Written submission from tradesecrets UK (SHW0032)

This document details a proposed approach that answers your request:

“actions that the Government and employers should be taking to change workplace culture to prevent sexual harassment, give people more confidence to report sexual harassment, and make this issue a higher priority for employers”

Dealing with Sexual Harassment in Corporate Cultures.

A Case Study including a proposal that could be rolled out as a Government backed initiative.

We are a company that works with blue chip organisations helping them deal with sensitive issues from bullying to diversity and inclusion of minorities. To see more of our work go to www.tradesecrets-uk.com.

For this project we were asked to develop a program that could address sexual harassment and other employment ethics, within a high profile high street retail brand.

When we were brought in there were 34 live cases relating to some form of grievance raised against an employee. 9 of these concerned some allegation of sexual harassment or inappropriate behaviour occurring in the work place.

A vital part of the HR team’s role in this context was to help employees take ownership of problems and help find new ways of facing them with the support of others. That takes more than a collaborative approach. It takes genuine openness, creativity and a strong commitment to active learning and collective problem-solving.

So with this background in mind, let us share with you just one of the creative communication strategies we are using to achieve our employee relations objectives: namely, the use of professional actors to raise awareness and support our people when it comes to managing employee relations in the workplace and demonstrate what it takes to identify issues, resolve and prevent them.

We designed a three-stage program that started with the writing, filming and production of a broadcast standard episodic TV drama. The storyline and characters were all located in the business and this was delivered via the internal (international) intranet. So as each episode was aired the corporate audience tuned in on a weekly basis to find out what happened next.

As a consequence of airing this viewership on the internal intranet service quadrupled. Over 1500 attended the live event. A portion of this audience went on to attend the Live Tribunal but a staggering 20 times that audience tuned in to watch it afterwards on TV.
The second element of the program was an innovative staged intervention at a conference / company meeting where in amongst other business our lead protagonists playing real conference delegates bought their grievance to a head in front of the gathered audience.

This left an awkward dynamic that had to be negotiated and settled but done in such a way that the gathered audience knew the grievance would need airing and resolving in a formal capacity.

Which led to the third stage of delivery, which was a private, Tribunal Hearing with real lawyers and a Judge in front of an invited audience of employees. The reason for this was so that the delegates could see the outcomes (and effects) of such behaviour on the business.

The Tribunal was an emotionally charged experience and designed to bring home the seriousness of the issues.

We finally created a digital space for employees to leave guided video selfies that gave them space to air their feelings, reactions and suggestions which acted as a sensory mood board for the company. The partner company we used to help facilitate this was an online Video Selfie Coaching Business – the link to their company is www.imeus.co.

Ultimately the real innovation of the project was that it bought to light the issue to the employees on an emotional level without feeling like they were being preached at by management. The extent of their buy in to the story was revealed when the incidents of harassment claims dropped and crucially the people at the top of the business felt they had addressed the issues head on.

We believe this sort of program should be rolled out within organisations that are prepared to sign up to a Govt backed initiative that effectively initiates a new form of charter.

Companies that have gone through this process would be given some form of Govt backed accreditation that says they are actively addressing this problem.

We believe that a supported initiative like this – backed by the Govt – will make indeed make the issue a higher priority for employers and we would love to have the opportunity to come in and meet with you to discuss further.

Quote from the client:

Too many employee relations initiatives focus on strategy and formulation, with insufficient emphasis on communication and delivery. This project not only allowed us to avoid this limitation; it provided a dramatic opportunity to articulate and demonstrate our commitment to creating and maintaining a positive supportive
working environment making it clear that this sort of behaviour will not be tolerated at any level. It also equipped our people with the practical knowledge to be able to recognise this sort of behaviour and put a stop to it.

How did we measure our success of the project? By the extent to which our managers spot problems early, become more aware of employee relations issues and the fact we completely changed the culture to one of early resolution and prevention. This ultimately saved relationships, time and money, and - perhaps most importantly of all reduced the number of complaints.

And that’s something worth applauding.

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