



WORLD ADMINISTRATORS  

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SUMMIT

## OVERVIEW

# HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE “THIS FAR AND NO FURTHER”

## WA-Summit Task Force

**Leader: Susan Engelbrecht (South Africa)**

**Reviewer: Bonnie Low-Kramen**

**Task Force Reporter: Rhonda Scharf**

Alison McKessar (New Zealand)

Carla Stefanut (Italy)

Ingrid Dumon (Belgium)

Annalee Brooks (Trinidad & Tobago)

Nasiru Yaro (Nigeria)



*Delegates from 21 countries at the 2018 10<sup>th</sup> WA-Summit in Frankfurt Germany*



## TASK TEAM

Susan Engelbrecht led the group from South Africa and created most of the documents requested at the WA-Summit in 2018. Rhonda Scharf provided support and reports to the Advisory Council, Alison McKessar worked on the Policy Statement, and the remainder of the Task Force Members were asked to review and provide feedback.



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## OVERVIEW

The 2018 10<sup>th</sup> WA-Summit Delegates asked for a Task Force to be developed to work on the outcomes from their discussions as shown below. Reporting dates are included on pages 8 and 9.

## OUTCOMES 2018

### Outcomes on Workplace Harassment:

1. Form a Task Force to come up with a WA-Summit policy statement on workplace harassment.
2. The Task Force to create a code of conduct (by 2019) to be shared with Associations and is to include identifying workplace harassment and management of this.
3. WA-Summit Task Force to encourage Associations/Networks to collaborate with charities or other bodies, within their own countries, that deal with harassment and provide links to them on their Association websites.
4. WA-Summit Task Force to create campaigns around workplace harassment and recommend each Association/Network find or develop training courses so that it is country specific (by 2020).
5. WA-Summit Task Force to develop a checklist for individual administrative/office professionals to complete, demonstrating inappropriate behaviour.
6. WA-Summit to encourage Associations/Networks to share best practice for their country. Each Association/Network's website should show useful information available within their country including links to assist e.g. charities, support networks, Government legislation, International Trade Union Agreements, etc.
7. WA-Summit Task Force to look at creating images of inappropriate behaviour so that Assistants know what is appropriate and what is not. Contact details with correct support for each country.
8. A repository of stories of harassment, including examples, to be gathered by the Task Force and held on the WA-Summit website from administrative/office professionals and how the behaviour was dealt with. These stories to be written in English and kept anonymous.

### Additional outcomes on Workplace Harassment:

1. The Task Force to lead this work will include: Susan Engelbrecht, Lead (South Africa), Angela Parker (Germany), Alison McKessar (New Zealand), Ingrid Dumon (Belgium).
2. WA-Summit Task Force to complete its code of conduct including workplace harassment by the end of 2019.
3. WA-Summit Task Force on Workplace Harassment, in consultation with the Advisory Council Chairman, is to revisit Goal 2 in *Administra* and clarify.

**ACCEPTED**

### How does our task force feel about this project?

*Alison McKessar* was excited to work on this important project! She felt that the team should decide, collectively, on whether we focus on one particular aspect of harassment (i.e. sexual) or whether our scope should be broader than that and should include bullying. She felt that bullying should be included as it is common.

Most of our team members thought that with **cultural differences, harassment** could be loosely defined as "anything that makes you feel uncomfortable". There is a different threshold for individuals as well. For instance, if you're a 'touchy' person, having your boss put their hand on your shoulder might not be an issue, but for someone else it could feel creepy. We are quite positive that there are some behaviours that are never okay no matter what country you're in. We also have this opportunity to assist women by highlighting that some actions are not tolerated in some cultures and that it probably should not be in theirs either.

*Carla Stefanut* agreed with the team that cultural differences have a different impact on different cultures. It is also a matter of age and experience. A 25-year-old assistant may be more sensitive and less experienced than an older more experienced assistant. **Research** was necessary to find out what is acceptable and what is not globally.

*Ingrid Dumon* felt that workplace harassment is more than bullying. Workplace harassment is the belittling or threatening behavior directed at an individual worker or a group of workers in other words: anything that makes the worker feel uncomfortable.

Further Task Force members were later included: Rhonda Scharf (Reporter) with Nasiru Yaro and Annalee Brooks who did not have specific tasks, but who contributed feedback when they were able.

Our *Angolan counterparts* are excited to represent their views and would like to promote Diversity and Inclusion practices to prevent prejudice, discrimination, and encourage tolerance.

- a) Host Unconscious Bias workshops and training
- b) Brief internal recruiters on fairness in hiring practices
- c) Implement awareness sessions to reflect on Own Biases
  - i. Inappropriate language
  - ii. Inappropriate Behaviour
  - iii. Discrimination
  - iv. Stereotyping, Assumptions and Judgments

*Eth Lloyd* shared Rhonda Scharf's definition of bullying. This definition of bullying is:

"... activity that is unfair, humiliating, malicious, vindictive and intended to harm the victim. It is persistent and prolonged."

