



Starbucks 'Race Together' May Brew Up Legal Risk

News

3.23.15

Ed Harold was quoted in *Corporate Counsel* on March 23, 2015. The article “Starbucks 'Race Together' May Brew Up Legal Risk” discussed how a new initiative launched earlier this month by Starbucks Corp., at the direction of CEO Howard Schultz, has urged baristas to write “Race Together” on the outside of coffee cups in order to spur conversations between employees and customers about racial difficulties in the U.S.

Ed was quoted on his take of Starbucks’ new initiative.

Ed told CorpCounsel.com that although he sees the good intentions behind Starbucks’ plans, he also sees the potential for problems. “I have always advised my clients to—just like at the dinner table—try to keep political discussions out of the workplace,” he said.

For a barista encouraged to bring up race with customers, part of the issue lies in the fact that it’s hard to know what sorts of opinions will come from the other side of the counter. A customer and barista might not agree, and considering how passions often flare around racial issues, the results could get ugly. “You can’t expect that because your employees had this great discussion about race [with each other] that other people are going to engage in the same level of intellectual discourse,” Ed said.

Furthermore, he said, under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, employers must prevent harassment based on race and protect their employees from it—even if the people doing the harassing are customers. Some jurisdictions even have separate laws protecting employees from discrimination based on political views and affiliations. And of course, if the discussion escalates from a verbal disagreement about racism in America to a physical confrontation, employers could be facing a lot more trouble.

To read the full article, please visit [*Corporate Counsel*](#).

Please reach out to our [Media team](#) for any news inquiries.

Related People



Edward F. Harold
Regional Managing Partner
504.592.3801
Email