

#metoo

(in)decent behavior

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# TIME TO CHANGE

**There's been a sea change in corporate culture, and it's time to call out, correct, or cull those who behave inappropriately.**

**It's getting much harder to shock Americans today. Disturbing news stories of inappropriate, harassing, and abusive behavior in the workplace have become commonplace. Since the shocking allegations against Harvey Weinstein, a parade of high-profile leaders in multiple industries have been publicly outed for varying degrees of inappropriate conduct.**

Equally distressing is the emboldened racism we've seen in the past year. From Rosanne Barr's racist tweet to the Starbucks incident in which a former white employee called police on two men of color as they waited for a friend, acting out on biases happens frequently. Starbucks found that "insufficient support and training" and "bias" led to that incident, and took steps to remediate it by providing training to 175,000 employees at the end of May 2018.

Your own resort likely has preventative measures in place, including equal opportunity employment, anti-harassment and discrimination policies, and training to reinforce the expectation of friendly, respectful behavior toward internal and external guests. But are you really doing enough?

Every day at our resorts, supervisors and managers field complaints from team members in distress about conduct that needs to be addressed. What if that supervisor is unsure, intimidated, or uncomfortable with confrontation? What reasonable expectations can managers have of team members to stand up to a pattern of unwelcome behavior—or just one creepy quid pro quo request from someone in a position of power?

Inaction is not a solution. On the contrary, it's condonation—essentially management's stamp of approval of the

behavior. And that might place the resort in legal jeopardy.

## DEFINING INDISCRETIONS

The #MeToo movement created a safety zone in which all genders are more comfortable reporting experiences of harassment and bullying. Now the Time's Up movement has taken awareness, intolerance, prevention, and accountability to the next level. What specifically has your resort done to renew its commitment to a harassment-free environment where respect gets respect?

## UNINTENTIONAL GENDER BIAS

Gender bias is defined as unequal treatment in employment opportunity (such as promotion, pay, benefits, and privileges), and expectations due to attitudes based on the sex of an employee or group



#timesup

Illustration elements: Vecteezy.com

ers or individual contributors because it seems inappropriate and uncomfortable to ask a woman out for a beer or to play a round of golf. Just as it's easy and natural for women to spend time with other women, men are conditioned to hanging out with men.

For men and women, it's hard to know how to behave at the executive table when no one is paving the way for them. Being ambitious is often not an admired trait in women. Subtle digs at a woman's drive for success can derail a promising career. Are mobility and pay-adjustment mechanisms at your resort transparent enough to encourage talent of any gender or color to climb the economic ladder?

## DISCRIMINATION IN PAY PRACTICES

Resort hiring practices can perpetuate discrimination, creating a form of institutionalized discrimination regarding gender pay disparity.

Why? Because resorts typically decide what they will pay new hires, especially in jobs above entry level, based partly or entirely on how much they earned at their last jobs. Since women are often paid less than their male colleagues, asking about past salaries nearly guarantees that the wage disparity will continue throughout their careers.

Mountain Creek Resort, N.J., is one operation that's adopting new practices. President and general manager Joe Hession recently launched an audit to ensure that incumbents were being paid based on defensible factors, and then unleashed funding to make the necessary wage adjustments.

It takes courage and commitment to audit your pay practices. It's easier to pursue "ostrich management," a term derived from the ostrich's tendency to thrust its head and neck into a bush, imagining that the whole of its body is concealed. Similarly, many managers ignore pay disparity and discrimination, hoping it will magically vanish.

Does your resort employ an objective system to assign pay rates and to identify candidates for leadership continuity? Are you proactively sourcing and prescribing development plans for qualified candidates of all genders? You can

begin by auditing your talent pipeline to create deliberate, intentional advancement of qualified women, even for male-dominated areas and departments, by providing transparent opportunities for upward mobility.

## HARASSMENT

Harassment is a pattern of repeated offensive behavior that appears to a reasonable observer to intentionally target a specific person or persons. **Abuse** can take many different forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, bullying, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, or other types of aggression.

To protect against such treatment, both federal and state employment laws define a **protected class** as a group of people who share a common characteristic and are legally protected from discrimination on the basis of that characteristic. Under federal law, it is illegal to discriminate due to race, color, sex (gender), age (40 and older), religion, national origin, disability, citizenship status, or genetic information.

**Gender identity** is how you think about yourself. Traditionally we have learned that there are only two gender identities, male and female, defined as "gender binary." Now, that applies to those who identify as one or the other, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth. But gender is a spectrum, and not limited to just two possibilities. A child could identify as both, or neither, or as another gender entirely. Agender people do not identify with any gender.

Think that's not worth consideration? Think again. In the last year, several jurisdictions—Oregon, Washington, D.C., New York, and Washington state—have recognized a non-binary option on drivers' licenses. California became the first state to allow non-binary residents to change their gender on all relevant legal documents, including birth certificates, to a gender-neutral option.

In our business, we serve guests from all walks of life. We invest in team members who create memorable experiences for every demographic and psychographic. Resorts strive to create a nondiscriminatory environment for guests and all team members. Resort operators need not wait for their own states to legislate

of employees.

