Managerial Ethics in the Creation of an LGBTQIA-Friendly Workplace (unpublished manuscript)
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It is indisputable that the Stonewall Riots of 1969 played a key role in increasing social and legal acceptance for the LGBTQIA community. If we fast forward to February 26 of this year, the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals—just two weeks ago—concluded that sexual orientation is legally protected under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This is another significant landmark. Even today, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which was designed to include sexual orientation and gender under federal workplace protections, still has yet to be passed since its first introduction in 1974. Make no mistake: the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals’ decision can still be appealed to the US Supreme Court. For now, however, it seems that we do in fact have federal workplace protections, such that an individual cannot be legally be fired just for being (or being perceived as being) a member of our community... or at the very least has some legal recourse if they are.

That being said, beyond not firing someone for even being perceived as being LGBTQIA, how do we make the workplace a safe environment? It is not a stretch to imagine that, from time to time, a manager’s limited professional experiences and/or even their personal beliefs may impede their ability to manage workplace diversity well, and potentially impair their ability to effectively prevent workplace discrimination. The foundation of this paper is to reinforce compelling arguments to do no harm, and to identify those behaviors that can help a manager focus on the moral end of ethical dilemmas. To that end, this paper will highlight mindful attention, which is rooted in the Socratic method of inquiry- and its usefulness in helping managers develop the ACHE professional and social responsibility competency of self-awareness.

Let’s further this discussion by examining the topic of freedom. Now when I talk about the word ‘freedom,’ I’m not referring to constitutional freedom. What I am referring to is the very nature of freedom— as it is experienced subjectively in our personal experience. I am referring to a sense of internal freedom that allows us to simply watch and witness all of the activity in our mind. When we are able to witness the very nature and activity of our mind, we become much more effective and productive in whatever we do. In the words of Richard Strozi-Heckler, who calls his work Attention Training, we become much more valuable, much more “complete and more flourishing as human beings” as a direct result of becoming masters of our own minds—instead of being led by them. That being said, it is important to address the connection between managerial leadership, ethics, and this seemingly esoteric concept of freedom.

Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato were some of the greatest thinkers of the Western world. These philosophers found the topic of ethics and freedom of such importance that they developed bodies of knowledge that continue to serve as a foundation for Western society today. It is the specific lineage of Socrates that I will explore, with a particular emphasis on the writings of Marcus Aurelius— one of the most powerful voices in the Roman world.

It is interesting to note that in Roman times, philosophy was not merely an intellectual or academic pursuit, but rather a independent vocation in its own right— complete with grueling daily practices for those courageous and dedicated enough to follow. Socrates- who embodied a ferocious curiosity- created an invaluable process to support, in Strozi-Heckler’s words, attention training. This practice soon became inextricably connected to the practice of philosophy, and is incredibly germane to our work here today.
The practice to which I am referring is what Socrates referred to as *inquiry*—the asking of an open-ended question that allows a listener to take a topic out of the intellectual realm of what is known, into the phenomenological realm of what is not known about a subject. Let me repeat: This practice that Socrates introduced is a way of paying mindful attention that invites a listener to enter the realm of what is not known about a particular subject.

Here are some sample questions aligned with the Socratic method of inquiry:

- Can you be simply *curious* about what you’re experiencing right now?
- Can you fully *embrace* what’s happening in this moment?
- If not, what’s getting in the way? Can you just be present with *that*?
- Is there anything here that you don’t understand?
- What is true about your experience right now? What about it feels *alive and vital*?

With questions such as these, the questioner and respondent were able to create an opening in the conversation, bringing about a space of true listening and exploration, and inviting a new or deeper understanding of a topic. In assisting individuals to challenge the status quo and inquire into a particular topic in this way, Socrates helped set the foundation for scientific inquiry that is the standard across many fields of study today.

Where would the field of science be without the ability to challenge certain preconceptions about the natural world? Where would the field of psychology be without the ability to question life and the human experience? Where would our connection to our sense of spirituality be without the ability to explore and identify the pressures that we encounter, and in turn help us respond and take action in the face of those pressures? Where would the field of business be without the ability to see and respond to unfolding situations and pressures? And how would we as administrators truly embrace our own intuitive wisdom that leads to beneficial actions in the workplace without the capacity for mindful attention? In essence, where would our world be without the ability to engage in introspection and self-reflection?

Many administrative responsibilities involve making complex, time-sensitive decisions. We go to workshops and trainings, hire consultants and counselors, read books and white papers—all with the intent of being the very best we can be. Unfortunately, I have found very few workshops, trainings, books, and consultants who have mastered the art of teaching managerial introspection and self-reflection.

