



With every passing day, it seems another name of some well-known public figure is being added to the list of those who have abused their power and are now being called out for it. Whether heads of companies, leaders of government offices, or creators of content, these authority figures have betrayed the trust of their employees, manipulated situations to their favor, and overstepped many personal and professional boundary lines.

While it is important to show proper respect to people in authority, it is equally important to respect the position of authority itself. Places of authority carry with them the weight of responsibility, the duty of humility, and the risk of liability. A good leader must take care of those who are under her—mentally, physically, and spiritually. A good leader recognizes that the needs of others, of the whole organization, must come before his needs. A good leader understands the requirements and standards for safe, healthy working environments, and seeks to go beyond those.

Now, in theory, it should be relatively easy for leaders to tell when they are in danger of encroaching on the rights of others. But just in case, here are some red flags for the specific subject of harassment:

- If you feel the need to tell someone to keep your actions secret, or if you feel the need to keep them secret yourself, chances are you are engaging in harassment.
- If you are asking your employees, colleagues, support staff, customers, etc. to do something that is a) outside of their job description or role and b) for your own personal gain, and c) making them uncomfortable, there's a good chance you are abusing your power.
- If you find yourself in a one-on-one situation in a professional context of any kind, and you decide that getting closer to a person physically and/or taking off clothing is okay, you are most likely engaging in harassment.

I know what you're thinking—this doesn't seem that hard to figure out.

You're right.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the article. Then discuss in this way:

Have you ever had a position of authority? What was that like?

What human qualities (e.g., honesty, self-control, ego, etc.) tend to be corrupted by the power of authority?

What do you think people in authority should do to safeguard themselves from situations in which harassment could easily occur?

The temptation to abuse authority can be a strong force. Today we'll talk about how we can be wise when we're in positions of authority.

