



## Retaliation Focus Group Questions:

**Note:** The questions below have been developed to assist leaders in identifying and understanding the impacts of retaliation within the organization. Select those that fit to your situation and modify or add to them as desired.

### **Introduction:**

*Facilitator note: A gap in understanding and/or perception may exist between a more socially accepted understanding of retaliation and retaliation as defined by the Department of Defense (DoD). Though not all retaliatory behaviors meet the DoD's criteria for retaliation, they are still damaging to individuals, teams, and the overall organization and should be addressed proactively.*

- How do you define retaliation?
- How does your understanding of retaliation compare with the DoD's definition of retaliation?
- Who can experience retaliation?
- Does your organization foster a fear of retaliation? If so, how?
- What factors might contribute to someone being fearful to report retaliation?
- Does a fear of retaliation inhibit others from reporting criminal or harassment activity?
- What actions/behaviors do you believe constitute retaliation?
- Are you comfortable in expressing concerns in your organization? If yes, what contributes to this feeling? If no, what prohibits you from doing so?
- Does a fear of retaliation hinder/hold back others in the organization? If yes, what contributes to these feelings? If no, what is currently being done that eliminates this fear?
- Does your organization hold leaders accountable for retaliatory behaviors?
- What does it mean to hold leaders accountable regarding retaliation prevention?

### **Risk Factors:**

*Facilitator Note: An organization that promotes competitiveness between peers without regard for individual improvement is an environment where retaliatory behaviors are likely to occur (Melgar et al., 2021; Meyer & Zelin, 2019). Additionally, leaders who experience uncertain or high-stress environments are likelier to exhibit negative emotions toward subordinates (Kakarika et al., 2022), which can lead subordinates to be more reactive and exhibit retaliatory behaviors towards leaders or peers (Kim & Shapiro, 2008).*

*Retaliation against reporting sexual assault in the military is especially troublesome. Just 27 percent of sexual assault survivors file official reports with their chains of command, according to Farris et al. (2021) and the fear of retaliation may play a huge factor. An earlier report suggested that 52 percent of survivors who filed a report said that they experienced retaliation (Jaycox et al., 2014). Retaliation is a particular risk when the perpetrator has authority over the victim via the chain of command, when the assault was part of a hazing ritual, if there was more than one assailant, or if any of the parties were consuming alcohol at the time of the assault (Farris et al., 2021).*

- Does your working environment, or your supervisor, promote a high level of competitiveness between peers? If yes, how do they demonstrate this?
- Does your working environment, or your supervisor, promote personal and professional growth and development equally among all individuals?
- Do you work in a high stress environment?





- If yes, how do deal with this stress?
- Does your leader contribute to or decrease this stress? In what ways?
- Are you comfortable turning to your leader for support in stressful situations? Why or why not?
- Does the climate in your work environment support reporting sexual assault incidents or other serious crimes without a fear of retaliation?
- What steps can be taken to discourage retaliation...
  - in the workplace environment?
  - outside of work?
- What actions can you take to increase the likelihood that service members will feel that they will be supported (and not be retaliated against) if they report an assault or other serious crime?
- How would you intervene if you suspected that someone was experiencing retaliatory behaviors?

### **Individual Experiences:**

- Can you share a specific example of when you experienced retaliation, or when you witnessed retaliation against another person?
  - If yes, what behaviors did you observe?
  - Were the retaliation addressed? If so, by whom and how did they address it? If not, why not?
- Have you witnessed behaviors such as bullying, ostracism/exclusion, or the sabotage of team members by peers or leaders?
  - Have any of these behaviors been directed at yourself?
- Have you ever refrained from reporting an issue for fear of retaliation? What were the reasons for not reporting the issue?
- How did retaliation, or a fear of it, affect your job performance or work environment?
- Have you ever felt compelled or pressured into participating in retaliatory behaviors against another individual?
  - If so, what factors influenced this feeling or perception?
  - Did you act on them? If so, why did you? What influenced you most?
  - If not, how did you stand up against it? Did you experience any negative feedback or consequences for taking a stand and not participating?

### **Impacts:**

**Facilitator Note:** Retaliation often results in counterproductive work behaviors such as shaming, ostracizing or otherwise punishing someone who filed a complaint or reported unwanted behavior. Counterproductive work behavior are, by definition, contrary to the organization's interests and serve to undermine trust, job satisfaction, and productivity (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). A leader's role in endorsing or failing to address retaliatory behaviors can determine an organizational climate that condones or discourages retaliation (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019).

- Have you witnessed counterproductive work behaviors that were associated with retaliation?
  - If so, what were these behaviors?
  - How did this affect productivity?
  - How did this affect team cohesion?





- Have you ever taken part in counterproductive work behaviors?
  - If so, why?
  - What motivated you to engage in those behaviors?
- Do your leaders endorse, or support of retaliatory actions through the organization's culture?
  - If so, how?
  - What specific ways does your leader convey these expectations or support for retaliatory behaviors?
  - What specific behaviors do your leaders express that make you feel they support retaliation in the workplace?
- Do you feel comfortable going to your leader regarding disagreements or concerns in the workplace?
  - If so, what does the leader do to make you feel comfortable?
  - If not, what specific behaviors or actions does your leader display to make you feel uncomfortable?
- Do you feel comfortable going to your peers about concerns or differences in perspectives?
  - If so, in what ways do your peers offer support?
  - If not, what specific behaviors or actions do your peers display that make you feel unsupported?

**Additional Factors:**

- Do you feel safe reporting retaliation?
- What can leaders do to help foster a safe reporting environment?
- Are you aware of your organization's policies on retaliation/where to go to report?
- Do you find current policies and procedures effective?
  - If yes, what makes them effective?
  - If no, why not?
- Are retaliatory behaviors currently affecting your organization?
  - If yes, how?
- Do leaders support and encourage others to report retaliatory behaviors?
  - If yes, how do they show support?
  - If no, why do you think they don't?





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