

Where's my big bear hug?



I think I rate a big bear hug for alerting you to this: The next crop of grads you hire into your workforce are huggers, and you know what would follow if a hugger hugs someone who doesn't want the hug? (Hint: It starts with an "L" and it ain't "Love.")

To high schoolers and college kids, embracing is the socially accepted way to say hello or part ways. You can witness it in a Caribou Coffee line at the local mall or just about any place they bump into one another. It's like they haven't seen each other since algebra class.

Girls wrap their arms around girls, boys wrap their arms around girls and vice versa, and guys wrap their arms around guys. Sometimes it's a threesome and gender doesn't matter. No romance here, just friends being friends. For the record, they text them too {{{hug}}}. There are even animated ones:

www.sherv.net/hug-emoticons.html.

Should you allow it in the workplace? Generally, no, but there are exceptions. Hugging is acceptable in the event when one employee is consoling another over bad news, or when a long-time employee is leaving and is saying his or her final goodbyes. In some cases, the hugs are welcome. In most, they're inappropriate and sometimes not welcome. Somehow, you know the difference.

If the recipient doesn't want the hug, it becomes an "unwelcome sexual advance," according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. It's a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This is where the "L" word comes in, and your organization will be spending a lot of money and time to fight it.



Consider that just recently, a 17-year-old high school student from Georgia was suspended for a year for trying to brighten a teacher's day with a hug. She saw it as sexual harassment. You should too.

There's no need for employees to offer hugs in place of hellos, handshakes or thanks for the raise or praise you just gave them. Employees should not welcome new employees with hugs, throw their arms around their supervisors, or worse, customers.

Be warned: The younger Millennials hug often. It's part of their culture. Excessive hugging *will* cause problems for your organization.

Now, about that hug you owe me ...