

Next Steps After A Culture Walk

Congratulations!

By completing the culture walk checklist, you've taken an important step in creating a workplace where you and your colleagues can be your best selves.

The changes necessary to shaping a safe, inclusive, respectful workplace might feel overwhelming. That's perfectly normal. We've created this toolkit to help you take manageable steps—whether small or large—to address the issues you and your coworkers believe need improvement.

You have the ability to fix problems you see around you, especially if you have a clear sense of the problem; who is in a position to fix the problem; what changes they need to make; and who can help you. Once you answer these questions, you will be able to create a simple plan with enormous potential.

As you embark on this path, remember the words of the ancient philosopher Lao Tzu: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Understanding your workplace culture

The Culture Walk Checklist shows you what visible and invisible factors make up your current workplace culture. Take a moment to review those, and then answer the following:

- What stands out? Why?
- Are there particular factors that you feel could make a big difference?

As you reflect on this question, trust your instincts, and your experience. We are often taught to believe that some things are more important than others, but our experiences and our gut are most often our best teachers.

Common problems, shared hope

The culture of the workplace impacts everyone who works there. For a variety of reasons, people may experience that culture differently. For example, some men may feel comfortable working in an environment that values their opinions above those of their female coworkers; others may not. It is important to understand how your coworkers experience the culture, and find allies who will work with you to make change.

Invite your colleagues to join you on this journey

Chances are that many of your colleagues who value respect and civility feel the same as you about the need to make changes. Working together, you can accomplish what otherwise seems impossible.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Meade

If any of your coworkers did not have an opportunity to be a part of the Culture Walk team, encourage them to look through the checklist, either together or on their own. You could also:

- Invite people to join you for lunch, or a snack, and share copies of the checklist and what the Culture Walk team discovered;
- Bring copies of the checklist to happy hour, or other social occasions; and/or
- Invite coworkers to join a social media group and create a space for exchange of ideas, concerns, and strategies.

Talking to coworkers about your work environment might feel uncomfortable at first. Here are a few tips to help you start those conversations:

- Try to talk in person; social media is great, but research shows that face-to-face conversations are more fruitful when discussing challenging topics. It's much easier to read part of an email, and delete it, than it is to leave in the middle of an in-person conversation. Share your vision for a safe workplace, and why it's important to you. If your coworkers understand why you're engaged in this effort, they're more likely to trust you. You will likely find that many of your coworkers struggle with the same concerns.

- Offer hope that change is possible and worth it!
- Listen. Listening is an important skill, and essential to forming human connection and developing trust. Here are **some tips to be a better listener**.
- Don't shy away from difficult topics.

Here are some guidelines for difficult conversations:

- **How do you Start the Conversation?**

Try to find common ground. Ask your co-workers the questions you asked yourself when you completed the checklist:

- **What stands out? Why?**

Try to identify issues that are felt both widely, and deeply. That combination is important because if an issue is important to only a small number of people, it makes it less likely that others will want to devote their time to trying to promoting change. Or, if a large number of people agree that a particular issue is a problem, but feel tepid about it, they likely won't put much energy into trying to fix the problem.

Take notice of people who feel particularly strongly about an issue. They will be natural leaders—i.e., more likely to invest their time and energy in trying to solve that problem, or they will be the loudest opponents of change if they are invested in the status quo.

An important tip: Make sure you stay in contact with the people who have agreed to work together to create a more respectful work environment. A simple way to do that is to ask everyone to take on particular tasks, and then arrange check-ins periodically so everyone can report on their progress.

Feel free to use the Post-Walk Worksheet to organize your thoughts.

- **Where can these conversations happen?**

You can talk in the cafeteria, in the break room, or anywhere else where your employer allows employees to gather during non-work time. Sometimes it's easier to have an honest conversation when people are away from work. Invite your co-workers for coffee, or a walk, or dinner. There are endless possibilities!