When it comes to managing diversity and inclusion, many managers find it to be a daunting task. Some agencies do it very well. I have been particularly impressed with the Department of Health and Human Services for their support of the Diversity and Inclusion Division, which offers workshops, webinars, and newsletters on a regular basis to support federal employees. The question yet remains: is that enough? Are we doing enough? What else do we need to do to not just protect ourselves from lawsuits, but much more importantly, to *lead*—to take leadership in supporting the humanity of the workforce in a way that is respectful, ethical, civil, and just?

I’d like to propose that we just might need to read ‘that’ book. It might be that we actually need to watch ‘that’ documentary. It might be that we need to go to as many workshops and trainings on the
topic of diversity and inclusion as we can so that we can put ourselves in the best possible position for becoming a truly just leader. To repeat the words of Richard Strozzi-Heckler, we become much more valuable, much more “complete and flourishing human beings” as a direct result of becoming masters of our minds- by taking the time for mindful attention, introspection, and self-reflection.

That being said, I’d like to offer another opportunity for us all to do just that: What are you noticing right now (pause)? Yes, it’s ok. It’s ok for you to briefly, just for a moment, let go of your agenda, your thoughts about what happened this morning, or your worries about what will happen tomorrow. Do you feel physically comfortable enough, in this moment, to let go of even just a little physical tension and anxiety- just long enough to take a really deep breath (pause)? Yes, it’s ok to do that. Taking a really deep breath can provide us with that much needed moment of relaxation and personal awareness.

Now, in this moment, let’s look and see if we can answer the following questions: what is our mind doing right now (pause)? Is it racing, or is it calm? Is it focused, or distracted? Is there one all-too familiar story that keeps racing across the ticker-tape of our minds at this conference, or are we able to locate- to recognize and to actually know where we are right now, in this moment? Are we here, or are we somewhere else? If we’re somewhere else- if our minds are focused on something other than what is happening right now—do we actually need to have our attention be there of here? Or, can we actually let ourselves refocus our mind and attention, and be focused on just being right here, in this moment?

Adapted from Marcus Aurelius: If some type of “predetermined necessity” is ruling your attention right now, why do you resist? If this moment- your personal moment- is a “chaotic ungoverned” mess, can you “be satisfied that even in the midst of this storm, you have within yourself a mind whose nature it is to govern and command? So even if the storm should carry you off, let it carry off your flesh, your vital breath, and the rest, for it will not take your mind.”

In 1991, I took a workshop with the late psychologist Rob Eichberg, the founder of National Coming Out Day. This two-day workshop culminated with participants writing coming out letters to their families, a heart-wrenching process. His book, “Coming Out: An Act of Love,” was a groundbreaking and vital gift. I was raised in a quiet, small-town Catholic family on the Canadian border of northern Maine for the first nine years of my life.

Marcus Aurelius again: “How ridiculous, what a stranger in his own land, is the person who is surprised by anything that happens in life.”

I can’t sway the hearts and minds and beliefs of those who don’t understand the nature of sexuality and gender identity. Like many experiences in life, we can’t always empathize or understand human experiences that we have not personally been through. We can’t force family or friends or neighbors or co-workers to listen deeply and pay attention to the inimitable words of the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mary Oliver when she wrote, “Let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.” We do, however, have the power to “tether our camel”- the camel of our minds. Our minds have the power to create or destroy. Our minds have the power to take actions that harm others, as well as the power to take actions that heal- the definition of which is worth noting: to make healthy, whole, or sound; to restore to health; to bring to an end or conclusion, as in conflicts between people or groups; to settle; to reconcile

What would it be like, if we took just three minutes a day to let it all go; to stop all of our mental activity; to tether our camel; to take a deep breath; to notice our surroundings; to pay attention to the sounds and smells around us, and to take an informed Next Right Step. If we take just a brief moment to
just put a pause on whatever thoughts are occupying our headspace right now, what might we find? The inimitable Ram Dass spoke at my first Masters’ graduation in 1998, quoting from his book Be Here Now: Can you? Can we... Be Here Now?

What I do know is that we are much better people when we live in the moment. We are a much kinder people when we’re not obsessing on the past. We are much more focused individuals when we are not anxious about the future. If we truly take a moment to truly live in this moment, we are a much freer species, free to take effective actions that align us with our teams, support the development of our business, and make the workplace a much safer place for our LGBTQIA employees. Thank you for your time. It’s been an honor being here today.

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