

NBC Issues Hugging Guidelines for Employees (And How Christian Ethics Could Help Them)

It is fitting that 2017, a year of the unexpected, ends with more unexpected news. In an attempt to crack down on sexual harassment on the job, NBC has reportedly issued strict new guidelines that call for employees to rat out the miscreants in their midst. Not only so, but NBC has allegedly banned shared taxi rides for employees and even issued instructions on how to hug. Yes, NBC is going the way of sexual prudery—or perhaps the way of wisdom?

As reported on Page Six, “NBC employees have been ordered to report any inappropriate relationships in the workplace—and if they fail to do so, they could be fired for covering up for colleagues.

“Detailed rules also have been issued about conduct in the office, including how to socialize and even how to hug colleagues.”

What about romantic relationships in the workplace? Not anymore. There is zero tolerance for this.

“Staffers have been told that if they find out about any affairs, romances, inappropriate relationships or behavior in the office, they have to report it to human resources, their superior or the company anti-harassment phone line. Staffers are shocked that they are now expected to snitch on their friends.”

Is NBC overreacting? Perhaps. But the reaction is understandable. The allegations against NBC’s Matt Lauer do

not stand alone. Others either enabled Lauer to commit his alleged offenses over a period of years or simply looked the other way. So it is not just Lauer with lots of egg on his face. Many others at NBC are not looking too good.

Not only that, but Jeff Zucker, a former NBC executive who claimed to be unaware of Lauer's actions, participated in a 2008 roast of Lauer that contained lots of sexually explicit humor—at Lauer's expense, with him as the subject. In other words, his behavior was apparently well-known, even to Zucker, who told his own bawdy jokes about Lauer.

Of course, only NBC knows what it does and doesn't know, but many people have been badly hurt—the great majority of them women—and it would only seem logical that the company would be facing its share of major lawsuits in the coming days. They certainly don't want more of these.

So it's good that NBC wants to clean house and reverse the culture of abuse that was able to thrive in its midst (at least, in some places and with some people). But has NBC gone overboard? To quote from Page Six again, "There's been a series of ridiculous rules issued on other office conduct. One rule relates to hugging. If you wish to hug a colleague, you have to do a quick hug, then an immediate release, and step away to avoid body contact."

Strictly enforced hugging guidelines for adults in the workplace?

Had a major church or ministry issued such guidelines earlier this year, the general public would have mocked such prudery, calling it legalistic bondage. But this is NBC. Who saw this coming one year ago?

And this is where conservative Christians can only shake their heads and smile. What NBC needs is not simply guidelines and rules. NBC needs to promote a culture of honor rather than a culture of domination, a culture that respects members of the

opposite sex rather than objectifies and abuses them. With that culture in place, you don't need to mandate the reporting of workplace abuse because it is so rare as to stand out on its own. And when it does raise its ugly head, people won't need to be told to report it. They will do so as a matter of conscience.

That's why it was Harvey Weinstein, not Mike Pence, who was exposed for years of alleged abusive acts against women. Pence already had guidelines in place as a committed evangelical Christian, because of which there was not a ready environment for him to transgress. And he didn't build relationships with the opposite sex in a way that would open the door to such transgressions.

That's also why, in the circles in which I have traveled for years, we don't need to issue hugging guidelines. They come naturally to us out of respect for the differences between the sexes and the danger of certain kinds of physical contact.

While the watching world might mock us for our "side hugs" and our purity guidelines, it turns out we weren't so crazy after all. And inevitably, when we hear of someone falling in our midst—we certainly have more than our share of failures to deal with—it's because our common-sense guidelines were violated, probably repeatedly.

And followers of Jesus also know this. We may be mocked today, but we'll be admired tomorrow. That's not because we're special, but because God's ways are ways of life and God's ways are best. And while it's good that NBC is addressing a very real problem in its midst, the solution goes beyond rules. A change in culture and mentality is even better.

In fact, I know someone who could teach them a lot. He's just quite busy these days serving as vice president.