

LEAN IN

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TEDX TALK

# THE POWER OF US: HOW TO STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT

BY MARIANNE COOPER

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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## INSTRUCTIONS

Individually or as a group, watch the TEDx talk “[The Power of Us: How We Stop Sexual Harassment](#)” by Marianne Cooper. Read the takeaways below and then use the questions for a group discussion on the ideas presented in the video.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### When is workplace sexual harassment most likely?

It can happen anywhere, but it occurs most often...

- **When workplaces are male dominated.** Male-dominated organizations are more likely to have locker-room cultures. In these contexts, professionalism can give way to bro-like behaviors. Sexualized talk and crude actions marginalize and exclude women. Often other men don't label it as a problem, and this makes things worse. All of this sets the stage for harassment.
- **When organizations are very hierarchical.** Abuse happens in settings where leaders have a lot of power, research shows, because power has a corrupting influence. People in power tend to have less consideration for others' feelings and sometimes won't take no for an answer. A situation with high potential for harassment is when a powerful figure can make or break an individual's career—for instance, when a director can give an actor a role. Power can also protect perpetrators from being held accountable.

By contrast, workers with less power—including waitresses, farm workers, and minorities—are most vulnerable to harassment. Few victims who work in low-paying jobs can come forward because of legitimate concerns that retribution will put them out of work.

- **When management tolerates bad behavior.** The biggest predictor of harassment is how forgiving an organization is of harassment. Bad behavior leads to more bad behavior. When codes of conduct are violated and nothing happens, it's a green light for perpetrators. It also makes victims feel that it's risky to come forward and that their complaints won't be taken seriously. contrast, workers with less power—including waitresses, farm workers, and minorities—are most vulnerable to harassment. Few victims who work in low-paying jobs can come forward because of legitimate concerns that retribution will put them out of work.

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## What can leaders do?

- Take a visible and firm stance that sexual harassment won't be tolerated
- Clearly define what harassment is and what the disciplinary consequences are
- Make sure employees know how to come forward
- Maintain confidentiality
- Make it clear that no one will face retribution for speaking up
- Hold perpetrators accountable even when they're top performers or major clients
- Help promote more women into leadership. This can counteract imbalances of power that make harassment more likely and ultimately lead to more inclusive workplaces.

## What can individuals do?

- If you hear people excuse sexism by saying "Boys will be boys," call it out
- When you hear someone being harassed, call out the harasser
- When you see someone mistreated, talk to them and show that you know it's wrong
- Hold harassers accountable through your consumer and voting power

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## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **1. Have you ever worked somewhere that was male dominated or very hierarchical?**

- At that organization, did you feel that there was a locker-room culture or that harassment was tolerated?
- How were you affected by this kind of workplace culture?
- How do you think others were affected?

### **2. Have you worked somewhere that took a strong stand against harassment?**

- Did you see harassers held accountable?
- How were you affected by this style of leadership?
- How do you think others were affected?

### **3. Have you ever been a bystander when someone was harassed or treated poorly at work?**

- Did you say anything to the person being harassed? What happened next?
- Did you say anything to the harasser? How did it work out?
- What would you say if you were in that situation now?

### **4. Have you ever heard someone say “Boys will be boys”? Did you say anything in response?**

- What do you think would be a good way to respond?