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## **An Open Letter to Managers and Supervisors**

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Dear Managers and Supervisors,

As you know, the recent media attention on sexual harassment and misconduct in the workplace draws attention to one of the biggest problems companies are facing today. As a result, you might be reflecting on your own experiences as a leader and thinking about how you can ensure a safer work environment for your employees.

While you may think that your company's HR department and upper management are primarily responsible for handling reports of sexual misconduct, do not feel that your role as a manager is merely to pass along claims and complaints. Managers are often in the most effective position to model and uphold your company's values and promote a positive and respectful workplace culture. You are uniquely positioned to make some of the most impactful actions to address workplace harassment.

In this letter, we outline several simple, yet critical, steps that you can take to encourage a positive workplace and protect yourself and your team from becoming the next media headline.

### **Promote a Respectful Environment**

Your role as a manager means that you have the opportunity to — and should — model good behavior. As a role model, you should be able to recognize the kinds of actions and comments that may threaten the comfort and safety of your team. The following are things that can lead to a negative environment, and possibly violate your company's conduct policy. Proactive engagement on these things can help reduce the likelihood of more serious problems.

Comments/dialogue of sexual nature

- Nicknames
  - Lewd jokes — shared verbally or electronically
  - Comments on appearance
  - Asking about personal matters
  - Inappropriate touching or invasion of personal space
  - Displaying/distributing inappropriate content
  - Engaging in these behaviors when representing the company outside of the work place, such as at conventions, dinner meetings and events.
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## Ending Sexual Violence in One Generation.

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It is helpful to have regular, open discussions with your staff to articulate norms and standards for behavior within your team and encourage everyone to uphold those values. Conversations that promote open discussion are a simple and proactive way to prevent or address things before they escalate.

### **Be Engaged**

Effective managers are engaged with their team. Regular interaction can help mitigate inappropriate behaviors before problems escalate and build the trusting relationships that empower staff to bring problems to your attention. Victims often report instances to their supervisors rather than directly to HR. Best practice organizations empower managers and supervisors to respond quickly to incidents on their team, but it requires that managers understand how to respond effectively to survivors, as well as staff members who have behaved inappropriately. Work with your HR team to communicate the incident effectively, respectfully, and objectively through your company's channels.

### **Don't be a Complicit Bystander**

Leaders have an obligation to address inappropriate conduct when it is witnessed or reported. Ignoring the problem or assuming it was a one-time incident or misinterpreted comment can embolden or encourage the employee who is behaving inappropriately. Failing to address "lower level" problematic behavior can create a slippery slope and ultimately result in escalating harassment and misconduct.

### **Know your Company Policy**

Check with your HR team so that you know and are familiar with your organization's policy on sexual harassment and misconduct. Communicating regularly with your HR team about how policies are working for your team helps to strengthen the organizational culture and trust, but also ensures that your team's voice is heard during HR policy review and development. With this knowledge, you'll be prepared to take the right steps in the event of an incident.

Stopping sexual harassment will require involvement and support from all levels of an organization. You can read our other letters to [CEOs](#) and [CHROs](#) here.

As a supervisor, you are the front line in building a respectful and safe workplace. Work with your team to construct a positive culture that promotes respect and equality and empowers individuals to stop behaviors that are uncomfortable or threatening.

Sincerely,

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*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.*