



The Power of Authenticity

Reflections during Pride Month from a JAMS neutral and JAMS diversity fellow



HON. LAWRENCE E. MOONEY (RET.)

JAMS Arbitrator, Mediator, Neutral Evaluator, Referee/Special Master



MICHAEL A. ZUCKERMAN, ESQ.

JAMS Mediator, Arbitrator and Referee/Special Master



Amidst the celebrations of LGBTQ Pride Month, let's remember the power and beauty of living authentically. Neither one of us came out of the closet until we were adults. But once we did, we experienced the burgeoning power that comes with being ourselves. That power is liberating and broad.

In the workplace and our personal lives, we no longer feared being "found out." We stopped worrying how others might perceive us or what they would do if they discovered we were gay. Instead of repressing our feelings of being different, we began to express our interior feelings. We learned to accept and value our sexual orientation as simply part of who we are. This enabled people to know us.

Much to our surprise and relief, the sky did not fall. To the contrary. Of course, not everyone accepted us. But the freedom of living openly allowed us to overcome the self-doubt, shame and fear that had stunted us. Without the baggage of concealing our true selves, we could focus on being good people, skilled lawyers and (now) proud ADR professionals.

In fact, by embracing our authentic selves—we both self-identify as gay—we have become better professionals. We've gained some insights into managing and resolving conflict. We understand that honesty and vulnerability are not weaknesses. And our experience helps us relate to underlying interests and motivations that others may harbor. We can provide a safe space to those we serve—enabling others to abandon pretenses and hidden agendas.

The power of authenticity did not just empower us individually. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person elected to political office in California, once asked, “How can people change their minds about us if they don’t know who we are?” He’s right. People who do not know us may fear us. That is at the heart of prejudice—a prejudgment of who we are without getting to know us.

We know that we are much like everyone else. And as LGBTQIA persons began coming out of the closet in larger numbers, the stereotypes began crumbling. This revolution in thought—in how people see us—was brought about by courageous individuals of all ages risking rejection from those they most trust and value. And it continues today.

Of course, many LGBTQIA persons may not be able to acknowledge their true identities. Some families, workplaces and communities may reject us. And the consequences of such rejection can be grave. But for LGBTQIA persons with the power and ability to acknowledge their identities, the process can be liberating. We know this.

We can show the world who we are. We refuse to be strangers in our own families, workplaces and communities. And this empowers people’s evolution in understanding. Acceptance of the LGBTQIA community is at an all-time high. Gallup’s annual poll found that more than 60% of Americans accept those who identify as gay or lesbian. And with the help of the legal community, the Supreme Court over the last two decades has mirrored this public acceptance by requiring states to allow and recognize same-sex marriage (*Obergefell*) and extending protections against workplace discrimination to gay and transgender employees (*Bostock*).

Despite increased public acceptance, and courtroom victories, work remains to be done. We honor those brave people who paved the way. But we remain vigilant in protecting our community from increased hostility. No one can take away the power of authenticity from any person. And as more members of our community reveal their authentic colors, we can celebrate a future of acceptance, inclusivity and justice.

Hon. Lawrence E. Mooney (Ret.) is an arbitrator and mediator at JAMS and previously served as a judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals, Eastern District, including a term as chief judge.

Michael Zuckerman, Esq., is an ADR professional and principal of Zuckerman Dispute Resolution LLC and has conducted hundreds of mediations and arbitrations. He has served as a judicial law clerk for judges on the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and Seventh Circuit, in the Eastern District of New York and in the Northern District of Illinois.

EXPLORE MORE ON THESE TOPICS

Disclaimer:

This page is for general information purposes. JAMS makes no representations or warranties regarding its accuracy or completeness. Interested persons should conduct their own research regarding information on this website before deciding to use JAMS, including investigation and research of JAMS neutrals. [See More](#)