



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
“Sexual Harassment in the Workplace”
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Christine Talbot

Intro: Do you realize the increasing likelihood of sexual harassment in the workplace could be jeopardizing your organization right now? Today’s guest will tell you why it matters and what you need to know, next.

Female: This is the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*. Here’s your host, president of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Welcome to another episode of the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*, where our goal is to equip and inspire you to build a flourishing workplace. We are here to help you eliminate workplace distrust, improve your employees’ experience, and grow your organization’s impact. And before we meet our special guest today, I urge you to subscribe to this podcast. As a result, you’ll receive our action guide. It’s our gift to help you lead your organization’s culture to the next level. To subscribe, simply go to bcwinstitute.org/podcast. Hit the Subscribe button, and receive our free action guide.

Also, if you could share this podcast with others, and rate it, it would really mean a lot to me. Thank you.

And now, let’s meet today’s special guest.

Hello, and thanks for joining us again on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*. What we’re going to talk about is one of the most significant, relevant issues before us right now in the workplace culture. The issue is sexual harassment in the workplace. And my guest has something to say about this that can help you bring a new awareness and immense practical applications for where you work. With that, I want to welcome in Christine Talbot, the senior vice president of human resources at World Vision U.S., and, Christine, welcome to our podcast.

Christine Talbot: Well, thank you, Al. I’m very glad to join today and especially address this topic with your audience.

Al: Thank you, Christine. And to get started, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Christine: Happy to. So, I've been working for a couple of decades, at least, in increasingly responsible human-resource leadership roles, and I've had the privilege over my career to work largely in for-profit, large organizations, different industries, always leading H.R. teams, always being involved in changing sector or industry as well as organization changes. I've had the privilege to be involved in diversity and inclusion work and to be in support of leaders who are seeking to build positive, healthy workplaces, just as I know our listeners are interested in today. With that, Al, I must admit that what has come is an awareness and experience of what one might refer to as, well, the good, the bad, and sometimes the ugly of workplaces.

Al: Well, people in your role, as I've heard many say, you see the good, as you say, in the underbelly of what happens in day-to-day workplaces. But I've thoroughly enjoyed recent face-to-face conversation at your offices, World Vision offices, and you've got a big job overseeing over a thousand employees across the country, and I'm sure we'll learn more about that in the next few minutes. But before we get to our topic, I've been wanting to ask you something. Since 1950 and, of course, World Vision is so well known around the world, when the organization was founded by Bob Pierce, the name "World Vision" has been synonymous with transformational change, changing the lives of individuals and communities around the world and advancing the work of God's kingdom here on Earth. And, Christine, what is one clear and compelling thing about World Vision that people need to know and to not forget?

Christine: Well, thank you for asking that. I think the most-compelling thing about World Vision that I want to share with our listeners today is also the one thing about World Vision that has not changed since the beginning, and it's this: that we're motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, first and foremost, and out of that, we at World Vision invite people to help us improve the lives of truly the world's most vulnerable children, their families, and also their communities. So we work in partnership with those that we serve and with our donors so that we all might experience Jesus Christ's transforming love, grace, and power. You will always find children at the very heart of what we do.

Al: Well, I've had the privilege of supporting a World Vision child for over 20 years and just the communication, the updates that we get prove that over and over.

So, now I'd like us to set the table. How do we begin to look at the reality and the urgency of sexual harassment in the workplace? Let's start there.

Christine: Well, I think the place that we really need to start is the reality that Solomon said: there's nothing new under the sun, right? Sexual harassment has been happening in our workplaces, and I must admit that it's in all workplaces. Everywhere people come to work, things like this do happen. But what has most recently happened in the last few years and what we're witness to is a very strong, liberating but actually a very painful movement that strives to bring about healing to victims of sexual assault and harassment that are now coming forth—social media being a great enabler—but coming forth in large numbers and in unprecedented, very visible ways. This calls to our attention as leaders in a way that's very historic, very impactful, and, frankly, not slowing down.

