

Episode Script: Blatant Discrimination in the Workplace

Intro

- How to Have Hard Conversations at Work: An HR Perspective
- Name
- Podcast is about how to communicate effectively at work when the topics of discussion are difficult
- This is Episode 6: Blatant Discrimination at Work
- Basing episodes off research completed, my 3 years of HR experience, and the experience of my boss
- Cite my sources verbally along the way

Defining Discrimination

- Discrimination - treating someone unfairly because of protected characteristics (HR Search & Rescue in 2022)
- With the diversity pool of the workforce increasing, discrimination likewise increases, though it is prohibited by law
- People discriminate others based any aspect of their identity, but I'll draw attention to five types of discrimination and some statistics to demonstrate their prevalence in the workplace
- Age Discrimination
 - Chris Kolmar for Zippa in 2023 said that from 2020 to 2021, 21% of all claims filed with the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) were age discrimination claims
- Disability Discrimination
 - According to Wenzel Fenton Cabassa Employee Rights Attorneys in 2022, disability discrimination cases made up 36% of all cases last year
- Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression Discrimination
 - A survey by Harvard School of Public Health found that 90% of LGBT people believe there is discrimination in the American workplace against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people
 - The same survey said that 91% of LGBT people believe there is discrimination against gender-nonconforming individuals
 - Wenzel, Fenton, and Cabassa said discrimination against transgender individuals is the most common, with 90% of transgender employees experiencing it
 - The survey also mentioned that LGBT people of color are more likely to experience discrimination
- Race or Color Discrimination
 - A survey from Gallup in 2021 stated that 24% of Black and Hispanic employees said they experienced discrimination at work in the past 12 months

- Comparably, 15% of white employees and 16% of Asian employees said the same
- Wenzel, Fenton, and Cabassa said that 32% of all cases were race discrimination cases last year
- Sex & Gender Discrimination
 - The National Library of Medicine reported in 2019 that women reported a 53% higher rate of discrimination compared to men and that white men only experience discrimination 11% of the time

The Difficulties of Discrimination at Work

- It's no secret that being discriminated against is a negative experience, but I wanted to point out how discrimination affects work
- Maese and Lloyd for Gallup in 2021 said, "People who feel discriminated against are often less engaged, have poorer wellbeing, and, logically, would prefer to work elsewhere. Their employers are less profitable as a result."
- They also found that workplace discrimination can cause:
 - Negative perceptions of a company's culture, opportunities, and their coworkers
 - Feelings of psychological unsafety
 - Lack of belonging
 - Reduced ability to do their work
 - Reduced engagement and motivation

Why Employees Don't Speak Up

- Employees likely think the quickest way to end the discrimination is to quit their job
- They may not want to speak up because they fear they'll lose their job, so they bite the bullet and quit before they can be fired
- Borrelli & Associates in 2022 said that people may just accept harassment as the norm

Why Discrimination Exists

- Now I want to talk about why discrimination runs so rampant despite the amount of laws, employee handbooks, and articles that say it's unacceptable - what is the root of the problem?
- If we can figure out why discrimination exists, we can figure out to to eradicate it in the workplace because it's clear that what we are doing now is not preventing the problem from happening
- Amnesty International said, "At the heart of all forms of discrimination is prejudice based on concepts of identity, and the need to identify with a certain group. This can lead to division, hatred and even the dehumanization of other people because they have a different identity."
- So, why do we hate different identities?

