



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

From Don't Be Evil to Do the Right Thing: The Code of Conduct Evolution



In the year 2000, Google famously adopted the corporate code of conduct motto, Don't Be Evil to represent its approach to both business and workplace behavior. At the time, the approach seemed sensible, but today it feels strikingly out of touch. It's a low bar that misses the mark on one of the most pressing issues of our time: respect and freedom from harassment, at work, at home, and at play.

Don't be evil is simply not good enough anymore. The ugliness of workplace culture—and, in particular, discrimination and harassment related to race, religion, and gender—is now front-page news. And it reflects an opportunity to change generational habits of disrespect that are pervasive in our work environments. From the doctor's office to the construction site, we are failing to demonstrate and uphold the principles of equality and freedom that this country was founded on, and we must do better.

Healthcare is a complex work environment. We operate under significant stress and the problems we care for are complicated and emotional. To blow off steam, we frequently resort to banter and humor without appreciating the potential for harm. In our profession, by definition, we are expected to give opinions and counsel, but too often that overflows from the exam room to the nurses' station. And finally, healthcare is a melting pot of cultures, religions, races, and genders. The sum of these factors is a highly charged work environment that is ripe for everything from simple misunderstandings to outright harassment. Appreciating and respecting this potential will help us plan an approach to workplace conduct that works for everyone without degrading the culture or comradery.

The first step any organization needs to take is to establish a code of conduct, communicate it frequently, get buy-in from all employees, and commit to a zero-tolerance policy for violations. We all must accept this approach and work hard to avoid the pitfalls that can lead to an incident.

We can illustrate our commitment by being especially sensitive to situations that are prone to misinterpretation or hostility. How do we do that, you ask? Perhaps the surest way to avoid trouble is to be conscious in your communication, careful with your opinions, and resolutely avoid intimate workplace relationships and overtures.

Here are 10 specific things to consider that can help foster a safe and respectful work environment:

1. Any relationship, no matter how mutual you believe the interest is, can lead to harassment, intentional or not. It's wise to avoid them completely.
2. The workplace is not the place for political, social, and religious debates. These are notorious for disintegrating into hostility. Don't think for a minute that you can navigate these respectfully. Again, it's best to just avoid them completely.
3. Be careful about gossip, complaining, and negativity.
4. In difficult or controversial situations, don't be quick to judge. Give these "time to breathe" and you may be surprised by the perspective you gain.
5. Don't be impulsive, and be careful about negative assumptions regarding intent.
6. Be inclusive and sensitive. Build bridges instead of trenches.
7. Be respectful in your communications, written or verbal.
8. When you sense a situation is escalating or becoming personal, call a "time-out." Call on others to stop and be accountable to a respectful work environment.
9. If you are in a position of power, by profession or title, you must be very self-aware and careful. Using rank or power to retaliate against someone should not be tolerated.
10. Be very careful with humor. What may be an attempt to lighten the mood can easily be interpreted as divisive, disrespectful, or inappropriate. Think before you speak.

These are challenging times for our society, and these issues naturally permeate into the workplace. But we have the opportunity to make progress if we commit to getting better. The urgent care industry should *do the right thing* in support of a safe and civil workplace, free of harassment and threat. ■

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