

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Please Don't be Offended, but You're a Hypocrite

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Did you hear the one about the Scientologist, the Mormon, and the Pakistani Shia, who stood with their Roman Catholic colleague at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) having "several friendly conversations with un-offended co-workers" regarding their beliefs?

The Scientologist was explaining his Church's belief that seventy-five million years ago the galactic ruler Xenu brought billions of people to earth, stacked them around volcanoes and blew them up with hydrogen bombs. He also said that his Church disapproved of homosexuality and has fought gay marriage.

The Mormon, in a very friendly way, so as not to offend her colleague, told him that the story he told was "suspect" because the earth wasn't that old, and according to her faith, God the Father and Jesus told 15-year-old Joseph Smith, Jr., in the early 1800s, who at the time was helping a traveling magician use "Peep" stones to find buried treasure in farmers' fields, that all creeds other than hers were an abomination. "But," she added, "we don't approve of homosexuality either and were very involved in the defeat of gay marriage in California."

The Pakistani Shia grimaced in a friendly way so as not to offend his Mormon co-worker, and said, "We also believe that every religion other than ours is wrong. We also believe that wives should not leave their homes to work, to be educated, or to go to a doctor's appointment without the permission of their husband, who also has the legal right to rape them at home. But, like you, we too think that homosexuality is an abomination unto God and is punishable by death."

The Roman Catholic who was gay and not yet out to his co-workers, said "When I was in school, we actually prayed during class time for all of you so that you might become Catholic and be spared the horrors of hell." But he said nothing about his deeply hurt feelings about their negative beliefs about homosexuality. As a result, he found it impossible to focus attention on his job that day. How he wished, as depressed, angry, and distracted as he felt, that he didn't have to pilot the afternoon flight of his Scientologist, Mormon, and Shia colleagues to visit another FAA site.

If you think the story is tragic rather than funny, chances are you probably won't get a kick out of the fact that a U.S. District Court in Georgia has just ruled in favor of a supervisor who had been disciplined by the FAA for discussing his religious views on homosexual behavior with colleagues at work. The man, Larry Dombrowski, has had his record cleared, and has had all of his legal fees paid by the government. The FAA, in compliance with the agreement, also distributed a memo titled Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Expression in the Workplace, a 1997 document issued by the White House that says federal agencies "shall permit personal religious expression by Federal employees to the greatest extent possible, consistent with requirements of law and interests in workplace efficiency." I don't know if the decision will be appealed, but it's obvious that the Obama administration needs to clarify the meaning of the 1997 document.

It was a press release from the archconservative Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) about the decision that said Dumbrowski had been misjudged for “several friendly conversations he had with un-offended co-workers about his Christian beliefs.” The ADF describes itself as “a legal alliance of Christian attorneys and like-minded organizations defending the right of people to freely live out their faith...to protect and preserve religious liberty, the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family.”

Despite the ADF’s claims that it was “a friendly conversation he had with un-offended co-workers” I can’t imagine how hearing a supervisor at work talk about how his or her faith condemns homosexual behavior would be anything but disruptive. Would the ADF also be willing to defend my right as a person raised Catholic to say at work that my religion teaches that those religious fanatics who quote the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Koran, or the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard to judge others are, in the words of Jesus, hypocrites?

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (NIV, Matthew 23:27-28)

If I said that at work, do you think I too would be protected by the 1997 White House document, especially if it was in a friendly conversation with un-offended co-workers? It’s just my personal religious expression and that of Jesus too.

Despite the ruling of the U.S. District Court, no person in the workplace should be allowed to cite their religious beliefs to put down or make judgments on any other person in the workplace. It is disruptive and counterproductive.