- In an article called Why People Hate: The Science Behind Why We Love to Hate, Vanessa Van Edwards lists four main reasons:
 - People want a scapegoat
 - If you're struggling in any capacity, it's easy to put your energy into blaming someone else than to confront your own problems
 - Van Edwards mentioned something really interesting about hate groups. She said, "A lot of people join hate groups because it allows them to funnel the blame for all of their problems into another group of people while being supported by a group of people who share their beliefs and make them feel like they belong."
 - She further explained, "Research has found that people form stronger bonds when they are able to talk about their dislike toward someone else than when they both have positive feelings toward someone."
 - People want to connect
 - If someone is lonely and desperate to find a friend or form of community, they may feel especially inclined to join hate groups
 - People fear the unknown
 - Van Edwards explained that when a new person enters a group (whether it's a group of friends, class, or work team) many people begin to gossip about the person because they're afraid of how that person will change their established group dynamics - sharing hatred is a way for the original group to strengthen their bond
 - People let their insecurities get the best of them
 - Van Edwards went on to say that it's common for people to compare themselves to others, and when they conclude that another person may be better than them or have traits that they don't want to acknowledge that they share, they will speak out against that person to project their anxieties
- The last thing from Van Edwards' article I wanted to share is about the nature of humanity. She said, "Humans desire structure and certainty in their social lives. To establish that, people naturally divide into in-groups (social circles where everyone feel like they belong with one another) and out-groups (people who exist outside of social circles and are typically not welcomed into them). When people declare their dislike for others, it helps people understand the boundaries between social circles. This is a powerful motivator for people to form bonds because it satisfies their need to feel connected to others."
- Based on Van Edwards' findings, it appears that the people who discriminate or take part in hate groups are insecure, lonely, fearful of new people, and generally struggling
- People like this are going to exist no matter what - so it seems like discrimination will never fully be rooted out

What to Do if You are Discriminated Against

- Report a discrimination claim by following the steps outlined last episode. The condensed version of reporting a claim includes:
 - Gathering evidence of discrimination
 - Reporting a written claim to HR detailing what has happened and include the evidence - this is usually done in an email
 - Follow up with HR
 - If nothing is done, contact a lawyer
- How to Cope with Discrimination
 - The American Psychological Association in 2022 listed several discrimination coping techniques, which include:
 - Focusing on your strengths and practicing positive self-talk
 - It is easy to internalize the mean things people say
 - Focus on what you're good at and remind yourself of your positive qualities
 - Find a support system
 - Family and friends can remind you of your positive qualities
 - It can be painful to talk about discrimination, but finding a safe group of people to talk to about it can help relieve some of the stress
 - Get involved in communities
 - Finding a sense of belonging in other groups can be a great way to relieve stress and incorporate much-needed positivity into your life
 - Help yourself think clearly
 - When anxious or angry in response to discrimination, there are physical signs such as increased heart and breathing rates - when you feel these things, delay your response to the person discriminating against you
 - When you respond with high emotions, it may only make the situation worse
 - Don't dwell on it
 - Easier said than done
 - It's more productive to make a plan on how to respond better next time than to ruminate on what you think you did wrong
 - Seek professional help
 - Discrimination is often associated with signs of depression
 - There is no shame in reaching out to a psychologist if you feel these symptoms
- How to Respond in the Moment
 - The Anti-Defamation League said the best thing to do is to walk away, if possible

- I mentioned before - don't respond with heightened emotions as it will likely egg the aggressor on
- Lastly, they said to tell the aggressor to stop if you feel safe doing so - may want to align your request with a company goal
 - Example: Rick, it's 4pm and I'm trying to reach the daily goal of 50 calls, so please leave me alone so I can do my work

Review

- The definition of discrimination is treating someone unfairly because of protected characteristics
- People can discriminate against others for any aspect of their identity, but five main categories include age, disability, sexual orientation & gender expression, race or color, and sex & gender
- Discrimination negatively affects employees' ability to work by decreasing engagement, motivation, capability, a sense of belonging, and increasing negative perceptions of the company as a whole and feelings of psychological unsafety
- Employees don't speak up when being discriminated against because they fear for their job security or they accept harassment as the norm
- Discrimination exists because humankind desires security in social settings, have insecurity about themselves, are lonely, fear the unknown, and struggle in general, so they lash out at those that are different in an effort to protect themselves and find community with others who hate different individuals
- If you are discriminated against, you can report a claim to HR
- To cope with discrimination, you can focus on your positive qualities, find a support system, respond without heightened emotions, don't dwell on it, and seek professional help
- To respond to the aggressor in the moment, you can walk away or tell them to stop if you feel safe doing so

Conclusion

- Regardless of laws against it, discrimination is prone to happen because of the nature of humankind
- Though it is undoubtedly mentally and physically difficult to go through, there are techniques and resources you can use to get help
- Join me next week for Episode 7: Giving Bad News
- Thanks for watching!