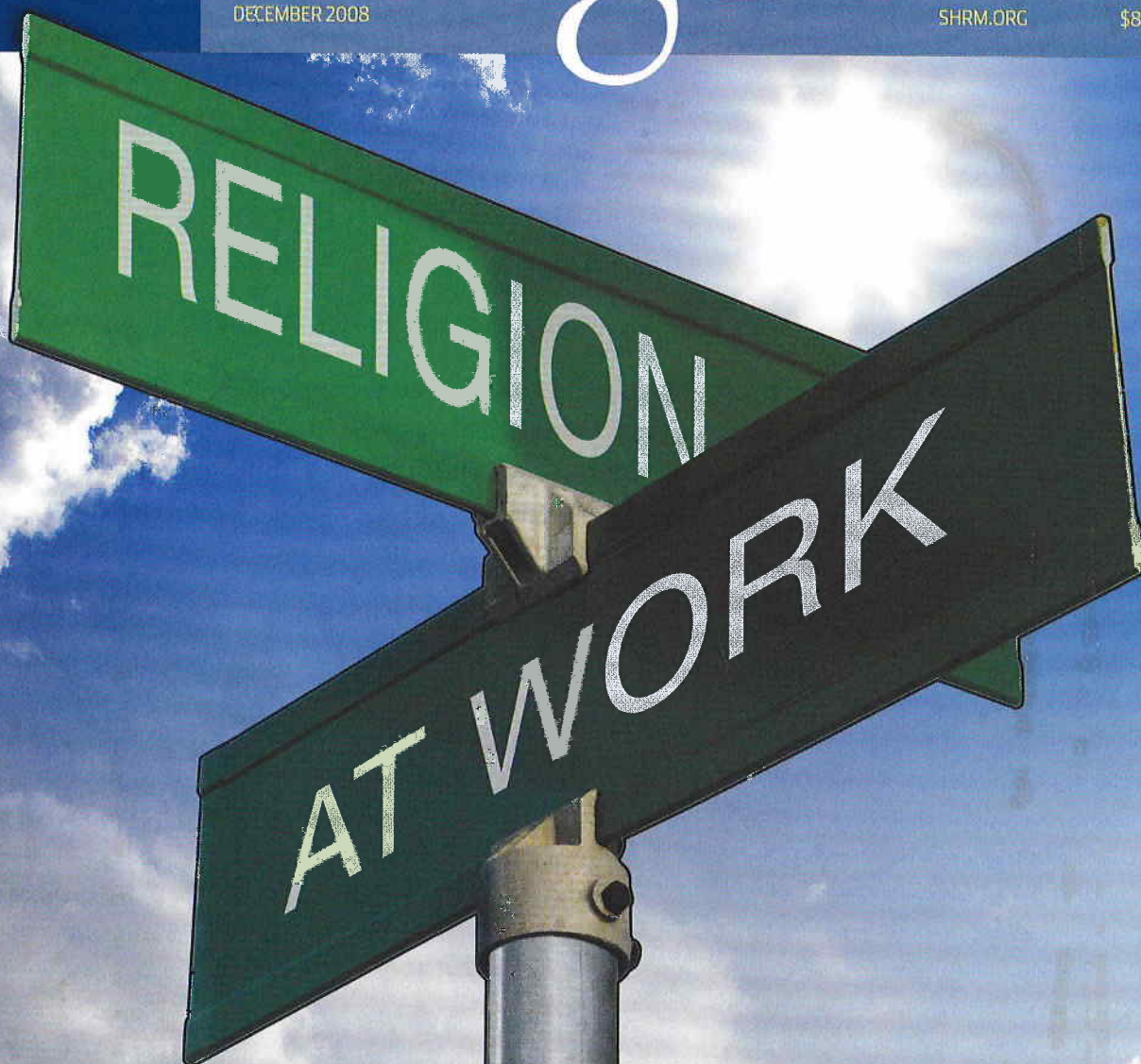


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SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Many employers are weaving religion and spirituality into company cultures. The push may come from bosses or the rank and file—and their motivations vary. Either way, when religion and spirituality cross the threshold, they result in daunting legal and managerial challenges along with perceived benefits.