From the beginning of #MeToo, of course it evolved into many other hashtags because it was just the beginning. The Band-Aid has been ripped off in a new way. And I think for us as Christian leaders, we are called at this very same time to bear our own share of making changes, addressing this issue, speaking out, and caring about our society but also responding to biblical mandates about what our workplace should actually be like. And in fact, I would suggest that we as leaders of Christian workplaces are even called to a higher standard around this very topic.

AI: I'm curious, Christine. When did sexual harassment in the workplace get your attention and become important to you as an H.R. leader?

Christine: Well, you can imagine with my background, as I described, over several decades, dealing with sexual harassment and efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace has been part and parcel of the work that I've done for a very long time. But I must admit that with the advent of the #MeToo movement, my own attention was grabbed in a new and fresh way as I listened to the stories, as I read the stories, as I allowed my head and my heart to be deeply moved by the stories that were coming out, thinking both about the survivors and the victims and all that lay in the wake of this happening in the workplaces, the ripple effects being very dramatic. And I also will say that I was touched in a way that caused me to take extra time to get beyond the news, to read blogs, to look at some books, and hear both what men and women in Christian workplaces and from biblical perspectives were saying on this topic.

AI: You know, Christine, I've been touched by the same. Reading these stories, I admit that I've been pretty naive about this, even in my career. So how did you begin to bring together the issues of sexual harassment and maybe some kind of biblical context, as you just mentioned?

Christine: Well, I think it's especially important for us as leaders and Christian organizations to seek biblical perspectives and have a distinctly Christ-centered perspective on this topic, while many things apply to us equally, regardless of whether you're a faith-based organization or not. But I do think about, in a Christian workplace, we have values. We have policies that have Christian perspectives and Scriptures that are embedded in them.

At World Vision, one of our values is we value people, and there's a lot behind that value, "we value people." And so we hold ourselves to a scripturally derived definition in our workplace of what it means to value people. And I would venture to guess that many of our listeners today in their respective workplaces have core documents, philosophies, and policies which are rooted in Scripture, which probably quote Scripture, that tell us how we want to treat our people: with respect, with equity, how we want to handle power.

So I think that that's one of the places that I would begin to look as well as spending time in Scripture, looking at God's perspective on the use of power, and Scriptures around what it means to be a leader, a manager, employer. Even if those exact words aren't being used, we certainly have stories of what it means to be lord over laborers, so to speak.

AI: Yeah. As you say, I love your value, "we value people," and of course the Scripture, we're commanded to love one another, and certainly, that's a part of it, too. Christine, there are some specific

suggestions that you could give our listeners about maybe some specific trainings or webinars, just to get up to speed on these topics. What would you suggest for us?

Christine: Well, I think there's two parts of how I would like to give some tips to our listeners today, AI. The first is I would urge all of our organizations to get the basics in place. So what do I mean when I say *the basics*? The basics are things like having a policy explicitly that addresses preventing harassment and abuse in the workplace. It needs to be spelled out, and it needs to be in a policy, and people need to know that the policy exists.

There needs to be a statement from the top of the organization, a CEO statement that says, "We do not tolerate harassment. We have a harassment-free workplace." And related to that, if you believe that you have observed or have been subject to or party to any type of harassment, there needs to be a clear reporting place that is safe for people to come forward. And *safe* might be you're a bystander, you might be a victim, you might be an observer, any of those. So there needs to be the policy, a CEO statement, reporting avenues.

From there, there needs to be a capability in the organization, and this usually rests with the human-resource department, to be able to address claims; to do proper, thorough fact finding in order to determine what has actually happened. And I must also say that we've become more sensitive during this #MeToo era to take what's called a survivor-sensitive or survivor-centric approach. You've heard a lot about "believe her," the notion being that when someone comes forward, we begin from a place of assuming they're coming forward with good intent and something that must be told and must be understood.

