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TEMPO Milwaukee Survey: More Than Two-Thirds of Respondents Say They've Experienced Sexual Harassment on the Job

MILWAUKEE (January 8, 2018) — In the wake of mounting sexual harassment allegations against the nation's cultural and political elite — effectively lifting the cone of silence surrounding sexual misconduct in the workplace — Milwaukee's women business leaders are bringing awareness about the issue to the local level.

One of those leaders is TEMPO Milwaukee, a women's professional networking group composed of approximately 350 women who hold CEO, executive and leadership positions, posted the online survey to its members in December. Using the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission definition of harassment ("sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature"), 68 percent of the 97 women who responded indicated experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace, though almost all women shared experiences on the continuum of harassing or inappropriate behaviors.

"These survey results — and the vivid and shocking examples of harassment our members provided — should serve as a wake-up call to Milwaukee's business community," says Jennifer Dirks, TEMPO Milwaukee president and CEO. "Milwaukee is not immune to its own problems with sexual harassment. This isn't just happening in Hollywood."

For example, women provided information about being forcibly put into locations: dragged into or followed into hotel rooms at conferences, locked into stockrooms, trapped in offices, and having to physically fight to get out of a bad situation that had potential to get worse.

According to one respondent, "It's happened to me on four different occasions at four different organizations. On one occasion very early on in my professional life - a male employee indecently touched me. At another, a male supervisor tried to kiss me; at another, a male counterpart repeatedly verbally undermined me with sexual innuendo. At another, a male supervisor talked to me about his attraction to other women in our workplace."

Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision — such as the victim being fired or demoted.

That last part is largely why so many women experience harassment early on in their careers but fail to come forward to management, Dirks believes. TEMPO Milwaukee's survey revealed half of respondents experienced sexual harassment incidents at the entry-level stage.

Dirks says it's especially important for young women to be vigilant about unacceptable behavior early on, but that doesn't mean women should avoid being friends with their male co-workers. She says sexual harassment can often be a grey area, which is why it's imperative for companies to openly discuss

the nuances of sexual misconduct and implement a workplace policy that all employees acknowledge and understand.

Steven Stall, business leader of inclusion at Rockwell Automation, says he personally believes in a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to sexual harassment – for men and women.

“Though great progress has been made, the recent deluge of sexual harassment claims in the media also highlights that much work is still needed,” says Stall. “I truly believe that groups like TEMPO Milwaukee can help bring awareness and work toward a time and place where zero tolerance is the norm, and men and women work together to achieve equality in the workplace.”

Adds Dirks, “Every man and woman deserves to work in an environment that is safe and comfortable. That’s why we’re hoping to shift the conversation away from the salacious scandals of Hollywood and Washington D.C., to real solutions and honest dialogue about the problem right here in Milwaukee.”

About TEMPO Milwaukee

TEMPO Milwaukee’s membership is composed of approximately 350 women who hold CEO, executive and leadership positions throughout the Milwaukee area. Its mission is to further the impact of women leaders in our community. TEMPO Milwaukee serves its diverse membership and community through educational programming, networking opportunities, relationship building, and mentoring, with the goal of empowering women to achieve and sustain leadership roles. Learn more at tempomilwaukee.org.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Nearly 100 TEMPO Milwaukee members, generally women in high-level leadership positions, completed the survey, which included questions relating to sexual harassment, as well as opportunities to share personal stories. The online, private survey was sent to TEMPO Milwaukee’s 340 members in December 2017. All responses were anonymous. Findings include:

- **Sexual harassment is pervasive.** Even among some of the top women leaders in our community, 68 percent of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment (by the EEOC definition) in the workplace, though almost all shared experiences on the continuum of harassing or inappropriate behaviors.
- **Sexual harassment happens at all levels.** Respondents experienced harassment more frequently while in entry-level positions, and nearly equally at middle management and upper management positions.
 - 50 percent experienced harassment in an entry-level position
 - 36 percent experienced harassment in a middle-management position
 - 35 percent experienced harassment in an upper-management position
- **The #MeToo movement is positive, but it may have unintended consequences.** Two-thirds (66 percent) felt that current conversations and media coverage around sexual harassment positively impacted workplace culture and policy, yet there is significant concern that the #MeToo movement will negatively impact the movement toward women in leadership. Responses included these remarks:
 - “I don’t want to be excluded from male dominated meetings/discussions” and fears media coverage will have men believing that “exclusion is safer.”

- “I expect some men will become uncomfortable working with women for fear of being accused of something, and some women will use this as a means to advance their careers.”
- “I worry about the potential for over-correction that could inhibit the ability for men and women to build strong professional working relationships.”
- “My concern is that some women may make false allegations for money or attention, which will put doubt in some minds regarding legitimate stories.”
- **A reporting stigma remains.** Nearly one-third of women stated they would not report or were unsure if they would report blatant sexual harassment if it happened to them tomorrow, because they fear repercussions, career damage, not being believed or embarrassment.

Several members were forthcoming about their experiences, many of them shocking.