By Robert J. Grossman

Bob Pettus spent his entire career with Charlotte, N.C.-based Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated—all with top-level human resource responsibility. Like an Israelite wandering in the Sinai seeking the Promised Land, he engaged in a quest—to find the keys to attracting and retaining high-performing workers and managers. After decades in the wilderness, he was losing heart.

“Our employees’ salaries, benefits and perks were always a little bit ahead of others so we could attract the kinds of employees we needed,” recalls the HR veteran, who retired in 2005 as vice chairman of the nation’s second-largest Coca-Cola bottler with 5,800 employees in 11 Southeastern states. “I would get all excited about giving everyone a 3.5 percent increase, putting in a new insurance policy, adding a new holiday. But when I made the announcements, there was hardly any response except, ‘Hey, that’s what everyone else is doing. You guys should have been doing this a long time ago.’ We spent all those millions, and all we got for it was ‘ho-hum.’” »

The author, a contributing editor of HR Magazine, is a lawyer and a professor of management studies at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Then Pettus—who now consults for the company—saw the light. He was meeting the physical and emotional needs of workers, but what about the spiritual? Did it make sense to keep religion under wraps and require people to leave their faith at the doorstep? Equally important, if leaders really believed in running the business in concert with God and religious values, shouldn't they say so?

Pettus knew company leaders who answer affirmatively buck convention: Most business leaders are *faith-frosty*, convinced that the less religious expression at work, the better. They comply with legal mandates and accommodate individuals who require special arrangements, but go no further.

The U.S. educational system and other teachings “say you should compartmentalize faith,” Pettus says. “Folks who are willing to talk about their faith and live it out Monday through Friday often are viewed as fanatical. Someone can go to a football game and scream and holler, throw things in the air and dress like a slob. But at work, if you mention that you should love one another and live right every day—it’s like, ‘What’s wrong with you?’”

Pettus took a stand. Working with the chief executive officer, he drafted a mission and values statement that makes it clear company leaders embrace and honor God. It opens the door to spirituality for all employees and champions stewardship. The statement leads with “Our Values Honor God.”

Finally, an initiative that was met with an overwhelming positive reaction. When people learn they can live out their faith, Pettus says, “There’s this loyalty, this willingness to go the extra mile.”

Faith Focus

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated represents one of many *faith-focused* U.S. companies. These organizations proactively conduct business in a manner that embraces the faiths of leaders or owners. Their faiths provide underlying values that motivate and guide the organizations. A few, such as Coca-Cola Bottling, are publicly traded. Many more—such as Austaco Ltd., a privately owned Taco Bell franchisee with 1,800 workers in Austin, Texas—number among the nation’s small and medium-sized and frequently family-owned businesses.

“We classify ourselves as a Christian company—Christ- or God-centered,” says Don Barton, Austaco’s HR vice president. “We do things like say grace when we have a meal, something a typical company might not do. The employees know that our CEO, Dirk Dozier, is open about sharing his Christian faith in personal testimony. Our motto is to serve, which includes serving our employees on a spiritual basis.”

Faith-Friendly

Also welcoming religion are *faith-friendly* companies. They value inclusion and promote diversity and religious self-expression. They do not align with one religion, but instead invite workers to bring all manners of religious and spiritual expression to the workplace.

At Ford Motor, for example, workers’ religious groups have

access to facilities after hours for meetings and communicate through newsletters. “Being able to bring your whole self to work is essential to us,” says Allison Trawick, global manager in Ford’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion in Dearborn, Mich. “That means everyone.” At the centerpiece of Ford’s religious diversity: the Ford Interfaith Network (FIN), one of eight recognized and supported affiliate groups.