Eth also shared: "The [Report from New Zealand 1992](#), after the 1<sup>st</sup> WA-Summit, where an item on page 12 of that report was headed:

- Sexual Harassment: The Summit did not decide on a definition of sexual harassment, but each Delegate reported on laws in their respective countries.

This topic was being discussed by administrative professionals nearly 30 years ago, we now need to stop harassment in the workplace in all its forms – bullying and sexual."

Stuff.NZ<sup>1</sup> shares a bullying case in New Zealand and steps that had to be undertaken to handle this, as it is often not handled well in the workplace. The article includes links which could be useful.

In today's high-tech world, bullying isn't limited strictly to face-to-face interactions; this behavior has taken to computer networks and social media, where it shows its face in nasty emails (after all, email gives you more time to choose your words and be unemotional – and it gives you a paper trail) and messages. No matter how it happens, though, bullying is hurtful, harmful, and it also can damage professional reputations.

## REVIEWER

*Bonnie Low-Kramen* from the United States is a highly respected international advocate promoting stopping and preventing Workplace Harassment/Bullying. Bonnie supplied the Task Force with her resources initially and then reviewed our work. Bonnie and the Task Force felt that, in the interests of ensuring all administrative professionals were able to contribute to the discussion, it would be best to include her feedback with these documents. This means that all Delegates can take account of her input when they are consulting within their own countries and in formulating their feedback.

### **Bonnie Low-Kramen wrote:**

"It is with the deepest gratitude, respect, and admiration for the truly fine work of the WA-Summit Task Force on Harassment in the Workplace that I write this note.

I have reviewed the Task Force materials that you sent me on July 4, 2020. While I believe the body of work is profoundly comprehensive and thorough, I do have several ideas to put on the table for consideration.

Thank you for seeking this input. Here goes.

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<sup>1</sup> [Stuff NZ](#)

1. Re: Appendix 4 Introduction. Suggested edit:

"...declaring that any type of harassment in the workplace is unacceptable, will not be tolerated, and proactive measures will be taken to directly and immediately address these behaviors with intervention, counselling, and clearly communicated consequences. (NB: This change has been made).

2. An idea to bring forth is the notion that all the constituencies and stakeholders of the workplace play a part in addressing harassment in the workplace. I am talking about finding ways to **bring together** Leaders, Assistants, HR professionals, Recruiters, and Trainers to coordinate the messages and the policies around these issues that impact EVERY one of them. Real change will not happen without involving each of these groups.

Part of this collaboration will be to address the marketing and promotion of these ideas. I am referring to clear communications on the website's Careers tab and all company job-related and culture-related materials, including job descriptions, interviewing materials, and onboarding programs. These printed materials communicate to the world where the company stands on the issue of harassment.

3. A point can be made that these issues can no longer be dismissed as a female problem. It can no longer be painted or perceived as a women vs men situation. It is a human issue that has systemic ramifications and therefore, we need overt support from ALL genders in the workplace.

Comparisons I often make are:

- a. When women achieved the right to vote, it didn't happen only because women wanted it.
  - b. When slavery was ended in America, it didn't happen only because the slaves wanted it.
4. The price we are paying is too high. I suggest reinforcing in the language of the materials the deadly serious and long-term mental and physical trauma that happens as a result of harassment. Many targets report suffering from PTSD and others have nervous breakdowns and hospitalizations. The pain and trauma do not only last for a day or a week or even a month, but for YEARS. Forever. I suggest using language such as, "the need to break the toxic cycle" of harassment. I believe it is completely accurate to refer to this problem as a "global epidemic."

Why do this? The human price is massive. And if it is true that our staff is the backbone of companies, then harassment is destroying this backbone from the inside out. Productivity suffers. Retention suffers. Profits suffer. Harassment is the ultimate Lose/Lose/Lose situation, but it has been covered in silence for far too long.

Other words to consider using:

dangerous, toxic, poisonous, transparency, accountability, consequences, silence, muzzled, backlash, isolation, respect, disrespect, abuse, humiliation, demeaning.

5. To include a few quotes from targets would be powerful. There is a “you can’t make this stuff up” quality to real-life experiences.
6. Use the Harvey Weinstein landmark sexual harassment case that began in 2017 and spurred the #MeToo & #TimesUp movements. It also spurred another hashtag in the hospitality/hotel industry - #HandsOffPantsOn. As of 2020, over 100 women have accused HW of sexual harassment and he is in jail. This is one of the most vivid case studies of power run amok, a situation where leaders looked the other way for many years.

These are my thoughts which are intended to only strengthen the materials to achieve the desired results. I hope you are still glad you asked me to comment! I care deeply about ending workplace harassment and we cannot shy away from the strongest language necessary to illustrate what this actually is.

