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Scenario Discussions for Addressing Workplace Sexual Harassment

Scenario 1

Brian, Jose and, Anika work in a small office where each of them has their own cubicle. Brian and Jose sometimes make comments about what type of women they find attractive. One day, Brian says to Jose, “I like women with little round butts” in front of Anika. Jose laughs as usual. Anika tells them to knock it off and that they are disgusting. Both Brian and Jose apologize to Anika. The next day, Anika again overhears Brian tell Jose a comment about a woman’s “nice legs”. Anika’s face flushes. Anika asks them to stop. Brian and Jose continue to ignore Anika’s protests and say they were just privately talking about their own personal preferences in women. Anika is upset and goes to HR to complain. Anika is nervous Brian and Jose will retaliate in some way as it is a very small office. Anika thinks they should stop.

Question 1:

Is this sexual harassment?

Question 2:

What else could Jill have done?

Question 3:

What should the organization do?

Question 4:

Brian and Jose’s supervisor often laughs and rolls their eyes at Brian and Jose’s comments. They are told to knock it off if they get a little too crude though. Does this change anything?

Question 5:

What if in the scenario Brian and Jose were replaced with Jane and Rebecca and they were talking about the type of men they find attractive. Would that change anything?

Question 6:

What if Anika did not hear the comments made by Brian and Jose? Is it still a problem?

Scenario 2

The local delivery driver comes into the office at least every other day with deliveries. The driver takes a liking to the new receptionist who is signing for the packages and asks her out. The receptionist is not interested and says no. The delivery driver is convinced the receptionist's mind can be changed. While not every day, but usually once a week or so, the driver brings candies, flowers, cards, small stuffed animals just for the receptionist. The receptionist is not interested and ignores the gestures. The receptionist tells a supervisor the driver is making them uncomfortable.

Question 1:

Is this sexual harassment?

Question 2:

What should the organization do?

Question 3:

What if the receptionist was painfully shy - and didn't speak up. Instead, they just looked uncomfortable and blushed?

Question 4:

Did you assume the delivery driver was a man? What if the driver is a woman?

Scenario 3

When Maria began working for your organization as a general labourer, she went by a different name and pronoun. A few years later, Maria began transitioning from male to female. Maria started the process of medical transition and developed female breasts as a result of hormone treatments. Maria was stared at and ignored. Other female co-workers have complained about Maria using “their” washroom. Other women in the office were friendlier, but often asked uncomfortable questions like what “parts” they had down there, if they could use the “new ones” and how?

Question 1:

Is this sexual harassment?

Question 2:

What should the organization do?

Question 3:

Does the industry matter? Construction is a notoriously “tougher” environment.

Question 4:

What should you do about staff complaints regarding Maria’s use of the “women’s” washroom?