Led by a board of representatives of Buddhism,

Catholicism, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, evangelical Christians, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Orthodox Christianity, FIN welcomes all religious and spiritual groups. One discovery: “how many values we have in common,” says Daniel Dunnigan, manager of worldwide volumes and FIN chairman. “We all value family, integrity [and] personal industriousness and are committed to leading morally upright lives.”

Dunnigan says Ford’s celebration of religious diversity and the impact it has on culture can’t be measured in financial terms alone: The Muslim representative “doesn’t have to worry about where he’ll go for his midday prayers. He thinks it makes him more loyal. Another man affiliated with the evangelical Christian group told me he wouldn’t want to work anywhere

More Religion, Not Less

A strong majority in the United States are religious, even as religious affiliation becomes increasingly diverse. According to a 2008 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life:

- 92 percent of Americans say they believe in God.
- 83 percent are affiliated with a religious group.
- 54 percent attend religious services at least once or twice per month.
- Nearly 60 percent pray every day.
- 39 percent meditate at least once a week.
- 74 percent believe in life after death.
- 63 percent say they believe Scripture is the word of God.

Major Religious Traditions In the United States

Religion	Percentage of Adult Respondents
Christian	78.4%
Protestant	51.3
Evangelical churches	26.3
Mainline churches	18.1
Historically black churches	6.9
Catholic	23.9
Mormon	1.7
Jehovah's Witness	0.7
Orthodox	0.6
Other Christian	0.3
Other religions	5.0
Jewish	1.7
Buddhist	0.7
Muslim	0.6
Hindu	0.4
Other world religion	<0.3
Other faiths	1.2
Unaffiliated	16.1

Religious Affiliated Who Agree That Many Religions Can Lead to Eternal Life

Religious Affiliation	Percentage of Respondents
Total affiliated	70%
Protestant	66
Evangelical churches	57
Mainline churches	83
Historically black churches	59
Catholic	79
Mormon	39
Jehovah's Witness	16
Orthodox	72
Jewish	82
Muslim	56
Buddhist	86
Hindu	89

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008.
Table doesn't total 100% because of rounding.

else because of Ford's welcoming environment. How do you put a dollar value on this?"

Nation of Believers

Religion remains integral to life in the United States, and religious practices are increasingly diverse. In a 2001 survey

conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in New York, 36 percent of HR professionals reported an increase in the religious diversity of their employees during the previous five years. In SHRM's 2008 *Religion and Corporate Culture: Accommodating Religious Diversity in the Workplace* survey report, 64 percent said their organizations have some degree of religious or spiritual diversity.

Immigrants affiliated with various religions contribute to these numbers. In 1970, only 4.5 percent of the population was foreign-born; of those, 62 percent came from Europe and were overwhelmingly Christian. By 2000, 12 percent of the population was foreign-born but only 16 percent of that group shared European heritage. Many more came from Asia or Latin America and were Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or members of other religions. Today, 78.4 percent of U.S. adults are Christian and about 5 percent are members of other religions; 16.1 percent are unaffiliated.

For some, religion and spirituality rest comfortably under the umbrella of "faith." For others, "religion" is a loaded, politically charged word.

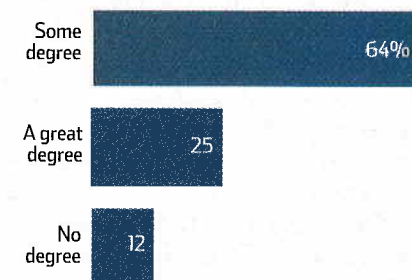
"In the business community, many accept the notion that spirituality should be welcome at work, while religion is to be avoided," says Douglas Hicks, associate professor of leadership studies and religion and executive director of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond in Virginia. "They contrast religion as dogmatic, rigid [and] tradition-bound, and spirituality as open, liberating, individualistic and creative."

Diversity's Forgotten Child

To the chagrin of those who favor religious expression, the HR community has been reluctant to champion the cause. "At best, HR has ignored the issues and at worst, it has been hostile," says David Miller, director of the Princeton University Faith &

How Religiously Diverse Are Organizations?

