

## **Religion at Work**

March 31, 2014

Likely because of an influx of immigrants to the country, there is a diverse array of religious beliefs nationwide and that diversity is reflected in the American workforce. Being able to celebrate religious diversity in the workplace can be a very powerful contributor to workplace morale if done correctly. Unfortunately, there has been a sharp increase in workplace religious discrimination claims over the past 15 years. Below is a compilation of information and resources that: (1) explore American religious demographics; (2) provide examples on how to appropriately celebrate religion in the workplace; (3) examine workplace religious discrimination and provide examples of the types of religious discrimination claims that are being made; and (4) provide information about how to avoid religious discrimination claims.

### **I. Religious Landscape Nationwide**

#### **PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project: Religious Landscape Survey**

February, 2008

<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#>

This survey is based on the responses of over 35,000 Americans above the age of eighteen. The majority of Americans, roughly 78%, identify as some type of Christian and most of those are Protestant. Sixteen percent of the population identify themselves as unaffiliated with a religion, and that is more than half of the people who said they were unaffiliated as children. The group that has seen the most growth in the survey is unaffiliated Americans. The Mid-West most closely corresponds to national numbers, the South has the most evangelicals, the Northeast has the highest concentration of Catholics and the West has the most atheists and agnostics.

### **II. Celebrating Religious Diversity**

#### **Starting Religious Employee-Resource Groups**

DiversityInc

<http://www.diversityinc.com/resource-groups-2/starting-religious-employee-resource-groups/>

This article details different approaches to interfaith groups in a company. One example, see below, is the Ford Motor Company model which is one large interfaith group open to people of all religions. The second example is the American Express model which has at least three different faith groups that all are open to everyone and include at least one senior level management member. The purpose of the groups is to educate employees about religious diversity, recruit talent, and increase employee engagement.

#### **Ford Motor Company Interfaith Network**

2005

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

<http://pluralism.org/reports/view/83>

Ford Motor Company developed The Ford Interfaith Network in 2000 with the purpose of strengthening the company through respectful dialogue and understanding. The group is made up of board members who represent no less than 8 different religions. They meet periodically to discuss programs and put on events.

### **Religious Celebrations in the Workplace**

December 20, 2013

Lauren Bloom

The Street

<http://www.thestreet.com/story/12158355/1/religious-celebrations-in-the-workplace.html>

This article includes ten tips to help celebrate religious diversity at work including: (1) never making any religious activity, such as praying before a meal together, mandatory; (2) distribute all benefits, such as bonuses, without regard to an employee's religious beliefs; (3) try to be inclusive, for example, consider a menorah and Kwanza kinara in addition to the Christmas tree in the lobby; (4) diversify the party planning committee and make sure everyone knows they are invited to join in the party planning; (5) edit out parts of the celebrations that could be too religious, for example instead of religious lyrics in Christmas carols, opt for instrumental versions of the songs; (6) be prepared to accommodate employees' wishes for holiday breaks or be prepared to explain why such a break would create an undue hardship; and (7) be prepared to intervene appropriately if employees offend each other while attempting to convert their coworkers.

### **III. Workplace Religious Discrimination**

#### **What American Workers Really Think About Religion: Tanenbaum's 2013 Survey of American Workers and Religion**

August, 2013

<https://tanenbaum.org/publications/2013-survey/>

Tanenbaum Center for Religious Understanding, a secular and non-sectarian non-profit organization, released its 2013 survey of American workers and religion. The study found that a more diverse workforce leads to potential religious discrimination that employers should be prepared to address. One third of the respondents felt they had seen or experienced incidents of religious discrimination in the workplace and half of non-Christians felt that their employers were ignoring their religious needs. Moreover, in companies where there was a clear complaint procedure in place, only 2 out of 10 employees were looking for other jobs as compared to 4 out of 10 in companies that did not have specific complaint protocol. Non-accommodation of religious beliefs can include lack of kosher or halal options at work functions, requirements to work on the Sabbath or religious holidays, and taunting employees' beliefs, dress or religious practice.

#### **Religious-Discrimination Claims on the Rise**

October 27, 2013

Melanie Trottman

Wall Street Journal

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304682504579153462921346076>

Types of religious discrimination claims that have recently cropped up in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's database include a Muslim truck driver who felt it was against his religion to carry alcohol in his truck and an evangelical Christian mine worker who opposed biometric hand scanning technology that was part of his daily checking in process as something that the Bible warned against (the sign of the anti-Christ on the hand or forehead). A common religious discrimination claim arises from employers refusing to allow employees to take time off on religious holidays or the Sabbath. Also, many grooming and dress religious discrimination claims have arisen of late. These include religious piercings, facial hair, headscarves and tattoos. While religious discrimination claims are relatively low compared to racial and sexual discrimination claims, they are increasing at a higher percentage than other discrimination claims.

#### **IV. Resources to Safeguard the Workplace Against Religious Discrimination**

##### **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**

<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm>

The EEOC website is an excellent resource for employees and employers alike to help navigate the laws that help protect against religious discrimination. The website provides the standard for religious discrimination which is when an employer will not make reasonable accommodations for an employee where those accommodations are not an undue burden on the employer. The standard by which religious discrimination claims are decided is whether an employer can make a reasonable accommodation without undue hardship. Some examples of accommodations include flexible work schedules, job reassignments and modifications to workplace policies and practices. The website also includes fact sheets on popular religious discrimination topics including grooming and dress, see here:

[http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa\\_religious\\_garb\\_grooming.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_religious_garb_grooming.cfm) and FAQs on Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs in the workplace post September 11<sup>th</sup>, see here:

<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/backlash-employee.cfm>. Moreover, the EEOC provides a resource filled with best practices for eradicating workplace religious discrimination, see here:

[http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/best\\_practices\\_religion.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/best_practices_religion.html). This last link provides examples of best practices including manager training, consideration of schedule changes and job assignments, and modification of workplace policy and procedures.