But I'd like to go one step further for our listeners, and that is having the checklist of good hygiene in place, so to speak, which would also include everybody engaging in prevention training. That's the first most-important thing. How do we prevent these kinds of situations from happening? So everybody needs to get that.

But for the leaders in the organization, AI, I would especially go one step further and suggest that leaders need to take this not only in their head but into their heart. If you think about the statistics that one in four women have probably or have experienced some form of harassment in the workplace, what that means to me is that one in four women in my organization, one in four women in my organization, women in my own professional circle of friends have experienced something like this. That makes it very personal. And so I as a leader, I want to go beyond my head. I want this to touch my heart, and that's what took me to reading blogs and articles of survivors and listening and reading and rereading carefully so I could get beyond my head and have this deeply affect my heart as a leader.

AI: Christine, I really like your six steps here: a policy; a CEO statement; reporting avenues that are defined; make sure that you address claims quickly; have a checklist for good hygiene, including prevention training; and the leaders take it into their heart. I'm struck, and I heard you say this at your speech at CLA, one out of four women are bringing this to the workplace. Is that a good way to describe it?

Christine: Yes, and there's an important clarification here. I'm not saying that one out of four women will experience some form of harassment or sexual harassment or sexual abuse in our workplaces, but one out of four women in workplaces has had this experience. And what that tells me is that the women that we're hiring—and this happens to men as well. The statistics are a little bit different. Most recently, it's about one in eleven—but that tells me that employees that we're bringing into the organization, under the surface, coming into a place that we're working so hard to have be a safe place are also bringing with them experiences, other places they've worked.

Al: You know, BCWI, we're all about inspiring and equipping Christian leaders to create a flourishing workplace, and you're already helping us do that right now. And we really hope that Christian-led organizations set the standard as the best, most-effective places to work in the world. And if you were going to equip today's leaders to effectively deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, what would you do? What do you propose? You've already mentioned a number of things. Is there anything else?

Christine: I think there's three realities that really have to capture our attention in order to be sincerely, intentionally, earnestly about creating these safe workplaces. The first reality, and I alluded to it a few minutes ago or spoke to it, the first reality is recognizing that there is already real harm in our midst. People who have stories, stories of harm, and we don't know whether those stories have been heard, and we don't know how those stories shape people's experience in our workplace currently.

The second reality is that the dynamics of power are actually a root cause in harassment, and so unless we are addressing the dynamics of power in our workplace, we are not sufficiently doing what we need to do.

And a third reality is that, again, the tone at the top. Whether it be the CEO, the senior leadership team, however you define it, the tone at the top on this topic of preventing sexual harassment, it must be personal. There must be personal voice. There must be story, perhaps, as a leader engages in a more personal way and heartfelt way. But it must come across as a message that matters personally to the person at the top.

Al: I trust you're enjoying our podcast today. We'll be right back after an important word for leaders.

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Al: And now, back to today's special guest.

I think about your one in four, and, of course, this isn't a topic that's just going to come out in conversation, is it, these experiences that people have had in the past, coming into our workplaces. So that's really insightful.

But I really like your three realities: recognizing that real harm already is in our midst; that the dynamics of power clearly are a root cause, and, of course, if you look at this in depth over any period of time, you see that; and how leaders really, by setting the tone at the top, how they have a huge influence in this and how it's got to be personal. So, how about a storyline for how these three realities play out? Give us an example.

Christine: Well, I've thought about an example that, hopefully, will relay how these realities play out. And I'll say that this is a fictitious story. It's not one that's real from my years of experience with this, but it could be a real story, okay?

So imagine with me that we have a staff member, and I'll just call her Sarah, and she comes to work. She encounters a new fella on the job, a male employee on the job, and she just has an "er" in her when she's working around him. She feels agitated. For some reason, she's sensing she feels unsafe. She feels uncomfortable in the way that he notices her, perhaps making comments on her style of dress, the amount of attention he gives her, a conversation evolving into their lives outside of work. And he doesn't seem to be picking up the signals that she really just wants to keep things strictly business and not personal at all. And she begins to wonder about, is he, perhaps, making some sort of advances? And she might even see that he's wearing a wedding band, and he's talked about his kids. Even more, she might imagine that he's followed her home from work one day. I mean, all sorts of things are going through her mind.

