



Navigating the Rise in Complaints:

Turning Risk into Opportunity



May 20, 2025



Katherin Nukk-Freeman
Co-Founder
SHIFT HR





























Consistently document performance concerns.



Drive best practices in documenting issues.



Conduct investigations if they escalate.



Enable your employees to anonymously report issues.

FRACUITY

The *leader* in strategic employee relations from issue through aftercare.



Uncover trends to proactively **prevent future issues.**

The Leader in Employee Relations







Employee Relations Benchmark Study

The go-to resource for ER leaders, packed with valuable insights and data.



Employee Relations Quotient (ER/Q)

The first-ever maturity model for Employee Relations.



empowER.

The largest free-to-join online community exclusively for ER professionals.





ERroundtable.

Our annual event connects over 400 global ER leaders to learn, share ideas, network and more.





Important Dates & Upcoming Events



May 28 12:00 PM ET



June 4 2:00 PM ET



Oct. 28-29
In-person Event



Donation

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

 LLS is at the forefront of the fight to cure blood cancer and improve the quality of life of all patients and their families





What's Happening Now:

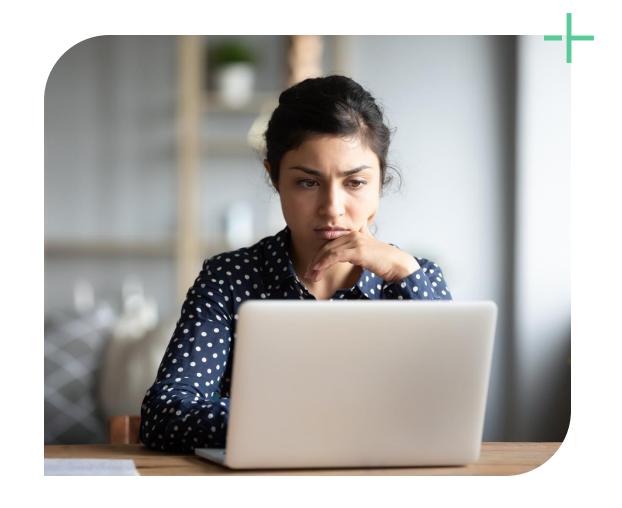
The New Era of Employee Complaints



Complaint Volume is Rising

Complaint volume has been rising and is predicted to continue

- Employees are more informed, more vocal, and less willing to tolerate harmful behavior—especially in the post-#MeToo era and as workplace power dynamics continue to shift.
- From 2021–2024, workplace discrimination charges surged 44%.
- In FY 2024 alone, the EEOC received 88,531 new workplace discrimination charges, marking a more than 9% increase over the previous year.





Social Discourse and Misunderstandings

The current social discourse is creating new complexities and potential for misunderstandings.

Recent Executive
Orders can
unintentionally create
tension when
employee views clash
with protected
categories.

Without clear, up-todate training, employees may misunderstand what's appropriate in workplace conversations.

lack of explicit
protections allows
negative remarks —
but these can still be
viewed as harassment.

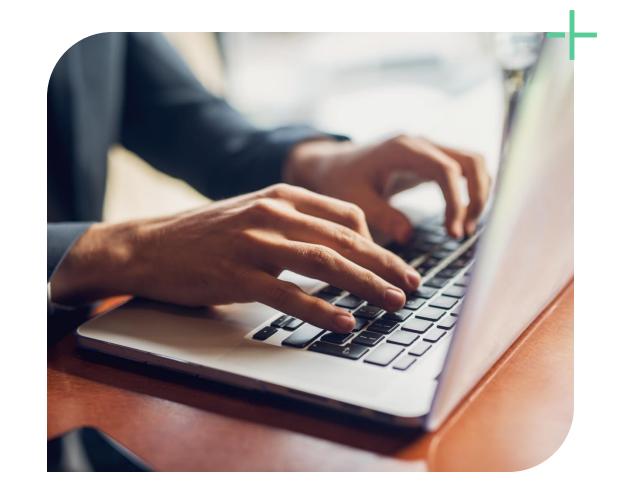
respond with clear communication, inclusive training, and a consistent commitment to a respectful workplace.



Return to Office is Fueling Complaint Volume

The return to in-person work post-COVID is also driving the rise in complaints.

- After years of remote or hybrid setups, many employees are re-adjusting to shared spaces, team dynamics, and face-to-face interactions — which can lead to more friction, misunderstandings, and formal complaints.
- For HR and compliance leaders, this shift underscores the need for proactive training and clear policies that support a respectful, safe workplace.





EEOC Clarifies: No Such Thing as

"Reverse" Discrimination

- On March 19, 2025, the EEOC stated:
 "The EEOC's position is that there is no such thing as 'reverse' discrimination; there is only discrimination."
- Title VII protects all employees equally—regardless of race, sex, or other protected characteristics.
- The EEOC applies the same legal standard to all discrimination claims.
- Employers must focus on preventing bias and retaliation while ensuring consistent policy enforcement across all employee groups.





