

# BREAKING DOWN GENDER BIAS

A Toolkit for Construction Business Owners

*Version 1.0*  
*September 2016*

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# Defining the Challenge

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# Gender Diversity in the Trades

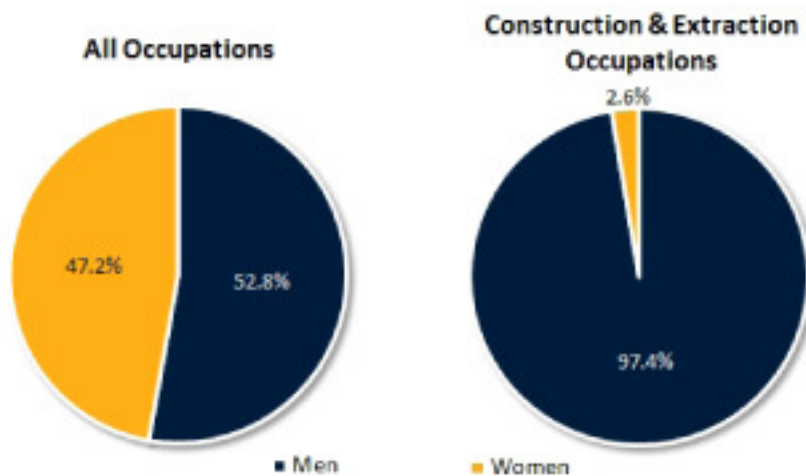
*Naming and confronting bias and discrimination in the workplace is a key responsibility for any business owner.*

The construction trades have long been one of the industries with the lowest percentage of women in the workforce – as of 2015, less than 3% of workers in the Construction and Extraction trades were women. Data on the percentage of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) workers in the trades is not available.

However, it is clear that many women and LGBTQ workers face bullying and discrimination as a result of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in the workplace.

Our goal in developing this Toolkit is to offer an array of suggestions and solutions to help small business owners and managers break down gender stereotypes and create companies that are inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations. We recognize that many other kinds of discrimination happen in the workplace- including but not limited to race, class, ethnicity and ability- but this Toolkit is specifically focused on gender discrimination.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION/EXTRACTION AND ALL OCCUPATIONS



Source: NWLC calculations using Miriam King et al. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey 2013*.



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# Why Bother?

According to cumulative Gallup Workplace Studies, companies with inclusive cultures do better on several indicators than those that are not inclusive, with:

