

Progressive Accountability Practices

The lack of accountability aids in the perpetuation of silence and normalization that surrounds violence, in all its forms. Although zero-tolerance policies demonstrate a willingness by workplaces to prevent harassment and violence and to provide a safe environment for workers, research questions their effectiveness. A well-planned and carefully implemented progressive accountability model can be an alternative to zero-tolerance policies and practices, shifting a punitive approach to a constructive, ongoing learning process that aims to bring about positive change in employees and the organization itself.

A progressive and constructive accountability model, as a learning and change process, provides those who engage in abusive behaviour the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour, learn from the process, and change their behaviour. In so doing, it also generates confidence in the workplace and a history of action – of issues being addressed – within the organization¹. This can be a powerful avenue for communicating expectations about behaviour throughout the workplace. Anti-violence policies are key tools in using accountability measures as a constructive process. Policies set expectations which are clearly tied to accountability².

Below are examples of progressive accountability practices, gathered from policy examples that specifically relate to those who use abusive/harassing behaviours.

- verbal warning/verbal counselling – used to bring problematic behaviour to the attention of an employee before it escalates and becomes part of a written warning
- written warning
- behavioural contract
- an apology – verbal or written
- interviews to discuss the employee’s performance and to develop a program for improvement
- mandatory referral to counselling
- education or training

¹ Berlingieri, A. (2015). Challenging workplace bullying: the shaping of organizational practices toward systemic change. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.

² Ibid.

³ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. (2009). Information on labour standards: Unjust dismissal. Gatineau, QC. Available online at: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/migration/documents/assets/portfolio/docs/en/reports/labour_standards/unjust_dismissal/unjust_dismissal.pdf

- coaching (e.g. one-on-one remedial human rights coaching, conflict coaching)
- conflict resolution and mediation processes – focused on restoring productive and harmonious working environment
- restorative justice processes (that are culturally relevant)
- non-voluntary transfer – from job or program
- change of work assignment, appointment, or location
- activity restrictions
- setting of a probation period during which an employee could improve performance
- a suspension (with or without pay)
- demotion
- withholding of a promotion
- no-rehire – a period of time during which an individual is not eligible for employment with the organization
- No Contact Order
- removal from premises and issue of trespass order
- Persona Non Grata (PNG) designation – e.g. denial of privileges of entering designated portion(s)/areas of the organization or participation in organizational events/activities
- removal or expulsion
- notification to professional association or governing body
- letter of complaint to individual or regulatory/governing body
- termination/dismissal/contract cancellation

⁴ Ibid.