

Mission Ready

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Preventing Sexual Harassment

Most companies do not proactively try to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace; rather, they try to protect themselves from its consequences. To that end, all employees must sign - along with so many other unread documents upon their first day with the organization - a piece of paper acknowledging the company's position against sexual harassment. One can almost hear the sigh of relief from HR; now they have the signed statement should complaints and/or litigation follow.

The Marine Corps knows that signing a piece of paper does not constitute training. That's why, during basic training and throughout his/her career, a Marine is required to actively participate in discussion groups on the topic of sexual harassment. And it pays off: the Marine Corps - ostensibly the most macho, and thereby the most likely organization to be plagued with problems stemming from sexual harassment - has the lowest incidence rate of all the services.

Managers would do well to emulate this practice.

Exalting Human Resources

Would you be surprised to learn that:

* In the world's most elite fighting force, a tour of duty in human resources (i.e. recruiting/training) is considered to be the zenith of one's career.

* Only the cream of the crop, at the peak of their powers, are offered the prestigious assignments of a Recruiter or a Drill Instructor - the most revered positions in the Marine Corps.

* A Marine considers a tour of duty in Human Resources a launching ramp for continued success within the organization.

Why isn't HR similarly exalted in the business community? Certainly if HR fails at its tasks - recruiting individuals who will be a credit to the

The open, friendly workplace - in which all employees dress to look their best - is very fertile ground for unwanted behavior of a sexual nature. Furthermore, many employees come from the comparatively permissive environments of high school and college and might be shocked at what kind of behavior constitutes sexual harassment. In-depth discussion groups can make all the difference. Participants can come to appreciate the victim's point of view, and the truly destructive effects upon morale and performance that result from persistent, unwanted attention.

A Marine leader wants nothing to get in the way of mission readiness; a manager, likewise, must create and maintain a workplace free of resentment and feelings of victimization. And a manager must never walk away from a bawdy joke at the water cooler, smiling apologetically and blaming company policy for not being able to "join in the fun." He or she must view such behavior as a literal form of sabotage, undermining the "mission readiness" of the department.

company, then training them, and then retaining them - the results would be catastrophic to the organization. Yet often, HR people, like Rodney Dangerfield, "don't get no respect." If you haven't thought of it before, just ask yourself: How many CEOs come from HR?

The business world would do well to make their Human Resources department "the place to be" for its career-minded associates, at least for a year or so, where the top performers will recruit and/or train the new employee force. But it takes commitment, and a long-term view. A business has to be willing to take its best knights off "the front lines" - so that generations of top performers can continue to flow to the front.