Religious and spiritual diversity among employees



Source: SHRM's 2008 *Religion and Corporate Culture: Accommodating Religious Diversity in the Workplace* survey report.

Work Initiative in New Jersey. "How can you say you stand for diversity and inclusion when you limit it to external characteristics and don't extend it to the inclusion of worldviews that include some kind of god or not?"

Until recently, religion and spirituality have been the *bête noire* of the diversity movement. People who have advocated for diversity in gender, race or sexual orientation have avoided speaking in support of religious expression in the workplace. Hundreds of senior executives are devout but silent, says Miller. "They think it would be career suicide to come forward."

Human resource professionals know that religious expression can lead to litigation or polarization. To avoid problems, "stay away," advises Robert Campbell, senior vice president of HR at NiSource Inc. in Merrillville, Ind., a *Fortune* 500 company whose 7,600 employees engage in natural gas and electric generation, transmission, storage and distribution.

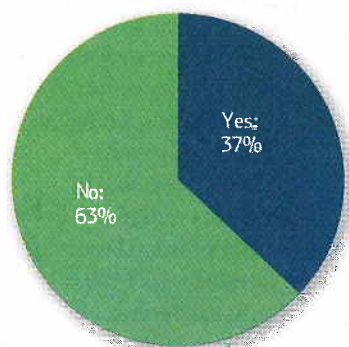
"HR folks are too busy worrying about where the next lawsuit will come from instead of helping enable people to live the one life they are called to live through a business which has a higher purpose than just to make money," says Don Barefoot, president of C12 Group, a support group for born-again Christian CEOs and business owners, based in Greensboro, N.C. "They're the gatekeepers for society's fears and hang-ups."

But when HR professionals look objectively at the spiritual values of the major religions, they will be less concerned, says Michelle Knox, executive consultant with Novations Group Inc. in Boston. "The values are very similar—integrity, respect for oneself, altruistic behavior, putting others first."

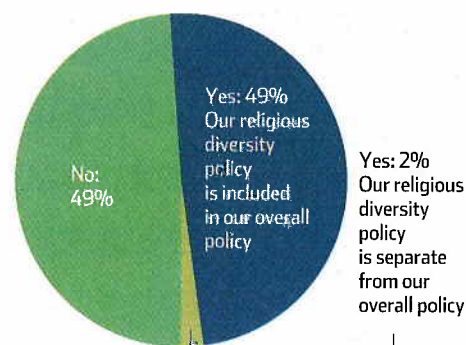
HR professionals are "risk-averse about what can happen from a compliance standpoint, and I was, too," recalls Rod Nagel, senior vice president of human resource operations at Tyson Foods Inc. in Springdale, Ark. But "You'll realize the benefits go well beyond the risks," he says. The publicly traded company's core values literature includes this language: We strive to be a faith-friendly company. ... We strive to honor God and be respectful of each other, our customers and other stakeholders.

(For an online-only sidebar on chaplain-at-work programs

Are Religion and Spirituality A Component of Employee Training?



Does Your Company Have A Formal Written Policy Regarding Religious Diversity?



Source: SHRM's 2008 Religion and Corporate Culture: Accommodating Religious Diversity in the Workplace survey report.

operated by Tyson Foods and others, see the online version of this article at www.shrm.org/hrmagazine.)

Out of the Shadows

While no data are available, many experts say the number of companies that promote or encourage religious expression is trending up. Georgette Bennett, president and founder of the Tanenbaum Center and a member of SHRM's Workplace Diversity Special Expertise Panel, attributes the trend in part to globalization and the politicization of religion. "With everyone from the [U.S.] president on down wearing their religion on their sleeve, it's not surprising that employers and employees are encouraged to assert their rights."

In fact, "We've reached a tipping point where the conventional wisdom that you keep your spiritual side at home is about to collapse," Miller says, adding that millennials and Gen Xers "want to live a holistic life" and that older workers tend to be interested in religion as well.