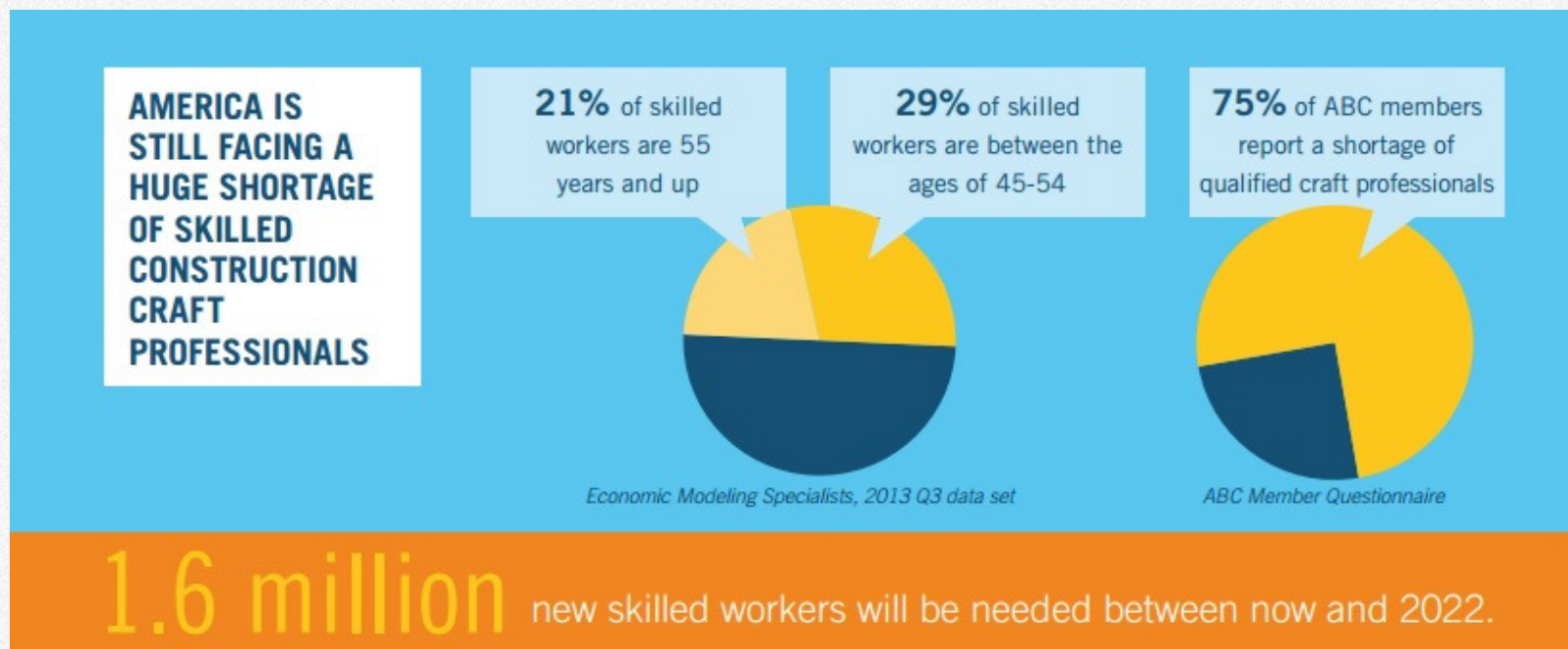
- **Customer satisfaction +39%**
- **Productivity +22%**
- **Profitability +27%**
- **Lower turnover -22%**





# Building the Workforce

*The construction industry is faced with an aging workforce and a shortage of skilled labor. By expanding your recruitment efforts to include women, trans and gender non-conforming people, you are expanding the pool of potential employees by over 50%!*



\*ABC= Associated Builders and Contractors

Source: <http://www.workforceunderconstruction.com/featured/the-skilled-labor-shortage-from-4-perspectives/>



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# Acknowledging Inequality

*"We all want to live in a world where there's no question about why they picked you – you were the best, most qualified candidate, full stop. But we can't live in that world yet, because we haven't all had equal privilege and opportunity. Some of us start with clear, unfair advantages rooted in history. Failing to acknowledge that distribution and pretending there's an equality of privilege is a form of willful ignorance that maintains those biases."*

- Rand Fishkin, co-founder of Moz and Inbound.org

Source: <https://moz.com/rand/why-i-believe-in-intentional-efforts-to-increase-diversity/>



# Changing Company Culture

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*What You Can Do*

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*Gender Inclusive  
Language*

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*Pronouns and Self-  
Identification*

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*Behaviors that Create a  
Hostile Environment*

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*Confronting Offensive Talk*

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*Zero Tolerance  
Harassment Policy*

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# What You Can Do: Changing Company Culture

Develop and enforce a zero tolerance sexual harassment policy

Use gender neutral language in job postings and job descriptions

Ensure that adequate gender neutral restroom facilities are available on every job site

