

Best Practices to Foster Religious Coexistence in the Workplace

In the face of rising bias and hate, corporations, some of the most powerful forces in our society, have a vital role to play in fostering coexistence. Intolerance of religious minorities has been growing at an alarming rate in America. According to the [FBI](#), attacks motivated by bias or prejudice recently reached a 12-year high. Nearly 60% of religion-based hate crime in the U.S. targeted Jews and Jewish institutions, [more than any other religious group](#).

Companies should pay attention to religious coexistence, not only because of its social impact but because it affects business operations. Research shows companies with robust equity policies and practices generate greater worker productivity and increase talent retention. For example, employees at companies that provide flexible hours for religious observance are more than twice as likely to [look forward](#) to coming to work. Workers whose companies offer education programs, town hall forums, and leadership training around diversity and flexibility for religious practice report higher [job satisfaction](#). Companies that have supported religious coexistence are promoting worker productivity, by cultivating the best possible workplace environment for employees to thrive.

Corporations also face unique risks by failing to confront intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities. When Abercrombie & Fitch refused to hire a Muslim employee because she wore a hijab that conflicted with the company's "Look Policy," the Supreme Court [ruled](#) the company's choice unconstitutional. When Walmart [refused](#) a Seventh Day Adventist's request to avoid working from sundown on Fridays to sundown Saturdays so he could observe the Sabbath as his religion requires, the company faced a lawsuit from the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. And most recently, a jury [awarded](#) a dishwasher at the Conrad Hotel in Miami \$21 million after she was forced to work on the day of the week that she had repeatedly told management her religion precluded working.

But religious coexistence goes beyond just [antidiscrimination](#). Companies have an opportunity to use their power to foster religious coexistence, accommodate the needs of religious minorities, and help prevent further growth of bias and hate.

JLens Recommended Best Practices

Since 2019, JLens has been a leading voice on religious coexistence with corporations. Through extensive research and engagement with hundreds of companies over the past two years, JLens has identified a set of best practices for religious coexistence in the workplace:

- **Employee Resource Groups (ERG):** encourage faith-based and multicultural ERGs. These groups (most companies also have cultural- or ethnic-based groups as well) serve as a support mechanism for minority groups as well as an opportunity for employees of that group to organize together and strategize ways for the company as a whole to be more accommodating and embracing of diversity.
- **Anti-Discrimination:** affirm commitments to anti-discrimination in company policies including offering unconscious bias trainings to employees that highlight religious discrimination.
- **Products and Services:** create procedures to manage potential intolerance or bigotry in the corporation's products and services.
- **Floating Holidays:** provide employees with floating holidays to enable holiday leave (at least 3-5), and a clear process for taking additional holiday time off.
- **Dress Policies:** ensure that employee dress policies explicitly allow employees to dress according to religious imperatives.
- **Food Sensitivities:** Offer kosher, halal, or at minimum vegetarian meals in company cafeterias.
- **Prayer Space:** provide dedicated prayer or reflection spaces.

Companies should share these policies with their entire workforce and ensure they are consistent across managers, instead of placing the burden on an individual employee to negotiate and advocate with their manager for accommodation. To truly embody best practices, companies should disclose these policies publicly.

Ten Companies that Score Highly on Religious Coexistence

Through our advocacy and research, JLens has identified ten companies that have scored highly based on our recommended best practices.

Abbvie (ABBV):

Abbvie has a strong commitment to religious coexistence, as demonstrated by their very active ERGs and Company Communities. Recently, a Jewish Resource Committee was formed, which has already sponsored listening sessions and facilitated a communication sent out by Abbvie's Chief Equity Officer about Abbvie's strong stance against anti-semitism. This group has received an outpouring of support from Jewish employees as well as other employees at Abbvie. Additionally, Abbvie has put in place various best practices, like multi-faith prayer rooms across company offices.

Accenture (ACN)

Accenture provides technology, business and management consulting. The company maintains an active blog about religious coexistence, called Belief without Borders. Accenture exemplifies religious workplace inclusion with its Interfaith Employee Resource Group (ERG). As the company reported to JLens, “We have an interfaith employee resource group that is very powerful. Every religious alignment represented, including self-proclaimed atheists, and this group comes together to talk about commonalities and differences within the ERG.” Accenture offers generous PTO to employees as well as an additional floating holiday. Across its offices, Accenture ensures that dietary restrictions are accommodated for in its cafeteria and kitchen facilities and there are prayer and wellness spaces available.

