

Visible tattoos in the workplace essay



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Visible Tattoos in the Workplace Stars, angels, and tribal tattoos are just a few of the most popular types of tattoos around today. Placement of tattoos varies from one person to the next. Placement can range from the arm to the leg, even the back is a recent favorite place. Tattoos have become a way for people to express themselves without saying a word.

Tattoos are so popular that one in 10 Americans has a tattoo, compared with one in 100 just three decades earlier. At one time tattoos were reserved for the biker, the rebellious child or the hell raiser, but today that is not the case. Now more people from doctors to stay-at-home parents have tattoos. Now many people in America have tattoos. When one goes to the office, that person in the next cubicle probably has one that no one ever knew about.

As tattoos grow into the workplace norm, the problem is that even though not all employers are accepting of visible tattoos on their employees, many companies are adjusting their dress code to address them because tattoos have become more mainstream in today's society. Reality shows and celebrities play a key role in the popularity of tattoos in America. Television programs like "Miami Ink" and "Inked" show the increasing popularity of tattoos to more everyday Americans. The tattoo artists on these shows talk to the people getting the tattoos. The people share their personal stories behind the reasons for the tattoos. These shows demonstrate that the types of people who are getting these tattoos range from the business type to the customer service professional.

The varying clientele on these shows demonstrates how people are placing tattoos in places on their body without fear of how it will affect their professional career. In the past when someone went and received a tattoo, one would put it so it could be hidden by the shirt and tie. Now tattoos are not hidden, they are displayed so everyone can see. Kohl (2008) discusses the results of a Pew Research Center study (2008), that an estimated 30 million to 40 million people have tattoos. With so many people having tattoos out there, it was only a matter of time before employers would have to address visible tattoos in the workplace. Thirty-three percent of Americans between 18 and 25 have tattoos and 40% of people between 26 and 40 as well (¶13).

With these numbers for tattooed Americans, it is a safe bet to say employers have employees with at least one. As the number of Americans with tattoos increase the popularity of them sometimes is still a question. Stereotyping people with visible tattoos is still an issue today. Harper (2008) discusses the findings of a study conducted by Brian Miller, who is a professor of management at Texas State University.

He completed a study that examined the downside of tattoos in the workplace. In Miller's study, which included a survey of 150 people some with tattoos and some without, he found that a majority were "put off by body art." The study states that: People would rather not work with someone who has visible body art in situations requiring face-to-face contact with customers, even if qualified for the job. Also, people do not want to share sales commission with body art wearers, concerned they will negatively impact their own job performance (¶10) Employers are no

exception when it comes to stereotyping people with visible tattoos. Some professions are more accepting of visible tattoos than others are. Those professions that it is seen as more acceptable are the ones that deal less with customer service (Norman, 2005).

The mentality with employers about customer service is that perception is reality. If the customer does not feel comfortable dealing with an employee with visible tattoos then he will go somewhere else, and employers are not willing to lose another customer. Visible tattoos are appearing more often at work. As these tattoos appear, they bring many legal questions for not only the person with the visible tattoo but the employer as well.

Employers must now adjust their dress code policies to include employees with visible tattoos. Walt Disney World, Sea World Orlando and Wal-Mart are just three examples of employers who have written policies that apply to visible tattoos (Mlodzik, 2007). In the article “ Discrimination Laws Under Fire from Tattoos, Piercings, and Makeup” David Barron, an attorney, recommends that employers seeking to avoid potential legal trouble take four actions: Have dress code policies reviewed by experienced labor and employment counsel to identify potential risk areas; identify any unequal burdens that the policies impose on males or females; determine whether those unequal burdens can be eliminated or minimized; identify what areas are critical to business operations, and those that are not (§16). Another issue that employers must address with visible tattoos comes from the determination of the purpose of the tattoo on the employee. Is the tattoo on the employees a statement of their personal religious practice, or just freedom of expression? This question must be answered to determine what

legal battle the employer might have. As the visible tattoo debate goes on employers continue to maintain written dress code policies that meet Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) standards.

Barron (2007) cites an example of a lawsuit filed in Washington Federal Court in 2006. The restaurant was sued for firing an employee who refused to cover visible tattoos which he claimed were a religious devotion. The restaurant claimed that its policy was essential to its family-friendly image. The court disagreed and awarded the employee a \$150, 000 settlement. Other possible liability issues arise when tattoos are not restricted but are found to be offensive by other employees.

Barron (2007) states, “ The best advice is, if the artwork wouldn’t be acceptable on a poster or a calendar in the store, it should be no more acceptable if visibly displayed on an employee’s arm (§11). The final question to this topic on visible tattoos is simple. What approach to visible tattoos in the workplace are employees and employers taking? First, the approach of the employee with visible tattoos, as Americans continue to get more visible tattoos, is the need to take steps to cover tattoos if policies address that. For example, Mlodzik (2008) states, “ The Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department requires that officers with tattoos cover them up while they are on duty (§12). ” The placement of new tattoos is something people take in to consideration when thinking about the workplace.

Employers have to take a different approach to visible tattoos in the workplace. As the search for qualified applicants becomes more difficult, employers have to look past the colorful arms and assess them for their

talent. Employers have to revamp their current dress code policies to address the growing trend of visible tattoos. As companies adjust policies they must ensure compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as well as equal enforcement of all violations of these policies.

Visible tattoos in the workplace is a topic that is here to stay, as the popularity of tattoos continues to rise with little signs of stopping. Employers must sit and debate the way to handle them equally and fairly towards all employees. Some companies revise their dress codes to include them as acceptable, while others chose to revise their dress codes to include rules for covering them up. As long as perception is reality to the employer the best way to handle visible tattoos is left up to them. Employees have to accept these rules as long as employers meet all laws and treat all employees uniformly on all policies. So remember these things when sitting in the chair at the tattoo shop, just like the one seen on television, trying to decide to get the skull or flower, think to yourself what will happen when I go to work tomorrow? The answer to the question should be part of the decision on where to place the tattoo.

Tattoos are everywhere. Do not let the ink on the person discriminate against the talent that could be displayed. References Are Tattoos Here to Stay?. 2001, March 15).

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