

WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS

Emma is a young woman in the third month of her training contract at a City law firm. Her supervisor is called Harry. Simon, another lawyer comes up to her desk and says 'Look, I know you are Harry's b*tch, but I need you to do this for me.'

Where do you start with this? The gratuitous insult? The casual sexism? The abuse of position and power? There is nothing so visible and impactful as behaviour. It's visceral and immediate. It's what happens between two human beings. It goes to the heart of who we are. And so often we think it's about us. That it's our fault. That somehow, we must have done something to make this happen, to make this other person behave in this way.

And what is Emma to do about Simon? (The names, of course, have been changed.) Complain to HR? Challenge this older man, a partner in the firm in which she hopes to progress her professional life, a man who has the power to advance or to block the advancement of her career? No. She does nothing. She endures, rationalises, explains away. 'It's just banter. He doesn't mean anything.' She returns to her work, gets on with her day. But the feeling of violation lingers.

Does using the language of 'violation' sound like an over-reaction? A disproportionate response to a casual comment? We don't think so. Simon has daughters. Would he call his daughter derogatory names? His wife? No. Would he be angry if someone else, another man, talked to his daughter or his wife, with disrespect? Yes. Simon's behaviour is hypocritical, disgraceful, unacceptable. But what is his employer to do? Dismiss everyone who falls short? Everyone whose behaviour fails to meet the standard?

Addressing behaviour in the workplace is complex, nuanced and fraught with difficulty. The example above is about casual sexism but the list of other types of behaviour is a long one – from bullying, racism and intimidation to rudeness, exclusion and disrespect. The effect on people's careers, health and wellbeing can be profound. In the last paragraph we used

the phrase 'meet the standard'. A phrase which begs many questions. What standard? Who sets that standard? What is the logic, the justification, the reasoning that lies behind that standard? And what penalties are to be imposed on someone who falls short?

So, what do we do about workplace behaviour? Begin by holding a conversation. Get your people talking about where the boundaries lie. Because, fair enough, boundaries shift and change as society develops and evolves. Next, having set the boundaries, make clear the principles and values that underpin those boundaries. Whatever the culture in which we were brought up; whatever religion we do or do not belong to; whatever belief system we uphold: there are certain values that I believe are universal. Respect. Consideration. Courtesy. Kindness. Universal because they are admirable in themselves. And because, without them, life is intolerable and a civilised society impossible.

Peace is more than the absence of war. A productive, energising workplace is about much more than the absence of bad behaviour. Make this a positive. Keep the focus on what good behaviour looks and feels like rather than installing complex processes of prohibition and control. Work to create a culture in which negative behaviours are not tolerated. As leaders, be the embodiment of courtesy and grace. Make time for your people. Show them the respect they deserve. Be kind.

The FTI Consulting approach



Gather information and understand the status quo

What behaviours are being seen in your organisation?
How frequent are they and in what context do they happen?
How far is unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour being reported?



Quantify the impact

How extensive is the impact of these behaviours in different dimensions – employee engagement, morale and motivation, productivity, staff retention etc?



Assess the risk

The risk to reputation and brand. Financial and operational risk. The risk of litigation and employment tribunals.



Undertake an analysis

Why are these things happening? What combination of factors is coming together – culture, role models, leadership style, workplace environment etc?



Define objectives

What do you want to achieve? What does success look like? What is the change you want to make?



Define a strategy to achieve that vision of success

That strategy will be unique and tailored to the needs of your organisation.

How we can make an impact for your people

Our innovative and effective solutions can be applied in your organisation to mitigate the impact of negative behaviours, to support those who have suffered as a result of them, and to orientate your company and its people towards success in the future by creating a culture where such behaviours are stamped out, and where individuals can thrive. We can apply our wealth of experience and expert knowledge and to help you:

- ✓ Do the immediate and urgent things that need to happen: call unacceptable behaviours out, support the people who have suffered from those behaviours ensuring the progress of their career is not hindered and mediate and resolve conflicts between individuals
- ✓ Provide leadership development to ensure senior people are acting as effective role models
- ✓ Implement a culture change programme to create an improved working environment and to shift attitudes and behaviours
- ✓ Train key people on the employment law framework and the penalties that may be employed under that law
- ✓ Create an internal communications plan to support that change
- ✓ Run workshops for managers on how to deal with different types of unacceptable behaviour and to stop situations escalating – and run workshops for team members to help them understand the impact of their own behavior
- ✓ Ensure you have clear processes and procedures your people can use to express concerns, raise issues and report on behaviours that they see
- ✓ Define and agree boundaries in relation to behaviour, language and vocabulary. Encourage personal accountability and prevent 'bystander effect' – where people see but do not report or call out the unacceptable behaviour they see
- ✓ Facilitate the creation of new support networks to share insights and ideas, to empower women and to promote positive action
- ✓ Facilitate the creation of a charter that sets the standard for conduct across your organisation

WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS

Preventing workplace conflict is a key driver for improving employee retention

Preventing workplace conflict is a key driver for improving employee retention. 40% of UK employees reported conflict at work in the last year. The majority of the problems reported were with the person's direct line manager. 75% of employees reported they left their job because of their manager and not the job itself.

*Gifford, J. 2000. *Getting under the skin of workplace conflict: Tracing the experiences of employees*. CIPD

*Gallup, 2016, *State of the American Manager*

Positive workplaces yield positive results: improved talent attraction, profitability and diversity

- Organisations that promote high emotional wellbeing are highly sought after by younger generations, along with organisations that are fair and value diversity¹. Thus negative workplace behaviour drives turnover intentions and reduces talent retention.
- Gallup reports 21% greater profitability in the absence of negative workplace behaviours, along with a 20% reduction in absenteeism.
- In the absence of sexual harassment, the ability to concentrate increases and consumer service is also improved².
- Positive workplace behaviours facilitate the achievement of other strategic objectives, for example, allowing women to flourish in their roles and achieve high paying jobs is key to reducing the Gender Pay Gap.

1. FTI Research on Millennials

2. The Spiritual Impact of Workplace Sexual Harassment and Bullying on Nurses (2013)

Workplace crises will cost your businesses reputation and finances

Harassment claims, or high-profile workplace disputes can lead to periods of crisis within a company, which can have serious consequences for both the reputation and operation of the business. To put the cost of a crisis into perspective, FTI Consulting analysed 100 companies hit by crises in the past year. As a direct result of these incidents across these companies, it was revealed that:

- 32% of senior executives lost their jobs and 14% of companies went out of business
- \$200bn of value was destroyed via share price plunges
- Media coverage of companies increased by 35 times in the month following the crisis, and even more so on social media

Therefore, the avoidance of a crisis of any type, but especially crises related to workplace cultures that may be easier to prevent, should clearly be prioritised at all costs.

MATTHEW SOLON

Managing Director

People & Change

+44 (0)20 3319 5593

matthew.solon@fticonsulting.com

About FTI Consulting

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organisations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centres throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities.

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