

# The importance of strategic policies when dealing with racism

Strata-G Labour Solutions advises companies, including schools, to make sure they adopt appropriate strategies and implement relevant policies in order to identify and eliminate racism in the workplace.



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Strata-G, Adv Tertius Wessels, says there should be certainty around the issue of racism in company policies. “Policies need to be clear, so that when someone commits an act of misconduct, there is one hundred percent clarity on what the consequences will be.

“Bearing in mind that teachers are employees of the schools, they need to be held accountable for their actions. Policies should state how acts of racial misconduct will be dealt with, that is, what disciplinary process will be followed and what the outcomes will be if found guilty.”

At St Johns, the teacher found guilty of racial slurs was initially demoted but eventually dismissed after the school came under pressure from Gauteng Department of Education. “The entire process could have been dealt with much more efficiently, if the school had a clear policy in place to deal with such matters. The same goes for Windsor House where girls were asked to leave the premises because of their ‘unruly’ hairstyles.”

Importantly, policies and practices must not be discriminatory, should emphasise respect for all cultures, religions, races and sexual orientation and should be aligned with the company's disciplinary code. "In addition, there should be clear guidelines on what procedures to follow and how to address incidents quickly and sensitively.

"Condoning racial misconduct can only have one outcome - major reputational damage to the organisation – spread quickly via social media and other communication channels. Where reputational damage is great, it may lead to a boycott of services or products, which may result in a loss in revenue and ultimately a loss of jobs, which is something this country certainly does not need.

## **Understanding policies**

"While the first step is drawing up a policy it is no good if employees do not have access to it or do not understand it. Employees need to know the policy applies to everyone, even temporary workers, and they need to know and understand that racist conduct and unfounded allegations of racism in the workplace is wholly unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

"They need to be clear on what constitutes a racial misconduct. This can only be achieved by going through the policy carefully and ensuring employees understand it. It is best if employees are coached on the company's policies during the induction phase.

"Obviously, there are instances where a new policy is put into place and then all employees should be apprised of the changes via workshops or online training programmes. Policies should also be easily accessible on the company intranet."

With the Sparrow incident still fresh in everyone's minds, Wessels is amazed that people continue to make indefensible racial comments. "They also need to know that trying to offer an 'emotional outburst' as a defence for one's actions will not be accepted in South African courts, especially considering that the use of racist language against a person or class of persons amounts to hate speech and is prohibited in terms of the Constitution and other law in South Africa."

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