How to Avoid Sexual Harassment?

Persons accused of sexual harassment are often surprised to learn that someone viewed specific behavior or comments as offensive. The following are steps that you can take to avoid engaging in behaviors that may be harassing or offensive to others.

- Consider whether you base your behavior (i.e., comments, decisions) on stereotypes of others. Review your behavior and make sure it is sex-neutral and free of bias.
- Consider the impact that you could have on others’ work attitudes, education, and self-esteem.
- Consider how others respond to what you say and do.
- Consider whether difference in culture, religion, or background might make someone uncomfortable with your actions.
- Consider and understand that unwelcome sexual humor and innuendoes may violate the University's sexual harassment policy.
- Do not assume that colleagues, peers, employees, or students enjoy sexually-oriented comments, jokes, or stories.
- Do not assume that colleagues, peers, employees, or students are flattered by comments about personal appearances, requests to go on a date, questions about relationships, or being touched (i.e. hugs, massages, playful patting).
- Do not assume that you will be made aware when others are offended or feel harassed by what you say and do, especially if you are in a position of power over them.
- Do not assume that your colleagues, peers, employees, or students enjoy e-mails or internet sites that contain sexual jokes or innuendoes. Creating or forwarding the e-mail can be just as offensive as if you had uttered the words yourself.
- If you have any doubts as to your behavior, ask yourself:
  - Whether you would like someone to do the same to your wife/husband/partner, daughter/son, mother/father, grandmother/grandfather, or another considered close to you.
  - Whether you would like to see a picture of yourself and a description of the behavior on the front page of the newspaper.
  - If you answer "NO" to either of these questions, odds are you should refrain from the behavior!
- Ask yourself many of these same questions with respect to behavior related to race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. Veteran.

*Remember that when assessing for harassing behaviors, it is not the intent of the 'harasser' that matters, but rather the impact the behavior has on the person who is offended/harassed by the behavior.