Moving Solutions

An important step in developing viable solutions is to identify who is in a position to fix the problem within the organization.

For example, if the problem is isolated to one coworker who tells inappropriate jokes at staff meetings, that coworker has the power to fix the problem, as does his supervisor, and others in the management chain. Or, using your culture walk team of committed individuals interested in culture change, a potential solution is to confront the coworker directly.

If the problem involves inappropriate conduct by the CEO or management, direct confrontation is likely not a viable solution. In that case, members of the Board of Directors might be the only ones in the position to directly fix the problem or an ally in management or leadership.

Think about external allies

- Are there partners you could approach to discuss the issue, and seek their input?
- Does a particular entity—a client or contractor for example—have influence over someone inside your organization who has the power to change the culture?
- Is there a community leader with a powerful voice who might be helpful?
- Would the media be interested in what your team is trying to do?

Many individuals have turned to the media as a mechanism to address pervasive sexual harassment in their work lives. If you believe that this type of external pressure would be helpful, here are some tips to working with the media.

Building a plan

- Consider whether there are any existing mechanisms in your workplace that allow you and your coworkers to voice your concerns and suggestions.
- **Employee Engagement Councils:** Some companies have established voluntary employee engagement councils whose goals

include facilitating networking, exchanging ideas, and suggesting ways to enhance employee satisfaction and work effectiveness. If your company has such a council, reach out to someone you trust on that council, and ask them to give you and your coworkers an opportunity to share your analysis of the problem. Try to engage the council in crafting solutions.

- **Employee Satisfaction Surveys:** If you have access to employee satisfaction surveys, consider whether the reported data could help you make a case for change. If your employer does not conduct such surveys, or if the existing surveys fall short, consider conducting your own informal survey. You can get some ideas to get started developing one here.
 - In 2018, a group of women at Nike circulated an informal survey to gather information about women’s experiences with sexual harassment on the job. The survey landed on the CEO’s desk, and resulted in a formal review that led to the resignation of several top-ranking executives.
- **Corporate Circles:** Some organizations are looking at models that combine restorative practices, dialogue and appreciative inquiry to address workplace conflict, and change culture. While restorative processes are relatively new to the workplace, they have a long history of success in other settings: schools (where they are used to deal with bullying and inappropriate behavior), as well as in religious and indigenous communities. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission **used restorative practices** to give victims of apartheid a voice in the process.
- **Unionized Workplaces:** If you and/or some or all of your coworkers are covered by a collective bargaining agreement (CBA), consider the following:
 - Would filing a grievance help you solve the problem?
Grievances are most helpful when someone can point to specific conduct—by a supervisor, manager, or coworker—that violates the terms of the CBA.
 - If your CBA doesn’t have specific language addressing sexual harassment, look for anti-discrimination language; that may apply.

- Is there a Labor-Management Committee in place that might be able to take on the task of culture change together?
- Check your union's governing documents, including the constitution and by-laws. These documents often define what conduct by union members is unacceptable, which might provide an avenue to hold harassers accountable.
 - In one notable example, a group of women animators in Hollywood came together in 2018 to hold a powerful man in the industry with a long history of sexual harassment accountable. The nature of the industry was such that if the harasser was fired by a studio, he would soon be hired by another. The women filed charges against the harasser under their union's constitution, which forbids "disloyalty to fellow members." They secured a hearing, where they presented evidence of the persistent sexual harassment. The union expelled the harasser for one year, which meant that he was unable to work in the industry during that time.

Putting your final touches on a plan

Your plan for moving forward should clearly identify the problem you seek to fix, and lay out concrete steps. The Post-Walk Worksheet will help focus your efforts. Your chances of success are greatest when everyone on your team shares an analysis of the problem, as well as a commitment to fixing it.

Take care of yourself

Stay hopeful and remember to take care of yourself as you go through this process. Transformation can be taxing—on the body, the mind, and the spirit. As Audre Lorde cautioned long ago, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation."

Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the Resource Center.



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