

Non-Discriminatory Religious Practices And Tolerance In The Workplace

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace discrimination and harassment based on religion. It also requires that an employer provide reasonable accommodations for religious practices and beliefs unless doing so would result in undue hardship. Additionally, some states impose their own requirements. The following discussion outlines a few actions that can be taken to promote non-discriminatory religious practices and tolerance in the workplace.

Actions to consider include:

- Maintain and distribute Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and harassment policies that include discussion of religious discrimination issues.
- Review email and other communication guidelines.
- Provide regular training to employees and managers to ensure that they understand legal requirements and company expectations.
- Promote a climate of “diversity” and acceptance of individual differences.
- Examine leave and holiday programs.
 - ✓ Are they flexible?
 - ✓ Do you offer a “personal day” that could be used for religious observances?
 - ✓ Are managers aware of the holidays that various employees may celebrate so that meetings, events, and work schedules may be planned around them?
 - ✓ Do you have a system that allows for trading of days or voluntary substitutes as required?
 - ✓ Do you use expressions or require practices that may be offensive to some employees? (e.g., Easter vacation could be referred to as spring break, the Christmas party called the holiday party).
 - ✓ Are employees required to answer the phone “Merry Christmas” or participate in Halloween festivities?
- Review employee scheduling.
 - ✓ Some religious observances restrict diets or require fasting during certain periods (e.g., Passover, Ramadan). Do you try to avoid company parties, award banquets, or related activities during these times?
 - ✓ Are you sensitive to scheduling meetings and conferences on days of worship (e.g., those that might occur on Fridays or Saturdays)? Are you aware of daily religious observances by some employees (e.g., some organizations provide prayer rooms for Muslim employees who pray several times a day and those who seek a quiet place to meditate)?

- Think about dietary requirements.
 - ✓ Do you accommodate vegetarianism, Kosher rules, etc.? Do company sponsored events include food for everyone?
- Review your dress code policy and practices.
 - ✓ Are they flexible enough to permit required accommodations (e.g., head coverings, facial hair, robes, and religious symbols)?
- Consider maintaining and distributing a “diversity calendar” that lists all major holidays and events so that managers and employees are informed.
- Examine your hiring process.
 - ✓ Are you unreasonably excluding some applicants because they may not be available for work on certain days? (The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) position is that “pre-selection inquiries that determine an applicant’s availability...violate Title VII unless the employer can show that they did not have an exclusionary effect...or were otherwise justified by business necessity.”)