And she may be sharing all of this with her best friend in the workplace, another woman in the workplace. So this other friend of hers winds up mentioning something to human resources. Human resources gets involved. That's a good thing. In the course of the investigation into what's really going on and seeking the facts here in Sarah's story, and even interviewing her friend, her friend begins to also mention, "I'm not very comfortable around this fellow coworker, either," and makes mention that, "Well, nothing in particular has happened, but past experiences prior to joining this organization really make me feel sensitive and leery."

And right there, you have it, if you listen closely, that someone has happened to mention in the course of, in this case, an investigation into what's going on, that they have been influenced in what they're experiencing by things that have happened previously. And so this takes, really, an astute person to listen well for clues such as these. Oftentimes, in a story such as this that I've relayed, the unfortunate result is that one or more of these women will ultimately decide, especially if they have a heavy workload or in any other way are considering other opportunities, one or more of these women may actually decide to leave the organization.

Al: And that's really unfortunate. And I'll have to say, the story that you've outlined with Sarah kind of creeps me out a little bit, certainly makes me uncomfortable.

So, the rest of the story. Is there any more to the story?

Christine: Well, the more to the story, which is the best-case scenario, is that human resources, or if you have another resource within your organization to investigate into these kinds of experiences, actually does a very thorough job of doing fact finding and determining what has happened, what has not happened, and then can recommend to management appropriately what steps need to happen and how to bring a constructive closure to the situation. And in some cases, it may be coaching for one or more of the coworkers, it may be a review of some preventing-harassment training to reinforce what has already been provided, but it does include a very thorough, and I might add, preferably swift process to bring to a constructive conclusion.

Al: Yeah, well, this is very insightful, Christine. And, yes, we all have our own histories that we bring to the workplace, I admit that. And I can see this story playing out in a Christian or a secular workplace setting. At this point in Sarah's story, where does leadership need to be? Thoughts on that?

Christine: Well, I think that leadership in this story, again, in an ideal situation, leadership has already made very clear in the organization that we have safe places for people to come to if they feel unsafe or believe that they've experienced something inappropriate. And so that's the work of leadership today and ongoing in reinforcing.

I think there's also a place for human-resource leadership to ensure that the organization has a high degree of confidence that human resources is a place that people can come to report, to get help, that they have full confidence that the H.R. team is capable and highly effective in operating in a sensitive way to receive a report, to handle an investigation, for everybody involved—the person who says, “I have experienced something I'm uncomfortable with,” or has been “downright wrong done to me” as well as the person who has done the wrong or is accused. Everybody must be treated with the highest degree of respect in the fact-finding process. And so that's where I think leadership comes in, both organizational leadership and human-resource leadership.

Al: Yeah. And I like your point that really leadership needs to act quickly when something comes up, that, really, for no further harm to happen, there can't be disbelief or skepticism or even dismissing these claims, that you really need to act quickly, don't you?

Christine: And, Al, I would just say that one of the worst things that could happen—and it has happened in many organizations, and we have decades later—people now coming forward because there wasn't either a safe place or there was disbelief. Why would we disbelieve that someone's coming forward with an issue, a concern, or an experience, and not believe them? Start from the place of there's something here that has compelled this person to come forward, that they are claiming harm, and we must understand what has happened.

Al: So, the first reality or imperative that we've been talking about is recognizing that real harm is already in our midst, and we do need to recognize those facts. And you make a great point about acting quickly because disbelief, skepticism, or dismissal breaks trust and, perhaps, creates more harm in these situations.

Now, you've got a second imperative for us, Christine. What's that?

