Advice to 2020 Political Candidates and Campaigns

Political campaigns, along with many other high-pressure workplace environments, can, even if unintentionally, create cultures where sexual harassment, misconduct and abuse can thrive. This may not be a surprise when an environment consists of working around the clock in high-pressure environments and close quarters, socializing together and an absence or shortage of formal HR policies and procedures due to the "start-up" nature of campaigns.

As the 2020 campaign season quickly kicks into high gear, it will be essential for political candidates to champion safe, healthy and harassment-free workplaces and environments. RALIANCE offers the following best practices and tips to consider when it comes to prevention.

1. Be proactive. Promote a culture of respect and inclusion.

Political candidates and their senior staff are responsible for modeling good behavior and setting norms and standards that make clear sexual harassment, misconduct and abuse will not be tolerated. In many ways, how campaigns structure and treat their staff sends a message about the political candidate's broader values and priorities. It is essential that campaign leadership move from a focus on targets, harassers, and legal compliance to one where all employees, regardless of position, are empowered to change their workplace culture.

2. Maintain a clear and comprehensive anti-harassment policy

A commitment to an inclusive and respectful workplace is not in and of itself enough. Campaign leadership must ensure accountability mechanisms are in place throughout the organization to hold employees responsible for their actions. These policies and procedures must also ensure that all employees are not only informed about their rights, responsibility, and resources, but also are confident that the campaign will quickly, objectively and thoroughly address an incident when it arises.

3. Integrate bystander trainings across the campaign

Stopping sexual harassment will require involvement and support from all levels of the campaign, from the campaign manager setting the strategy to the field organizers knocking on doors. Every staffer should be trained to be an educated and engaged bystander, meaning owning the responsibility of being involved before, during, or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that threaten, harass, or otherwise encourage sexual misconduct.

4. Put workers' safety ahead of success

Everyone who commits to a political campaign is dedicating their lives on behalf of a candidate's success, and they may be even more hesitant to come forward if they fear their story will threaten their candidate's electoral chances. It's therefore doubly important to communicate to staff that all reports of sexual misconduct will be taken seriously and should be made without fear of the consequences to the reputation of the candidate or the success of the campaign.

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5. Acknowledge and mitigate power dynamics

Campaigns have a number of elements that can exacerbate harmful power dynamics. They are fronted by high-profile candidates, many of whom themselves are influential leaders. Staff in management roles are often long-trusted aides, overseeing larger staffs of workers looking to break into politics. As the #MeToo movement has proven beyond dispute, these power dynamics can make organizations of all stripes breeding grounds for harassment and abuse, both sexual and otherwise. Campaigns must be mindful of how these dynamics can enable unsafe environments and hurt survivors who seek to come forward. For example, campaign leadership can take proactive measures to reduce these harmful impacts by training supervisors and mid-level management to understand how to respond effectively to survivors and staff members who have behaved inappropriately.

RALIANCE provides training, tools and consulting to help organizations working to strengthen their sexual harassment policies and procedures. For more information, please email corporate@raliance. org or call (202) 869-8550.