# Religion in the Workplace : 10 Best Practices for Preventing Discrimination



When it comes to religious tolerance in the workplace, Canada still has a long way to go. According to a recent Randstad survey, 16% of Canadians say they've suffered religious discrimination at work. One group having an especially tough time is Muslims. And with tens of thousands of Syrian refugees headed to Canada, this is an especially good time for employers to ensure they comply with religious discrimination laws. Here are 10 Best Practices to help you achieve your goal.

1. **Audit Your HR Policies & Practices**

Conduct a full scale audit of your personnel policies to ensure that they are non-discriminatory. Leave no stone unturned—look at all aspects of employment including recruitment, hiring, training, supervision, job assignments, scheduling, transfers, promotions, compensation, discipline and termination.

2. **Implement an Anti-Harassment Policy**

Make sure you have and consistently enforce a written policy banning religious harassment that includes, at a minimum:

- An explanation of what religious harassment is;
- A procedure employees can use to bring harassment complaints;
- A procedure for investigating such complaints; and
- Assurances that employees who submit complaints won't suffer retaliation.

3. **Implement an Accommodations Policy**

Remember that human rights laws require employers to not only prevent adverse and differential treatment that constitutes religious discrimination but make accommodations for employees' religious preferences up to the point of undue hardship.

4. **Implement an Accommodations Procedure**

Exactly what accommodations are and are not required? The only blanket rule is ***that there are no blanket rules.*** Accommodations must be based on the employee's individual needs and unique circumstances of the situation. Accommodations must be determined based on the employee's individual needs and unique circumstances of the situation. What's required, then, is not just a set of principles but a procedure for submitting

and responding to accommodation requests in accordance with those principles. (Model Accommodation Policy and Procedure)

5. **Be Prepared to Adjust Work Schedules**

Accommodation of religion involves adjusting work schedules so that employees can observe religious holidays and practices, e.g., not requiring Orthodox Jewish employees to work on the Sabbath or letting Muslim employees go on extended leave during Ramadan or for religious pilgrimage. So you should be aware of the major religious holidays and be flexible in your scheduling and leave practices.

6. **Be Prepared to Accommodate Daily Prayer**

Muslims pray five times per day. And Islam is hardly the only religion that requires daily prayer and meditation. Make sure that being at work doesn't force employees to sacrifice these duties.  Possible accommodations include prayer breaks and dedicating space for employees to pray.

7. **Don't Compel Prayer or Prosyletize**

Be very careful about prayer. Although employers must accommodate employees who want to pray, they may not encourage or compel them to do so. As the new Ontario  Human Rights Commission guidance cautions, (Model Accommodation Policy and Procedure) mandatory prayer sessions or Bible classes, starting business meetings with prayers and similar "creed compelling" activities are a form of religious discrimination.

8. **Be Prepared to Loosen Dress Code & Personal Grooming Restrictions**

Make efforts to accommodate employees who want to wear skull caps, head dresses, turbans and other religious garb. But remember that accommodations aren't required if they impose undue hardship. Accordingly, you can enforce dress requirements to the extent they're essential for health or safety, such as mandatory hardhats for workers exposed to falling objects at construction sites or a no facial hair policy for workers who use respirators to the extent that beards significantly compromise the device's effectiveness.

9. **Be Prepared to Accommodate Dietary Restrictions**

Be aware of and prepared to accommodate employees' dietary restrictions, especially if you have cafeteria facilities or hold social events that are catered.

10. **Be Open Minded & Inclusive**

Above all, make sure that management, supervisors and employees at levels of your organization are tolerant and sensitive about religious differences and understand their responsibilities in avoiding stereotypes and providing a diverse and inclusive work environment.