



Part 2: Sex, Power, And The Workplace – Preventing The Backlash

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Are workplaces at risk for a backlash? How do we preserve and continue to advance opportunities for women when their male coworkers are worried? Worried about exactly where the line *is* between friendliness and sexual harassment at work? A [recent New York Times article](#) raised this question with men at work, who wondered about their own behavior, and also raise concern for their female coworkers.

In general, although women at work acknowledge the recent conversation about sexual harassment is overdue, they now worry about being discouraged from or worse, not even groomed or considered for new opportunities. They worry about being excluded. Candidly, for women, these are old worries. In addition to the oft-reported wage disparity, statistics confirm the corporate world has long been run by men.

A Bloomberg BNA analysis in July 2017 showed that there were no (i.e., zero) women on corporate boards at almost half of the 75 biggest IPOs in the U.S. in the past three years. But, it is also well-established that hiring women is good for business. The reasons for these disparities are complex and won't be solved in one blog post, or even six. According to one [recent poll](#), both men and women are wary of one-on-one situations with the opposite sex. So, how do employers continue to advance the opportunities for women (and all employees) and reduce the risk of sexual harassment or inappropriate

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behavior? It requires men and women in power to be deliberate about their decisions, to be thoughtful about opportunities and to think beyond what is convenient or easy.

Whether male or female, if you're in a position of power, here are some guidelines to consider:

- Don't flirt, even in jest
- Respect a co-worker's personal space
- Don't have more than one drink with co-workers
- Discourage the concept of a "work spouse"
- Except in *clearly professional contexts*, avoid meeting alone with a colleague of the sex to which you are attracted to
- Avoid complimenting or commenting on someone's appearance

You might find that some of the above don't work for your business. Yet, I would argue that they are both good practice and smart for business. For two nearly opposite views on this subject, I encourage you to add both these articles to your reading list: [New York Times](#); [National Review](#)