

## Diversity in Practice

### *Diversity in Practice: Integrate political incorrectness*

February 2013

By: Arin N. Reeves, J.D., Ph.D.

Nextions



In 2008, I wrote a column on political correctness ("Cutting through political correctness") that garnered a tremendous amount of feedback in agreement with the perspective that a little bit of political incorrectness would do a lot of good for diversity and inclusion efforts.

I proposed that our politically correct culture, with all of its intent to create more respectful interactions, actually suppresses the candid conversations that we need to have in order to move from distant tolerance to active inclusion.

Last month, I had the opportunity to see Matt Stone and Trey Parker's (the creators of "South Park" and the standard bearers for all things politically incorrect) latest endeavor — "The Book of Mormon."

The musical follows the misadventures of a couple of Mormon missionaries in an African village.

Prior to seeing the show, I read great reviews praising the show as an absolutely hysterically politically incorrect musical about the Mormon church.

But I also digested many of the harsh critiques written by members of the Mormon church and went into the performance with some concerns about the subject matter and doubts about how I might ultimately feel about the show.

Opening the playbill before the show, I laughed aloud when I realized that the Mormon church ran three ads in the playbill. One ad showed a smiling man with the words, "I've read the book."

The second ad showed a smiling woman saying, "The book is always better"; and finally an ad featuring the caption, "You've seen the play ... now, read the book."

All three ads (featuring very diverse faces!) led you to the website, an official site where members of the Mormon church answer people's questions about their religious texts and doctrine with in-depth narratives on the Mormon faith.

The seriously funny ads were no joke; they were the perfect response by the Mormon church to an irreverent and possibly offensive roast of their religious beliefs and views. The show was fantastic, and yes, I visited the site when I got home.

I learned some new things about Mormonism and I was better able to contextualize the realities of the Mormon beliefs in relation to the sarcastic humor of the show. The Mormon church's response to political incorrectness aimed directly at them was to use the exposure to create greater understanding of who they were. Bravo!

Political incorrectness, as an inclusion tool, is quite effective, but only when we understand that it cannot work unless we respond positively when someone launches political incorrectness at us.

I have found it to be true that even if we embrace political incorrectness in a respectful way, we don't often know how to deal with political incorrectness that is aimed at us, with equal respect.

It is one thing to dish out political incorrectness that we agree with. But how do we deal with the political incorrectness that we find incorrect?

The ability to use political incorrectness as an inclusion tool begins with accepting things you disagree with. When we are working toward a more open and inclusive perspective in our lives, we have to start with personally building up our productive response to political incorrectness we don't like, political incorrectness that may touch, or even offend our identities, perspectives or culture on a personal level.

My 2008 column featured the television show, "The Office," as an example of how to use hilarious political incorrectness to productively advance the dialogue on inclusion. (Check out the "Diversity Day" episode on YouTube!)

Stone and Parker's portrayal of the Mormon church and the Mormon church's response is a great continuation of the political incorrectness conversation.

A productive response to political incorrectness is not about being passive in the face of offense.

They are actually active responses that deliberately focus on using the circumstance to create awareness, rather than a passive reaction that creates greater distance.

Of course, we need to account for power dynamics, privilege and other societal realities to fully utilize this discussion, but we can start the dialogue simply by acknowledging that political incorrectness moves the inclusion dialogue further than political correctness and our ability to wield this tool depends on our ability to respond well.

How will you integrate political incorrectness into your inclusion strategies?