



# THE SIMPLE TRUTH OUT AND ABOUT AT WORK

When we speak of coming out, there's often talk of cliché metaphorical doors – a slightly ajar door stands at the end of a dark hallway and when opened, it can never be closed. My university even celebrated National Coming Out Day one year with a literal door that GLBT people could walk through as they “came out.” At the opposite end of this spectrum is the celebratory aspect – coming out represents an affirmation of one's self, quite often the end of denial and the beginning of truth. And while the significance of this event in a person's life cannot be understated, it's important to realize that it's not a singular event. The day a person comes out is not the beginning and the end of the story; it is part of a person's journey through life.

More frequently than not, when a person comes out for the first time they share the moment with family or close friends. It can be difficult to anticipate how anyone will react, but with family and friends, there are usually some indicators. Coworkers are harder to predict, especially when starting a new job. You're surrounded by strangers who could have completely different morals, backgrounds and experiences. And until we reach that point in our society wherein we aren't considered different, this won't be the first or last time this event occurs.

A few months ago, I had an interview with an online news organization in the Vancouver area. The job description and publication excited me – I'd finally have the opportunity to become a reporter again. At the interview I spoke with the editor and another reporter. The conversation went well — I proved my abilities through my experiences — until they asked how I ended up over here. I explained that I thoroughly enjoyed the city and the new opportunities it offered me and that while visiting my best friend, I had met my boyfriend and I needed to remain here for us. This revelation killed the conversation. The two women looked at each other, mouths agape. After a claustrophobic moment of silence, the editor merely said, “Oh, I see...well, we'll be in touch,” and ended the interview.

Thoughts raced through my mind as I followed the editor to the lobby. With a rush of adrenaline, I asked for one more moment of her time and took her aside. In a moment of blind courage, I asked point-blank, “Will my sexuality really be a problem?” Her eyes darted back and forth, but could not meet mine. “Well...I...no...I mean...if it's not usually a problem for you, then no, but, I mean, we are against gay marriage, so, you know,” she stuttered. I smiled politely, laughed and said, “I see...then I'll be in touch,” and I left.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I couldn't work for a company or with people who were completely against me. I can work with people whose morals and values differ from mine – we all do it every day – but this would clearly be an environment in which I already had strikes against me. I didn't know from the company's online profile that they were reli-

giously-affiliated or conservative. I only learned because, in a show of good faith, I tried to share my story with them. I can only imagine the horrors of what would have happened if I hadn't. I withdrew my application before I heard back. I didn't lose anything by not getting that job.

When I interviewed for my current job, I followed the same protocols, but with better results. It's a non-issue for my employer and my coworkers. I only know this because I took that chance, though. And it's not as though I make a routine of outing myself. I don't walk into rooms and make a formal announcement of it, and most people don't know until I tell them. I usually bring it up at the water cooler, so to speak. If someone asks how my weekend went, I tell them I spent it with my boyfriend.

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If you aren't out at work, consider what it is that stops you. There's no reason to hide yourself, but there's also no rush if you're nervous. Just as in any coming out situation, fear of the unknown is your primary antagonist. As the opportunity presents itself, come out and test the waters. It's unlikely you're completely alone in your workplace. And as employers continue to come out as supporters of LGBT rights, there will be even less to fear. You have little to lose and everything to gain. Just be yourself. ■

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