- “Many incidents of comments on my body, my sexual habits, my menstrual cycle, my body changes during pregnancy, etc. I remember one boss in particular who used to regularly refer to me as a “real screamer” in the bedroom.”
- “I was at a black-tie event with a superior, his client inappropriately touched my backside and propositioned me, asking if I was married and then following to ask if I was happily married. I declined, and he continued. The superior did not help in supporting me in fending off the advances, but was encouraging it. I ended up leaving the event quickly.”
- “The most jarring was when the owner of a company I used to work for kissed me (on the lips) after an event (he was drinking heavily).”
- “At company-sponsored conferences for distributors, several of the distributors were very sexually aggressive and one tried to drag me into a hotel room. When I reported it to my superior, I was told, “you’re young, you’re pretty and you’ll just have to get used to it.” When I then raised it with HR, to find out if I really just had to get used to it, my superiors were reprimanded and trained.”
- “Unwanted sexual advances, relentless (but secretive) pursuit, with implied expectations for participation if I wanted a major promotion. I hesitated to report it for over 6 months, for fear of negative consequences. Once those consequences were happening anyway, I reported the ongoing problem and left the company a few months later.”
- “A boss who followed me to my room while at a conference and kept knocking and wanting to come in. It is never appropriate to make a romantic advance on a direct employee.”
- “It’s happened to me on four different occasions at four different organizations. On one occasion very early on in my professional life - a male employee indecently touched me. At another, a male supervisor tried to kiss me; at another, a male counterpart repeatedly verbally undermined me with sexual innuendo. At another, a male supervisor talked to me about his attraction to other women in our workplace.”
- “Pushing themselves into my hotel room, scary persistence for sexual activity. I got them to get out, but I was close to screaming. Then I had to work with the person the next day as we were out of town on assignment. I just pretended nothing happened and he never said a word.”
- “I’m in a revenue generating position where there is equal pay and equal commission structure between women and men... but when I’ve won accounts I’ve been told it’s “because you wore a skirt” -- “lucky you... that guy must want to buy from women” -- “good that you showed some leg” -- “I’m a horny guy what can I say... sorry for that comment” --“Your outfit is a great distraction today”... constant, sexually-charged commentary on how I look.”

- “Constant but accepted hostile environment that absolutely impacted my career progression within a company here in Milwaukee. There was a perception that since I was a higher paid exec that the money would make it ‘worth it’ for me to ensure the situation. It wasn’t – on so many levels – and while I am not longer at the company, the experience still impacts me today.”

Many of the personal accounts provided by respondents involved a clear use of power. These include:

- Unwanted advances including dancing, shoulder massages, gifts, insisting on getting a drink together and sharing a cab or vehicle.
- Inappropriate comments about looks, clothing, bodies, or sexual scenarios or fantasies.
- Unwanted and inappropriate kissing and touching of women’s bodies, buttocks, breasts.
- Being forcibly put into locations: dragged into or followed into hotel rooms at conferences, locked into stockrooms, trapped in offices, and having to physically fight to get out of a bad situation that had potential to get worse.
- Obscene acts, including men touching themselves, intentionally done in front of women.
- Many of these situations resulting in women’s roles being changed, jobs being quit, travel being curtailed, and losing out financially as a result.

The survey also provided space for respondents to provide advice to businesses and employees.

- **General advice to businesses:**
 - **Every company needs to have clear policies regarding sexual harassment and annual training sessions or “refresh” sessions.**
 - More than one-third (37 percent) of respondents said their company hadn’t done anything in the past 12 months in terms of training or addressing the sexual harassment issue in the workplace.
 - While about two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents confirmed a formal reporting process is in place at their company, nine percent of respondents said their company does not have a formal reporting process in place, and 15 percent were unsure of one.
 - **Several respondents suggested that small or women-only companies don’t need to have policies for sexual harassment, but every company does need a policy.**
 - These policies don’t exist just within the four walls of the office, but also need to exist outside of work (e.g., business travel and dinner) and through the whole business chain and supply chain.
 - Many of the examples of harassment shared by our members were at after-hours work events, or involved clients or customers, not colleagues. The policies need to address how to handle these situations as well.
- **General advice to women:**
 - **Document and report.** Again, this goes back to the importance of all companies having a sexual harassment policy in place, and employees knowing what it is.
 - **Be vigilant during after-hours situations,** but don’t forgo them because they can be important for mentoring or professional development.
- **General advice to men:**
 - **Support women.** The overwhelming sentiment is that most men aren’t crossing the line with harassing behaviors, so the advice to those men is to just keep on what you’re doing, and support women by continuing to include them in those opportunities for career growth.

- **When you see something, say something.** Hold others accountable and indicate you are not going to continue to support inappropriate and sexist behaviors.
- **Be respectful.** Many women felt that some men treat women in the workplace differently, or less respectfully, than women in their personal lives (daughters, sisters, etc.). Many women suggested that men should hold all women to the same standard. If you wouldn't say or do something suggestive or potentially harassing to your daughter or sister, don't do it to a female colleague.
- **Avoid comments on appearances.** Many women called for an end to the commentary on looks. While men may be trying to be polite and complimentary by making a comment about a woman's looks: "You look pretty today" or "The room just got a lot better looking now that you walked in." However, it puts a woman on the spot, and immediately shifts the focus to her looks rather than her intelligence, her role, or why she's in the meeting in the first place. Men don't get reduced to just physical appearance in this way, and women shouldn't either.

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