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Chick-fil-A and LGBT movement: an example of dialogue that works

Isabella R. Moyer | Jan. 29, 2013 NCR Today

I'm always on the lookout for concrete examples of real dialogue in action. A friend forwarded this story to me from The Huffington Post: "Dan and Me: My Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A [1]." The story is not only inspirational, but proof that dialogue can work amid the deepest of divisions.

Shane L. Windmeyer is an out, 40-year-old gay man and the executive director of Campus Pride, a leading national organization for LGBT and ally college students. The organization was actively protesting against Chick-fil-A for its anti-LGBT stance and funding. On Aug. 10, Windmeyer received a surprise phone call from Dan Cathy, Chick-fil-A's president and COO. The phone call became the springboard for a surprising dialogue between the two men.

Cathy had never entered into such a dialogue with any member of the LGBT community. Windmeyer described their interactions as "awkward at times but always genuine and kind." Cathy never once asked Campus Pride to stop their protests:

> On the contrary, Dan listened intently to our concerns and the real-life accounts from youth about the negative impact that Chick-fil-A was having on campus climate and safety at colleges across the country. He was concerned about an incident last fall where a fraternity was tabling next to the Chick-fil-A restaurant on campus. Whenever an out gay student on campus would walk past the table, the fraternity would chant, "We love Chick-fil-A," and then shout anti-gay slurs at the student. Dan sought first to understand, not to be understood. He confessed that he had been naïve to the issues at hand and the unintended impact of his company's actions.

As the dialogue progressed, both men grew in their commitment to better understand the other, to find common ground if possible, and to build respect. In the process, they "learned about each other as people with opposing views, not as opposing people."

> Throughout the conversations Dan expressed a sincere interest in my life, wanting to get to know me on a personal level. He wanted to know about where I grew up, my faith, my family, even my husband, Tommy. In return, I learned about his wife and kids and gained an appreciation for his devout belief in Jesus Christ and his commitment to being "a follower of Christ" more than a "Christian." Dan expressed regret and genuine sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly in the name of Chick-fil-a -- but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage.
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> And in that we had great commonality: We were each entirely ourselves. We both wanted to be respected and for others to understand our views. Neither of us could -- or would -- change. It was not possible. We were different but in dialogue. That was progress.

Cathy "expanded his world without abandoning it," calling the experience "the blessing of growth." Windmeyer experienced the same grace, and summed it up beautifully:

In the end, it is not about eating (or eating a certain chicken sandwich). It is about sitting down at a table together and sharing our views as human beings, engaged in real, respectful, civil dialogue. Dan would probably call this act the biblical definition of hospitality. I would call it human decency. So long as we are all at the same table and talking, does it matter what we call it or what we eat?

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[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shane-l-windmeyer/dan-cathy-chick-fil-a_b_2564379.html