HANDLING ANONYMOUS REPORTS

BY: MERIC CRAIG BLOCH

When a company receives a report of wrongdoing from an anonymous reporter, either through a company hotline, by telephone, letter or through any other anonymous reporting mechanism, the allegation must be reviewed. Considering that the reporter is usually the first person to be interviewed, however, the anonymous report can pose some difficulties.

Reasons for Reporting Anonymously

While anonymity can protect someone who is making a false report, it's important not to assume that the report is unfounded just because the reporter doesn't want to be identified.

Fear of being seen by others as a "snitch"

Fear or retaliation from the implicated person

Fear that reporters may implicate themselves in the wrongdoing

The reporter is making the report on behalf of someone else

Lack of trust that management will do anything

There are many reasons a reporter may wish to be anonymous, and an anonymous report may be as valid as one with an identified reporter.

Relationship with the implicated person

Never actively try to identify an anonymous reporter

Your process will be undermined if people believe they will be identified. Remember that the identity of the reporter is not as important as the information they offer.

Look to find credible information to support the report

1 If the reporter identifies specific employees, speak to them about the report. However, use caution so as to not make it appear that you seek to identify the reporter

2 If the report is via a hotline, you may be able to invite the reporter to call you anonymously or post questions for the reporter in the application.

3 Check with department heads or Human Resources to see if they have any knowledge about the subject matter of the report.

A reporter is only one source of information,

even if anonymous. You need the reporter to give you facts, to explain how they know the facts, and ways to corroborate them. The identity of the reporter is not as critical.

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