

# Encouraging a whistleblowing culture in the workplace



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By **Melissa Greene**

**W**hat is whistleblowing in the workplace? Growing up our parents and our teachers would echo the statements "if you see something, say something". This usually came from a place of concern to encourage us to report any activity that we knew within ourselves was wrong. This concept should also be encouraged in organisations. Employers also share the same sentiment and believe the duty of care lies with every employee to take responsibility to report any activity that he/she considers to be dishonest, illegal, unethical, or improper.

## A cohesive work environment

The courage of an employee to report unethical behaviour starts with a healthy work environment. This begins with effective communication and the promotion of inclusivity to create a safe space where employees feel as though they matter. Employees are the most valuable assets a company has, and it is the responsibility of each employer to show appreciation every day. Employee engagement, retention, and satisfaction can all be improved with frequent, meaningful recognition because it is an important component of a positive work environment.

## How do you encourage whistleblowing in the workplace?

An open-door policy is usually a step in the right direction to encouraging whistleblowing within the workplace. Fostering a culture within an organisation where employees are inspired to "speak up", is the first step towards transparency. Letting employees know that they can approach management to



## A whistleblower's fear of retaliation should not be overlooked. (Internet image)

discuss any concerns is paramount to encouraging the flow of information.

Promoting safety, integrity, and a solid whistleblowing culture can help employees report wrongdoings more easily. Employees will be proactive in reporting instances of misconduct if they feel their company cares not only about its financial assets but also the protection of its people.

Employees should feel comfortable approaching management with concerns and be encouraged to immediately report anything of note that they encounter during their workday. Immediate reporting is the most effective way to prevent minor infractions from becoming major issues. This should be viewed as a positive workplace development and celebrated as such.

## Implementing policies and procedures

Having clear and concise written policies and procedures

for employees to follow and refer to for guidance, is always a fundamental aspect of any organization's code of conduct. This will establish protocols and enable internal structures for reporting. Communication and training are also important as they keep employees informed of changes in the workplace as well as any new requirements. Prior to implementation, communication and training about the new policy or changes should ideally take place.

## Protection of whistleblowers

Though, whistleblowing when implemented correctly is advantageous to a company, an employee's fear of retaliation should not be overlooked. One of the most important reasons why some whistleblowers do not report incidents, is the fear of retaliation. A robust code of conduct policy can counteract the fear of victimisation in the workplace and create a positive work environment. The

key is ensuring that employees trust the organisation to protect them and reduce the risk of reprisal.

## Identifying misconduct in the workplace

Employee onboarding and training are excellent opportunities to instill the importance of reporting misconduct among new hires. Whistleblower training during onboarding introduces employees to:

- Behaviours that fall under the umbrella of misconduct.
- How they can go about reporting any wrongdoing.
- How the company ensures their protection (and anonymity if the company incorporates a third-party ethics hotline).
- How the company will handle misconduct reports.

Unresolved infractions are poisonous flaws that snowball into massive growth roadblocks that obstruct the path to a happier, healthier workplace. Companies thrive when their workplaces become safe and productive havens, and it is important that wrongdoers face appropriate disciplinary action regardless of their age or position. When whistleblowers and victims speak out against wrongdoing, they unknowingly set a precedent for others who may face similar situations in the future.

In conclusion, companies are encouraged to implement whistleblowing and internal reporting in the workplace. Knowing how to encourage whistleblowing is important for legal, reputational, and business ethics reasons. It is critical for compliance. It also shows your employees that you value them and are open to change and improvement.

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