Within the last week, allegations of harassment at the San Diego Comic-Con were in the forefront of every Vulcan Mind-Meld as Geeks for CONsent petitioned the 45 year old convention for better anti-harassment policies and procedures. They took this step since some attendees have found themselves subject to unwanted groping, photography, and verbal bedevilment based upon their choice of costume, as well as traditional protected traits. CONsent says the San Diego convention’s Code of Conduct is just not enough. They want to see a formal anti-harassment policy adopted that provides for a reporting mechanism, publication throughout the convention of zero-tolerance enforcement mechanisms, and training for volunteers who will be responding to harassment reports.
Do these requests sound familiar? They should if you have an anti-harassment policy in your workplace. Effective policies require reporting and enforcement mechanisms and the 3 Ts: training, training, and training. In fact, the stories I’ve read this week make me think they should address a little more. Admittedly, Comic-Con’s four sentence Code of Conduct is insufficient in any employment setting. It’s also true that most work environments have a somewhat more conservative dress code. However, the lesson to be learned from this fantasy world is that effective harassment policies should take into consideration the particular challenges of your workplace.

For instance - and keeping with the theme - the Grand Poobah of Comics, the legendary Stan Lee, has a fairly broad anti-harassment policy for his Comikaze Expo, protecting participants from harassment on the basis of “gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, or religion.” The policy further provides specific examples of harassing behavior, including not only offensive comments and touching, but also convention-particular concerns such as stalking and harassing photography and recording.

In another example, Central Coast Comic-Con makes it clear what consequences may follow harassing behavior, including removal from the premises, criminal charges, and more. Its policy directs anyone who feels they are being harassed or who believes they are witnessing questionable behavior to bring it to the attention of any staff member, security, or volunteer for appropriate action.

In an environment fraught with the potential for inappropriate behavior, where people may feel anonymous due to cape and cowl, the need for effective controls is as clear as the light emanating from Hal Jordan's lantern. Anti-harassment policies are about prevention. **Make sure your policy is addressing the realities** of your workplace. As the experience at Comic-Con shows, harassment is not just a fantasy. Don’t let it become a reality for you.

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