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— Fearful of Changing Values —

There are many workplace challenges facing Canadians. From observations while working in the field of workplace and community human rights over many years, Stephen Hammond has chosen what he considers the top 10. This video transcript is intended to start a dialogue. If you feel it may help your workplace or your association, please use it. Print out the text, have a discussion, and try to come to resolutions that can be helpful to your group. The best way to deal with workplace challenges is to talk about them in a respectful way. If you would like to access the video that goes with the transcript, it can be purchased at HumanRightsTrainingStore.com

Many Canadians think their fundamental values are under pressure because of some people coming to Canada. How do you address concerns, without being seen as being intolerant of others? This challenge encourages Canadians to look at values and changes from a different perspective.

Canadian values of justice and fairness are very strong. Although there are many ways to define “right” and “wrong,” most Canadians would agree they were brought up with ideas and ideals of equality, eliminating discrimination, a level playing field and so on.

We think these values are under pressure because of some people coming to Canada, however if you look at our history, those values weren’t always there: they evolved. First Nations, women, persons of Indian, Japanese, Chinese and African descent, Jews and Jehovah’s Witness, (just to name a few) were excluded from voting, owning property, or property in certain locations, doing certain kinds of business and enjoying just some of the basic rights we all take for granted today.

It wasn’t too long ago where fairness for job opportunities had everything to do with who your father, brother, or friend was. And while there are still elements of that today, it’s changed dramatically.

While our country isn’t pure, many people coming to Canada have left homes where corruption, outright discrimination and even ethnic conflict are part of every day life (this isn’t everyone coming here, of course). For some people it will take a while to trust certain elements of the government and/or police forces. They won’t immediately know that they have certain rights, protected by our

laws and our constitution. They might also be afraid, or at least concerned, that if they speak up and assert their basic rights, they may be thrown out of their homes, jobs or even the country.

And then there's a fear many Canadians have of certain religions and their values. Women don't have all the same rights as men within aspects of their faith. Gay men and lesbians aren't allowed to marry, even though it's allowed by Canadian laws. There is a history of some members of their faith being abused. You might not be expecting this, but I'm talking about the Catholic church (women can't be priests), the Anglican church (they are going through turmoil just about allowing gay and lesbian relationships being blessed, let alone married) and the United church (First Nations children were abused while in their residential schools).

These are Canada's three most populous faiths and part of our Canadian values. Now don't get me wrong and I don't want flak over this. The Catholic church has the legal right to not allow women priests and along with the Anglican church, they have the legal right to not allow gay men and lesbians to marry. And these two, along with the United church have come along way in accepting their responsibilities in the tragic behaviors that took place in their residential schools.

My point is that we get sanctimonious about certain people coming to Canada with various customs and values, and yet Canadian customs or religions aren't always consistent nor are they absolute.

Most new Canadians, or people wanting to become new Canadians are thrilled with our values of fairness and equality. And if there are aspects of their customs, faiths, or just themselves that come into conflict with these laws or values, then they'll figure it out by either education, or simply talking to their neighbors or co-workers.

Thank goodness Canada's values changed from a time when your gender, colour of skin, sexual orientation and faith were a barrier to better equality and fairness. I'm not foolish enough to say there's no discrimination, but at least most of our laws and policies are in place to discourage discrimination. Our values will continue to change...for the better and it might seem corny, but it's up to each of us to ensure we retain the values we want and to change the values that need improvement.

What do you think?

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