Ball Corporation (BLL)

Ball provides metal packaging for beverages, foods and household products, as well as aerospace products and services. Ball Corp has served as a catalyst for creating Business Resource Groups within the company, including the active CARE multifaith Business Resource Group, “which seeks to promote and maintain awareness of the different religious cultures of Ball employees to improve inclusiveness and increase workplace diversity.” As primarily a manufacturing company, Ball does have a dress code, but this policy includes accommodations for religious requirements, such as beards or head coverings. The company also has prayer rooms globally, as well as food in all of its facilities that meet employees’ religious dietary requirements, and an internal portal called “Ball Connect” where employees can access holidays off as requested. Employees are all required to complete an ethics and compliance training which specifically includes religious discrimination. Additionally, Ball has implemented various professional, career retention leadership, and welcoming groups to retain and recruit diverse employees.

Biogen Inc (BIIB)

Biogen is a biotechnology company that produces various drugs used in the treatment of neurological diseases. Biogen is committed to providing kosher- and halal-certified food to employees who request it, and each of its offices has a Reflection Room which employees can use for prayer. The company offers four floating holidays to employees. Additionally, Mosaic, an active Employee Resource Group, is dedicated to celebrating multiculturalism and engages in interfaith work. Biogen remains committed to looking at diversity of patient populations so that they can continue to improve health outcomes in the disease areas they treat. To enhance clinical trials and drive health equity, Biogen is partnering with faith leaders in local communities.

Cigna (CI)

Cigna is an insurance and healthcare company. Cigna demonstrates a number of best practices around religious coexistence, including prayer and wellness rooms throughout their offices. Cigna has a publicly-communicated Dress for Your Day policy, and as a result of JLens' advocacy efforts, Cigna made explicit that this policy applies to employees who seek to dress according to their religious imperatives. In 2019 Cigna launched UpLift, an interfaith Employee Resource Group focused on increasing awareness of faith-based resources at the company and creating an inclusive community for people of all faiths. Cigna mandates unconscious bias training for all employees.

Cisco Systems (CSCO)

Cisco develops and manufactures technology services and products. Cisco offers reflection rooms across campuses that are intended for quiet reflection or prayer and are available to all employees as well as contingent workers and guests. Cisco's internal website has a published list of reflection room locations. Additionally, spaces for prayer and reflection are available at large annual company events. The company offers two floating holidays and has kosher, vegetarian, and halal food in its cafeterias. Cisco has an active Interfaith Network that aims to celebrate, educate, support, and respect the inclusion of employees of all faiths. The company has a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, and Cisco representatives shared that "as people continue to be unfairly targeted for their race, orientation, beliefs and other factors, we take a stand and speak out to support our people inside and outside the workplace."

CVS Corporation (CVS)

CVS Health, a healthcare company, shared its commitment to religious coexistence with JLens as "ingrained in our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion policies, practices and programs." CVS offers employees 2-4 floating holidays (on top of core holidays), has a uniform dress code that provides accommodations for religious beliefs, and makes available kosher, halal, and vegetarian meal options at corporate cafeterias and events. The company has an active, 3,000-member faith-based employee resource group known as FAITH. Every year, the group hosts a webinar for the CVS Health Merchandising Team to promote understanding of how religious differences affect employee/customer relationships, as well as other trainings specific to healthcare about how religion plays a role for patients in terms of acceptance of drugs and dietary requirements. The company also has a nondiscrimination commitment that prohibits profiling customers and suppliers based on religious identity, and mandates unconscious bias training for all employees.

Fifth Third Bancorp (FITB)

Fifth Third Bank encourages religious coexistence through its support of local groups and partnerships with the communities in which it operates. The company provides

dedicated prayer and wellness rooms that are available to employees without reservations, and kosher, halal, and vegetarian food at its cafeterias. Fifth Third explicitly directs managers to make reasonable accommodations for dress directly related to employees' religion, ethnicity, or disabilities. As of July 2020, Fifth Third launched mandatory unconscious bias training and included this training as part of its onboarding program.

Mastercard Inc (MA)

Mastercard is a global financial services company that has demonstrated a deep commitment to religious coexistence. The company stands out with its Inclusive leadership training to address underlying bias for all 20,000 employees. Mastercard has a flexible workplace dress policy, and the company's CEO, a Sikh, wears a turban and religious jewelry, setting an example of religious dress inclusivity. The company has a flexible PTO policy to accommodate religious holidays, and provision of five days of personal time off aside from vacation. There is also a robust selection of vegetarian, kosher, halal, or vegan food in the company's cafeterias, and when there is food at workplace events dietary preferences are taken into account. Additionally, Mastercard offers "huddle rooms" for private reflection or prayer in all of its offices.

PPG Industries (PPG)

PPG is a global supplier of paints, coatings, optical products, and specialty materials. Recently, the company added additional floating holidays (three in total), has outlined policies that allow employees to dress in accordance to religious imperatives, and is exploring moving forward with a faith-based ERG. Headquartered in Pittsburgh, PPG was close to the scene of the Tree of Life synagogue shooting. PPG's CEO and Chairman, Michael McGarry, sent a message to all employees expressing support for the Pittsburgh Jewish community as well as a donation to the affected community.