

The Box & 1: Defense Strategy Against Harassment

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Not even the upsets and unpredictability of one of college basketball fans' favorite weekends would have revealed much of the old-school "Box & 1 Defense." But, it may be time to resurrect the Box & 1 defensive strategy as an effective program against harassment. The "Box-and-1" in basketball is a hybrid defense: four defenders represent the corners of a box as the core of the defense. Then, the "one" is the best defender doggedly guarding the opponent's biggest scoring threat. Applying the Box-and-1 to the workplace involves developing a foundation that covers the underlying, day-to-day issues. In other words, the "Box" includes the following:

- **Culture:** Build a culture of respect, starting at the top, where employees are valued and productive, and diversity and inclusion are embraced. Science proves the success of diverse organizations.
- **Policies and Procedures:** Emphasize a higher standard of conduct and enforce it. Bullying, insults, and unprofessional conduct are discouraged. Colleagues speak up for each other. And there is a trusted system for reporting bad behavior.
- **Investigations:** Employees who complain often complain *again* about how investigations are conducted-- the embarrassment, the backlash, the gossip. Effective investigations are handled with the dignity of the accused and the accuser in mind.
- **Training:** Focusing on "compliance" instead of "understanding" has derailed effective training. The most effective training helps explain the nuance and complications of workplace behavior, is interactive, and reinforces the three other corners of the box.

One-on-One. The "One" of the Box-and-1 is a company's strategy to isolate toxic employees—often an organization's biggest threat. Toxic employees don't always become harassers, but they always cause trouble. They are toxic (not just difficult) because they *infect* co-workers with negativity, low morale, and reduced productivity. And, for many reason, firing isn't always an immediate option. Experts recommend separating toxic employees physically, minimizing their interactions with others, and keeping track of their statistics (e.g., document). For more information on the isolation technique, I recommend Christine Porath's article on handling toxic employees. (See her article "[Isolate Toxic Employees to Reduce Their Negative Effects](#)," Harvard Business Review November 15, 2016. I hope your bracket is still intact. Go Team!

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