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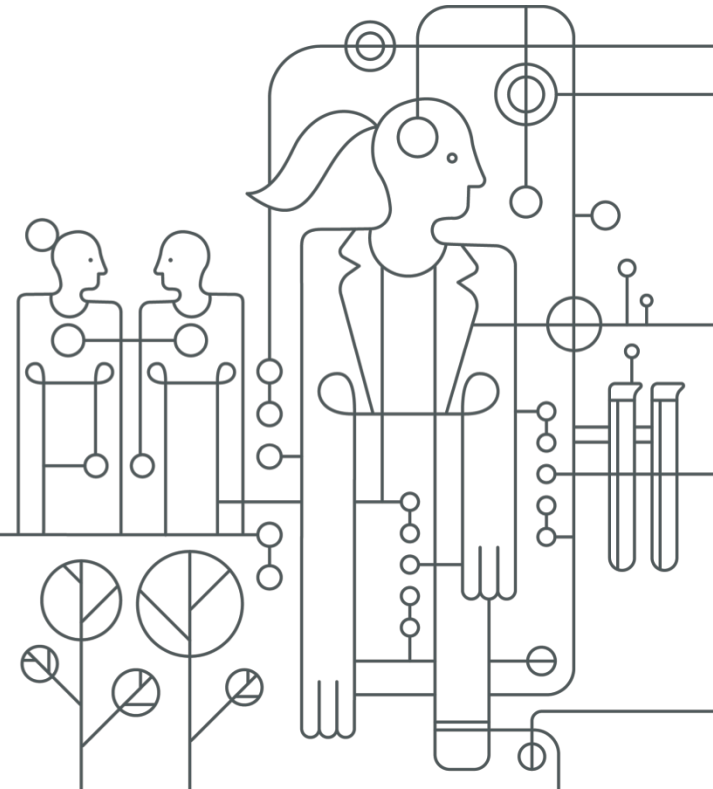# Your Sexual Harassment Training May Be Doing More Harm Than Good

Best Practices Post #MeToo

Dr. Shannon Rawski
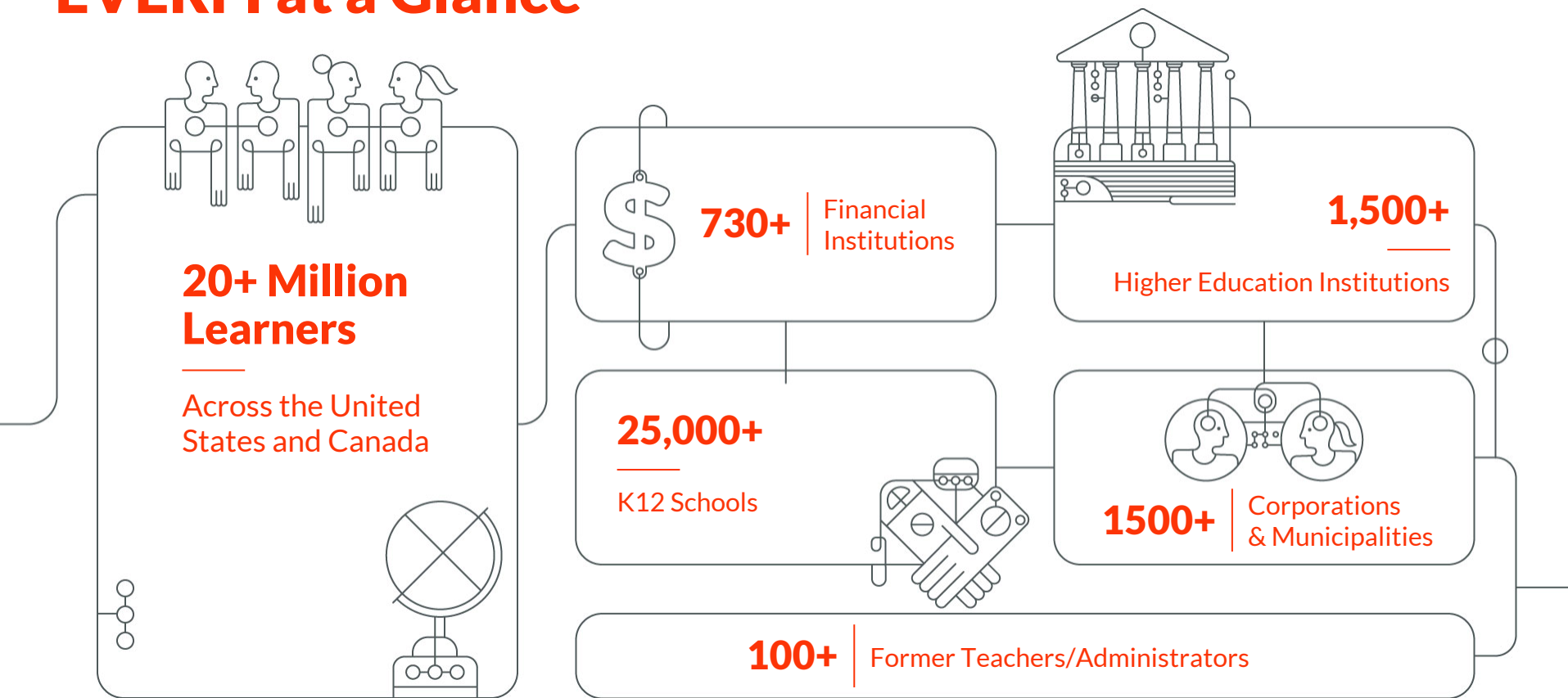University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Thrive Mind Consulting

