

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T In The Workplace? The EEOC Becomes Trainer-in-Chief

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The EEOC announced this week that it is launching [training programs](#) to help employers foster respectful, inclusive work environments. The EEOC Training Institute is offering to send trainers into your workplace and lead separate modules for supervisors and employees. Supervisor training titled “Leading for Respect” is a four-hour program; the one for all employees, “Respect in the Workplace,” is a three-hour program. This week’s announcement culminates a long inquiry into workplace harassment. In January 2015, the EEOC formed the Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, which released its findings last summer — right around the same time as a series of high-profile sexual harassment lawsuits occurred. The Select Task Force determined that most compliance training focuses on legal definitions and standards. So, the EEOC’s new program promises to provide an “exciting training alternative for harassment prevention,” including

- reviewing acceptable conduct
- teaching how to create respectful workplaces
- providing tools for responding to harassing conduct
- teaching bystanders when and how to intervene

This program also would presumably meet the EEOC’s standards for compliance with the “reasonable care” standard to prevent harassment, as well as the statutory-requirements for training in California, Connecticut and Maine. The EEOC’s guidance on these training programs provides insight into its view of businesses’ responsibilities: “No one training can change an organizational culture. That said, preliminary studies suggest that training on civil and respectful workplaces can help foster a climate in which uncivil behavior may be nipped in the bud – before it rises to the level of illegal harassment.” The introduction of the training modules raises numerous questions for employers that may need to be addressed. For example, what are the risks and benefits of inviting the EEOC in-house? How will employees react to three-hour programs? Stay tuned.

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