Ensure that all crew members have properly fitting PPE

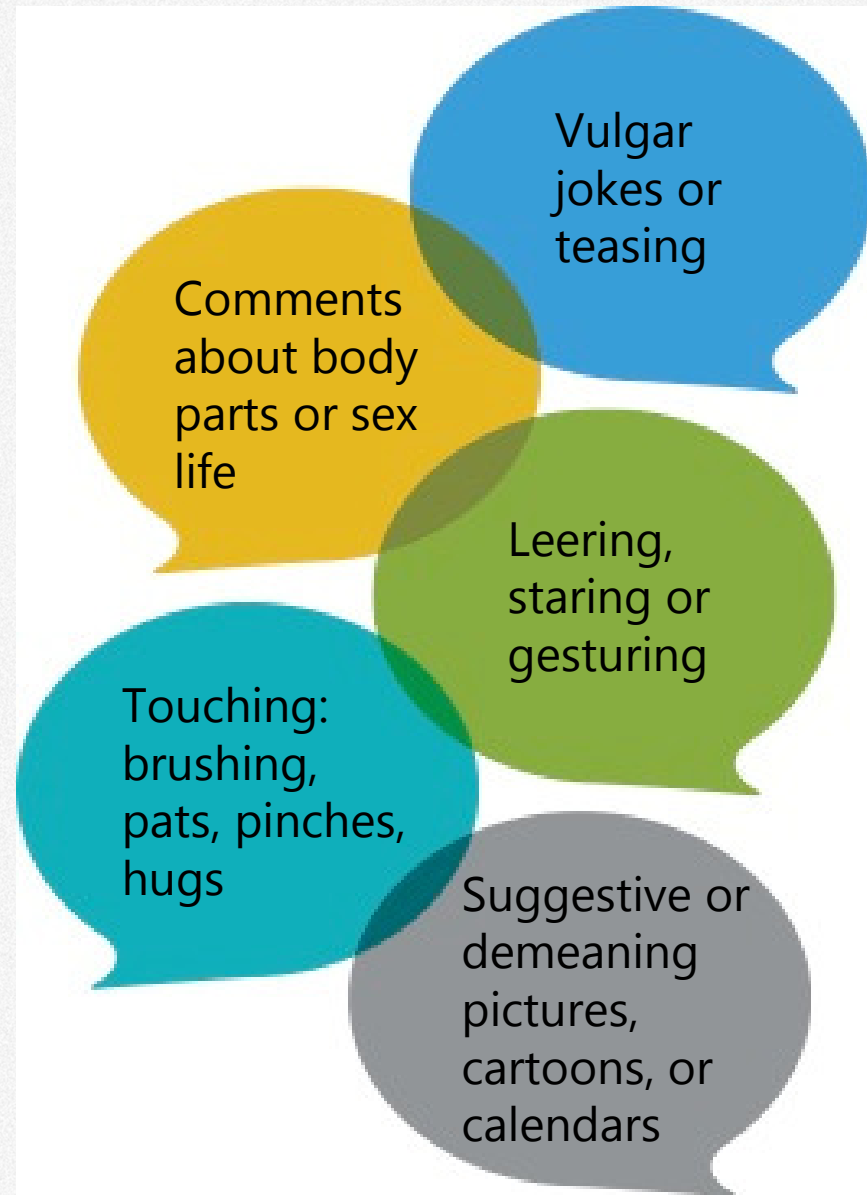
Connect with tradeswoman organizations and post your jobs there

Create opportunities for mentorship



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## Examples of Behaviors that Create a Hostile Environment





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# Pronouns & Self-Identification



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**Respect everyone's self-identification.** Call everyone by their preferred name/s and pronoun/s. Use language and behavior that is appropriate to their gender self-identification.

If you don't know what pronouns or gender-labels someone prefers (and there's no mutual friend around to clue you in), just ask them. Politely. And respectfully. For example: "What pronoun do you prefer?" or "How do you like to be referred to, in terms of gender?"

If you misrecognize someone's gender, it's okay, don't freak out. Apologize once and get it right the next time. Misidentifying or being unable to classify someone's gender does not have to be an awkward or shameful experience.

Some transgender or gender non-conforming people are bravely making more space for gender diversity by using language creatively. Respect these efforts and don't dismiss them as silly, funny, weird or too difficult. For example, some people prefer to be referred to as 'they', or as both 'he' and 'she' interchangeably. Some people prefer to be referred to only by their name. Some people use non-binary pronouns like 'ze' and 'hir'.



