

TANENBAUM

CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP

TANENBAUM CENTER FOR INTERRELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING • AUGUST 2015

Marriage Equality is the Law of the Land. Now What?

Pride month is over, but that doesn't mean companies should wait another year to work on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion at work. During June, we heard from clients who were navigating backlash from religious employees who disagreed with their employers' LGBT inclusion campaigns both within their workplaces and the marketplace. When such conflicts arise, it sometimes seems tempting to simply ban religious conversations from the workplace. But this is not a viable solution.

Trying to silence a portion of your employee population will only lead to resentment and isolation. And it might not even be possible. Our nationally representative survey, ["What American Workers Really Think About Religion"](#) found that 15% of workers discuss religion with their coworkers at least a few times a week, and 22% share their beliefs or views about religion with coworkers at least once or twice a month. Given the diversity of corporate employees, the Supreme Court's recent landmark ruling on marriage equality predictably upset some of them, on the basis of religious beliefs or otherwise. But the reality is that many people of faith support marriage equality, and LGBT and religious identities are not mutually exclusive.

Tanenbaum has had the privilege to work with Jean-Marie Navetta, Director of Equality & Diversity Partnerships at [PFLAG National](#)/[Straight for Equality](#) on a number of projects, including conference presentations and trainings. This newsletter reflects our collaboration with Jean-Marie, Tanenbaum's invaluable partner in



exploring the intersections of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and religious identities in the workplace. It includes two items: highlights from a co-authored "myth-buster" article by Jean-Marie and Tanenbaum's own Mark Fowler, Managing Director of Programs (recently published by Diversity Best Practices), and an exclusive interview with Jean-Marie, where she shares her perspective on these often contentious issues.

How to balance, leverage and manage religious and LGBT identities to develop and retain the best talent is an ongoing challenge for our Corporate Members. We

hope that this newsletter will offer some guidance and ideas on how to move forward inclusively during rapidly changing times

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THREE MYTHS ABOUT RELIGIOUS AND LGBT IDENTITIES...AND HOW TO DISPEL THEM

Myth #1: People can't be both religious and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Fact: In 2013, the [Pew Research Center](#) found that 52% of LGBT adults have a formal religious affiliation. In 2015, Pew found that 48% of LGB Americans now identify as Christian and 11% belong to a non-Christian faith such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism.

Myth #2: Religious individuals and/or communities oppose marriage equality.

Fact: [Public Religious Research Institute](#) research found that:

- 52% of Catholics support same-sex marriage
- 62% of white mainline Protestants support same-sex marriage
- 27% of white evangelical Protestants support same-sex marriage
- 83% of Jewish Americans support same-sex marriage

Additionally, a number of religious congregations now support same-sex marriage as well.

Myth #3: Companies have to choose between supporting religious or LGBT inclusion.

Fact: Companies can (and often do) create an inclusive environment for people from a whole range of identities, including religion and sexual orientation/gender identity.

No choice necessary.

This discussion has been around for a long time, but we're looking at it in new – and often exciting – ways. The end of the either/or approach and vast assumptions is here, and the question is on the table: How are you going to lead this change in your organization?

To read the full article, visit DiversityBestPractices.com

A CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-MARIE NAVETTA

We recently asked Jean-Marie Navetta, Director of Equality & Diversity Partnerships, PFLAG National, to share her particular perspective on the intersections of religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity in the workplace. Jean-Marie offers unique insights on this topic, bringing her experience working with straight allies and members of the LGBT community to achieve equality for all people, no matter their sexual or gender identity, as the leader of the Straight for Equality campaign, and her background as a skilled trainer, innovative thinker, and compassionate activist. Her perspective is informative and her focus on inclusion aligns with Tanenbaum's conviction that we must bring fully respectful behavior into the workplace for all employees.

1. You represented PFLAG National at numerous events around the country for Pride Month. Are people talking about religion at these events? Are there any particular issues connected to the intersection of religious and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identities in the workplace that are coming up often?

This year (and certainly this June) was another testament to how much people want to discuss LGBT issues, especially at a time when things are perceived by many to be making such tremendous progress. The part that I appreciate most is how many people out there, both LGBT and ally-identified, want to discuss the things that changing laws or policies can't change. In other words,



they're really focused on how do we ensure culture is just as inclusive as the legal change? And one of the places where we continue to see this in full-force is in the conversation about the intersection (and not exclusivity) of faith and LGBT inclusion and equality.

I have no doubt that the way that this conversation has been portrayed among those resistant to LGBT equality, whether in terms of law or cultural acceptance, has fueled a lot of this discussion. In some ways, the idea that at work, either people of faith will prevail or LGBTs and their allies will prevail has more buzz than ever, because some of the public debate (e.g., Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act) has become so visible and charged with polarizing rhetoric. However, I think that the prevalence of people who are pushing back against this idea of a zero-sum game is making the conversation different. And I don't think that this is just about LGBTs pushing back. More and more one of the most welcome – and frequent – things I'm hearing in learning sessions is "As a person who is [fill in your faith tradition here] and an ally to LGBTs..." That's progress.

