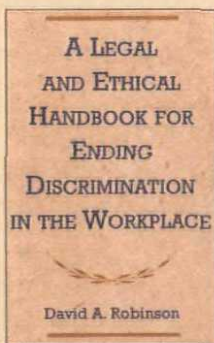


BOOK Reviews



A Legal and Ethical Handbook for Ending Discrimination in the Workplace

David A. Robinson

Paulist Press,
Mahwah, NJ, 2003,
101 pp., \$11.95
(paperback)

David A. Robinson has written a little book with a big goal—to end discrimination in the workplace by encouraging both employers and employees to change their way of thinking. His perspective is informed by practical experience. Robinson practices labor and employment law in Springfield, MA. He is also a senior lecturer in Western New England College's School of Business.

Robinson's primary audience is employers, but he has advice for employees, too. This blended audience, combined with the author's attempt to connect the topic of workplace discrimination with biblical teachings, makes his book rather unique. Robinson admits that the book is more legal than ethical. Although the legal information is necessarily limited because employment law varies slightly from state to state, the general advice (based primarily on federal law) will be helpful to employers.

The book is short and written in simple language that makes for easy reading for non-lawyers. Discrimination in the workplace means treating one employee less favorably than others because of his or her race, color, national origin, sex, age disability, or religion. Robinson covers all of these forms of discrimination, as well as sexual harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation (discrimination based on sexual orientation is illegal in 13 states). A chapter apiece is devoted to race discrimination, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. Discrimination based on religion, disability, and age is all covered in a single chapter. The author concludes with a chapter on discriminatory language.

Robinson begins by asserting that discrimination is forbidden not only by law but also by the Bible. Throughout the book, he cites Scripture passages and comments from several different Christian denominations to support this thesis. The connections he makes between

Scripture and discrimination law are mostly superficial and could be more theologically developed. Robinson concludes that if employers and employees will follow the Bible, they will follow the law.

The author suggests that employers should "try harder to be color-blind, gender-blind, age-blind, religion-blind, and national origin-blind when dealing with their employees." Alternatively, he urges employees to be the best they can be. Although he does suggest that diversity in the workplace is bad, he is generally not in favor of diversity training, believing that it can do more harm than good. He believes that diversity training does not encourage employers to be color-blind, gender-blind, and age-blind.

Although most of the material in this book is credible, some statements are highly questionable, if not ludicrous. For example, regarding gender discrimination, the author writes, "If women will display the same assertiveness and financial self-determination in dating and courtship as men do, women can end male domination in the workplace (and in life generally)." Unfortunately, this type of unrealistic oversimplification is apparent in several areas of the book.

The book's greatest value is in giving employers practical guidelines regarding behaviors that will limit their legal liability in the area of employment discrimination. However, it falls far short as an ethical handbook on employment discrimination in the workplace. The book has a simplicity that makes it accessible. But it adequately acknowledges neither the complexity of discrimination in the workplace nor—more importantly—its genuine causes and remedies.

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