

I am so pleased to share with you this post by guest blogger Amy Stephson. Amy and I have enjoyed coffee dates talking shop about workplace harassment and conflict. I thought that you would enjoy hearing some words of wisdom from her.

**Reflections of a Workplace Investigator.**



A gay male employee complains: My co-worker and her husband lunch together every day, but it's discriminatory that she doesn't want me to discuss my same sex partner. The co-worker says: I'm a Christian and homosexuality is against my religion. I'm happy to interact with my gay co-worker, but don't want to have to hear about his partner.

An African-American employee complains: My co-workers laugh and talk about me in their native language. This is harassment. The co-workers reply: When we use our language, we're not talking about her; we're just chatting and only do it when no one else is around. Our employer's policy allows us to speak in our language and it would be discriminatory to stop us.

These are just two of the many scenarios in the life of a workplace investigator. Most are more mundane: Managers have terrible communication skills or play favorites. Poor performers blame bias rather than their job performance. Managers have anger problems. Perceptually challenged employees create havoc. People hate their jobs, but can't find another that pays as well, so make trouble.

And now a new source of conflict is creating challenges in the workplace: generational diversity. The 62-79 year-old “Matures” (as consultant Karyl K. Innis calls them) have very different attitudes toward work than the 43-66 year-old Boomers, who in turn have different attitudes than the 28–42 year-old “Gen X’ers” or the under-28 “Gen Y’s.”

Is there an underlying reason for all this? Much of it is just human nature: people are complex, see the world through their own perceptual lens, have competing interests, have personality conflicts, lack the necessary competencies, offend and get offended. We live in a country where personal boundaries are often blurred, many have a sense of entitlement or victimhood, and television shows workplaces where there’s more talk of sex than work.

There’s another reason why employers end up having to hire investigators: They fail to prevent conflict through policies, training, and coaching. And then, when conflicts do arise, they fail to manage them in a timely manner. Proactively dealing with conflict may seem like a distraction, but it’s an essential part of risk management and running a productive, efficient business.

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