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# Inclusive Language

*Our everyday language can often unintentionally affect the people around us. By making small but intentional choices to use inclusive language, you can make the workplace more welcoming to women, trans and gender non-conforming people.*

## When greeting others

Avoid:

**ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys** etc.

Consider using instead:

**"Thanks, friends.  
Have a great  
night."**

**"Good morning,  
folks!"**

**"Hi, everyone!"**

**"And for you?"**

**"Can I get  
you **all**  
something?"**

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

## Be mindful of language

Source: <http://www.tonilatour.com/hello-there/>



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# Confronting Offensive Talk

## 1. Stop an offensive remark before it happens.

You might have heard statements like these: "I'll probably be accused of being a sexist for saying this, but . . ." or "Some people might be put off by this joke, but. . ." If you hear that language, you might try nicely stopping the remark before it gets off the ground.

Here are some possible rejoinders:

"Go ahead, and then I will tell you why I think *it is* sexist."

"If you're saying it's going to be offensive, I'd appreciate it if you didn't say it."



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# Confronting Offensive Talk

## 2. Respond indirectly.

When someone makes an offensive remark, we have to weigh the costs of a potentially uncomfortable confrontation against the benefits of addressing the remark directly.

Here are some alternatives to saying nothing:

"Wow."

"Yikes."

"Ouch."

"Hey, let's keep it PC, ok?"

"Could we elevate the conversation?"

"Now that the sexist part of the conversation is over, can we move on?"



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# Confronting Offensive Talk

## 3. Respond directly.

Answering offensive comments requires forethought, judgment, and courage, and it often works best when we keep our responses simple.

Consider responding with brief statements like these:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Do you really think that?"

"It doesn't seem like you to say something like that."

"No, I don't think about it that way."

"I don't find that funny."

"Would you want to have that said to/about your wife, daughter, or sister?"

"That type of remark about people makes me uncomfortable."

"Wow, I didn't know you felt that way about women (or trans or gender non-conforming people)."

"I'd rather not talk that way about people."

"I don't like to think about people that way."

Source: <http://stopsexistremarks.org/stop-sexist-remarks-the-5-minute-guide/>



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# Confronting Offensive Talk

## 4. If an offensive remark is repeated, nicely ask for what you want (and don't want):

When someone repeats a remark after you've previously asked them to stop, try politely telling them that you'd prefer they not share their sexist/racist/homophobic/transphobic comments when they're with you.

For example, if someone is calling you "honey" in a setting that makes you uncomfortable, tell the person that you would prefer to be called by your name.



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## What Does Zero Tolerance Mean?

If your company has expressed its harassment prevention policy as a "Zero Tolerance" policy, be certain that supervisors and managers all understand what the "Zero Tolerance" represents. If it means that we will not tolerate behavior that might violate the law and that we will terminate anyone who engages in such serious misconduct, then everyone also needs to understand the elements of the law of "hostile environment harassment."

If "zero tolerance" means that we will not overlook more trivial violations of the company's demand for respect in the workplace, then it is important that everyone in management understands that this does not mean we seriously discipline any violation of workplace etiquette. Rather, it means that we do not ignore even childish, immature, or unprofessional workplace behavior and we use appropriate progressive discipline, including informal discipline and coaching and counseling, for such behavior. In turn, when a violator has been warned and repeats the behavior or when behavior truly approaches a violation of the law, those in management need to understand the gravity of the situation and how to initiate appropriate serious disciplinary action, including termination of employment.



*It is **critical** for every employer to develop and distribute a written no-harassment policy.*

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*Source:* <http://www.micropact.com/blog/detail/what-does-zero-tolerance-actually-mean/>



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## What You Can Do



- Create A Strong Sexual Harassment Policy
- Respond to Sexual Harassment Complaints Right Away
- Never Laugh At Or Encourage Inappropriate Jokes
- Keep Your Office Parties "PG" Rated



# Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Team

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*Creating Fair and  
Inclusive Companies*

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*Training Programs in the  
Northeast*

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*Writing the Job  
Description and Ad*

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*Tips for Retention*

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*Places to Post the Job*

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*Communication Styles*

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# Creating Fair and Inclusive Companies

