

BEFORE YOU LEARN THE HARD WAY

RULE 13

Three Things You Never Discuss at Work

A free chapter from the book every new graduate needs

Terence Pitre, Ph.D.

Corporate Veteran · Navy Veteran · Professor · Dean

PART 1 — THE OFFICE IS A GAME

Three Things You Never Discuss at Work

There are three topics I told every single one of my students never to discuss at work.

Every semester. Without fail.

Not because I wanted to lecture anyone. I just realized that most students don't have a clue about what's actually appropriate to talk about at work. And that's not their fault. Let's be real. College is an environment that encourages free thought, open debate, finding your voice. We tell students constantly to speak up, share their perspective, bring their whole selves.

We just forget to tell them that in the real world, certain topics need to stay off the table.

Once I started doing this in class the word got around. It became something students expected — and one of the most talked about things on campus.

"Take Professor Pitre for Accounting 200. He's great and he has the best stories and advice."

I'll take it.

THE THREE TOPICS

Politics. Religion. Sexuality. No matter how much someone probes you or asks you. No matter how cool they appear. No matter how much they seem like your ally — don't do it.

And don't be fooled just because someone looks like you or belongs to your same organization. In the Black community we have a saying.

All skin folks ain't kin folks.

So don't do it.

I know what some of you are thinking. That feels like you can't be your authentic self. That you're proud to be X or support candidate Y.

I hear you.

Just don't do it.

Here's the thing. People form alliances and factions at work. And unfortunately, those groups often form around things that have nothing to do with work. If your politics, religion, or sexuality don't align with theirs, that one small admission — your candidate, your church, your life — has now cast you unknowingly into a group, complete with all the stereotypes that come attached.

Say you support Trump and you get labeled a MAGA extremist, a racist. Say you supported Harris and suddenly you're a woke bleeding heart liberal who isn't patriotic. Don't be fooled into thinking that because someone has risen to the level of Vice President or President of a company they are immune to irrational thinking or incapable of having a warped idea.

They aren't.

"The workplace is a conglomeration of personalities, cultures, and belief systems. You cannot — you simply cannot — know all of their views."

And since we're talking about woke — let me get this out there because it needs to be said.

The people who have turned that word into a political weapon don't have a clue what it actually means. The original meaning of being woke was simple. Stay alert. Don't be fooled. Don't fall for the lie. So the people out here fighting against "wokeism" — telling people not to fall for some conspiracy or con?

They're actually being woke. By definition.

If you think wokeness is some grand lie and you're telling people not to fall for it — congratulations. You just described the original meaning of the word.

But I digress.

The workplace is a conglomeration of personalities, cultures, and belief systems. People from every kind of background and life experience. Some hold views that would genuinely surprise you.

Some hold authority over your career. And you cannot — you simply cannot — know all of their views.

Once you place yourself in a particular category, you will mysteriously stop getting invited to certain things. The after-work get-togethers. The weekend barbecues. Not because you're a bad person. But because — well — you're straight and someone isn't sure how you'd act around their gay friends. Or you're a Republican and someone doesn't want the drama around their liberal ones.

You don't even know it's happening.

That's the part that should concern you.

THE RISK / REWARD TEST

Best case scenario: you share your political views with a colleague. They agree with you. Now what? You haven't advanced. You haven't built anything meaningful. You've just confirmed something that didn't need confirming. Now ask yourself what the worst case scenario looks like. Not good, is it?

Your personal life belongs entirely to you. What you believe, who you love, how you vote, how you worship — all of it is yours and none of it is your employer's business. But the moment those topics enter a professional conversation you haven't been explicitly invited into, you are taking a risk you cannot fully measure.

And there is no upside.

Just don't do it.

Save those conversations for the people in your life who have earned them.

The office hasn't.

This is Rule 13 from [Before You Learn the Hard Way](#) by Terence Pitre, Ph.D.

The complete book covers 13 rules of corporate survival and the financial decisions that compound over a lifetime.

Available at www.beforeyoulearnthehardway.net