Elizabeth Bille
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EVERFI at a Glance

20+ Million Learners

Across the United States and Canada

730+ | Financial Institutions

1,500+

Higher Education Institutions

25,000+

K12 Schools

1500+ | Corporations & Municipalities

100+ | Former Teachers/Administrators

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Featured Speakers

Dr. Shannon L. Rawski is a leading researcher in understanding sexual harassment in the workplace, and specializes in the effectiveness of anti-sexual harassment training programs and their unintended, negative side effects. Her research has been internationally recognized by The Washington Post, The New York Times, NPR, The Wall Street Journal, and Le Monde. Dr. Rawski is currently an Assistant Professor of Management and Human Resources at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, as well as a Co-member/ Consultant of Thrive Mind Consulting.

Elizabeth Bille is an employment law attorney and currently serves as the subject matter expert on the prevention of harassment and discrimination in the workplace for EVERFI. Prior to joining EVERFI, Elizabeth was the General Counsel of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM); served as a legal and policy advisor to the Vice Chair of the EEOC; and counseled employers as an attorney at the law firm of Hogan & Hartson (now Hogan Lovells). Elizabeth's work has been cited by several news outlets such as National Public Radio, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times.

Note: The information provided via this webinar is not intended as legal advice. Please consult with your counsel regarding applicable legal requirements, risks, and practices for your organization.

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Comprehensive Prevention Strategy Framework
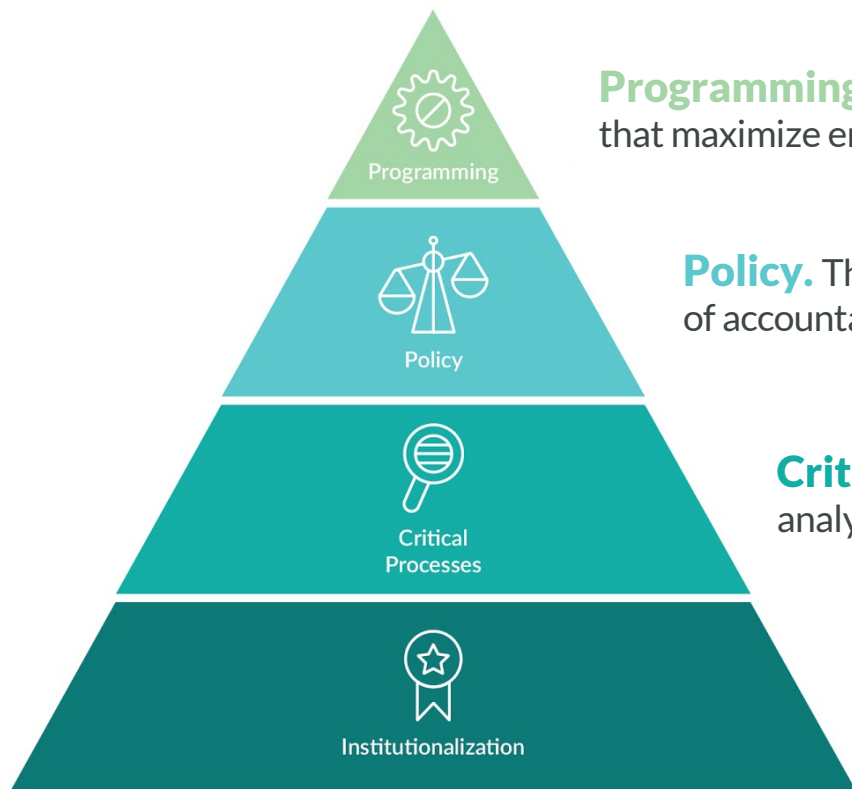
Programming. Prevention training, programs, and communication strategies that maximize engagement and drive impact.

