

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Why We Care

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Carol Jean Lucke and Jessica Cummins were married Friday afternoon in Decorah, Iowa. They met at a management retreat. Ms. Lucke, a divorcee, was attracted to Ms. Cummins from the start but was also seeing someone else. "I looked at her and thought she was adorable," she said. Ms. Lucke and her partner then invited Ms. Cummins and her partner to dinner, but it never occurred because Ms. Cummins and her partner broke up. Carol Jean and Jessica then became friends and after a few years, Ms. Cummins proposed to Ms. Lucke, who gave Ms. Cummins her mother's diamond in a pendant. "I just want to spend the rest of my life making you happy," she said.

Barbara Burke and Robert Cullinane were married Thursday at a hotel in Rhinebeck, New York. But who cares? They're a cute, older couple, and I hope they had a wonderful wedding. I want them to be very, very happy for the rest of their lives, but when I'm scanning the Weddings/Celebrations pages in the Lifestyle section of Sunday's *The New York Times*, my eyes only settle on the faces of same sex couples, unless the heterosexual groom is very handsome. That leaves Barbara and Robert very low on my list of interests.

We care about what we know, and we want other people to care as much or as little as we do.

When my first book on gay issues was published, my father wrote a note to me that read, "Got your book, found it interesting. When are you going to write about something else?" He didn't care about gay issues at the time, and didn't want me to care about them as much as I did. But 30 years later, I'm still writing about gay issues, because that's what I care about.

We care about the people, places, and things that touch our lives deeply. For instance, if you have been to Egypt, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, or Haiti, and had positive, memorable experiences in those countries, you will probably care a lot more about what is going on in those places than people who have never traveled there. We all read the same newspaper accounts of world events, but we have different reactions based upon our personal experiences.

Two friends and I were talking about transgender issues recently, and one very thoughtful, caring man said, "I just can't get my arms around it. I understand it biologically, but not personally."

"Do you have any transgender friends?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

"That's why you can't get your arms around the issue. I have lots of friends who are transsexual, and because of them, I get it."

Our conversation followed my telling them how hard I was working to get transgender people on the Board of Directors and the Board of Advisors of The Stonewall National Museum & Archive in Ft. Lauderdale. When you know transgender people personally (Christine, Michael, Seth, Joanne, Mary Ann, Stephanie, Jamison, Jackie, and Ari, among others) you not only "get" them, but you also get why it's so important to have their voices clearly heard in every community endeavor, be it on an organization's Board of Directors or in a corporate Employee Resource Group. When we say, "I care," it means that we give it our attention.

But don't we have to care about everyone? Some of us do, such as corporate Directors of Human Resources, and of Diversity and Inclusion, priests, doctors, rabbis, and police officers, among others. They're paid or ordained to do so. But the rest of us are free to choose where we want to put our attention—with Carol Jean and Jessica, or with Barbara and Robert.

Years ago, one of my mentors, Sol Gordon, in response to hearing me say that art museums overwhelm me, and actually made me feel tired, said, "Wisdom is knowing what to overlook." His sage counsel enabled me to let go of my assumption that I needed to see and appreciate every painting, and be able to identify the work of every major artist. As a result, art museums became a lot more fun for me because I focused my time on the types of paintings that I cared about. The same now also holds true for what interests me in the newspaper.

What is happening throughout the world, particularly the events that impact the safety, freedom, and health of other people, is of enormous importance to all of us because we are one large family living on a single planet. What happens to any of us impacts what happens to all of us. But none of us can respond effectively to all of what is happening to others in the world. We have to pick and choose what is important to us. That's true in deciding whether to donate all of your available dollars to create a well in an African village, or to correct the cleft palate of a child in Indonesia. We have to choose. What we choose—charities, causes, politicians, wedding announcements—is what we care most about. Being able to make such choices is wisdom. We also need to allow others to choose what interests them, such as gay and transgender rights.

Two-thirds of my life has been focused on gay people. The plight of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people trumps all other issues for me—the economy, health care, foreign policy, the Oscar race, etc. It's not the only focus of my life, but it's the primary one. If possible, I watch movies and television programs, and read books that feature positive gay characters. I buy products from companies that generously and proudly support gay issues. I drink my decaf, skinny, double mocha, iced latte in places where other people share my interests and values.

My second tier of concern and interest involves the welfare of other minorities, particularly those with whom I have a personal relationship, such as transgender men and women, blacks, Latinos, Asians, heterosexual women, and people with disabilities, especially little people.

Ray and I buy breakfast for children with AIDS in Africa, animals for villages in Central America, smiles for youngsters throughout the world, and supplies for Doctors Without Borders, but the bulk of our "Who Cares?" money goes to improving the plight of people like us. And that's okay.

I have no doubt that there were many readers of *The New York Times* who read the whole story on the marriage of Barbara Burke and Robert Cullinane. In fact, more people may have read about them than about Carol Jean Lucke and Jessica Cummins. But, it's not important to me what others find of interest. To each his, or her, own.