

# Matt Lauer Too? Unlike Cats, VIPs No Longer Have Nine Lives

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Accusers of Harvey Weinstein were catalysts for an important national dialogue on sexual harassment. Weinstein's company reportedly knew of his behavior and settled multiple harassment claims against the former mogul. By all appearances, it was then business as usual. Until, that is, an accuser went public and other victims shared their experiences with Weinstein and other entertainers, politicians, and public figures, including celebrity chef John Besh.

Weinstein was not even the first heavy hitter in recent times to be accused. Prominent women in journalism have spoken out about their experiences with perpetually misbehaving bigshots who, for decades, continued to harass without penalty. But, in the case of Weinstein, victims offered graphic details. And, it's unfortunate that it mattered, but many of the accounts came from respected celebrities, and they were so numerous they became impossible to ignore.

The country took note — as did NBC. After witnessing the backlash that ensued from recent events, when NBC received a "detailed complaint" against Matt Lauer on Monday, it did not simply write a check and sweep it under the rug. Less than 48 hours after the complaint was made, the network fired Lauer, despite his *Today Show* fans, value to advertisers, and status as a 20-year employee. In a statement, NBC News' chairman affirmed the network's commitment to creating a workplace where its values apply "no matter who the offender."

No details of the accusation are public. However, big businesses that swiftly fire employees after harassment allegations typically have substantial evidence in hand, which is corroborated in some way. For example, the wrongdoer may admit misconduct. There may be email, text, or voice messages to the victim seeking asylum from misconduct. Photos or video may also exist. Businesses often review company records or the accused's emails to confirm a complaint. This approach is particularly true when the wrongdoer is top talent.

NBC News says this was the first complaint it received against Lauer and acknowledged there may be more. This statement was meant to differentiate NBC News from other companies that had excused misbehavior by their top talent. In light of the #metoo battle cry, NBC wants the public to know any other incidents are 'news to it too.'

All NBC News employees will likely read into this message. Some may hear, "I have been warned that sexual harassment is a serious offense and will be fired if I do it," while others probably hear, "It is safe to report harassers; my employer will do something to stop it." Communicating these messages should be a goal for every business.

After all, sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination, and illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Employers' best practices to extinguish sexual harassment in the workplace include: having Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies; training and retraining employees on these policies; empowering employees to report without fear of retaliation; and, enforcing consequences for policy violations even against rainmaking talent.

The consequences of harassment go beyond legal ramifications such as: federal or state agency investigations, lawsuits, awards of employee back pay, front pay, injunctive relief, emotional distress, punitive damages, attorneys' fees, and others that may vary by jurisdiction.

Businesses that do not enforce consequences at the top may damage their reputations. Potential and talented applicants may go to competitors because the business becomes known as a bad place to work. Businesses can lose vendors, advertisers, supporters, customer goodwill, and talented employees. Media coverage may fuel the damage.

NBC News' decision to terminate Lauer may be effective in staving off some of these intangible costs. Other employers are taking notes.

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