Policy. The values and expectations of the organization, and the system of accountability to uphold and enforce them.

Critical Processes. Using goal setting, strategic planning, and data analysis to inform and evaluate prevention work.

Institutionalization. System-wide buy-in, visible commitment, and investment in effective prevention initiatives.

Programming

Policy

Critical Processes

Institutionalization

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First, Do No Harm

The EEOC found no evidence that standard, legal compliance-driven sexual harassment training is effective.

Mixed results from (the few) past academic studies

But, if you look for backlash effects, you will find them!

Some training actually motivates potentially harassing sexual behaviors!

Whether online or in-person, training should apply best practices to prevent backlash effects.

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10 Tips for Better Sexual Harassment Training

1 Keep It Positive

2 How Can I Be a Good Bystander? Let Me Count the Ways...

3 Targets & Imperfect Allies: Through the Looking Glass

4 Just Give Me a Reason (to Learn the Law)

5 Establish the Professionalism Standard

6 Open Skills for the Elephant in the Room

7 Recruit Social Influencers

8 Build on a Foundation of Culture & Policy

9 Address FAQs

10 Prove & Improve Training Effectiveness

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1

Keep It Positive

- Training is a sense-giving mechanism

- Provide a positive framework for the training
  - e.g., This training is to promote a respectful culture

- Provide a positive role for employees to play
  - e.g., Bystanders, Allies, Heroes
  - e.g., Targets and Imperfect Allies

- Train what **to do**, rather than what **not to do**

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2

How Can I Be a Good Bystander? Let Me Count the Ways...

- Provide multiple options for how to enact the good bystander role
  - Interrupt the ongoing harassment
  - Informally address the harassment after the fact
  - Formally report the harassment
  - Encourage others' allyship

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2

How Can I Be a Good Bystander? Let Me Count the Ways...

Reframe: Being an Ally

Let's go back and see how each ally could have handled things better.

Ally #1: Yuval

Thought: *Whoa, that definitely felt inappropriate. Maria is always doing that. I bet if I'm feeling like this isn't okay, other people are too. I am going to say something directly.*

Action: "Maria, I don't think that is a respectful way to speak to Jon."

Ally #2: Ariane

Thought: *Yikes, that wasn't nice. I feel guilty about eavesdropping, but that's just not an acceptable way to talk to someone. I'm going to distract Jon by removing him from the situation.*

Action: "Hey Jon, the team needs you to look at our presentation in the conference room. Can you come now?"

Ally #3: Elsbeth

Thought: *I don't know this guy at all, but I would be so upset if someone said that to me. I don't feel like it's my place to speak up directly, but I'm going to take my concerns to HR right away.*

Action: "I'd like to share a situation I witnessed."

Continue >

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3

Targets & Imperfect Allies: Through the Looking Glass

- Present information for Targets and Imperfect Allies as Advice that Good Bystanders can Share

- Information for Targets
  - How to report

- Information for Imperfect Allies
  - How to respond to an accusation
  - How the investigation process works
  - How progressive discipline systems work

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4

Just Give Me a Reason (to Learn the Law)

- The law must be covered for compliance reasons
  - But, legal compliance-based training can lead to backlash

- Frame information about the law as helpful knowledge for positive role performance

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5

Establish the Professionalism Standard

- (Most) employees are not employment law experts
  - Identifying unprofessional behavior is easier than identifying legal violations