The Business Case

Miller says welcoming religious diversity gives recruiters an advantage.

When employers allow spirituality to be expressed, levels of employee commitment and engagement increase, Knox adds. "It allows for greater meaning and reduces stress. Whenever we subjugate something that makes [other people] different, it lessens their ability to be productive and satisfied in their work."

It's no coincidence that in SHRM's Religion and Corporate Culture survey, HR professionals said employee morale was

most affected by companies granting religious accommodations, Bennett notes.

To faith-focused executives, byproducts of promoting spiritual expression, such as financial rewards, “are icing on the cake,” Pettus concludes. “Don’t say you’ll get more productivity because people will see it as a ploy to extract more work from them. Do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

Legal Parameters

Of course, employers are obligated to make reasonable efforts to accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs of all workers. Accommodation may include opportunities for prayer, respecting holidays—even proselytizing and the distribution of literature. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination occurs if an employer fails to reasonably accommodate employees, or if employees are harassed by being required to abandon or adopt, or coerced into abandoning or adopting, a religious practice as a condition of employment (*quid pro quo*) or subjected to unwelcome statements or conduct based on religion so severe or pervasive that the person finds the work environment hostile or abusive.

Hence, employers must balance the obligation to accommodate religious views of one or more employees—an obligation that legal experts say is becoming more onerous—with the obligation to prevent harassment or creation of a hostile work

► Online Resources

Talk to your peers about religious expression in your workplace in an online discussion featured on *HR Magazine*’s home page. For more information about this topic, see the online version of this article at www.shrm.org/hrmagazine for links to:

- Online-only sidebars on chaplain-at-work programs and four different company approaches to faith.
- SHRM’s 2008 *Religion and Corporate Culture: Accommodating Religious Diversity in the Workplace*.
- SHRM’s *Religion in the Workplace* Toolkit.
- SHRM Online articles.
- Federal guidelines.
- The mission statement of the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated.

environment for others. For example, unwelcome words or conduct, whether emanating from a fellow employee or the boss, may be permissible until the target of the communication or conduct objects. Even then, they may not constitute harassment unless considered pervasive or severe.

Navigating this terrain is dicey; hence, most employers opt for a hands-off approach wherever possible.

More Than Meets the Eye?

Religious discrimination charges filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) more than doubled from 1992 to 2007. Still, the EEOC received just 2,880 charges in 2007, a relatively small number compared to charges filed for other reasons. Of the EEOC claims filed in 2007, the agency found “no reasonable cause” in

almost 60 percent. Claims cost businesses \$6.4 million that year. Yet, only 2 percent of respondents to SHRM’s 2008 Religion and Corporate Culture survey said their organization has been named as a defendant in a lawsuit related to religion in the past 12 months.

But these figures may underrepresent the problem, with many instances unreported or resolved. For example, in a 1999 employee survey by the Tanenbaum Center, 66 percent of respondents said they had seen indications of religious bias at work. Of those who were targets, only 23 percent reported it.

In an April survey of 278 organizations by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) in Seattle, nearly one-third of HR executives said they have seen personal clashes in the workplace linked to religion. Thirty-one percent said unsolicited sharing of religious views has been a problem.

In faith-focused organizations, employees sometimes quit, saying they felt “marginalized because the ethos was too Christian,” Hicks says. “Many leave without formally complaining, making it difficult to assess the scope of the problem. Workers are vulnerable, unwilling to risk their jobs by coming forward or speaking out. Often, the cultures from which these workers come teach them to ‘keep your head low—don’t complain.’ Also, they don’t understand what their rights are.”

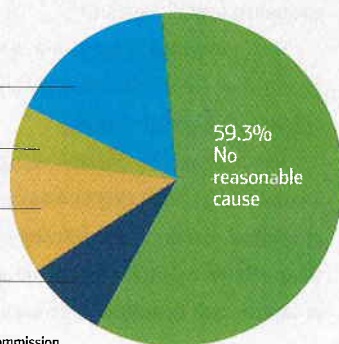
Frank Manion, senior counsel at the American Center for Law and Justice in Washington, D.C., says people come forward reluctantly; “They don’t want to offend anyone.”

