

sistent or severe, it warrants a formal complaint with the person designated to handle such cases in the workplace, experts say. Employees also can file a complaint with the EEOC. Complaints must be filed within 180 days of the incident.

"Whenever possible, whenever we're comfortable, speak up," said Shira Tarrant, an assistant professor of women's studies at Goucher College in Baltimore.

Harassment's gray areas

Bernstein said other factors help determine how a woman deals with an uncomfortable work situation or relationship. For instance, a generational gap may be in play when a woman shrugs off a sexist remark by an older man. Or a 20-something woman may find an unwelcome comment about her attire offensive while a 60-year-old woman may see it as a compliment, Bernstein said. "That's where cultures come in," she said.

What constitutes improper or disrespectful behavior sometimes is in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, workplace experts say, there's no one-size-fits-all rule on when good-natured teasing or flirting, for example, crosses the line.

Even though an off-color joke or a suggestive comment may fall short of the legal definition of sexual harassment, such behavior violates professional workplace rules of behavior, said Amy Oppenheimer, a California-based lawyer and business consultant who specializes in sexual harassment training.

A company can establish a good policy on sexual harassment prevention and workplace conduct that spells out what type of behavior is and is not expected on the job, she said. "A good employer program is going to give people the opportunity to bring issues up when they're uncomfortable," Oppenheimer said.

In the 20 years since Buck took over her father's company, the industry has become more welcoming to women, she said.

Men want the environment to change because "they want their daughters in the business," and women are taking on leadership roles in the industry, Buck said. She is set to become the first chairwoman of the National Beer Wholesalers Association in September.

Buck's two 20-something daughters plan to join their mother in the family business. And Buck's advice is simple: "Believe in yourself and don't let others define you."