Christine: That second imperative, as a reminder, is about addressing the dynamics of power. And here, the obvious place to start in our organizations is in the manager-employee relationship, because, of course, managers have hire, fire, performance evaluation, and lots of other naturally occurring powers granted to them as a supervisor or a manager over an employee's work life. And so I think this is a prime place to introduce some training or dialogue around what it means to be invested with this power and what the expectations are for using that managerial role and power to create safe workplaces.

Al: Yeah, that dynamics of power is frequently at the core. And it reminds me, quite frankly, my now-married daughter met her husband, and he was her boss at work. And I give him a lot of credit because their supervisor noticed that right away, and they transferred departments so that they weren't both in the same department, so that eliminated the dynamics of power. But with this dynamics of power in mind, what needs to happen leadership-wise in these kinds of situations?

Christine: Well, I think, again, this points to leaders at all levels, especially the senior-most leaders, demonstrating their own awareness of the power that their word, their position carries, and actually introducing this notion of awareness of power that one has into their conversation as they speak, perhaps in managerial forums or leadership forums in their own organization. I think a very powerful thing a leader can do in doing their own personal work and investigation into this topic—remember, making it real for their head and their heart—and then finding the right kind of place in your organization to have dialogue with other leaders around expectations and Biblical imperatives for handling power, especially as it's related to this harmful, harmful topic of harassment and sexual harassment in particular.

Al: Well, let's pursue this further. How is this being handled and worked out at World Vision? Let's bring it home in that regard.

Christine: Well, I'm going to tell you what we're doing here because we are doing some things, and I'm really pleased what we're doing. This year we've undertaken a new initiative that requires all of our managers to participate in a very interactive training session on the dynamics of power for them as managers. Now, we did develop this looking at a number of resources outside the organization, but we did create it specific to our Christian work environment. And we used examples of things that can go wrong, examples for them to be aware of. And we also ask the managers to develop their own personal learning and action plan around translating what they've learned in this training to what they're going to go do differently and commit to their own teams to do.

I personally have gone through the dynamics-of-power training course, and we're well on course to have all of our managers through it. And we're really receiving some very positive feedback from these sessions. Ninety-six percent of the managers that have gone through so far have agreed that this course has equipped them to handle their power better. And so following this, I'm excited that we'll be developing a version of this course, which will be for all of our employees so that individuals also can be aware of the power that they carry in the workplace. And we'll all seek to stand tall and use the power according to our role well.

AI: Well, that's a great step. I like, first of all, you're having the leaders understand it but then bringing it to all employees, helping leaders and employees understand the dynamics of power. And this leads us now to the third reality that you mentioned earlier involving sexual harassment. Tell us a little more about that.

Christine: Well, I have mentioned this a couple of times, really an admonition, that we as leaders make this a topic that is personal in some way, because in so doing, we will be speaking both from the head and the heart. We will be acting from our head and acting out of our hearts. Why do I continue to bring this home that for leaders it must be personal in some way? Because to the degree it is, it is so much more believable to our staff that we are committed to creating workplaces that are safe and harassment free and developing the confidence in our teams and our organizations that when and if something should happen, that we will take it seriously, that there will be belief and that there will be proper actions taken. And this goes a long way for leaders to make it personal because it's born of a voice that bears integrity.

I know well that with all that we've read and heard in the media following the launch of the #MeToo movement, it can feel to us at times that this is getting old, that it's a tired topic, or I've heard enough. It's a dangerous place to land there. And it does require an extra effort on our part as leaders to ensure that we never find this topic tiresome, but we prepare ourselves and we act.

AI: Well, I'd like to echo your point here, Christine, that, yes, for leaders, this must be thought of as a personal issue and for people to believe it's important to them and the organization because it critically really is. When people's lives and the integrity of the organization is at stake, personal means practical. I mean, it becomes personal. So do you have any other suggestions for us?

