

# Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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## What Stories Does Your Elf Tell?

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Chippey is Santa's eyes and ears. He's an elf on a shelf, and he comes in white and black. There are also female elves, but at the moment there are no Asian or Latino elves to report back to Santa on who has been naughty or nice. I suspect there are no transgender elves for sale yet either but, given his outfit, I'd say Chippey has some sugar in his tank.

I learned about the elf on a shelf from a friend who has young nieces and nephews. Her sister told her of how hard it is to keep moving the elf to a new hiding place each night when the kids are asleep. You see, if you buy the *Elf on the Shelf* book, adopt a sleeping elf, and read the book out loud to your children, the elf comes alive, and flies back to the North Pole every night. When it returns to the house before dawn, it plays hide and seek with the children. The magic lasts only if you don't touch the elf. Apparently that just applies to the kids, because how is Chippey supposed to move around the house if Mom and Mom (or Dad) doesn't touch him?

My lesbian friend's spouse hadn't heard of the elf on the shelf either, despite its manufacturer insisting that it's already a Christmas tradition. She, on the other hand, recalled for us the Christmas morning when she was four years old, and how she saw Santa when she opened her eyes. He was standing at the end of her bed, and she quickly squeezed her eyes closed so as not to see him. She knew that if she saw Santa, he would go away without leaving toys. After a few seconds of keeping her eyes squeezed tight, she opened one, saw Santa again, and squeezed them closed. After a while, her parents came in wondering why she wasn't up yet on Christmas morning. They helped her to see that it wasn't really Santa at the end of her bed but just a big Santa blow up doll.

The same day I learned about the elf on the shelf, and how one should squeeze their eyes shut if they think they see Santa, I got a letter from my 80-year-old, dear friend in prison. He was in a good mood when he wrote, which made Ray and me happy. We worry about him a lot, fearing how he is treated. He and we have accepted that he will probably die in prison, despite his elf on the shelf telling Santa how good he is. After spending his lifetime as a priest who had a special knack for reaching people who lived on the periphery, he helps the others in the protective custody unit be calmer and happier men.

There are no chimneys in prison for Santa to come down with a bag full of presents. Nothing is allowed to be sent in as a gift. But that doesn't mean Santa doesn't have his list of who has been naughty and who has been nice in the last year, and who deserves rewards. He has elves everywhere that come in all forms: white, black, yellow, brown, gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, transgender, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jew, atheist, and agnostic. We elves have all paid visits to people in prison, in hospitals, in war zones, in foster homes, in rectories, in gyms, in bars, in locker rooms, in high-end high-rises and in homeless shelters, and we've written in our hearts our impressions of who has been naughty or nice in 2011.

Some of the things we've learned from our observations of others, and that we've communicated to Santa, is that there are good deeds done in places where we put people we think are naughty, and there are bad deeds done in places occupied by people who claim to be nice. Being rich doesn't mean you'll be naughty. Being poor doesn't mean you'll be nice. Everyone is capable of being naughty or nice regardless of where they sleep at night. We all choose our behaviors. We decide daily whether we want to behave in ways that are good or bad.

All of us are elves who move around a lot, playing hide and seek with naughty and nice in ourselves and in others. Perhaps we all would behave better if we believed there was an elf on the shelf watching us daily, and reporting back every night to the big guy what we did each day. What we forget is that we actually are being watched, and our deeds are noted, not by Chippey, who will lose his magic if touched, but by the angels and elves in our lives who hunger to be touched by kindness when we're in the kitchen, check out of the grocery store, drive down the street, answer the phone, talk about religion and politics, play games, do our work, and serve food in the prison cafeteria. Nothing we say or do is forgotten.

And there's something else that we elves and angels have learned. If you see Santa, or what you think is Santa, don't close your eyes. Goodness doesn't disappear when it's seen. It grows. That's something to remember as we get ready to make our choices to be naughty or nice to ourselves and to others in 2012.