

# Why companies should encourage and not victimise whistle-blowers

Companies should be actively encouraging employees to blow the whistle on corporate issues, ethics or concerning behaviour, without fear of risk or harassment, because an effective whistle-blowing programme is of immense value to the business.



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Nicol Myburgh, Head: CRS Technologies HCM Business Unit, says, "Employees have considerable legal protection when it comes to blowing the whistle. Besides the Labour Relations Act, they are protected by the Protected Disclosure Act, and against harassment by the Companies Act.

"Companies should develop a programme that actively encourages people to blow the whistle. It's a superb tool that can help your business create a culture of transparency and uncover unexpected problems that could cause long-term impact."

This transparency is key to long-term business success. Employees who work in companies that have open policies and encourage information sharing are far more engaged, productive and driven. They are more connected to the company's vision, and are more likely to work harder and give more to ensure its success. When a company is entrenched in secrecy, it tends to foster a toxic environment where people feel stifled and suspicious.



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"Today it is so important to understand the value of transparency in the organisation," says Myburgh. "Some companies are so mired in secrecy that they even keep the organisational structure a secret. This just creates a negative environment that doesn't inspire people, and will definitely stop them from blowing the whistle on unethical behaviour for fear of

retribution."

To establish a solid policy for whistle-blowing, make sure people understand exactly what they need to do and how they can do it. Encourage them to share their thoughts and misgivings with the right people, and show them how this behaviour is rewarded and how it benefits the business. Low-level issues should be reported to mid-management, while more complex issues should be fast-tracked to the top level through a clear and visible process.

"There is the misconception that the bosses don't want to know – they do," concludes Myburgh. "People are afraid that if they push the issue, they will be fired or victimised, but with a clear policy and process in place, they will be far more comfortable letting you know of any problems."

A whistle-blowing programme is of inordinate value to the business. Employees bring financial mishandling, unethical behaviour, and other damaging situations to the right person's attention. This information can fundamentally change a company's financial status or future, and the company culture. If employees are actively encouraged to be a part of the process, then the company can only benefit.

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