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Featured Article

Don't Become The Enemy: *Maintaining Respect for Mainstream Coworkers*

Whether your particular affinity involves Wookies or heavy eyeliner, most of us have experienced ridicule at some point or another. It can be tempting to retaliate once you've gained some semblance of status, or even before. I've met several alternative lifestylers who bash mainstreamers as a matter of principle. For those of us who have been put down our whole lives simply for being different, sometimes that payback can seem justified. But beneath the emotions, there are so many reasons it's wrong, especially in a business setting.

Often, an employer can feel like they are taking a risk by hiring an alternative lifestyler. The last thing you want to do is to become a troublemaker. Not only could that confirm stereotypes about socially inept geeks and mentally imbalanced goths, but it could prevent your boss from taking a similar risk in the future. It's not fair to ask you to represent your entire subculture, but that is often what happens when dealing with minority groups. Conduct yourself like an ambassador, because that's what you are; get used to it.

If you've managed to work your way up the ladder before running into any friction, consider yourself blessed. But don't let that be an excuse to let go on your new Green Bay fan underlings. The higher you go, the more responsibility you have. We're all expected to behave like adults in the office, but people with authority are cut less slack. If lashing-out at a coworker can get you fired, lashing-out at a subordinate can ruin your career.

Lashing-out can be any number of things: giving the jock the most work, ignoring the platinum blonde's ideas, or making snide remarks at the water cooler. If you have any kind of "out there" interests, you can probably think of a thousand things that qualify as lashing out because you experienced them yourself. And that's the biggest reason to rein yourself around mainstreamers. Sure, you might be holding a grudge against your district for voting against gay marriage, or you might be working with a woman who used to tear you apart in high school. But lashing out at others, mainstream or alternative, just continues the cycle of violence and isolation.

Regardless of whether you think football fans are weird, regardless of whether anyone who tormented you ever changes or not, you can choose not to become the enemy. You can choose to open the lines of communication and maybe teach someone else about your subculture in the process. If you find you just aren't able to set your feelings aside, at least leave them at home. Building your career will be infinitely easier if you can learn to get along with mainstreamers. Besides, life is too short to hang on to old grief. So if you're having trouble getting along with any of your coworkers, the next time you go into work, try to look past their clothes and tastes and see them as people. Just like the rest of us.



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