March is often a busy month for those of the Jewish and Christian faiths since Lent, Easter, and Passover usually fall within this time frame. That makes this a good time of year for a refresher on religious issues at work. This issue of Frontline Supervision helps you get religion right in your workplace.

Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, you may not treat employees or applicants less (or more) favorably because of religious beliefs or practices. For example, you may not:

- Refuse to hire individuals of a certain religion.
- Impose stricter promotion requirements for persons of a certain religion.
- Impose different work requirements on employees because of religious beliefs or practices.

It is also against the law to discriminate against an employee or applicant because of:

- Affiliation with a particular religious group,
- Physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics associated with a particular religious group,
- Perceptions about whether an individual is a member of a particular religious group, or
- Association with people or organizations that are part of a particular religious group.

It is also illegal for management, coworkers, or third parties to harass workers because of religious beliefs or practices.

**Latest Guidance**


**Religious Practices**

Religious practices are broadly defined and include traditional religious beliefs, moral and ethical beliefs, and beliefs that individuals hold “with the strength of a traditional religious view.” It doesn’t matter if there is no established church that espouses an employee’s beliefs. The issue is whether the religious belief is “sincerely held” by the individual.

Religious practice may affect the workplace in a variety of ways. For example:

- Employees asking for time off to observe religious holidays.
- Workers needing time and a place for prayers during the workday.
- Employees following particular dress or grooming rules required by their religion.

**Reasonable Accommodation**

You are required to accommodate religious practices unless it would cause an undue hardship. “Undue hardship” may be claimed when accommodating religious practices would require more than ordinary administrative costs or when changing a bona fide

**Tip**

- Understand your organization’s policy concerning religious accommodation and discrimination, explain it to employees, and enforce it fairly and consistently.
seniority system would deny another employee the re-
ward guaranteed by the seniority system.

Reasonable accommodation might include:

- Flexible arrival and departure times or flexible
  work breaks
- Floating or optional holidays
- Work during lunch break in exchange for early
  departure for religious reasons
- Permitting employees to make up time lost due
  to religious observances
- Allowing employees to trade shifts
- Transferring job assignments

Tip

- Be prepared to document a compelling
  business-related reason for rejecting a
  requested accommodation.

Avoiding Discrimination

Take these steps:

- Don’t ask applicants about their religious beliefs
  or practices.
- Don’t judge applicants by dress or grooming
  practices related to their religion.
- Don’t ask applicants whether they are available
  for work on a specific date or time. Instead, after
  making it clear that the applicant is not required
  to disclose the need to be absent for religious ob-
  servances, describe normal work hours and ask
  whether he or she is available during those hours.
- Take religious diversity into account when plan-
  ning work activities.
- Don’t allow employees to criticize or mock co-
  workers’ religious beliefs or practices.
- Take immediate action to investigate and resolve
  religious discrimination complaints.