

## Open Letter to the Editor Guernsey Press

### Ditch the Gag

The Guernsey Disability Alliance has been shocked, saddened and disappointed to hear of the alleged disablist remarks made by some staff at Aurigny but we welcome the inquiry and offer any assistance and guidance.

Rather than just being appalled at what might have been said we should reflect on how we might react if faced with such comments in our own organisation. Would we be a brave whistleblower; be confident to speak out at the time to challenge ignorance and discrimination; sit, quietly appalled; embarrassedly laugh at the comments; find them funny; add to the remarks?

There are many things what might affect our response to such situations; for example, whether

- you have an impairment or are a carer, or else had never really engaged with a person who has a significant impairment or who is a carer;
- it was your boss, or else it was your junior who was making the comments;
- you are a Deputy, Director, or Community Leader, or you are an onlooker, a volunteer, or a passer-by;
- you are hearing inappropriate office banter daily and are labelled as woke or a snowflake if you object, or else teasing and mockery are not tolerated in the workplace, and you know you will be supported if you speak out;
- you know the organisation obtains feedback from customers and staff regularly and makes changes based on this feedback, or else you believe customers are seen as a nuisance and staff don't make any suggestions for improvements because they know no one listens;
- you believe that training is seen as a waste of money, it is a box ticking exercise that wastes staff time, or else you believe that continual development is important to your organisation, including monitoring of outcomes and appraisals with induction for new people;
- you know that complaints are filed with no action or that complaints always end up with someone being sanctioned without consideration of root causes, or else you know that complaints are taken seriously, investigated systemically and seen as valuable learning and improvement tool;
- you believe you have to "put up, shut up or ship out", or else you believe you are respected, valued, listened to and expect to stay for years within your organisation;

- you work for a charity, or else in the building sector, or else in the financial services sector, or else in the retail sector, or else in education, or else for the States of Guernsey, *etc.*;
- the comments were made at home or at the pub, or else in the office or at a meeting;
- you grew up in another jurisdiction, or else you grew up in Guernsey.

Perhaps none of these differences would affect your choices, and you would do the right thing regardless of your experience, the situation, the context and the balance of power.

Unfortunately, the evidence shows that the people who speak out are in the minority. People who do not feel supported or even feel threatened or are just unsure of their position are less likely to say anything.

Culture is a hard thing to pin down. I tend to think of it as “this is how we do things around here”. It’s not just what we do, but how we do it that counts. Culture will be different for different groups in an organisation (such as finance vs marketing) for different organisations, for different sectors and for different jurisdictions. It is the thread that stitches us together as a community with common purpose, history, rituals and lore. We know what behaviour will be rewarded and what won’t be tolerated in our group. Culture creates our norms and determines what happens when we cross the lines.

Of course, society includes multiple cultures. They are overlapping and dynamic. An organisation’s individual culture – its ethos – can foster a common purpose built around shared values and ethical professionalism, whether it’s a huge organisation like the States of Guernsey, or a small tabletop charity.

How the organisation developed gave rise to its culture and set the norms that got the organisation to where it is. However, established internal cultures can become impediments when the wider culture changes. Worse still, the internal culture may reinforce and reward unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour that will ultimately be damaging to the organisation or the Island.

If you feel you cannot speak out against inappropriate or unethical behaviour, if there is a failure to promote diversity, equality and inclusion and you don’t feel respected, it means that internal culture is holding you back. It’s not just bad for you but for your colleagues, the organisation and ultimately the Island.

So what can each of us do to change culture to ensure that norms are acceptable and appropriate?

## What can you do?

We are a right leaning, conservative Island. Guernsey culture affects all organisations operating in this environment. You might think that you do not have an opportunity to change much about that, but remember that there is a general election coming in 2025. You can therefore:

- help to make sure the culture of the island develops in line with the expectations of the community by taking an interest in what the States is deciding and how your representatives are behaving, and letting your Deputies know your views;
- make sure you register to vote when the new register opens so you can vote in the 2025 general election; and by voting for those candidates who will speak out for what you believe in.

Most of us have to work. Having a healthy culture at work not only makes us happier, it also improves productivity. While bosses have a large role to play in establishing the organisations culture, there are things we can do as individuals. Harmful traits can be pervasive and complex so start small, within your own team and network.

- Stand up against inappropriate and unethical behaviour and speak out when it happens. Identify it as being inappropriate and, if you can, explain how it makes you feel. If you don't feel you can speak out at the time, speak to your boss or to HR afterwards.
- Learn more about equality, diversity and inclusion and share your knowledge with colleagues. Go on training courses offered by your organisation. If they do not provide any, you can take free online courses to learn more about disability (see: <https://states-of-guernsey.accessabletraining.co.uk/login/create-account> to register for a course).
- Join your organisations equality and inclusion group, or, if you do not have one, start one.
- Read your company's policies on whistleblowing, personal and professional conduct and diversity. If you cannot find them ask your boss and then ask that they be made available on the organisations intranet or as easily accessible paper copy.
- Find out what happens to staff suggestions and customer comments/complaints. If you don't know what the process is for dealing with them ask your boss. Take an interest in how many suggestions/ complaints are received and what action is taken.
- Find out about your organisation's values. They are normally published in annual reports and on the organisation's websites, *etc.* Do these values align with your own personal values? If you believe an action is not being true to the organisation's values, raise your concern with your boss.

- Find out what to do if you think someone has been discriminated against. Visit the Employment and Equal Opportunities Service website <https://eeos.gg/> .

Speak out: ditch the gag!

Carol Le Page  
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ENDS

### **Notes**

This is an open letter which can be published in its entirety. Please seek the author's permission to publish edited versions.

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Further information:

The Guernsey Disability Alliance (GDA) campaigns for greater respect for the rights and dignity of anyone affected by disability including everyone with an impairment and their carers. We influence policy and practical change in a manner consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

[www.gda.org.gg](http://www.gda.org.gg)