

## **Toolbox Talk – Jokes in the Workplace**

We all like a good joke, and workplace banter is great for building relationships with our colleagues and business partners. A relaxed environment increases morale, and yes, there are plenty of jokes that are entirely workplace appropriate. However, something that one person finds humorous can be humiliating or harassing to others.

So what constitutes a good joke? We must always ensure that our interactions are professional but fun and friendly, humour can bring with it the potential for misjudgement and misinterpretation. The basic rule is that any jokes, remarks or banter that might be offensive to another associate should be avoided. We need to recognise that our colleagues may have different views, feelings and levels of sensitivity about certain matters and banter is no excuse for making inappropriate comments. It doesn't matter if you didn't mean a joke to be offensive: it comes down to whether another person reasonably found it offensive.

Here are some common-sense rules that can be applied by us all when having a laugh at work:

- Steer well clear of jokes related to characteristics protected by RPM's Policies, these include age, disability, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation among others. These are often quite personal and emotive topics, and they are specifically protected by discrimination and harassment laws and our policy.
- Understand that people may be offended by certain jokes, even if they themselves are not the subject of the joke or don't have the characteristics being joked about themselves.
- Remember a one-off joke can constitute harassment.
- Read the room, is everyone joining in and having fun? Or is someone withdrawing, staying quiet or looking upset? Everyone has the opportunity to call out others in a respectful way if their jokes are going too far.
- Think about the context: do you already have a good relationship with that person? Are you joking one-on-one or is it in front of a group of people?
- Think about how a joke would sound if it was repeated back to you if a complaint was made, would you feel uncomfortable trying to justify it?
- Be careful with written communications, text messages etc. tone can be lost and easily misinterpreted. Always take a step back before hitting send.
- Don't use winking face emojis at work, they can be misinterpreted as inappropriate.

By following these best practices, it is entirely possible to laugh and joke at work without harassing one another. If you see or experience discrimination, harassment, or you see or hear inappropriate banter in the workplace, please immediately report it to a supervisor, Human Resources, the Legal and Compliance department, or call RPM's hotline.