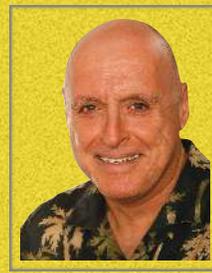


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



274 LGBT, Civil Rights and Comfort Zones.

A few days ago I was asked to weigh in on the concerns of people who may be uncomfortable working with those who are members of Guam's LGBT community. I'm Jerry Roberts and today we'll frame the conversation in terms of law, the uniqueness of our island, and what I feel should govern the issue. That's next, on The Extra Point.

When we begin talking about LGBT — that is, people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender — conversations usually lean into areas of rights. LGBT people want the same rights and access to services, and to be treated the same as non-LGBT.

Of course, there are opponents to that view. We've seen celebrated cases where people fought the concept of same sex marriage and for those marriage partners to share the same rights as heterosexual couples. We've seen states sue companies who refused to do business with same sex partners, who cited religious grounds for their decision.

Let's talk about law. More than half the states don't have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does apply to LGBT, but the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia ruled differently. Then, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the U.S. Department of Justice are on opposite sides of the issue. Thus, there are no clear federal statutes.

In Guam, our size and familial system may be the reason this seems to be a lesser issue than it is elsewhere. We defend members of our family, even if we don't line up with them in certain matters, including this one. You've seen it, too. It's "Say what you want about me, but watch out what you say about my brother or sister."

Not having family ties in place, my guess is that non-local military units here might face a different experience.

As for people who find it challenging to work together when one party falls under the LGBT banner and the other doesn't, I'd like to offer some personal thoughts.

1. Put the interests of the employer first, not your own. You've both been hired because you possess particular skills the organization feels will enhance its success.
2. Even if you don't accept the positions of the other person, find common ground in how you perform your jobs. Push differences aside and do what you've been hired for. If you find you can't respect someone for their feelings that oppose yours, at least respect their talents.
3. Regardless of which side of this issue you come down on, if you're a manager you need to get with your HR director and make sure you are protecting the company by maintaining absolute fairness in every respect. Even in the absence of specific laws, courts have handed down big judgments against discrimination.
4. I can't tell you what to agree with or who to like. I probably haven't helped with any discomfort someone may be feeling. There are a lot of factors that drive a wedge between people in the workplace. LGBT is just one of them. All I can say is I hope people seek out that common ground.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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