

Avoiding Religious Discrimination in the Workplace

WORKSHOP/CONSULTANCY PROPOSAL

RATIONALE

In the face of globalization, changing economic realities, demographic shifts, and religious pluralization, increasing awareness regarding religion in the workplace is proving to be vital in creating a harmonious professional environment. This field of study and diversity training is attracting growing interest from academics, management scholars, human resources professionals, legal experts, and the media. More and more businesses and non-profits are considering the development of policies on religion to avoid retaliation and costly lawsuits.

Requests for religious accommodation in the workplace are rising. Claims of discrimination based on religion are second only to sexual harassment. Managers and supervisors need to understand how to balance the various rights and obligations of religious practices, observances, and beliefs among employees. Employees need to know how much they can express and share their religious and cultural identity in the various workspaces. Employers have to refrain from giving the impression of sponsoring a particular religious orientation. To avoid creating a hostile environment for employees, religious activities cannot be required as a condition of employment.

GOALS AND DESCRIPTION

In order to help professionals in Tennessee achieve that balance, Professor Rosalind I. J. Hackett of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville offers workshops for business organizations that provide:

- An overview of the **legal framework** related to religion in the workplace
- A basic understanding of the ways that **diverse religious practices**, observances, beliefs, and identity issues may **manifest** themselves in the workplace and sometimes **generate hostility** between employers, employees, and the public
- Guidance and interactive discussion on how and when to **reasonably accommodate** those expressions (e.g. in relation to attire, dress, diet, holidays, scheduling, devotional acts, communications, workspace use) and how to **foster an inclusive, respectful, productive, and pluralistic work environment** and **attract staff** in an increasingly competitive job market
- Online **resources** and handouts for employers, managers, supervisors, and employees

Duration of workshop: one full or half-day, or a series of customized sessions

Format: PowerPoint lecture, interactive discussion/focus groups, and Q & A

BIO OF CONSULTANT

Rosalind I. J. Hackett is Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (since 1986). She is also adjunct in Anthropology, faculty associate of UT's Baker Center for Public Policy, and a board member of the Prince Al-Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. She holds a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and is internationally known as a scholar of the religions of Africa. She has particular expertise in the area of religious pluralism and conflict. As a major advocate for the academic study of religion worldwide, Dr. Hackett currently serves as President of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) [until 2012]. She coordinated a [workshop](#) on religious diversity in the workplace at UT's Baker Center for Public Policy in October 2011 and has conducted training sessions for the UT Institute for Public Service in May and June 2012. She received a grant from the American Academy of Religion to develop a department [website](#) to support this service work which is also a response to the UT Chancellor's Diversity and Civility Initiative.

SAMPLE RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION LAWSUITS

EEOC v. Townley Eng'g & Mfg. Co., 859 F.2d 610, 615 (9th Cir. 1988). Requiring an employee to attend a religious service or engage in prayers at business meetings is in clear violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the "Accommodations" section of the EEOC guidelines. Leading case on issue, holding that an employer must accommodate atheist employee by allowing him to opt out of worship services.

AT&T to Pay Missouri Muslim Woman \$5M in Harassment Case

<http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/midwest/2012/05/07/246586.htm>

Muslim woman sues Abercrombie & Fitch, says she was fired over hijab

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20075051-504083.html

Wal-Mart Settles EEOC Religious Discrimination Suit: Agency Obtains \$70,000 for Mormon Worker Required to Work Sundays <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/6-1-12b.cfm>

EEOC Sues Voss Lighting for Religious Discrimination: Qualified Applicant Denied Job Because His Religious Beliefs Differed From the Company's, Federal Agency Charges <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/6-12-12.cfm>

TESTIMONIALS FROM PREVIOUS WORKSHOPS

"I was pleasantly surprised – this was very enjoyable and useful." Knoxville

"The workshop made me more mindful of the religious and cultural differences that we don't normally see in the day-to-day routine." Knoxville

"The training was enlightening. It raised awareness toward the various personal practices held by people embracing different religions, which have ramifications for the workplace." Knoxville

"Very engaging and stimulating – would never have thought about some of these issues and how to respond to them"
Jackson, TN

"This is something we should all know about as public servants." Knoxville

"People need to realize that one small mistake can lead to far greater problems." Nashville

"Being more knowledgeable about different religious traditions can improve knowledge of our customer base overseas."
Nashville

"We normally don't talk about religion in our organization but we realize that in some contexts this can be a primary issue. The workshop made us more aware of the broader context of religion becoming more of a public than a private affair." Nashville

"As a part of the University that works each day to help customers across the state and nation meet the competitive challenges of the day, we get an up-close view of the changing population that we serve. This course helps sharpen awareness of our own thinking and builds our awareness of others in a way that helps us represent ourselves, our agencies, our institute and our university with greater professionalism and respect for our customers." Knoxville