



NEW YORK
CITY BAR

Office for Diversity

Religion in the Workplace
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Statistics about Religion in the U.S.:

The American Religious Survey (ARIS) was conducted in 2001, with a sample size of 50,000 Americans.

Key findings from this study:

- The number of adults that identify themselves as *nonreligious/secular* has increased 110% from 1990 to 2000.
- *Islam* – increased 109%
- *Buddhism* – increased 170%
- *Hinduism* – increased 237%

The National Survey of Religious Identification (NSRI), a scientific nationwide survey of 113,000 Americans conducted in 1990 asked about religious preference. (http://adherents.com/rel_USA.html)

Top Ten Largest Religions in the United States, 1990
(self-identification, NSRI)

Religion	Estimated Adult Pop.	Estimated % of Adult Pop
Christianity	151,225,000	86.2%
Nonreligious	13,116,000	7.5%
Judaism	3,137,000	1.8%
Agnostic	1,186,000	0.7%
Islam	527,000	0.5%
Unitarian Universalist	502,000	0.3%
Buddhism	401,000	0.4%
Hinduism	227,000	0.2%
Native American Religion	47,000	0.03%
Scientologist	45,000	0.03%

A recent Gallup poll found that 38% of Americans identify themselves as “Born-again Christians.”

Increase of Religious Issues in the Workplace:

“Religion in the Workplace: The growing presence of spirituality in Corporate America.” *Businessweek Online*, 1999. http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99_44/b3653001.htm

According to a recent Gallup poll, 95% of Americans say they believe in God or a universal spirit, and 48 % say they talked about their religious faith at work that day.

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported in March 2005 that religion-based charges have increased 27% across five years and 40% in the past decade. This makes religion-based complaints the third-fastest-growing claim, after sexual harassment and disability.

Recommendations for employers:

“Religion in the Workplace.” *BSR Issue Briefs*, March 2005.
<http://bsr.org/CSRResources/issuesbriefdetail.cfm?documentID=50900>.

Learn about the religious beliefs and practices of employees in your company as well as legal requirements against religious discrimination.

Become familiar with key holidays of employees that may command adherence to fasting, changing diets, praying or other conduct that could affect their life during work hours

Review company policies and practices – look for clauses that might unwittingly discriminate against some employees’ religious practices. For example, if a company dress code prohibits head coverings, robes, long hair, beards, religious symbols and other outward expressions of faith, it may be appropriate to consider whether the dress code is justified by business necessity

Craft guidelines so that they apply equally to religious and nonreligious employees. For example, rather than granting employees time off or flexibility solely for religious holidays, policies should be developed for any personal need. This ensures that individuals who do not take time off for religious purposes will not feel treated unfairly.

Make it known to employees that your company will make reasonable efforts to accommodate their religious practices and expression. Include such information in employees orientation materials as well as periodically in other employee communications

Leadership Examples:

“Religion in the Workplace.” *BSR Issue Briefs*, March 2005.

<http://bsr.org/CSRResources/issuesbriefdetail.cfm?documentID=50900>.

Reebok is among several companies taking a nonreligious approach. In addition to vacation and company holidays, employees are allowed two “floating” days off – special times that they can take off whenever they designate. As a company that does business in 140 countries, Reebok strives to be sensitive to the traditions of other cultures. During the December holidays, for example, the company shuns traditional green and red decorations for blue and silver ones (representing Reebok’s corporate colors) and adorns the lobby with decorations featuring concepts common to most cultures and religions: humanity, tolerance, faith, caring, teamwork, and the like. The company strives to take the focus away from any specific religion and recognizes instead the spirit of the season.

Texas Instruments has taken a number of steps to address issues of religion in the workplace. It has included statements about religion in its equal employment opportunity policy, its corporate code of ethics and its workplace diversity trainings. The company offers Serenity Rooms or quiet spaces that employees can use for prayer or personal reflection. The company also recently sanctioned two religious employees affinity groups – the Christian Values Initiatives and the Muslim Employees Initiative – among other diverse affinity groups such as the Black Employee Initiative.