

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

A Drop of Ink May Make a Million Think

Posted: 28 September 2011, 6:49AM

If a waterlogged book washed up on a beach today, it would be thrown in the trash, or left for someone else to dispose of. But in 1820, two little girls who were playing in the sand in Provincetown, Massachusetts, brought such a book back home to their parents, who they knew would treasure any reading material.

The book was an autobiography, the life of the founder of the Universalist Church in Gloucester, another fishing village as far north of Boston as they were south. His writings ended up completely transforming the spirituality of not just the parents of the little girls, but of much of the town. The readers all abandoned the fear of punishment they had found in traditional Christian writings, and embraced the love of truth they found in Universalism. The church they soon built is now a cornerstone of free-thinking affirmation in Provincetown.

For many years, there has been in my Provincetown office a framed, hand-colored lithograph of writers assembled around a table, with the quote, "A drop of ink may make a million think." It has always reminded me of the possible good that can be done by properly chosen and disseminated words.

Today's waterlogged books that wash up on beaches, and change the lives of a community, are electronic messages that span the globe through the Internet. Many writers of blogs and Facebook entries, and creators of YouTube videos, now find that something they have written or said has touched a life of a person or people in India, Poland, Australia, or Japan. I'm currently communicating with a young gay activist in Serbia. He wrote:

Dear Mr. McNaught,

As you can see, my name is Igor, and I am a 23 years old gay guy and activist from small European country of Serbia. I just wanted to say that just recently I stumbled upon your YouTube channel (and via that found your website and you, here on Facebook) and that I find your work truly inspirational. Your analogies and way of explaining things to our (potential) straight allies are fascinating to me. If you don't mind I would really love to use some of them in my own activism here in my country.

Another YouTube correspondent just recently wrote:

I couldn't help but think how much you hit the nail on the head for me! That's exactly how I felt my whole life. Different circumstances; I was raised in a Muslim family but I am bisexual and atheist. Any doubts or questions I voiced were immediately stamped as forbidden. Any mention of homosexuality and my father would show horrific hate. I am brave to be myself before anyone else

but my parents. I love them too much to change what they think of me, especially when he says he's proud of me.

With today's technology, every person can create a drop of ink that may make a million think, as the Arab Spring uprisings illustrate. You don't have to be a professional writer or be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender to make an enormous difference in the lives of people around the world as they struggle with oppression, or just look for moral support. Straight allies can fill their Facebook pages with periodic testimonies of affirmation. Corporate executives can send out companywide and, in some instances, global-wide e-mails reiterating their commitment to creating a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. Letters to the editors of periodicals don't need a stamp, just an e-mail address. Electronic blasts to e-mailing lists that challenge the anti-gay rhetoric of an office-seeker, or praise a pro-gay or pro-transgender move by a government provides a powerful incentive to pay attention.

If we're gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and we don't know what to say to make a difference in the life of some person like us, or their parents, simply write, "I love my life." Most people don't think of coming out as good news. If we're straight, or not a gender-variant person, we can say, "I love and admire my gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender friends."

It's not enough to say it once. Our love of life, and our fearless affirmation of ourselves or others need to be sent forth throughout our families and neighborhoods and across the globe in a constant, joyful rhythm. If we aren't moved to do it for others, we need to do it for ourselves. There is no more rewarding feeling in life than to know you have positively impacted the life of another person, even if it's just to make them think.