

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Cleaning Up Your Calling Card

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Many of us have had the experience of seeing a dog leave its calling card on the sidewalk and its owner thoughtlessly fail to clean it up. Then we watch people step into it, knowing that for the rest of the day the ill effects will be endured by others.

Sometimes the pile is small but nevertheless a nuisance, such as the one left this week by American Express, Booze Allen Hamilton, Chartis, and *The New York Times* in their 2,000 word promotion of "Leadership in Diversity and Inclusion" in this past Sunday's *The New York Times Magazine*. Not once did the author, Jason Forsythe, use the word "gay" in the very expensive advertising supplement. He used the acronym "LGBT" a couple of times, but most international readers of *The New York Times* do not know that LGBT means "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender". I am not an "LGBT". I am gay, and the impression given by the ad suggests that AE, BAH, C, and TNYT are too uncomfortable or embarrassed to say my name even in a piece touting their successful efforts at diversity and inclusion. They left a small pile, but lots of people will step in it, and track it home.

There are also really big piles left on the sidewalk, such as the announcement by the Reverend Terry Jones that he was going to burn a copy of the Koran. This pastor of a tiny congregation in Florida got international attention, thanks to the self-serving behavior of 24-hour news stations, and will undoubtedly be rewarded with a lucrative book offer. He has recently pledged that he would not burn the Koran, but his anti-Muslim bias, and his silly attempt at getting 15 minutes of fame has resulted in three deaths. Muslims across the world have stepped in the big mess that Jones made, and have rioted in protest.

One of my most frustrating life experiences is witnessing the injustice of innocent people paying for the crimes of others—children at the hands of pedophile priests, shoppers killed by a suicide bomber, and minorities emotionally and physically maimed by ignorant, frightened persons, including those posing as pastors or working as corporate managers.

In the gay community, one such ignorant, possibly frightened, person left his calling card in history in an op ed piece, entitled "Gay Revolutionary", published by the respected national, left of liberal periodical *Gay Community News*. It was called by the author, Michael Swift, a "cruel fantasy", "an eruption of rage" reaction to the Right Wing propaganda of a "gay agenda". In it, he suggested that the gay agenda means: "We will sodomize your sons... seduce them in your schools... they will come to crave and adore us."

Gay Community News should have cleaned up the mess immediately, but they defended it on the basis of First Amendment rights. As a result of their leaving the huge pile on the sidewalk, thousands of innocent gay people, young and old, have had their lives negatively impacted by the smearing of Swift's diatribe on national, state, and local discussion of everything from library books and bullying, to marriage and adoption. Its stench is even in the U.S. Congressional Record.

When an equally irresponsible and ignorant heterosexual plant manager decides to ignore policy and aggressively force on others his or her conservative religious beliefs, or a Human Resources professional defiantly clings to sexism and racism as his or her sole focus, or a managing director fails to discipline homophobic banter on the trading floor because "boys will be boys", or a Chief Executive Officer cuts funding for diversity training as soon as profits drop and belts need tightening, they leave their calling card in a corporation, and it is stepped into and carried into the lives of innocent gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people who simply want to work in an environment in which they feel safe and valued. It is irresponsible of the corporation not to clean up the messes before they ruin the days of others.

Attending to unwanted calling cards means keeping your eyes and ears open to what is going on, accepting responsibility to clean up after your behaviors, and proactively addressing the negative impact your bad behaviors have on others.