This can be problematic for employers that run into constructive discharge claims after employees leave. Seemingly,

Religion-Based Discrimination Charges in 2007

Resolutions by Type

- 16.5% Administrative closures
- 5.3% Withdrawals with benefits
- 11.2% Settlements
- 7.7% Reasonable cause



Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

the burden rests on the worker to request that offensive conduct cease, yet Manion envisions scenarios where the conduct is so overt that the burden may rest with the employer. And, don't overlook the possibility that some individuals or groups may set traps that could lead to litigation. "I wouldn't be surprised if people in civil rights groups start sending out 'salts' to test the impartiality of employers," says employment lawyer Michael Homans of Falster/Greenberg PC in Philadelphia. "People aren't required to disclose their religion when they apply, but if the information is volunteered or an applicant displays a cross [or] Star of David or wears the head covering of a Muslim, for example, the potential for a discriminatory response arises."

Almost one-third of 580 HR executives told i4cp researchers that religious discrimination was a workplace concern. "They see it as an issue, but not as one that affects them personally," says Anne Lindberg, i4cp research analyst. "People who have faced discrimination claims have handled it in-house. There's not a lot of news about people being dinged for thousands of dollars in lawsuits. But we're only at the beginning. Once you get some big judgments, the popular media will get on board, and then watch out."

Following Chosen Paths

According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life in Washington, D.C., two-thirds of the population affiliated with a religious tradition hold an inclusionary view, accepting that their chosen path is not the only road to salvation. One-third think their way is the only way and may be obligated by their beliefs to reach out. For example, data from The Barna Group, a research organization in Ventura, Calif., reveal that three-quarters of the nation's 1 million born-again Christians believe they "personally have a responsibility to tell other people about their religious beliefs."

The challenges presented by proselytizing grow large when supervisors deliver the message.

For instance, Brad Thompson, CEO at Columbia Forest Products in Greensboro, N.C., says leading his company by biblical principles is an opportunity to live his faith. "My goal is that people will sense something different about me. Once they do and want to know where it's coming from, I'll tell them. The best thing I can do is model Christian principles and let people come to me." Thompson identifies a dividing line "between an invitation and a push. I can't see any harm if I invite anyone to attend a religious event or prayer meeting with me. [But] I can't push anyone to the point that I make them uncomfortable."

Although Thompson seems to be within the law, some observers worry. "Because of the unequal power relationship, there should never be a situation where a supervisor

is making any kind of religious overtures to a subordinate," Bennett insists.

Managers should not proselytize, agrees Campbell. "You don't want to give anyone the false impression that you'll make a work decision based on your preference. The potential for lawsuits—meritorious or not—is undeniable. If someone has been rewarded or punished for any reason, it's not hard to put a case together attributing the action to religious bias."

Making It Happen

Regardless of the perceived benefits of religious expression in the workplace, employment lawyers counsel caution and following a course that will minimize conflict. That means, regarding religion, less is better. "The suppression by private employers of religious speech at work generally does not create legal exposure for the employer so long as the employer 'reasonably accommodates' religion," Homans says. "Keep references to religious values and God out of written policies and practices; instead, describe your values in the secular language of ethics."

Campbell says even voluntary activities that aren't

Spreading the Word

In a 2001 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management and the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in New York, HR professionals reported that 19 percent of the employees in their organizations engaged in proselytizing. Nine percent of employees in the same survey said they felt harassed by workers who expressed their religious beliefs.

In a 2005 survey conducted by The Barna Group, a research organization in Ventura, Calif., 55 percent of Christian respondents said they had shared their faith with nonbelievers "during the past year" in at least one of the following ways:

- They offered to pray with a non-Christian who was in need of encouragement or support.
- They engaged in "lifestyle evangelism," described as living in ways that would impress non-Christians and cause them to raise questions about that lifestyle.
- They engaged in "Socratic evangelism," intentionally asking a non-Christian what they believe concerning a particular moral or spiritual matter, and continuing to ask questions about their views without telling them they are wrong but challenging them to explain their thinking and its implications.

