support with the implementation of the policies
- recognise that discrimination and harassment between staff members is not just a personal issue but one which negatively affects the organisation's productivity and profitability
- aim for cessation of inappropriate behaviours now and in the future as a primary outcome, and discipline, if needed, as a secondary outcome
- ensure that all staff have access to staff notices, personnel procedural manuals and any other appropriate information.

Grievance procedures

An organisation that has grievance procedures is healthier than an organisation that does not have one. Employers should try to:

- circulate policies and related information widely and in appropriate languages
- institute grievance procedures which are accessible to all staff
- provide education programs (training, leaflets, posters, etc) for all staff about their rights and responsibilities
- provide information and support for potential complainants to enable the most effective resolution of the complaint
- review procedures regularly.

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CHECKLIST



A 'best practice' guidelines for the workplace environment checklist could include:

- ✓ *Induction for new employees to provide them with information about the organisation*
- ✓ *Good appraisal systems that meet the needs of the employer and employees*
- ✓ *Promotional opportunities for all staff members*
- ✓ *Different types of staff development and training*
- ✓ *Implementing positive work environment policies, such as flexible work arrangements*
- ✓ *Accessible grievance procedures*

This fact sheet is part of *good practice, good business* – information and resources for employers to address discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

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