

Sexual Harassment: The Work Is Never Done



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In a world where progress can quickly be reversed, we must remember that the fight against sexual harassment in the workplace is perpetual. It is time for organizations to take proactive measures, strengthen their anti-harassment policies, and create a culture that values equality, dignity, and respect.

2023 marks 50 years since Billie Jean King, EDGE Certification ambassador, successfully fought for equal prize money for men and women at the US Open. But when speaking at the anniversary event in August, King highlighted that working towards gender equality hasn't stopped:

"While we celebrate today, our work is far from done. Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won. You earn it and you win it in every generation."

The younger generation may not know about King's battle for gender equality in tennis and beyond. And in some ways, it doesn't matter; there are always new battles to fight.

The work is never done.

Michelle Obama, also speaking at the anniversary event, echoed this: "This is about how women are seen and valued in this world. We have seen how quickly progress like this can be taken away if we are not mindful and vigilant, if we do not keep remembering and advocating and organizing and speaking out and, yes, voting."

It is, in some ways, frustrating that the fight is never over, but we must not be discouraged. Times change. Societal expectations change. And every generation has the duty to rethink what gender equality is in the context of their own experience and continue advancing toward it.

"I'm still trying to learn more and more all the time," Billie Jean King said to PBS in a discussion about equal pay. "I'm not that emphatic. I'm trying to figure it out."

The ongoing battle against sexual harassment

On 20 August 2023, Luis Rubiales, then boss of Spain's football federation (RFEF), kissed player Jenni Hermoso while celebrating the nation's success at the Women's World Cup final. The backlash was swift and fierce. Hermoso stated to the media that she did not consent to the kiss and Rubiales – despite his protestations that he had done



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nothing wrong – eventually resigned from his position and was handed a restraining order by the Spanish courts.

This is a very public example of sexual harassment in the workplace. And it perfectly demonstrates why we must never stop progressing, never stop moving and adapting. The progress made through the popularisation of women's football was undone with a stark reminder that gender equity is a perpetual challenge.

Billie Jean King is right: time moves on, and you must move with it.

This is the very real reason why organizations must strengthen their anti-sexual harassment policies. If it isn't robust enough to prevent sexual harassment, business leaders can't be surprised by the consequences of their inaction. Only disruption can bring change.

Take the first step

Organizations must actively develop a culture in which harassment is known to be unacceptable and in which victims can raise concerns with the full confidence that they will be taken seriously and dealt with promptly and discreetly.

The first step to achieving this is to put in place a robust policy to prohibit and prevent sexual harassment that demonstrates the organizations values around equality, dignity and respect at work.

What is included in an anti-harassment policy?

- A clear purpose: a commitment to providing a harassment-free workplace for all employees
- Legislation with which the organization must comply and legal definitions of key terms



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- Objectives and actions, such as providing resources and introducing mandatory training
- How complaints can be raised, informally and formally, and how they will be investigated
- Who is responsible for policy implementation and who is ultimately accountable for its success
- How the policy's effectiveness will be measured and when the policy will be reviewed
- How the progress against actions will be communicated

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