Retaliation Risk + Employee Expectations

- Retaliation remains the most common EEOC claim year after year—over half of all charges filed.
- Even well-intentioned actions can create legal risk if not handled carefully and consistently.
- Employees expect action, not lip service.
- Today's workforce demands accountability, transparency, and trust in the process—not just policies.





Prevention Is Your Best Protection



Training and Documentation Are Your First

Line of Defense

- Implementing effective training and documentation practices is crucial for proactively addressing and preventing workplace complaints.
- A clear understanding of the current state, achieved through reviewing past complaints and existing policies, forms the foundation for building targeted training and documentation strategies.
- Define specific, measurable objectives for training programs and documentation processes to ensure they are aligned with the organization's goals for a healthier and more respectful workplace.



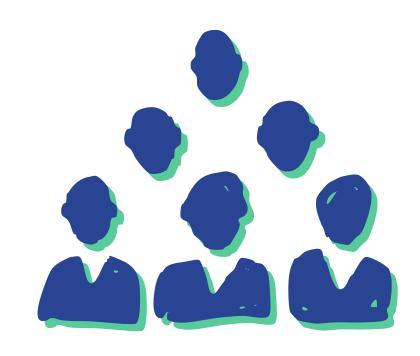


Prevention Pays Off and Shapes Culture

- Proactive employers reduce risk.
- The companies investing in prevention are also the ones avoiding costly litigation, PR fallout, and internal attrition.

Training Done Right is Culture-Shifting

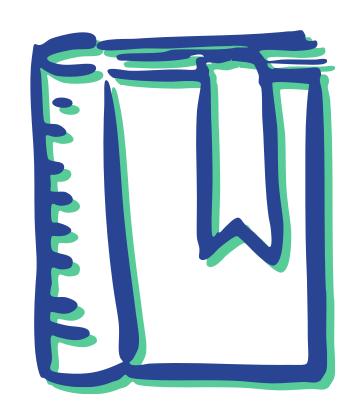
- Compliance training isn't just legal defense; it's one of your most powerful tools to build a workplace rooted in respect.
- Generic training doesn't cut it: Box-checking won't prepare your teams for real-world scenarios.
- Engaging, legally accurate, and up-to-date content makes the difference.





Training is Prevention, Not Just a Policy

- When complaints are rising, training shouldn't be an afterthought—it should be part of the solution.
- The right training helps organizations identify patterns, shift behaviors, and intervene early.
- Look for programs grounded in legal standards and real-world dynamics, with content vetted by legal experts and delivered in a way that sticks.
- It's not just about what's taught, but how it's framed—effective training connects the dots between daily decisions and organizational risk, helping teams spot issues before they escalate.





Outdated or Missing Policies Leave Teams Exposed

 Many employers lack a functional harassment and discrimination policy, or have one that employees aren't even aware of, creating serious gaps in readiness when risks are on the rise.

Solid documentation is another important part of your defense

• In a fast-changing regulatory landscape, it's not enough to say you acted fairly—you need clear, accessible, and legally sound records that prove it.





Crucial to Support Your Frontline Managers

They're often the first to spot issues—and the ones making real-time decisions, often without HR oversight.

Empowering them with training, clear processes, and strong documentation practices is essential to reducing risk and ensuring consistency.





Turning Complaints into Opportunities: The Good News? It's Already Happening



Complaints Are Opportunities to Improve

Each complaint is a chance to improve: With the right tools and training, every issue raised can strengthen culture and trust.

Patterns Reveal Gaps

- Viewing employee complaints as valuable data can **reveal opportunities** to strengthen workplace culture and build organizational resilience.
- In addition to addressing individual complaints, HR leaders should analyze complaint data to identify recurring patterns and systemic issues.
- This allows you to **gain insights into potential gaps in policies, training, or communication** that may be contributing to workplace friction.
- By identifying these underlying issues, you can **proactively implement solutions**, such as revising policies, enhancing training programs, and improving internal communication.



Addressing Complaints Can Enhance Trust & Transparency



Communicating the outcomes of complaint analysis and the resulting changes can **foster greater transparency and demonstrate a commitment** to addressing employee concerns proactively.



This open and responsive approach can encourage employees to voice concerns earlier and prevent minor issues from escalating into more significant problems.



By listening, analyzing, and acting consistently, you can build trust, credibility and systemic resilience in your organization.



How to Get Started

Start with Clarity. Lead with Purpose. Build with Trust.

By starting with a clear understanding of your current state, defining your objectives, and empowering both managers and HR with the right tools, you can turn every complaint into an opportunity for improvement, stronger relationships, and a healthier workplace culture.

Protect your people. Protect your business. Build workplaces where everyone feels safe, heard, and respected.

Thank you!



hracuity.com | info@hracuity.com



shiftelt.com | info@shiftelt.com