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Employers' Role in Changing "Me Too" to "Not Us"

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The news has been fraught with allegations of sexual harassment by major players in the television and movie production industries, high tech and venture capital firms, and others. High value employees alleged to have engaged in harassment and/or promulgating an environment that supports sweeping complaints under the rug are no longer being hidden by the silence of victims (female and male) that have allegedly been subject to sexual harassment and/or sexual assault in the workplace. However, as we know, harassment can occur at any level in an organization – and not just by high value employees.

Employers, mainly executives and human resources, play a pivotal role in changing the chorus of "me too" to a refrain of "not us." Executive and human resources professionals must lead the way for creating a diverse, welcoming, and supportive environment where employees who believe they have been harassed can *trust* that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated timely, and addressed as necessary. Although it seems daunting to build such trust, it can and must be done by employers not only to defend against claims of harassment, but to strive to create a workplace where women and men can be productive and where both are equally valued.

In light of the recent media spotlight on harassment, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently issued a statement entitled, "[WYSK: What to Do if You Believe You Have Been Harassed at Work](#)." It is pretty simple – tell the person who is harassing you to stop and/or follow the steps in your employer's anti-harassment policy. The EEOC goes on to state that if there is no policy, talk with your supervisor or other manager and ask for help. The EEOC also reminds employees that they can file a charge of discrimination and/or meet with an EEOC representative to discuss options.

By now, employers should know that a strong anti-harassment policy is a requirement for properly defending against harassment claims. Now may be the right time to dust that policy off, update it as necessary, and re-communicate to all employees with an emphasis on the commitment to maintaining a workplace free of harassment. However, that alone will not build trust; actions always speak louder than words in a policy, so employers must act when internal complaints of harassment are made or when they know that bad behavior is occurring. Taking prompt, appropriate action can help to build trust with employees and, at the same time, provide a defense to claims of harassment – who could ask for anything more?