- Professionalism ≥ Legal Compliance

6

Open Skills for the Elephant in the Room

- The Elephant in the Room
  - Different people will perceive different comments and behaviors as offensive or hurtful

- In addition to Knowledge, Skills are Needed
  - Conflict Management Skills
  - Empathy/Perspective Taking Skills
  - Critical Conversation Skills

- Train general skill principles and provide scenarios for practice

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Build on a Foundation of Culture & Policy

- Couch training in the already endorsed cultural values
  - Even problematic cultures will have some positive values you can leverage
    - e.g., "Protect & Serve" in Policing Organizations

- Before you train, ensure your policies and procedures are fair and easy to use

- Without these organizational supports in place training will fail

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7

Build on a Foundation of Culture & Policy

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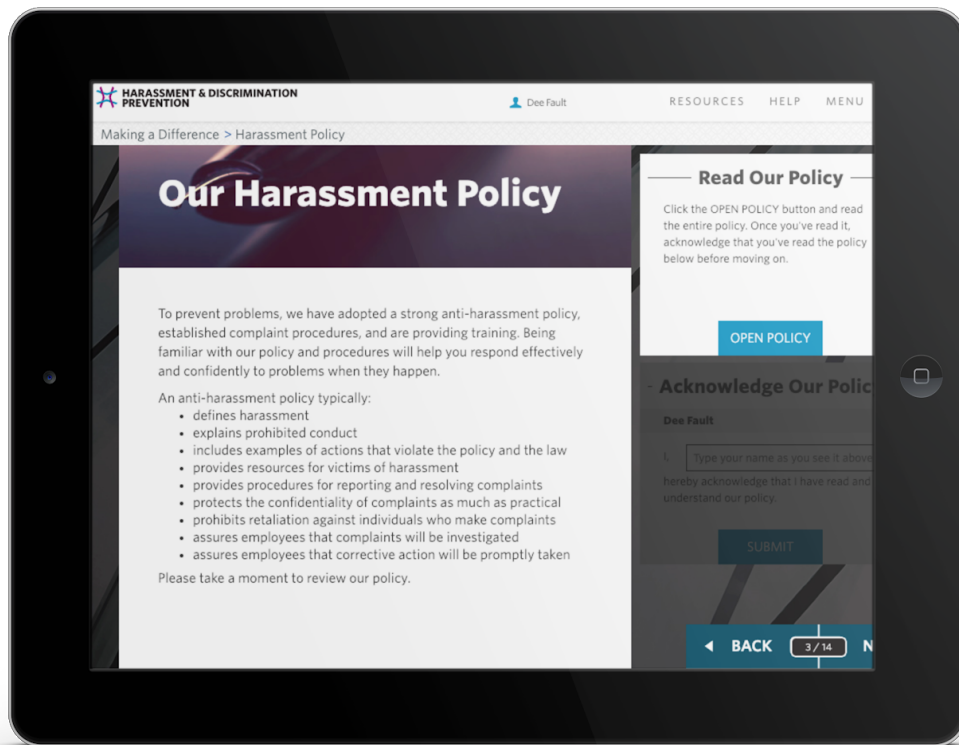
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Recruit Social Influencers

- Training is a social experience
  - A few bad apples will spoil the barrel
  - "Experts" can also resent being required to attend training

- Reach out to influential employees first to ask for their endorsement
  - Allow them to preview and provide feedback on training
  - Ask them to play a positive role before, during, and after training

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9

Address FAQs

- Employees will walk into training with preconceived fears and anxieties

  - e.g., So all men are guilty until proven innocent?

  - e.g., So we can't tell jokes or have fun at work anymore?

  - e.g., This training makes women look weak!

  - e.g., I could get fired for paying someone a compliment?!

- Advertise the training with a positive framing

- Directly address these FAQs and misconceptions in the training

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10

Prove & Improve Training Effectiveness

- Take an evidence-based approach to training
  - Keep up with the latest research
  - Measure the effectiveness of your training
  - Improve your training based on results

- Hold third-party vendors to an evidence-based standard

- Consider collaborating with an academic institution

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Questions?

Dr. Shannon L. Rawski

Thrive Mind Consulting, LLC

thrivemindconsulting.com

rawski@thrivemindconsulting.com

Elizabeth Bille

EVERFI

ebille@everfi.com

insights@everfi.com