

Humour in the Workplace

In today's day and age of difficult business transition, it has become increasingly difficult to judge the effect of your particular brand of humour. At Hill Advisory Services we often encounter people that believe that there can simply be no humour in the workplace. We often hear phrases like, "I can't say anything at work" or "I guess we can't have any fun at all." We could not disagree with that sentiment more! We urge people to find humour that doesn't target, degrade, humiliate etc. We have heard the response, "There are no jokes that do not target someone." Again, we could not disagree more! Have a look at the brand of humour used by Bill Cosby for example. Sometimes good humour is the only thing that brings us back to the workplace following a difficult day!

We believe the difficulty in understanding this problem lies in the interpretation of 'targeted humour'. The real key to humour in the workplace is in simply not targeting anybody or any group with it. The specific groupings for which harassment and discrimination are prohibited lie within Human Rights and individual company policies.

Whether or not a joke or humour in the workplace targets is of course subjective. As such every joke needs to be evaluated individually. Some employees seem to forget that the key is to be aware of the types of jokes they tell.

The bottom line to all of this is to be aware of your joke telling and humour in the office. If your jokes and humour targets a person or a group of people then it is simply not appropriate to the workplace.

That being said it may be possible to have an awareness of the type of ones humour and still make a joke that targets. We do not expect everyone in the workplace to be perfect. We believe there are jokes that are made in the workplace that cross the line but are not made with ill intent. In cases like these we advocate that the person that is offended by the interaction make the 'joker' aware of the issue. Once that is done people need to have the chance to apologize and change their behaviour. For the jokes that hang on the grey edge this is the best tool for diffusion.

In the final analysis we believe that if people show respect for others boundaries and also clearly identify their own in relation to this topic, we would all be much better off.

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