

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Why We're the "Frumpy" Angel's Biggest Fans

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Why has Susan Boyle, the 47-year-old Scottish lass, so completely captured our attention and our hearts? Though Ray and I listened twice (through YouTube, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lp0IWv8QZY>) to her extraordinarily beautiful rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" the night it arrived in my e-mail, I want to listen to it again and again. Each time a reference to her pops up in my CNN.com news briefs, I check in to see what delightful tidbit is now being revealed about the unassuming, never-been-kissed, singing phenomenon.

But why are we all making such a big fuss over her? Is it not because we all identify with Susan, and our souls leap with excited recognition of our own desire to be given not only the chance to shine but also the experience of having our standing ovation recorded and watched by millions of people worldwide, thus ending our obscurity and loneliness? Don't all of us feel certain that there are others out there who think we're common, unimportant, unattractive, and not to be taken seriously, and that when Susan Boyle embarrassed the doubters by proving their smug judgments dead wrong, that we felt fully vindicated? When she won, we won.

Wasn't it also Susan's unpolished nature and simplicity of spirit, so contrary to the star quality of her judges, and of all of the government, sports, and entertainment stars that dominate the attention of our daily lives today, that made her our David slaying the Goliath of "specialness?"

Consider what our reactions to the YouTube recording of Susan's great moment might have been had we not seen her interviewed in advance by the hosts of the show, nor watched the incredulous, impatient, and scoffing non-verbal responses of the judges and of the audience? Would we have taken her under our wing and experienced her as anything other than an extraordinary voice had we not seen the context of her singing?

And what would we think of Susan Boyle if we passed her in the grocery store, stood behind her in the Post Office, or knew only that she was an unemployed, middle-aged, church-going spinster had we never heard her sing? Would we imagine that she could make us cry by opening her mouth and sharing her talent? Don't we love her so dearly because she is much more than meets the eye and so too are we, unless of course we're pretending to be more than we are?

As Directors of Diversity and Inclusion struggle to effectively make the business case for the corporate mantra of valuing diversity, they need to do nothing more than share the experience of Susan singing on Britain's Got Talent, and the comments of the judges about their shortsightedness and about an impending lucrative record deal. The Diversity Directors can also show the senior executives and all of their employees the YouTube recordings of other contestants of the television program who have stunned the judges and the audience because their appearance belied their skills. Paul Potts, the heavy-set mobile phone salesman with the crooked teeth and the baggy suit, and Connie Talbot, the six-year-old girl missing her two front teeth, both were greeted by the judges and members of the audience with looks of disdain but nevertheless conquered the cynicism with angelic

voices and found homes in the hearts of millions of people globally. How many people in the workplace aren't given the chance to succeed because the way they look, speak, or get from place to place doesn't have the markings of stardom? Does the cream always rise to the top, or does it sometime require that we shake up our attitudes to allow it to rise?

When people walk past me on the street, refusing to respond to the "good morning," or the smile, I sometimes comfort my loneliness by thinking, "It's your loss." When I'm dismissed socially by some gay men because my body doesn't sexually arouse them, by some lesbian women simply because I'm male, or by some heterosexuals solely because I'm gay, I take refuge in the awareness that I'm a kind, thoughtful, smart, generous, and sometimes funny person who they won't ever have the chance to know, nor have their lives enhanced by my skills. Knowing that is how I feel is exactly the reason why I say "hello" to, and share a smile with, homeless people, grocery store baggers, garbage collectors, children, the elderly, black, Asian, Latino, and Indian people, ticket takers, popcorn vendors, foreigners, and anyone else who I sense might feel isolated and unappreciated because of their packaging.

When asked by Simon Cowell, the scariest but wisest judge on what constitutes "talent," why she hadn't pursued her dream of being a star like her idol Elaine Paige, Susan explained that she hadn't been given the chance before. That's all that any of us wants is a chance—a chance to test ourselves, a chance to let people know who we really are, a chance to shine. Only the tiniest number of us will ever be the subject of positive international attention, but we don't need to have the world know our name in order for us to feel fulfilled. All we need is the opportunity, that even just one other person can provide us, that allows us to be seen for who we are and not how we appear.

Thank you, Susan Boyle, for being "gobsmacked" by this experience. Like Barack Obama, and the young hero of Slum Dog Millionaire, you represent the aspirations of billions of people in the world at this time.

When asked how she felt when confronted with the unwelcoming sneers prior to her performance, Susan said that she thought, "I'll show them. So I did."

When asked how she felt since being "discovered," she replied, "I won't be lonely. I certainly won't be lonely anymore."