

Strive for workplace harmony and cordiality; don't obsess about eliminating all annoyances

Most of us want to work in a pleasant place free of tension, where everyone is friendly and happy. Reality doesn't usually measure up.

While management should strive for as cordial a workplace as practically possible, don't worry if yours sometimes falls short. Don't take complaints about petty slights and behaviors too seriously if you are sure there isn't more below the surface.

Recent case: Judith sued the college where she taught, claiming that she had been discriminated against on account of her sex.

But the incidents she described could best be considered petty annoyances. A man once gave her a hug at work. Several male colleagues ignored her from time to time. She didn't always get the schedule she wanted and her supervisor sometimes made her handle lower-level courses instead of the ones she preferred to teach.

The court quickly dismissed her claims, noting that the incidents and behaviors she described were at best annoying or, in the case of her co-workers, impolite. There was no indication that her sex had anything to do with the workplace atmosphere.

The only plausible claim she had was for a denied promotion. The college won that claim, too, when it showed that the man who had given her the hug several years earlier had nothing to do with deciding who got a promotion and who did not. (*Mills v. Southern Connecticut*, No. 11-3688, 2nd Cir., 2013)

Final note: Sadly, you can't stop employees from filing silly lawsuits.