

Educate, Prevent and Take Action

What to Know About Workplace Harassment

The topic of harassment has received a lot of attention in the media in recent months. While the magnifying glass has been focused on the Hollywood elite, politicians and corporate executives, workplace harassment is something that must be explained, prevented and addressed in all industries—including home improvement retail.

For a better understanding of workplace harassment, *Hardware Retailing* spoke to Patti Perez, vice president of workplace strategy at Emtrain, a company that strives to create healthier workplace cultures. Read the entire Q&A with Perez at [TheRedT.com/harassment-qa](https://www.theredt.com/harassment-qa), and then distribute this checklist to your team so everyone understands the nature of harassment and can work together to prevent it.*

What is workplace harassment?

Perez defines workplace harassment in two ways. One is with a capital 'H' and the other is with a lowercase 'h.' Both make for a toxic work environment, but only the capital H has legal ramifications. However, both are important to pay attention to.

Do you know the two forms of illegal harassment?

Quid pro quo, which is a 'this-for-that' situation that deals with sex or sexual favors. It features a power dynamic from leader to employee. A *hostile work environment* is the more common form of illegal harassment. It targets one or more protected characteristics, including race, religion, gender, age and disability, among others.

If a behavior isn't illegal, can it still create a negative work environment?

Any behavior that someone finds offensive should be addressed. To avoid illegal harassment, listen to those who report any type of offensive behavior and immediately address harassment that isn't illegal. The Workplace Color Spectrum™ is a free tool from Emtrain that can help you communicate and assess actions that are unlawful or may become illegal.

Use the Workplace Color Spectrum to communicate with team members.

When everyone is able to speak the same language on the topic of workplace harassment, it's easier to be on the same page, Perez says.

**This is not meant to provide legal advice. If you have concerns about policies and procedures, you should always check with a legal professional.*

Green

This type of behavior is respectful, positive and productive. If you see actions in this color, you have a great group of employees. Your work environment should strive to be green.

Yellow

This behavior wouldn't be categorized as harassment but is slightly problematic. The work environment may be stressful, irritating and demoralizing. The team should focus on communication and teamwork.

Orange

This is very close to being categorized as harassment. Whether welcome or not, jokes or comments based on a protected characteristic can lead to unlawful harassment. This may require guidance from HR.

Red

If considered severe or pervasive, comments and actions based on protected characteristics are unlawful harassment. This color represents an unproductive, uninviting and hostile workplace. This is very serious.