

# Reflecting on #MeToo Post-Weinstein: Lessons Learned

*Deb Muller, CEO of HR Acuity*

The Harvey Weinstein verdicts handed down this February symbolized more than just putting the Hollywood mogul on trial. Though the judge himself warned the jurors “this is not a referendum on #MeToo,” it’s impossible to see the event as anything other than a watershed moment for the global movement – and for how we as organizations handle sexual harassment and misconduct moving forward.

So what can employee relations and HR professionals learn from the moment? What’s changed – and what hasn’t?

First, it’s clear that the cultural shift that #MeToo set in motion in 2017 is taking hold. Weinstein’s behavior was allegedly an open secret, yet the accusers felt powerless to do anything about it. With the guilty verdicts, a seemingly out-of-reach harasser has been held accountable.

Recent legislation reflects this shift to no tolerance. New Jersey just proposed strict new anti-harassment legislation, following the lead of New York, Oregon, California and others. All hold employers accountable for reporting and routing out harassment and discrimination. The guilty verdicts are in line with this changing climate.

However: though progress has been made, fears of retaliation or lack of action are still real concerns for victims, and the Weinstein case also illustrates that. Though convicted of two charges, Weinstein was acquitted of the most serious charges, of predatory sexual assault.

In our HR Acuity research, we found that even with all the visibility #MeToo has provided, many employees are still

reluctant to come forward to report issues. In fact, just 64% reported issues when they arose. It's not because they don't know how. Eighty-five percent (85%) say they know when and where to report.

Why? Forty-six percent say they are afraid of retaliation. And 39% say they're not confident their issues will be addressed fairly.

It takes tremendous courage to come forward and report any issue, especially sexual harassment. Yet more than two years since the hashtag, employers are falling short across a variety of dimensions, from communication to process. We are at risk for lulling into complacency and inaction. We must do better.

## Recommendations for Moving Forward

Above all, the Weinstein case has continued to expand the spotlight of #MeToo. More employees will report sexual misconduct. As employers and leaders, we must ensure that we are providing a work environment in which all employees feel safe.

**Take action and address #MeToo in your organization starting now:**

- Disseminate a written statement detailing your organization's zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct to all employees, regardless of role, revenue production or who you know. Leaders must also be held accountable for misconduct they choose to ignore.
- Don't limit yourself to employees. In today's gig economy, consideration for the actions and safety of freelancers and contractors is required.
- Ignorance is not bliss. Proactively examine what's going on in your organization. Implement a recordkeeping mechanism to ensure history of patterns of misbehavior

are easy to identify and then take action.

- When (not if) an allegation is made, a standard and consistent process for conducting investigations into allegations of misconduct must be used across the organization. This needs to be a priority.
- Remember that targets of sexual misconduct can be men, as well as women, vendors, customers and visitors to your workplace.

The Weinstein trial won't be the end of #MeToo. The cultural, legal and corporate climates are irrevocably changed, and substantial progress has been made.

Now, we must work together to ensure we continue to build the fair, safe workplaces our employees deserve. Above all, as leaders, we are accountable. If we see something, we must say something – and we must act.



**About the Author:** *Deb is driven by an obsession to do things the right way, particularly in employee relations, where she has spent her career championing excellence and effectively managing workplace investigations. After serving in executive HR roles at numerous Fortune 500 companies like Honeywell, Citibank, and Marsh & McLennan, Deb launched HR Acuity to create technology with built-in expertise and equip organizations to manage employee relations more strategically. Deb provides a wealth of real-world experience and guidance to help companies strengthen processes, transform workplace culture, and elevate employee relations as a strategic driver of business success.*