

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Work Environment

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Retail and hospitality providers have always strived to create welcoming and inclusive environments for their customers. Yet as recent events demonstrate, customers are increasingly interested in how the businesses they frequent treat another group of individuals – their employees. In fact, a growing number of retail and hospitality customers purposefully seek out establishments that demonstrate a commitment toward equality and inclusivity of all groups in its workforce, including those in the LGBTQ+ community. Interested employers should be aware of this trend and adopt policies and procedures that reflect a commitment toward an inclusive work environment for all potential workers, including members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Work Environment

Employers that are interested in recruiting and retaining LGBTQ+ employees should first establish and promote a safe and inclusive work environment for all workers. This means establishing policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion, such as developing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies, providing sensitivity training for its employees, and ensuring that all employees understand the importance of respecting and valuing diversity in the workplace.

Like all marginalized groups, it is imperative that LGBTQ+ employees feel safe and comfortable in the workplace. In addition to the policies described above, which are essential for creating a safe and inclusive work environment, certain other practices may assist in creating a welcoming work environment specifically for those in the LGBTQ+ community. These include providing gender-neutral restrooms, offering healthcare benefits that cover gender-affirming care, and supporting LGBTQ+ employee resource groups. Employers should consider implementing these policies, which both demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and may also help attract and retain LGBTQ+ talent.

Recruiting and Hiring Practices

To recruit LGBTQ+ candidates, employers should consider leveraging diversity recruitment sources, such as LGBTQ+ professional associations and career fairs. This helps ensure that job openings are promoted to a diverse pool of candidates. Employers should also consider partnering with community organizations that support the LGBTQ+ community to advertise job openings. As retail and hospitality employers know, casting

a wide net for job openings is valuable and necessary. And for many employers, members of the LGBTQ+ community may represent an available talent pool.

When interviewing LGBTQ+ candidates (or any candidate), employers must avoid discriminatory or insensitive questions or comments. Employers should focus on the candidate's qualifications and experience, like any interview. Other topics, including their sexual orientation or gender identity, are irrelevant compared to an individual's qualifications and experience. Additionally, creating an intentionally diverse interview panel can also reduce the potential for bias – whether explicit or implicit – regarding the candidate.

Retention Strategies

Recruiting and hiring qualified candidates is only the first step. Even more critical is retaining LGBTQ+ employees. To do so, employers must demonstrate an ongoing and genuine commitment to inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. This means promoting and supporting employee-led initiatives and creating opportunities for employee feedback and engagement. These efforts should be meaningful and genuine, the lack of which may undermine the entire endeavor. Employees want to be heard and feel engaged in their place of employment. Yet, employer-lead efforts that only purport to do so may actually discourage engagement and interest among employees.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) can be an excellent way to support LGBTQ+ employees and help foster a sense of community in the workplace. ERGs allow employees to network, share information and resources, and advocate for change. Employers can support these groups by providing funding and resources, including time off to attend meetings and events.

Additionally, employers should provide ongoing training and development opportunities to all employees. This can include training on LGBTQ+ sensitivity, diversity and inclusion, and unconscious bias. Employers should also offer mentorship and leadership development programs to ensure all employees have opportunities to advance and grow in their careers.

Addressing Discrimination and Harassment

Yet despite efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity, discrimination and harassment can still occur in the workplace. Employers must have a straightforward and effective process in place for addressing these issues promptly and appropriately.

Employers should have a formal complaint process that provides multiple avenues for reporting and ensures that all reported incidents of discrimination are thoroughly and fairly investigated. Employers must also take swift and appropriate action when discrimination or harassment is reported, including supporting the victim and taking consistent disciplinary action against the perpetrator.

Employers must also be aware of the potential for intersectional discrimination involving members of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, LGBTQ+ individuals who are also members of other marginalized communities, such as people of color or those with disabilities, may face additional discrimination and barriers to success in the workplace. Therefore, employers must take steps to address these issues and create an inclusive environment for all employees.

Conclusion

Attracting, hiring, and retaining members of the LGBTQ+ community is no longer optional for employers interested in creating an inclusive work environment and attracting the best and most diverse talent pool. Employers should look for meaningful opportunities to attract, hire, and retain members of the LGBTQ+ community. Doing so not only benefits current and future LGBTQ+ employees; it benefits an entire workforce and the business as a whole.