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Sexual Harassment: How to Avoid the 'Harasser' Label

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1. Anyone may be considered a harasser if that person's behavior towards another becomes unwanted, offensive, hostile, or creates an offensive and disruptive work environment. Unwanted sexual behavior can apply in cases of supervisor to subordinate, or among peers. It is not limited to men/women situations.

2. You cannot assume that your behavior is acceptable to everyone with whom you come in contact. Whether harassment is intended or unintended, you may be appropriately accused of harassment if you indulge in such actions as:

" Making sexual comments about a person's clothing or body.

" Telling sexual jokes; using sexual innuendoes.

" Touching, hugging, patting, kissing.

" Making repeated, unwanted overtures of a sexual nature.

" Displaying lewd or offensive pictures or objects.

" Using lewd or offensive gestures.

3. If you are a supervisor, your subordinates may not feel comfortable in telling you when they are offended or harassed. Try to make it easy for them to speak up regarding their treatment.

4. Be aware of how people respond to what you do and say. If an individual objects to your behavior towards him or her, listen and heed his or her objections. What is acceptable behavior to some people is not always acceptable behavior to others.

5. Remember: A complaint of sexual harassment can result in a lawsuit's being filed against the company as well as the harasser.