

When a company receives a report of wrongdoing from an anonymous reporter, either through a company hotline, by telephone, letter or through any other anonymous reporting mechanism, the allegation must be reviewed. Considering that the reporter is usually the first person to be interviewed, however, the anonymous report can pose some difficulties.

While anonymity can protect someone who is making a false report, it's important not to assume that the report is unfounded just because the reporter doesn't want to be identified. There are many reasons a reporter may wish to be anonymous, and an anonymous report may be as valid as one with an identified reporter.

Reasons for Reporting Anonymously

- Lack of trust that management will do anything
- Fear of being seen by others as a "snitch"
- Relationship with the implicated person
- The reporter is making the report on behalf of someone else.

- Fear of retaliation from the implicated person
- Fear that reporters may implicate themselves in the wrongdoing

Never actively try to identify an anonymous reporter.

Your process will be undermined if people believe they will be identified. Remember that the identity of the reporter is not as important as the information they offer.

Look to find credible information to support the report.

1. If the report is via a hotline, you may be able to invite the reporter to call you anonymously or post questions for the reporter in the application.

2. If the reporter identifies specific employees, speak to them about the report. However, use caution so as not to make it appear that you seek to identify the reporter.

3. Check with department heads or Human Resources to see if they have any knowledge about the subject matter of the report.

NOTE:

A reporter is only one source of information, even if anonymous. You need the reporter to give you facts, to explain how they know the facts, and ways to corroborate them. The identity of the reporter is not as critical.

Meric Craig Bloch is the Principal of Winter Compliance LLC, a consulting practice helping organizations create effective internal investigations programs through investigation process design, investigator training and investigations management. He is a published author and sought-after speaker on conducting effective workplace investigations. To contact Meric, visit his author page at <http://www.i-sight.com/meric-bloch>