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Faculty Focus: Seeking to Promote Workplace Respect, Scholar Probes Roots of Harassment

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By Robin Florzak

EVEN THOUGH 98 PERCENT of business organizations have formal policies against it, sexual harassment and other forms of aggression are a persistent problem in the workplace.

It's a problem that Jaclyn Jensen knows well as someone who has been the target of harassment herself and witnessed its demoralizing effect on others in previous workplaces. These experiences influenced Jensen, an associate professor of management at DePaul, to focus her teaching on human resource management and her research on employee mistreatment and misbehavior.

"My interest in this topic is fueled by a real desire for others (mainly women) to never be in a situation where they are treated in anything less than a respectful manner, and to help victims find proper recourse to prevent mistreat-

ment in the future," she explains. "To that end, my work on incivility and harassment has investigated why employees are mistreated by their co-workers and bosses, how mistreatment affects victimized employees' job attitudes and behaviors, and what bystanders and leaders can do to try and stop mistreatment from occurring."

Growing up in Cleveland, Jensen initially wanted to attend medical school and become a psychiatrist. Her career focus changed at Ohio State University after she took an organizational psychology course and, as an undergraduate representative on the university's board of trustees, saw firsthand the complexity of people management in large organizations. "These experiences opened my eyes to the blend of psychology and business in organizations and the need

to be really thoughtful about people and human resources at work. It prompted me to pursue grad school in organizational psychology."

Jensen earned master's and doctoral degrees in this discipline at Michigan State University and then taught management courses at George Washington University for six years. She joined DePaul's business faculty in 2012. This past fall, DePaul honored Jensen with its Excellence in Teaching Award.

Jensen says she strives to teach future business leaders that they have both the "opportunity and the responsibility to set the tone for employee conduct in the workplace.

"This goes beyond having a set of policies in an employee handbook, and is more about setting the right kind of examples both in their own behaviors and in the types of people who are hired, promoted and rewarded," she says. "If the workplace jerk consistently gets ahead while those who treat others kindly do not, that sends a message about the kinds of behaviors that are valued."

Leaders need to speak up about harassing behavior, Jensen advises, and hold organizations accountable for enforcing policies against it. "If you witness this type of behavior, own your responsibility as a role model and do what you can to either help the victim, call out the bully or both. This is often easier said than done, as intervening in someone else's personal conflict can be risky or difficult to do. However, if you're trying to create a culture where mistreatment isn't tolerated, intervening—even when the behavior seems to be subtle—is an important first step in preventing escalation and sends a message to victims and bullies alike."

Associate Professor of Management Jaclyn Jensen