Lawyers' Recommendations Regarding Religion

Employment lawyer Michael Homans of Falster/Greenberg PC in Philadelphia, and co-authors Ingrid Johnson of Legal Services of New Jersey in Edison and Kevin Henry of the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated in Charlotte, N.C., in a paper delivered at an American Bar Association conference in April, suggest the following workplace practices regarding religion.

Do:

- Encourage diversity.
- Promote tolerance.
- Promote nondenominational "values" and ethics.
- Establish a mechanism to review and consider requests for accommodation.
- Encourage employees to report any discrimination or harassment.
- Train managers and HR professionals on religious discrimination, harassment and accommodation.
- Offer employees opportunities to promote voluntary participation in religious and nonreligious activities outside work hours.

- Be wary of workplace proselytizing.
- Respect employee beliefs, privacy and dignity.
- Follow best practices to avoid religious bias, as you would with any equal employment opportunity category.

Don't:

- Mandate attendance at religious services.
- Discriminate at work based on religion or nonreligion.
- Base accommodation decisions on the religion at issue.
- Allow employees to condemn as "evil" or "damned" others who believe differently.
- Rely on literature of only one religion to promote values or company ethos.
- Give overly generous or solicitous accommodations to employees of one religion unless you are willing to do so for all.
- Accommodate individual conduct, speech or religious observances that create a harassing environment for others or otherwise impinge on other employees' rights.

objectionable under the law—such as joining hands and saying prayers—may prove divisive and stressful, "so the person who is uncomfortable winds up going along."

Still, the growing number of successful faith-friendly and faith-based employers serves as testament that religion and spirituality can flourish in the workplace. Implementation remains key: If it is done carefully, faith-friendly employers may choose to celebrate religious and spiritual inclusiveness even if some people would prefer a secular environment. And faith-focused employers may pursue what critics perceive as "stealth agendas" of conversion, so long as they stick to the law that requires tolerance and equal treatment of all views. "You have to create a culture of openness that says, 'We'll open our conference room or message board on an equal basis to all faith groups; we'll have a brown-bag series where people can talk about their faith. It should be employee-driven,'" advises Hicks.

Policies and Training Gap

Whether an employer is faith-friendly, faith-focused or faith-frosty, the issues, rights and responsibilities of workers, supervisors and executives are complicated and call out for detailed policy and training. So far, however, many employers have been slow to act. Of the respondents to SHRM's Religion and Corporate Culture survey, nearly half reported having no policy on religion. Only 2 percent reported having a formal separate policy. The remainder included religion under diversity or anti-discrimination umbrellas.

"The mere inclusion of religion in a list of protected classes in the boilerplate diversity policy does not address the critical issue of accommodation," Bennett argues. The best practice? "Adopt a distinct religious diversity policy," she says.

Miller suggests the following definition of faith-friendly as groundwork for a policy: "As a faith-friendly employer, we recognize the importance of faith to many people, that a spiritual grounding is what makes them tick, and so long as one's practices are compatible with our company's value and mission, we welcome it."

Only half of the 540 HR professionals responding to the SHRM survey said religious issues were part of training for managers and supervisors; 37 percent said they were part of training for employees.

In the end, it seems likely that HR professionals will spend more time with religion and spirituality in the future. Faith-frosty employers will have more accommodations to deal with as workers and managers learn more about the extent of their rights to express their faith. Regardless of motivation, employers who see advantages of actively incorporating faith into the workplace now have advice, guidelines and examples.

But the devil is in the details: "I agree with what the lawyers say about maintaining a nondiscriminatory environment," says Pettus. "Faced with all the do's and don'ts, a normal HR guy would probably hold up his hands and say, 'Golly, if I've got to do all that, I better not do anything and just make sure we don't get into trouble.'" ■