

Learning Acceptance

LGBT folks don't automatically have an understanding of others

AS GAY PEOPLE, one might conclude that acceptance is a core value of our principles. It wouldn't be a stretch to think that growing up as a lesbian in Kansas, or a gay man in Utah, perhaps even a transsexual in Alabama, might influence our acceptance of others.

But do LGBT victims of prejudice filter their acceptance of others any differently than anyone else? Because we were bullied, kicked out of our homes as teens or fired from a job merely because of our sexual orientation, does that make us seek to foster understanding, not only in our community, but with others?

The truth is research shows that bullies and victims have many of the same traits. Only a few factors will decide if we will be one or the other.

Being gay doesn't give us a proclivity for acceptance. But I am of the belief that acceptance is a learned behavior — one that often takes deep breaths, patience and understanding.

Stereotypes are everywhere. At times, we all make assumptions of peoples' lifestyles, beliefs and cultures, based on the ideas of the large mass. Unfortunately, in the real world, these perceptions are not always accurate.

Because I am a lesbian who loves drag queens doesn't mean I would not be opinionated about a cross-dresser. Nor do I have to understand why Chastity wanted to become Chaz. And I'll never comprehend gay Republicans. But I can learn to accept these things.

However, it isn't just people in our community who suffer from widespread prejudice. Discrimination comes in all forms. People make judgments on everything from physical appearance or the type of clothing another person is wearing to the things they say, right down to the way they think. Sometimes we don't even recognize it as intolerance.

When a friend recently asked my opinion on polygamy, I heard my quick, sharp, negative retort. He responded that he was surprised by my close-mindedness.

"You're gay — I thought you'd be much

more accepting of others," he said.

That made me think about being gay and being accepting of others' lifestyles and situations I considered to be out of my comfort zone.

Luckily, I have discovered that since I am a human being who has struggled with acceptance, I have empathy. Empathy is conscious. It means I feel compassion for others. Yes, I judge, like anyone judges. But when I take a moment to put myself in someone else's shoes, my heart eventually comes around, and then so does my mind.

Why should I react negatively to a man having three wives? I have a wife. I should give the guy an ovation, not judge him. But I did. I judged polygamists because they are different — different from me and different from what society thinks is proper.

That is the problem. I am not trying to suggest that polygamy should be condoned. But sometimes we are quick to judge others when we do not really know them or their motives. We condemn them before we know the facts or truth about a matter.

There is an art to holding your tongue and allowing your mind to catch up. If people are doing what is right for them and not hurting others, who am I to judge?

For the past several decades, that has pretty much been the mantra of the LGBT community. I realized once I allowed myself enough time to gauge my compassion — kindness always won out.

My Two Senses

Commentary
By Lori Hicks



In *Scientific American*, Antoine Lutz, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who led a study on compassionate meditation, writes that research does not prove that compassion can be learned. It does however suggest the possibility. And he believes empathy can have an impact. "That raises the possibility that you can train someone to cultivate this positive emotion," Lutz said.

When you look at the true meaning of acceptance, it speaks of compassion, empathy and mindfulness. It refers to the experience of a situation without an intention to change that situation, or the person, place or thing. We all want acceptance, but offering it to others, unconditionally, is where the compassion, empathy and mindfulness is exercised.

Showing tolerance for the religious fanatics in the family may not be easy. Being eager for a person at work who is having their fifth child isn't simple for some of us. Putting up with a class of people you consider to be irresponsible, bigoted and narrow minded can be unnerving. Nevertheless, acceptance does not require that change is possible. Isn't that the point?

At times, we are all guilty of judging and condemning others. But, as LGBT people, I am suggesting that we remember as we judge others, we keep in mind that as gays it is our difference that has for decades been looked upon as a perversion, scandalous and appalling.

So when you see someone different than you, be tolerant, as least long enough to come from a compassionate place with your opinion. Take the extra time to walk on a different path before judging the trek. Look for the best in others — accept what is — and it might just bring out the best in you.

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