

# Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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## **A Man of Values & Good Humor**

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When I die, my good friend Bob Witeck has promised he will notify people that I'm gone. Given Bob's great skills as a public relations and marketing genius, he will undoubtedly make my passing seem like it was a significant event. It will be a bigger deal when Bob dies and, like so many of life's injustices, his many accomplishments in the work world won't be adequately noted. Though he wasn't listed with Tom Ford, Lily Tomlin, Cherry Jones, and Neil Patrick Harris in *The Advocate's* predictably West Coast, star-dazed "Year in Review", Bob's annual contributions to the everyday lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people far exceeds that of these gay celebrities. So too do his efforts on behalf of people with disabilities and those with HIV.

As co-founder in 1993, with his smart and adorable partner Wes Combs, of the first gay public relations and marketing firm, Bob has been the "go to" man whenever anyone has needed help clearly communicating a message to others. He and Wes, who have their own husbands but share an intimacy and affection for each other that is most-rewarding to witness, are reliably innovative and effective in their work for clients such as American Airlines, Volvo, Aetna, Whitman-Walker Clinic, and the Christopher Reeve Foundation, among others. American Airlines credits Witeck-Combs with their great success in the gay community, and Christopher Reeve, before his death, praised his friends Bob and Wes, with whom he and his wife Dana collaborated for nine years, for their "sensitivity, creativity, and conviction".

But that's not why I'm in love with Bob Witeck, nor why I feel he merits recognition and gratitude. Yes, he's accomplished as a communicator, as he proved in his role as director of communications for a U.S. senator, but far more important to me are the values and good humor he brings to his life and to his work. Bob is one of the most honorable men I know and one of the funniest, though I don't include his grade school reference to me as Brian McNaughty as a good indication of the latter.

Go to a conference such as the annual one hosted by [Out and Equal](#) and watch how people from all walks of life gravitate to Bob, as they did recently in Orlando. With big smiles on their faces, Vic Basile, the first executive director of the Human Rights Campaign and now counselor to the director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and Mark Smelzer, publisher of *The Advocate*, and former U.S. Ambassador Michael Guest made their way to where Bob and Wes were standing, feeling perhaps as I did the integrity of the space.

Bob Witeck is one of the few gay people in the spotlight who I have met over the past 35 years who doesn't hog the limelight nor worry that other people might steal recognition away from him. He is not competitive with other gay leaders nor does he bad-mouth other people. In fact, he goes out of his way to make sure that people with shared interests meet each other.

Bob and Wes co-authored a book entitled *Business Inside Out: Capturing Millions of Brand-Loyal Gay Consumers* (available at the [Witeck-Combs Communications Web site](#)). He and Wes are also

coordinating efforts to get the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people included in the 2010 U.S. Census data. (More information available at [ourfamiliescount.org](http://ourfamiliescount.org).) Every time I turn around, he's got a meeting with the folks at Wal-Mart or Disney or some other major company that seeks guidance in building a good reputation with customers.

When the day is done, 58-year-old Bob Witeck heads home to his beloved husband, Bob Connelly, where their evenings are often spent in their favorite pastime of watching old television programs such as "I Love Lucy", "You Bet Your Life" with Groucho Marx, and "What's My Line?". They go to bed early and get up early and are completely content with their lives. Ray and I wish that Bob and Bob lived closer. We're sure we would become inseparable.

I did not come here today to bury Bob Witeck, but rather to praise a man our national gay media fails to give due credit. He is undoubtedly going to live a long time and continue to do the incredibly effective, value-guided work that he now does. And, of course, he must live longer than me, as it is from him that you will learn of my happy passing.

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I'm going to be elbow-deep in a turkey cavity next week, and the following week I'm having dental surgery. I'm therefore going to take a short break from writing the blog. There may be another piece of reflections offered for consideration before the New Year, but maybe not. Thank you for your gift of readership. Happy Thanksgiving.