

Responsible bystanders need “receptivity” from organizations and communities

The public image of bystanders is that they are “do-nothings.” In real life bystanders help in dozens of effective ways, many of which can be supported by managers and authorities. Table One tells the tale.

This article reflects on hundreds of bystander stories about why they did not—or did—take helpful actions, in real life, with respect to unacceptable behavior.

Bystanders often have multiple, conflicting, idiosyncratic, and changeable motivations and are very strongly influenced by context. They face many barriers and dilemmas, and may need confidential and customized support to act or come forward about illegal behavior.

Effective support requires a coordinated systems approach—which requires resources. Providing confidential resources helps make a complaint system “*receptive*.”

Bystanders—and the bystanders of bystanders—ask for options; confidential resources can help. For example, there are many ways to get information about potential and real violations to managers and authorities, in addition to formal reports and in addition to tip lines.

Bystander training is developing fast. *Training managers—about receiving and becoming* active bystanders—is essential for an effective system.

Effective and receptive systems also need significant resources for investigations. Fair, prompt, independent, competent investigations are a major challenge for organizations and communities.

The nation needs a bystander research agenda. For example:

- a) how do bystanders react to behavior they perceive to be *exemplary*?
- b) do bystanders become more effective in response to systems that *focus major resources on respectful, kind and affirmative behavior*?
- c) what do we need to know about bystanders causing harm, inadvertently or intentionally?