*We understand that as a business you need to do what's right for your clients, employees and the bottom line. You can use fairness, inclusion and respect as tools to help stand out from your competitors.*





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## Writing the Job Description and Ad



*The images and language used in advertisements in male-dominated industries send a strong signal about whether or not a company wants to attract women, trans or gender non-conforming people to work with them.*

- Be sure to use gender neutral language.
- Example: "ABC Builders is looking for tradespeople to work at a variety of construction projects. Candidates must have their own tools, have reliable transportation and the ability to travel."
- In your ad or post, you might include the following intro: "We provide equal opportunities to all applicants and employees without regard to any legally protected status, such as race, religion, age, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, veteran status, sexual orientation, and disability."



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## Places to Post the Job



National Association of Women in Construction

<http://www.nawic.org>

Vermont Works for Women

<http://vtworksforwomen.org/job-listings/vww-job-bank/>

NESEA

<http://nesea.org/jobs-board>

Yestermorrow Design/Build School

<https://yestermorrow.org/jobs>

North Bennet Street School

<http://www.nbss.edu/alumni/jobbank.aspx?pageaction=updateCareerPostForm>



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# Construction Training in the Northeast

## **Connecticut**

Capital Workforce Partners Jobs Funnel

## **Maine**

Totally Trades Conferences

## **Massachusetts**

Gould Construction Institute

Building Pathways Building Trades Pre-Apprenticeship

Community Works Pre-Apprenticeship

Timberframers Guild Apprenticeship

North Bennet Street School – Carpentry and Preservation Carpentry

## **New Hampshire**

Heavy Construction Academy

## **New Jersey**

Construction Craft Laborers' Apprenticeship Program

## **New York**

Youth Construction Initiative Program

The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for

Construction Skills, Inc.

Hammerstone School

## **Pennsylvania**

New Castle School of Trades- Construction Trades Program

## **Rhode Island**

Rhode Island Construction Training Academy

## **Vermont**

Vermont Works for Women

Yestermorrow Design/Build School

## **Nationwide**

YouthBuild



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## Tips for Retention

*Working environments that are inclusive, safe and flexible benefit all employees.*

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**Sponsor and offer an apprenticeship program** to young women, trans and gender non-conforming people and promote the career opportunities available in the trades.

**Offer a buddy system** that starts from the job offer stage and assists women, trans and gender non-conforming people to form relationships, build networks and transition successfully to the company.

**End isolation** on worksites by assigning women, trans and gender non-conforming people, especially those new to the trades, in pairs or more.

**Guarantee pay equity** within your company.

**Change the company's culture** to embrace diversity and flexibility as an ongoing commitment to the entire workforce – not just 'special treatment' for women, trans and gender non-conforming people.



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# Communication Styles



***Tip:** At company meetings, encourage all employees to share their feedback and create space for constructive criticism that can help EVERYONE do their job better.*

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Acknowledge that there are common differences in communication styles between genders.

Effective relationships depend on understanding communication differences.

Men tend to be authoritative and direct, both qualities which are commonly associated with leadership, which commonly lead to men being promoted more quickly than women.

In group conversations, pay attention to different communication styles and create space for quieter voices to be heard.



# What is Privilege?

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*White Male Privilege*

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*"Hey, White Guys..."*

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*Many Types of Privilege*

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*What Does Privilege Look Like?*

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*How Do We Check Our Privilege?*

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# White Male Privilege

***Privilege:** Refers to the social, economic and political advantages or rights held by people from dominant groups on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc. For example, men often experience privilege that people of other genders do not have.*



A key aspect of privilege is that, due to its unearned nature, those who have privilege often do not realize they have it. In other words, they don't see the access and opportunity being a member of a dominant group affords them.



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“Hey, white guys...”



