What Managers and Supervisors Should Take Away From the Bill Cosby Allegations

The "Dateline-NBC" interview on October 9, 2015 of 27 alleged victims of assault or rape by Bill Cosby mesmerized me. Most of the incidences occurred when the women were young, naïve and most importantly, drugged by Cosby. While Cosby steadfastly denies any nonconsensual sex, the women's honest anger, tears and vulnerability -- as well as the similar detail in each account -- presented persuasive evidence of the truth of their stories.

What struck me as important new information in this interview, however, was how many of them maintained that someone in Cosby's world -- or in some cases, their own agents or managers -- knew what Cosby was doing but did nothing and said nothing. In some cases, the women complained to their own team or Cosby's about what happened but no one spoke up for the victims.

*When we train managers on harassment issues, we make it clear that they have an obligation to respond when they have information that harassment may be occurring.* Even if it's just a rumor, they need to investigate. When some of them resist this, I always ask them if they heard a rumor that someone was bringing a loaded gun into the facility would they investigate and most of them have to grudgingly acknowledge that they would.

*It's the same with harassment or assault in the workplace: if someone tells you or you hear a whisper that such behavior is occurring or has occurred, you need to find out if this is true.* You can't just look the other way or assume that the perpetrator -- like Cosby -- is untouchable. Legally, if you're a manager it's a part of your job. If you're a co-worker, it's certainly a moral obligation, if not a legal one.

While such an intervention may seem challenging, it's not as embarrassing as ending up as a participant in the next "Dateline-NBC" investigation.

*Do your managers need training on how to intervene if they see or hear about harassment or discrimination?* We can help. We provide training for managers and employees, or read Lynne's book, "We Need to Talk" - Tough Conversations With Your Employee.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE