



1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 869-8550
www.raliance.org

An Open Letter to CHROs and HR Executives

April 17, 2018

Released on Medium: <https://medium.com/@Huntbridge/an-open-letter-to-chros-and-hr-executives-5112d7040a67>

Dear Chief Human Resources Officers and Human Resource Executives,

We imagine you are aware of the recent media attention on sexual harassment. As an HR executive, you may have wondered about HR's role in responding to allegations of sexual harassment; you may have empathized with the HR department knowing what it is like when someone makes a complaint of harassment against top talent within an organization; or you may have paused to reflect upon similar situations within your own organization. "What if? Did we do enough? Could we have handled that better? Are we liable in any way?" These are all plausible reactions.

The law is clear about how complaints of harassment must be handled. The need to conduct a swift and thorough investigation is paramount. Even so, when you are managing the complaint and investigation process, rarely is it clear cut and your use of judgment comes into play. You may face opposing accounts of what occurred, lack of evidence, or internal pressure, to name a few. Most organizations have good intentions when it comes to how they handle complaints. Yet the actions, investigations, and resolutions are subject to scrutiny and, as we have seen, not always enough.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness month. Our goal is to support your efforts to foster a harassment-free workplace so that you are able to proactively create a culture that values and demonstrates respect, kindness, and a collective responsibility for a healthy workplace.

There is no doubt that you and your team are deeply committed to fostering an organizational culture where respect and civility are promoted and harassment is swiftly and proportionally addressed. Here are a few strategies that you can implement to create a best-in-class organization where all employees, regardless of position, are empowered to change their workplace culture.

Boost Your Education Efforts

Many organizations provide harassment prevention courses that miss the mark in one or more ways. Off-the shelf training does not provide the opportunity for employees and managers to engage, ask questions and truly understand the organization's commitment to a harassment-free workplace. In addition, some training programs inevitably create more confusion and fear about what harassment is and of the protections given to those who report harassment.

Assess the effectiveness of your current harassment prevention training rigorously. It is worthwhile to consult with outside experts in sexual violence prevention to evaluate changing behaviors and new approaches to training. Conduct focus groups consisting of individuals who have recently taken your harassment prevention training. Have an open discussion about the information they retained and get

Ending Sexual Violence in One Generation.

their input on what worked well and suggestions for improvement. This will provide you with meaningful feedback, and also demonstrates your organization's commitment to a harassment-free workplace.

Once you've assessed the effectiveness of your harassment prevention training and education, take the next step by partnering your in-house legal counsel with your talent development experts. Empower the teams to develop and deliver sexual harassment training that is rooted in adult learning theory AND legally sound. After the new training is offered, be sure to conduct focus groups and repeat the cycle if necessary.

Leverage your Employee Survey

Annual employee engagement surveys offer a great opportunity to gain an organization-wide assessment of culture around sexual harassment. We discussed this in our [open letter to CEOs and Boards here](#).

Engage your Board

Your Board of Directors has a vested interest in the health of your organization. Board members are not commonly involved in sexual harassment prevention; however, considering the current environment, it may be time to engage your Board in a meaningful way. Consider providing proactive board education regarding sexual harassment prevention. By offering executive level briefings, you'll not only increase awareness of the risks associated with sexual harassment complaints, but you'll also ensure that your board is engaged and supportive of your organization's prevention efforts.

As an HR Executive, you will have to make tough calls at times. Engaging outside help early to support your training, engagement, and policy efforts can help ease those tough calls while helping the organization move away from mere legal compliance and move toward investing to build a respectful workplace.

This is the second in a series of open letters aimed at providing information and best practices to foster a harassment-free workplace and guard your company's reputation from becoming the next headline. Our first [letter to CEOs and Boards can be found here](#).

Sincerely,

Kristen Houser, MPA
Chief Public Affairs Officer
Raliance
khouser@raliance.org

Jeff Perkins
CEO
Huntbridge
jeff.perkins@huntbridge.com

Ending Sexual Violence in One Generation.

Jackie Kindall

CEO

Kindall Evolve

jackie@kindallevolve.com

RALIANCE, Huntbridge, and Kindall Evolve have teamed up to provide training, tools and consulting to help companies working to strengthen their sexual harassment policies and procedures.