

BEING OUT ON THE JOB

I have said before that one goal I would like to see HTG pursue is the education of our employers; so that "coming out" at work might be as untraumatic as possible. Some of the concerns that many of us have about coming out on the job are a) that increased and unnecessary tensions might develop, b) that there might be an impact on our promotional opportunities, and c) that, really, our lifestyle is none of their damn business anyway. Much of this was merely philosophical on my part until last week.

Early one morning our software manager came into my office, closed the door behind him, and lowered his voice to inform me that my "lifestyle" was currently the talk of the engineering department. (About two months previously, a production planner had asked me point blank if I was gay, and I simply had said "yes". I had heard no more about it.) The software manager continued by saying he had known "about me" for a long time, but that it didn't concern him; but he was appalled that I was so foolhardy as to have said anything to "those morons in production who were really only baiting you."

At the moment of revelation I discovered that my reaction was not one of fear but of unconcern, amusement, and perhaps a little relief. My lack of concern obviously showed because he became more alarmed and warned me not to say anything further to anyone. "Don't affirm or deny it," he urged, "just say it's not a relevant subject and refuse to discuss it."

Why was he so afraid, and I not? All morning I was self conscious about passing people in the hall; were they looking at me differently? By mid-afternoon no one had said or done anything unusual to me: the company rednecks and liberals alike were quiet.

Am I in the middle of a crisis? Will my authority be undermined with my subordinates? Will my fellow managers pay less attention to me than heretofore? Stay tuned for the next episode (I know I will!).

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