Click to play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXeKrbtMz2M>



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## There are many types of privilege

**Class  
Privilege**

**Race  
Privilege**

**Educational  
Privilege**

**Gender  
Privilege**

**Gender  
Identity  
Privilege**

**Age  
Privilege**

**Body Size  
Privilege**

**Able-Bodied  
Privilege**

**Life on the  
Outside  
Privilege**

**"Passing"  
Privilege**

**Religious  
Privilege**

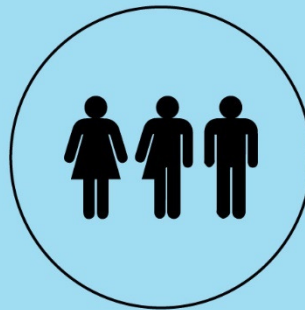
**Sexuality  
Privilege**



# What does privilege look like?



If you can expect time off from work to celebrate your religious holidays, **you have Christian privilege.**



If you can use public bathrooms without stares, fear or anxiety, **you have cisgender privilege.**



If you cannot be legally fired from work because of your perceived sexuality, **you have heterosexual privilege.**



If you're confident that the police exist to protect you, **you have white male privilege.**

If you don't have to think about it, **it's a privilege.**

**Becoming aware of privilege** should not be viewed as a burden or source of guilt, but rather, **an opportunity** to learn and be responsible so that we may work toward **a more just and inclusive world.**



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## How do we check our privilege?

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*"Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral. "*  
— Paulo Freire

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1. Acknowledge that the privilege exists
2. Move away from immobilizing guilt
3. Understand that your privilege will not go away until the root systems that give you privilege are abolished
4. Be an ally to communities you are not a part of
5. Recognize how and why your privilege can destruct community empowerment
6. Use your privilege to benefit groups you are not a part of
7. Educate others with your privilege to check themselves, and
8. Call people out and embrace being called out about privilege.



# Being an Ally

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*What is an Ally?*

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*5 Tips for Being an Ally*

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*Tips on Naming,  
Intervening, and  
Addressing Systemic  
Power*

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## What is an Ally?

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*An ally is typically a member of advantaged social groups who uses social power to take a stand against social injustice directed at targeted groups (Whites who speak out against racism, men who are anti-sexist). An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression.*

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**An ALLY**  
**is not an noun.**  
It isn't an identity, a label, or something to claim.  
**Being an ally is taking action,**  
**making a stand**  
**doing something to make a difference**  
**by standing up**  
**against oppression and marginalization.**  
**You are an ally**  
**when someone else recognizes you as an ally**



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## Characteristics of an Ally

- Feels good about own social group membership, is comfortable and proud of own identity
- Takes responsibility for learning about own and targeted group heritage, culture and experience, and how oppression works in everyday life
- Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of targeted group members
- Acknowledges unearned privileges received as a result of advantaged status and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that targeted group members also enjoy
- Recognizes that unlearning oppressive beliefs and actions is a life-long process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity
- Is willing to take risks, try new behaviors, act in spite of own fear and resistance from other advantaged group members
- Takes care of self to avoid burn-out
- Acts against social injustice because it is in their own self-interest to do so (as well as in the interest of targeted group members)
- Is willing to make mistakes, learn from them and try again
- Is willing to be confronted about own behavior and attitudes and consider change
- Is committed to taking action against social injustice in own sphere of influence
- Understands own growth and response patterns and when they are on a learning edge
- Understands the connections among all forms of social injustice
- Believes they can make a difference by acting and speaking out against social injustice
- Knows how to cultivate support from other allies

*Source: Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Second Edition, Routledge, 2007*



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# Tips on Naming, Intervening, and Addressing Systemic Power

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## **Name it when it's happening.**

"I'm noticing..."

"that I haven't heard from many folks of color recently."

"that there's a lot of interrupting happening, and that it's happening along gender lines. I want us all to work to become more aware of that and change that."

What you just said can be hurtful.

## **Refrain from saying things that people hear as name calling.**

Rather than what you just said is "racist." You can say: "What you just said is hurtful to people." Or ask questions.

## **Ask questions to support self inquiry.**

What makes you say that?

Where did you hear that?

What do you mean by that?