But it isn't always easy to get there if people and organizations fear this very discussion, which is still a significant challenge. I very recently had an organization tell me that it was not permissible to suggest to people that they talk about their allyship to LGBTs at work because it was the equivalent of "a Muslim trying to get you to go to their mosque, or a Jew trying to get you to their temple." This idea that the expression of some identities themselves – like sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion – is de facto proselytizing

runs strong. The idea that we can discuss both of these identities without implosion is still tough in many places.

2. Pew found that the number of LGBT Americans who identify as Christian is on the rise. How can companies leverage this growing population to enhance workplace inclusion?

Frankly, I think that they need to pay a lot more attention. Actually, both organizations as well as LGBT people and their allies need to listen to this trend and think about what it really means. At its core, it is shattering – that either/or frame that we've been locked into for entirely too long. The frame has led too many (on both sides of the conversation) to assume that if we talk about LGBT inclusion then people of faith will rebel. That if-then equation has never been universally true, but now we've got more evidence to disprove it and encourage this intersectional work. But this will only happen if everyone drops their assumptions about The Other and accepts that while there are still legitimate, difficult roads to navigate, it does not mean that we should skip taking the road altogether. Inclusion doesn't just mean talking about the things we think feel "safe" at work – it's about the inclusion of our many identities, and faith is certainly one of them.

3. The Supreme Court recently issued a landmark decision on marriage equality, and the topic is bound to come up in the workplace. What respectful communication tips would you recommend to help employees discuss this subject in a way that is respectful to their coworkers of all religious and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identities?

When the Supreme Court decision came through on June 26, I had my time for shock (in the best possible way) and celebration. And then I did what most people seem to do: I shamelessly went on Facebook to see how this was unfolding. I feel lucky that while the majority of my contacts there are fairly like-minded in their politics, I have many friends who are much more conservative, often with strong religious ties. And that's where I saw room for the most celebration. No one was condemning

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anyone. The expressions of loss were really focused on how this was not consistent with their faith, but this is the law now. Similarly, I saw a number of more liberal people being far more gracious about the win and not vilifying the opposition than I expected. It leads me back to my belief that we're beginning to see these paths to conversation even if we do not agree, because in the end, everyone should be treated with dignity.

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So in terms of how do we move forward on these discussions that are happening among people who disagree, we need to keep the conversation focused on how to not attack each other's beliefs. I mean, no one is ever going to switch my belief that being LGBT is right in the eyes of God and I'm never going to be able to, say, switch Pat Robertson's beliefs to the contrary. The focus needs to be on how we are going to move forward together. How can we come from different perspectives and still see each other as people and not as a single issue? Where is the common ground? What does it take for us to work together on shared issues? It may mean setting aside our feelings on the polarizing stuff, remembering that we're all seeing this through different lenses, and deciding that good people can, in fact, be in disagreement, but still be good to each other. I know that this sounds reductionist, but it is just that plain. And with the added structure of organizational values (e.g., respect for all) there's a strong framework to get this conversation going at work.

4. What first step can a company take to make sure that religious and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities aren't pitted against each other in the workplace?

I don't know if it is just one thing in terms of a step. For me, it has been about doing three things, almost at the same time. First, stop listening to the noise. It is extremely easy to get obsessed with the worst-case scenario, which often isn't grounded in reality at all (e.g., “The Gays” are going to force everyone to celebrate their weddings and “The Christians” are going to force LGBTs to listen to their readings of Leviticus at lunch.). The truth is that within the boundaries of work, we are all trying to find ways to allow our identities to remain intact, but that expression of identity needs to be guided by the overall expectations for employee behavior. Be respectful, keep it focused on transforming behavior to be inclusive and not belief to change. Make it all ultimately about how do we create stronger and more effective organizations through our workforce.

Then reality check yourself. When research is demonstrating to us that there is a significant number of LGBTs who are people of faith, and there are significant numbers of straight-identified people of faith who are accepting of people who are LGBT, listen to that. The people who tend to be loudest in the workplace are also those who tend to not be reflective of a population as a whole, but of a smaller group of people. Their yelling – whether on faith or LGBT issues – cannot dictate your response strategy. What's happening in the middle? What's happening with those who aren't yelling? How are you going to hear what they think?

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Finally, get help. I'm fully aware that this sounds like a shameless self-promotion for PFLAG and the work we do in partnership with Tanenbaum, but there is no reason that anyone or any organization should have to go on this journey alone. This is a big issue. For all the progress we see, this is still challenging. Leverage the organizations out there who can bring support to what you're doing and sometimes play the role of the outside observer to reframe how you may move forward. The progress

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that's happened in the diversity and inclusion field has not happened because one person did the work alone. It happened because we're all working in formal and informal coalitions and partnerships. That model works, and it works better than ever here.



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CEO

