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**The Workplace**

# “You’re a Joke... Who Do You Think You Are?”

Harassment in the Workplace –  
When is Enough, Enough?



“You’re a joke...”

“Who do you think you are? This bleep shouldn’t be here chairing our meeting”

“You audaciously and maliciously tried to defraud me of my property over a fraudulent bill”

These are direct quotes from email messages sent to me in the past week from condominium unit owners. The number of inappropriate comments made to me and my team of staff in the last month are too numerous to count. I’ve even recently been accused by a director of breaching confidentiality and taking kickbacks from contractors. False accusations – but, it hasn’t stopped the accuser from telling anyone who will listen that they know it to be true.

My personal credentials in condominium property management speak for themselves. Reigning Manager of the Year with ACMO, co-author of three educational resource guides for condominium managers, active participant in various

industry initiatives, sixteen years of experience in condominiums and over ten years since I obtained my RCM designation. I’m well known for my proactive approach to managing properties, my ability to achieve positive results in dispute resolution, and my ethics. I am not a joke, do not think I’m anybody special, and I certainly don’t practice fraud.

Because of recent events related to harassment in the workplace, I’ve felt the need to temporarily step back from some commitments that I truly looked forward to and enjoyed. I did so because I reasonably believe that there would be risk of further harassment from a particular individual if I continued some of this work. How is it fair to me that one individual can actively come after me and the tools available to end the situation are vague, lengthy, and difficult to advance?

**I’m Not Alone**

Nearly every property manager that I have encountered can tell you stories of inappropriate conduct in their workplace, from directors, unit owners, and even

Contractors servicing their properties. *It took me only five minutes* to collect the following quotes from various managers that I know to be competent and not deserving of this type of treatment:

“Why don’t you take your fat-bleep back to the office, eat a Twinkie and do your job?”

“I’m going to kill you if dust gets under my front door ever again!”

“How dare you tell me that if I don’t like it I should move?” (The manager made no such statement.)

“Get off my property or I’ll throw a rock at your head!”

One manager even reminded me of the time that his tires were slashed because of a collection file for unpaid common expenses.

When I look to the information for directors, condominium managers and management firms on the subject of workplace harassment much of it refers to board con-

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duct towards other board members or discusses the concept as something that we might occasionally have to endure. While there is certainly educational value there—I feel that the message is not strong enough. Condominium property managers face harassment and inappropriate conduct in their workplace Every. Single. Day.

Recent changes in condominium legislation, including licensing of managers, puts us at more risk in that it provides our harassers with additional ammunition to come after us on a professional level. But there are no easily accessible tools or resources for managers to defend ourselves, nor should we have to defend ourselves regularly against baseless accusations and threatening acts. The requirement for directors to now take mandatory training does nothing to educate them on managing relationships with their service providers (managers included). Nor does it give them the tools to assist managers being harassed by residents.

Workplace violence and harassment is legislated in Ontario under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The legislation requires all employers to ensure that

their workplace is free from violence and harassment of any kind. Frankly, the legislation should not even be necessary to promote positive work environments. It's simply a matter of treating each other with decency and respect.

I'm lucky enough to work in an environment where no level of harassment is tolerated. We support our team and take all reasonable steps to investigate claims of harassment and prevent the behaviour. The problem is that when you're facing a harasser, even if you take all reasonable steps to stop what is happening, it can be damaging to you personally, and frankly there is no end date or light at the end of the tunnel. It's over when it's over.

Can you imagine the difficulty for managers that do not have the same level of support that I am lucky to have? Perhaps their employer does not believe them, is too concerned about losing clients, or simply doesn't care about their well-being. How many communities have had excellent managers leave because they could no longer work in the environment created for them? How many managers have had to give up otherwise great opportunities because of the actions of a few individuals?

I say that it is time for managers and management firms to speak out against this behaviour in our work environments! In order to make it clear in the industry that such behaviour is not appropriate, welcome, or tolerated I implore all manag-


ers to take whatever steps are necessary when they are faced with harassment in their work environment. Hold your clients and employers accountable for how you are treated in the workplace. Even if you are not the perfect manager, and you make honest mistakes in your role, remember that you are not a joke. There are many of us that have faced these same circumstances and we support you.

I also implore all condominium directors to understand these daily challenges and support your property managers in an appropriate manner. Even the very best manager will have difficulty performing their roles if their day is filled with ridicule and harassment. Be mindful that condominium corporations have a joint obligation with their management team to provide a workplace free from violence and harassment.

I'd love to hear from other managers about how we can best support each other and start the end of harassment in our work environments. Let's start our own movement to promote discussion and resolution to this all too common concern. Use the #imnotajoke hashtag on Twitter to bring this issue to light, talk about your challenges, and provide advice and support to managers facing these challenges. 

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