Treating Everyone the Same Can Result in Religious Discrimination

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Handling employees' religious observances in compliance with federal law is not as simple as treating everyone exactly the same with no exceptions. In fact, a policy of treating everyone exactly the same can actually result in claims of religious discrimination! Although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin and religion, it also requires employers to "reasonably accommodate" workers' religious practices. This means that you must allow employees to exercise their religious beliefs at work, so long as it does not impose an "undue hardship" on the company or adversely affect the employee's coworkers. Some employers simply make a snap judgment that a religious accommodation would be an undue hardship. Then an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charge is filed and the employer has to answer some tough questions. The employer must be prepared to explain exactly what the negative impact of the accommodation would be and how that impact rises to the level of an undue hardship. The employer who makes the snap judgment likely will not fare well.

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