

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

With Apologies to Our Youth

Posted: 19 October 2011, 9:44AM

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of the world will number 900 million by 2050. Because of all of the hard work that has been done by their Baby Boomer gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender great, great aunts and uncles, and their straight allies, the majority of them will live full and happy lives, free of most forms of discrimination. But, like their straight sisters and brothers, they will worry about hunger and thirst.

When I was born, there were two billion people living on our planet. Today there are seven billion. In just 14 years there will be eight billion, and by 2050 there will be nine billion. With apologies to our youth, there isn't going to be enough food and fresh water for our children or grandchildren when they are born. Seventy percent of our planet is covered in water, but only one percent is accessible. The growth in food production has been cut in half since 1990. Do the math.

It's my hope that some brilliant, gay and transgender people will solve the water and food problem for the rest of civilization. Living in a world that doesn't make them expend so much energy hiding who they are, our best and brightest will have the freedom to focus on the major problems that face the world's population, rather than devoting their lives to stopping bullying and marriage discrimination.

In a week, I'm going to receive a "lifetime achievement" award at the annual [Out and Equal Workplace Summit](#). Called the Selisse Berry Leadership Award in honor of the organization's founding executive director, it cites individuals for their dedicated work for equality in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. I'm thrilled to receive this honor, particularly since it has only been given once before, and that was to Selisse Berry. I could die today feeling quite fulfilled by my life of service as an educator on these issues. In my acceptance speech, I plan to thank the Catholic Church for firing me in 1974 for being gay. If they hadn't, I wouldn't be writing this.

But what if I hadn't been fired in 1974 for being gay? What if there was no job discrimination against gay people then? What if heterosexual people didn't feel so threatened by homosexual men and women? What other things might I have accomplished if I hadn't been required by cultural discrimination to spend nearly 40 years completely focused on creating a world in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people felt safe and valued?

Sometimes, while watching television or reading a book, I wonder what my life might have been like if I had been a doctor or a lawyer. I fashion myself saving lives with a scalpel, or with my ability to cite legal precedent. I wouldn't want to actually change my real life for my fantasies, but I wish I had been given the freedom to decide for myself, instead of having the decision made for me by the newspaper editor who was instructed by the bishop to fire me because I had come out as gay.

What if we were able to completely eliminate bullying and other forms of discrimination in the grade schools, high schools, colleges, workplaces, and more importantly, in the homes of today's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth? What might all of those children do with all of the time and energy they now must put into hiding who they are? What wonderful, creative, and useful things might they do for the world without all of the stress?

When we allow bullies among the social conservatives to make us spend our money and time in public campaigns about marriage equality or high school curricula, rather than on solving the truly serious problems facing the people on this planet, we forfeit the quality of life of our descendants.

Forty years from now, when even individual states of the United States are fighting over food and water, someone will ask, "What were people doing about these problems 50 years ago when they knew there would be shortages?" How embarrassing it will be for us to have it said, "They were spending billions of dollars fighting one another over whether gay and lesbian people could get married."

With a fresh glass of water, let's toast to the end of discrimination against our youth.