Can you tell me more about that?



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## Tips on Naming, Intervening, and Addressing Systemic Power

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### **Support the leadership of those targeted.**

Allow people to respond on their own behalf. Either way make sure it's covered.

Synthesize. "What I heard from this person is this...."

### **Create space for those who we are not hearing from.**

"I'm going to take a moment to see if anyone who hasn't spoken in a while has something to say."

"We've been hearing from a lot of men. Let's take a moment to see if any of the women, genderqueer, trans folks in the room have something to say."



# Additional Resources

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*Sample Harassment  
Policy*

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*We Want Your Feedback!*

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*Gender Neutral Signs*

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*Sources for PPE*

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# Sample Harassment Policy

Respect for the integrity of each employee in the performance of their job is basic to COMPANY's core values.

COMPANY strives to create a workplace free from discrimination and harassment. To that end, COMPANY strictly forbids discrimination or harassment of any kind, including discrimination based on race, color, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, criminal record, ancestry, age, disability, veteran status, active military status, genetics, or any other category protected under applicable federal, state, or local law. In addition to violating COMPANY's policy, harassment in the workplace may be unlawful. This policy extends to each and every level of COMPANY's operations. Accordingly, any form of harassment or discrimination, whether by a fellow employee, manager, supervisor, client or third party doing business with COMPANY, will not be tolerated.

COMPANY takes allegations of harassment very seriously and will promptly investigate all complaints. Any employee who believes that he or she has been harassed should immediately notify Owner or any other member of management staff with whom he or she feels comfortable.

COMPANY will promptly and impartially investigate all allegations of discrimination and harassment with appropriate care and discretion. If an investigation reveals that inappropriate conduct has occurred, COMPANY will take prompt and effective remedial action. COMPANY retains the right to take whatever action it believes appropriate under the circumstances, up to and including termination.

Retaliation against employees for reporting or complaining of discrimination or harassment (or for cooperating in the investigation of a report or complaint) is unlawful and will not be tolerated. Any retaliation will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of the offending employee.



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# Sample Sexual Harassment Policy (1)

In addition to COMPANY's general policy against discrimination and harassment, COMPANY also has a specific policy prohibiting harassment on the basis of sex. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is against the law.

Sexual harassment refers to any type of behavior of a sexual nature, intentional or unintentional, that is unwelcome and that has the purpose or effect of creating a work environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating, or humiliating. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature where: (a) submission to such conduct is either an express or implied term or condition of employment; (b) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for an employment decision affecting the harassed person; (c) the purpose of such conduct is to substantially interfere with the affected individual's work performance, or to create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment; or (d) the effect of such conduct is to substantially interfere with the harassed individual's work performance, or create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment may include the following conduct if it is unwelcome, and depending upon the circumstances, severity and pervasiveness of the conduct: verbal comments or propositions of a sexual nature, the display or circulation of sexually suggestive or explicit visual or printed material, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. All employees are expected to be aware of this policy and of the types of conduct that may constitute unlawful harassment, as well as of the avenues of assistance provided by COMPANY for addressing complaints of sexual harassment.

This policy extends to each and every level of COMPANY's operations. Accordingly, sexual harassment, whether by a fellow employee, manager, supervisor or third party doing business with COMPANY, will not be tolerated. In furtherance of COMPANY's policy to provide its employees with a work environment free from harassment, COMPANY requires that each of its supervisors be responsible for the prevention and elimination of all forms of harassment within their respective departments.



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## Sample Sexual Harassment Policy (2)

Examples of conduct that, if unwelcome, may constitute sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Direct or implied requests by a supervisor for sexual favors in exchange for actual or promised job benefits (i.e., favorable reviews, promotions, salary increases);
- Unwelcome sexual advances, whether they involve physical touching or not;
- Derogatory or provocative remarks about an employee's gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or sexual activity;
- Displaying or transmitting, by e-mail or otherwise, sexually suggestive materials or sexually explicit language;
- Inquiries into or discussion of sexual activities;
- Continuing to ask an employee to socialize on or off duty when that person has indicated an unwillingness to do so;
- Coerced sexual acts;
- Repeatedly not referring to someone by their preferred pronoun;
- Retaliation of any kind for having filed or supported a complaint of sexual harassment; and
- Off-duty conduct that falls within the above definition and affects the work environment.

