

## Religion at Work

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It's that time again...the holidays are almost upon us and some of the headaches for company event planners are about to begin. It seems to be increasingly more difficult to keep everyone happy, but that might be due to a poor development of their company culture - especially in light of the increasingly diverse religious perspectives represented in the workplace.

Last year, Tanenbaum released a study, *What American Workers Really Think About Religion*. Their findings indicated that whether Christian, Muslim, Jew, atheist or other faith practitioner, too many workers feel the sting of religious prejudice. In fact, at least one-third of the participants indicated that they had either witnessed religious bias or been subject to it.

We've all been taught that religion is too dicey to tackle in the workplace, but that might not be true. The Tanenbaum findings indicate that workers tend to be happier when employers boldly develop policies about faith practices in the workplace, intentionally promoting inclusion as well as understanding. To aid in that endeavor, Tanenbaum has developed a free tip sheet for avoiding bias in the workplace. It covers a number of items such as allowing the display of devotional objects to including special diet options such as halal or kosher foods at company gatherings.

American Airlines seems to have navigated the minefield of religion to their advantage. According to a 2013 Society for Human Resources report, the company has three faith-based employee resource groups that feature seminars to educate others about their beliefs. Their efforts have not only positively impacted the work environment, but have helped the bottom line, too. For instance, the Christian group helped American promote sales for churches and conventions, amounting to \$900,000 in sales. The Muslim group helped flight attendants to accommodate travelers with understanding customs involved with the annual pilgrimage to Mecca as well as the introduction of halal meals on flights and the installation of prayer rooms at DFW Airport.

Embracing the differences of religious perspectives in the workplace is based on the cornerstone of all ethical behavior: respect. As Tanenbaum put it, "this is not about ignoring the majority or privileging one group over another. Religious accommodation is about ending religious bias, prejudice and discrimination...it is an opportunity that, if seized, can bring success for employees and the companies where they work."

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