Reducing Harassment in the Workplace through Bystander Intervention:

92% of participants said they felt confident in their ability to intervene when witnessing harassment after attending our Bystander Intervention Training.

Over the past year, Hollaback! trained 2,252 people in Bystander Intervention in the Workplace from six different companies including, 501cServices, Cold Spring Harbor, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, American Library Association, and Bandcamp.

These trainings were given in order to teach those participating how to recognize and safely intervene when they witness disrespectful behavior and/or sexual harassment in the workplace.

In the trainings we covered:

1. The spectrum of disrespect that can lead to a culture of harassment.
2. The Bystander Effect
3. How to navigate the reporting process via HR and other reporting tools.
4. How to address the disrespectful behavior if someone disrespects you.
5. How to apologize and make amends when you are the person who is disrespectful.
6. Interactive exercises and practice scenarios.

Bystander Intervention: a growing trend. In the post #MeToo era, corporations are being held to a higher standard – but sexual harassment trainings – the leading vehicle that employers use to prevent harassment – are woefully outdated.

In the 1980s when sexual harassment trainings were implemented nationwide, they tended to be designed by lawyers. The focus was on legal definitions and reporting resources, with the goal of reducing employer liability when sexual harassment occurred (i.e. “See! We told them not to do that.”) But this approach failed to address the complex realities of power, identity, and relationships that are at the core of sexual harassment. The failure of this training approach has been proven over time: in the 1980, the government surveyed its own workers and found that 42% of women and 15% of men experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

In 2018, 38 years later, a MSN poll showed a slight increase in sexual harassment for women and consistent data for men – 45% of women said they were sexually harassed and 15% percent of men said they were experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.

Noting this failure of public policy to reduce sexual harassment, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has taken note and recommended “bystander intervention” and “workplace civility” trainings in lieu of traditional sexual harassment trainings.
While traditional sexual harassment trainings tell you what to do and what not to do, and where to report harassment once it’s happened, bystander intervention and workplace civility trainings diagnose the problem differently. They see sexual harassment as part of a broader workplace culture — one where putting others down, speaking over people, and making racist or sexist comments in the form of “jokes,” is accepted, and at times, rewarded.

Bystander intervention has been widely used as a strategy to address sexual assault on college campuses, but is a newer trend in workplaces. New York City is the first place in the country to mandate that bystander intervention training be a component of all mandated sexual harassment trainings; and more cities and states are sure to follow suit.

Results

After attending the workshop 92% of participants indicated that they had a strong understanding of what disrespectful behavior and/or sexual harassment and their impacts looked like.

Overall, 92% of participants said they felt confident in their ability to intervene, when witnessing case of harassment after attending our Bystander Intervention Training.

“The training was one of the most dynamic and interactive online sessions I have ever attended. The trainer created a safe space in which to self-reflect and practice the skills. I would even say that 2 hours of the content or a second shorter follow-up session would be beneficial. Thank you so much for the invitation to participate! I feel much better prepared and empowered to act in the moment.”

95% answered that after the training they felt adequately informed on ways to intervene safely, when witnessing a situation of harassment by using Hollaback’s 5D’s methodology of Bystander Intervention.

Out of the people surveyed, when asked what their preferred method of intervention or “Super Power,” participants answered:

93% also said that the training provided them with tools to promote a respectful and civil workplace. Some participants had commented the following:

“I thought the training was excellent! I particularly liked the real-life scenarios and variety of options in the 5-D approach.”

“I think this is one of the best of this type of training that I’ve done, as far as giving people useful techniques wherever they happen to be in their willingness to intervene.”

90% of participants would recommend this workshop to their friends to learn how to intervene safely when they witness street harassment.

Bystander intervention gives employees and employers more options. It goes beyond recommending that employees just “report harassment” and offers solutions for gentle, safe way to correct disrespectful behavior before it escalates into harassment. By equipping employees with the tools to disrupt disrespect, the data in this report supports the EEOC’s finding that bystander intervention in the workplace is a promising best practice.