Christine: You know, I wonder if any of us has ventured a conversation with someone we know who can describe what it's like to experience sexual harassment at work. You've mentioned you have an adult daughter. I wonder if some of us have thought to ask family members or friends that we feel like we could broach a conversation. "Hey, do you know anyone? Have you ever experienced anything like this? What was that like? What did you do? Where did you turn?" I'll tell you, that makes it personal very quickly. But if we don't know of someone that we feel we can broach this topic to and listen to what they have to say, I mentioned previously, I turned to some active blogs, podcasts, articles, and began looking beyond the hype, albeit it helpful, but the short bit that we get from media and looking beyond that to dig deeper into other things that are published out there.

AI: Well, if there's one personal, practical, and intentional invitation you'd like to make to everyone who's listening, Christine, what would it be?

Christine: You're not going to be surprised, but it certainly is along these lines of making this more personal. I think if our listeners have taken in this podcast and chosen to listen because they recognize this really is an important topic, something is required of them, I would just say just commit the next 30 days to asking that question of someone that you feel that you can, or doing some additional reading, but set some time aside—a timeline of 30 days, I'm just going to suggest—and dig in and take something in that goes beyond what you have already heard thus far. Open your heart, prayerfully asking God to give you a soft heart and a broader understanding of this topic, of what this means when

someone experiences sexual harassment, and ask God to bring to mind a conviction of what you can and need to do within the sphere of your own role.

Al: So, everybody, 30 days, become more informed.

Christine: Thirty days.

Al: I got it, yeah. And recently, you even dug into this deeper in another program. What was that?

Christine: I did. I've gone fairly far with this, and I recently participated in a certificate program, here in Seattle, at the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology and their Dan Allender Institute. And this is a program that focuses heavily on healing and a narrative approach to healing of trauma, a lot of which touched on sexual trauma. Very challenging curriculum for me; very involved, head and heart; digging deeply, seeking to understand; and also knowing my own story. So I'm trusting God that with that experience that I will be as effective as I can going forward, again, in the position I have today and any other environment in which I might be able to both be a healer and a helper.

Al: Oh, that's great. Well, I've really appreciated everything that we've learned today. And I really like your six steps that you introduced earlier about how every organization should have a policy about harassment and abuse in the workplace; how there should be a CEO statement; how every organization should have reporting avenues where there's a safe place to report this kind of behavior; that organizations address these claims quickly; that there's a checklist for good hygiene, including prevention training; and that leaders take it not only into their head but their heart, and they make it very personal.

And then just the three realities that it is in our midst. We need to recognize that this is in our midst; the one-in-four, one-in-eleven numbers were really striking; that oftentimes, it's the dynamics of power that's behind sexual harassment. That's something to take into consideration, and especially, I know our listeners all have more power than they probably think they do. And also, how the tone at the top, making it personal, is really important for this topic.

But, Christine, given all that you've experienced and the ongoing transformation of greater health in your culture at World Vision, give us one final thought that you'd like to leave with ministry leaders.

Christine: Well, thank you for that invitation, Al. I would suggest that our distinctly Christ-centered workplaces really can be lights to a hurting and a suspicious society. I believe that our workplaces can be safe, as we demonstrate sensitivity, as we exercise a readiness to respond, and as we take actions both to prevent sexual harassment and to set the tone at the top. The tone that we set is so important. I've said it must be personal. We must take time to make it be true, and I believe that our Christian workplaces can and should truly be upstanding places that are safe for all our staff to come and to use their God-given talents and work. We can and should be lights in our society. And so, really, that's why I've dedicated my career in working in organizations to create safe and positive workplaces. It feels like it's never more important than now, and I'm so grateful that I've been able to speak with you about this topic.

AI: Well, thanks, Christine. Ladies and gentlemen, Christine Talbot, senior vice president for World Vision U.S. Thanks for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've shared with us today.

Outro: I want to thank you for joining us on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast* and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a specific insight, story, or action step you've enjoyed in these past few minutes, then please share it with others so they can benefit as well. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please be sure to show your support by rating, reviewing, and subscribing wherever you listen. You can also share this podcast with friends on social media.

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