Changing the status quo is no easy task and so I thank you and the Task Force for taking on this mammoth effort with such professionalism and heart.

There are human lives at stake here. This problem is urgent and pressing. Please let me know if I can be of further help.”

Bonnie shared the following clip with us of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s<sup>2</sup> response to Representative Yoho’s “apology” for abusive comments he made to her which is a very powerful 10- minute viewing.

In discussion with Bonnie, one particular phrase came to mind when it comes to stopping injustices. It seems that there is a point reached where those involved say “This far and no further”. We feel that the time is right for this to become our phrase for Workplace Harassment/Bullying “This far and no further”.

## SUMMARY

- What we produce for the initial round of feedback (after August 30, 2020) will not be the final version.
- Task Force members have reviewed the various tasks mentioned below on pages 9 and 10, which include our timeline of tasks to complete this topic.
- All who review this please provide us with relevant material from your own countries.
- Once everything has been reviewed, we will adjust and redistribute the documents to the 2021 Delegates for them to consult with their own country's administrative professionals, prior to the face-to-face WA-Summit 2021 discussions.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3Xjv03Qrtc>

- After the 2021 Virtual summit there will be final adjustments to the documents before we share them on the website.
- This document will remain a living document where we can incorporate updated information as we are provided with it.

## **INTENTION**

It is intended that these documents open discussions within Associations/Networks and further the organisations where the members of Associations/Networks are employed, on workplace harassment whatever its form. The Team intends these documents to be tools to assist you in those discussions where your organisation does not already have such policies, procedures or documents.

It is important that any individual deciding to undertake change within their employment first checks their own organisation's policies and procedures with regard to "workplace behaviour" and whether there is anything on "harassment". Also, that any changes are ideally in consultation with their organisation.

Anyone undertaking workplace policy changes should also understand what laws their country has with regard to workplace behaviour and harassment.

## **APPENDICES**

The tools developed by the Task Force to support you in managing workplace harassment are in separate documents which are appendices to this overview document.

1. Code of Conduct.
2. Checklist for bullying in the workplace.
3. Campaigns around workplace harassment.
4. Harassment in the Workplace Policy.



## TASK BREAKDOWN & TIMELINES

| Task  | Alison | Carla | Ingrid | Susan | Eth/Rhonda | 1 <sup>st</sup> reporting timelines | 2 <sup>nd</sup> reporting timelines | 3 <sup>rd</sup> reporting timelines | 4 <sup>th</sup> reporting timelines |
|---|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Develop a <b>Code of Conduct</b> of expected behaviour within the workplace by 2019   |        |       |        | LEAD  |            | 30 April 2019                       | 1 July 2019                         | 30 November 2019                    | 1 February 2020                     |
| Develop a <b>checklist</b> for administrative professionals to help determine if behaviour is unacceptable  |        |       |        | LEAD  |            | 15 April 2019                       | 28 June 2019                        | 30 November 2019                    | 1 February 2020                     |
| Develop a <b>Policy Statement</b> from the WA-Summit Advisory Council on Workplace Harassment. Advise all Associations/Networks around the world and this should, therefore, be combined with encouraging <b>Associations/Networks</b> to find others (e.g. charities) who deal with this type of issue and <b>provide links</b> on the WA-Summit website and their own websites for administrative professionals to access. It can also include encouraging all Associations/Networks to share <b>best practices</b> from their own countries and provide helpful links to: support networks, government legislation, Trade Union Agreements, etc. | LEAD   |       |        |       |            | 30 May 2019                         | 30 August 2019                      | 15 December 2019                    | 1 February 2020                     |

*WA-Summit Task Force*  
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| Task  | Alison | Carla | Ingrid | Susan | Eth/Rhonda | 1 <sup>st</sup> reporting timelines | 2 <sup>nd</sup> reporting timelines | 3 <sup>rd</sup> reporting timelines | 4 <sup>th</sup> reporting timelines |
|---|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Create campaigns</b> around workplace harassment and <b>recommend each Association/Network develop or find training courses</b> that are country specific by 2020. This should also include the task to <b>create images of inappropriate behaviour</b> so administrative professionals know what is inappropriate and what is not |        |       |        | LEAD  |            | 15 April 2019                       | 28 June 2019                        | 30 November 2019                    | 15 February 2020                    |
| <b>Develop a repository (on the WA-Summit website)</b> for anonymous stories including examples to show administrative professionals how it was dealt with.   |        |       |        |       | Eth Lloyd  | 20 April 2019                       | 31 May 2019                         | 1 January 2020                      | Not yet completed                   |
| <b>Take the lead with visual representation</b>   |        |       |        |       | LEAD       | 1 August 2019                       | 27 September                        | 1 January 2020                      | Not yet completed                   |



WORLD ADMINISTRATORS

SUMMIT

*WA-Summit Task Force*

*HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE - OVERVIEW*

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**Thank you for your support!**