It shouldn't be a stretch for industry managers to recognize and accept that they have unintentionally created a good-old-boys' network that has made upward mobility more accessible for men. Look around. Most resorts' management teams are still overwhelmingly male. Granted, the landscape has improved, and more females now sit at executive tables. But it's still very rare to find a female mountain manager, terrain park manager, lead groomer, or snowmaker. Why is this still a challenge?

I was once told that females choose to leave the harsh conditions of mountain life after a couple of seasons. The rationale was that once they find a husband they want to have kids, and they are only successful in inside positions. The female patroller who just saved a life or the talented female instructor who has converted thousands of children into lifelong snowsports enthusiasts would respectfully disagree.

While this may seem like a true story that happened before the millennium change, and it is, consider the reasons that women haven't yet widely cracked the pink ceiling. Without malice, male managers may not consider spending informal time with aspiring female lead-



additional SOGIE (see below) protection for their valued employees.

## BASIC SOGIE

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** is who you are physically attracted to based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.

**GENDER IDENTITY** is how you think about yourself.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** is how you demonstrate your gender based on traditional gender roles through the ways you act, behave, and interact.

### DO THE RIGHT THING

Consider your own resort's investigation and resolution mechanisms. How responsive are they? Were there times when leadership was unwilling to make decisions and approve actions, even when there was a sense of urgency? Managers may have avoided launching investigations and enacting progressive corrective action procedures for certain high-performing or sacred-cow employees or managers.

Imagine this scenario. A trusted high-performing male employee complains repeatedly about an angry manager with an explosive temper who yells only at female employees. This long-tenured manager is highly valued for his operations expertise and ability to meet goals. The inexperienced, non-executive-level HR manager is frustrated that she can't get any traction. Although there was plenty of rationale to separate this volatile manager for just cause, management was reluctant. The solution? When conservative legal counsel advised that they separate him with a severance agreement, they chose not to reveal any of the complaints against him.

Was it a reward for bad behavior?

Regardless, there's plenty wrong with this scenario.

It might take less time to ask if anything went *right*. Did you catch it? It was the male employee standing up for his female colleagues. This is the kind

of action that changes dysfunctional norms. This action can take several forms: Witnesses call out bad behavior. Men don't let other men get away with "locker room talk" or blatant bullying. Women don't diminish the sensitivities of other women.

There's a further unhappy aspect of this scenario: For the angry manager's next employer, the management team and their unsuspecting employees will be exposed to the same destructive, uncorrected behaviors.

### FIVE MANAGEMENT MUSTS

Change is often difficult. The following steps can hasten and ease the process.

1. Train managers, especially front-line supervisors, to keep a finger on the pulse in their departments. It's up to them to look into rumors of inappropriate behavior, thoughtfully listen to concerns, and address them swiftly.
2. Hire and mentor emerging HR representatives. Fully fund their wages and the activities that create employee engagement. You get what you pay for.
3. Provide the HR team a strong, experienced leader who embodies gravitas. This person should report directly to the head of the resort and have a seat at the executive table. HR people are not the sheriff—they are your specialist in organizational behavior and development, and the conscience and keeper of your culture.
4. HR management should take the lead on investigations in a timely manner to get to the truth. They must consistently enforce policies for reporting, investigating, and resolving complaints of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
5. Department heads should audit physical environments such as locker rooms, kitchens, and male-centric areas such as maintenance shops where offensive items might be displayed.

### TRAINING TEAM MEMBERS

In training team members to stand up to inappropriate conduct, do you clearly communicate the protocol for reporting issues and complaints? Ideally, an expert should facilitate annual training for

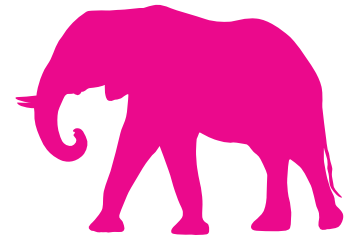
anti-harassment and bullying, and conduct a live, robust discussion of real life issues that happen in our industry. That's much more effective than a canned, dry, impersonal legal or computer-based presentation or "quiz."

Your resort can, and should, include "unconscious bias" training. Mountain Creek committed to a half day "diversity and inclusion" workshop for managers in June. The session exposed feelings and behaviors that were then discussed and addressed.

Like your resort, Mountain Creek has values that it intends to honor. But biases, unconscious or conscious, and acting on them, erode that aspiration. Based on the success of the managers' workshop, Mountain Creek intends to cascade this training to all team members during onboarding.

### THREE TEAM-MEMBER MUSTS

1. Speak up! Don't engage in a debate with the offender. Tell the person to stop.
2. Document, document, document! When, where, what, and who was there? Tell somebody!
3. If you witness it, get involved! Be a defender. Don't turn a blind eye.



We're all in this together, and these three team-member musts will go a long way toward quashing unwelcome behavior. Speak up about harassment, bullying or discrimination.

That said, supervisors must understand it is their responsibility to notice and report behaviors even when team members don't complain.

When mountain resort leaders choose to champion and adopt these practical suggestions as strategic initiatives, their resorts, and by association our entire dynamic industry, can become a collective beacon for fairness and practical progress.

Learn more from Laura Moriarty at [www.tahoetrainingpartners.com](http://www.tahoetrainingpartners.com). ■