Please note that while this policy sets forth COMPANY's goals of promoting a workplace that is free from sexual harassment, it is not designed or intended to limit COMPANY's authority to discipline or take remedial action for unacceptable workplace conduct, regardless of whether that conduct satisfies the definition of sexual harassment.

A copy of this policy will be provided to every employee, and extra copies are available from the Owner. COMPANY also will distribute this policy annually.



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# Sample Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedure

Sexual harassment of any kind serves no legitimate purpose and has a disruptive effect on an employee's ability to perform their job properly. COMPANY takes allegations of harassment very seriously and will actively investigate all complaints. If it is determined that inappropriate workplace conduct has occurred, management will take appropriate action against the offending person, up to and including termination of employment.

Any employee who believes that they have been sexually harassed immediately should bring their concerns to the attention of management in any of the following ways:

- Report the conduct to their immediate supervisor;
- Report the conduct to the Owner; or
- Report the conduct to any member of the management staff with whom they feel comfortable.

It is COMPANY's policy that all such matters will be handled with appropriate care and discretion and receive a thorough investigation. When an employee brings a complaint to the attention of any member of management, an appropriate representative of COMPANY management will be notified and will undertake an investigation of the allegations. Such investigation generally includes interviews with all persons identified as having direct and personal knowledge of the incident(s) in question.

If the investigation reveals that inappropriate conduct has occurred, COMPANY will take prompt and effective remedial action against the offending person. Such measures are designed to put an immediate stop to the harassment as well as prevent its recurrence. Therefore, management retains the right to take whatever action it believes is appropriate under the circumstances, up to and including termination of the offending person.

In addition, retaliation against employees for reporting or complaining of sexual harassment, or for cooperating in the investigation of a report or complaint, is unlawful and will not be tolerated. Any retaliation will warrant disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.



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## Gender Neutral Signs



Sources for ordering gender neutral signs:

<http://www.smartsign.com>

<http://www.mysafetysign.com>



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## Sources for Personal Protective Equipment Sized for Women



Sources for ordering women's PPE:

Lincoln Electric- welding gear

<http://www.lincolnelectric.com/en-us/equipment/welding-gear/Pages/womens-welding-gear.aspx>

Construction Gear

<http://www.constructiongear.com/womens-products.html>

E Safety

<http://www.esafetyinc.com/store/categoryList.cfm?catID=7959464C4D187D>

Aris Industrial

<http://www.arisindustrial.com/products.php?id=3&sub=21>



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## We Want Your Feedback!

This toolkit was developed by Kate Stephenson and Mel Baiser of HELM Construction Solutions with help and feedback from many of our colleagues in the building trades and social justice movements.

We recognize this is just a first step towards raising awareness of these issues in our industry and our workplaces, but we felt the need to start somewhere.

If you have feedback on the Toolkit, ideas to share, or suggestions for additions, please email [kate@buildhelm.com](mailto:kate@buildhelm.com).

We look forward to developing this Toolkit as a living document. Please share it widely!

If you found this Toolkit useful in your work, please consider making a donation to support the time and effort it took to put this together. Send checks to: HELM, 61 Prospect ST, Montpelier, VT 05602.



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## About Us



[www.buildhelm.com](http://www.buildhelm.com)

**HELM Construction Solutions** works with owners, designers and builders to create high performance and sustainable buildings and businesses. HELM provides a range of innovative services to help your business and your projects run smoothly and efficiently. We are committed to high performance and sustainable building practices that are not only right for the environment, but result in more durable buildings, better indoor air quality, comfort and a significant reduction in the operating costs of your home or business. HELM is a collaborative team with over thirty years of combined construction, management, leadership and education expertise.

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