

Off the Cuff with Ryan Weyandt, CEO of the industry's fastest growing LGBTQ group

Q: This is an unprecedented time for the LGBTQ community. Public opinion for same-sex marriage now tops 70% in the U.S., yet there are now more than 200+ pieces of legislation in motion at the state and local level that seeks to roll back LGBTQ rights. How do you explain that?

A. I wish I could explain this logically. American society was given the opportunity to become emboldened in its opinions in recent years through political discourse that more resembles political warfare. I talk to folks, some who I'm related to and love very deeply, who tell me that they support me. They tell me that they're blown away that there aren't equal rights protections under federal law for LGBTQ people. They tell me that they want to learn about how they can help, and then tell me they voted for Donald Trump a second time, or Greg Abbott, or Josh Hawley. I believe good, decent, caring people are voting for loud, ignorant, hateful politicians because they campaign on breaking the system – they have reality TV personalities that get attention. Politicians promise to change the system, they campaign on draining the swamp, or breaking the wheel that keeps low-to-moderate income folks "stuck" in their socioeconomic seat, and to many people who have privilege in America, their vote is almost entirely rooted in their own economic disposition. They don't show up and vote for a candidate who could change the world for their kids, or their neighbors, they vote based on how it will impact them directly. In this case, the privilege I'm speaking of is straight Caucasian people whose biggest consideration at the polls is how their vote will impact their wallet, not how it will impact the millions of Americans who don't have the same rights or privileges they do. They vote that way. This is the only explanation I can offer to a country that elects Marjorie Taylor Greene, or Ron DeSantis. These voters want change that presents itself as loud and bold. Elections have consequences. The current political tide is a perfect example of those consequences.

Q. Given this legislative trend, what do you see as the top priorities for the Alliance in its work today?

A. There are at least a dozen different things that need our attention. Our top priority is education. Our responsibility is to educate Allies across the country about the current challenges LGBTQ individuals face in housing and real estate transactions. My hope is that through education we're able to touch hearts and minds and provide insight. When I tell a room of 5,000 people that 10% of the population are LGBTQ, they shrug it off because it sounds like a minority too small to matter. But if I tell them that one in three households in America has or knows someone who is LGBTQ+, that has impact. It's the same information delivered in a different way, but it is more impactful. When I tell those same people that in 29 states it is legal to discriminate against a gay couple who wants to buy a house by terminating their purchase agreement simply because they're gay, that is impactful. The man in the 10th row, who five minutes ago didn't know why he stayed in the room when I got on stage just realized that in his house or his neighbors house(s) there may be an LGBTQ person who might never be able to own a home just because of who they are. That's impact. Education aimed at changing hearts and minds is the only way to make progress in equality and equity.

Q. Is discrimination against LGBTQ+ home buyers still occurring in today's market?

A. Absolutely. Yes this really is a problem and we have the numbers to prove it too. What scares me more than this pattern of discrimination is the higher percentage of LGBTQ+ people who are so afraid they may face discrimination and have completely written off buying a home. The Alliance

released a report in 2021 that shows how the mere perception of discrimination impacts a buyer so incredibly that it is a deterrent to homeownership.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

If owning a home isn't the pursuit of happiness, I'm not sure what is.

Q. The Alliance recently did a survey of its members that touched on unconscious bias and the occurrence of discrimination among Realtors. Is this really a problem?

A. The numbers indicate that it is. Numbers don't lie, and there are no alternative facts. A majority of Alliance members that were polled said that they have experienced discrimination AS a real estate professional. A significant portion of these members indicated that it was directly associated with either their MLS or Realtor association. There are many reasons why that is a problem, several of them could be seen as subjective.

The National Association of Realtor's Code of Ethics specifically states that it is the duty of Realtors to report any actions that resemble discrimination. This code isn't intended to just protect consumers, it is there to protect members of the profession as well; all 1.6 million of them. Realtors and other professionals in the industry are literally the gatekeepers to our communities, the ambassadors to our neighborhoods. If we can't treat each other equitably and fairly, how can we assume we are treating our clients equitably and fairly?

Q. From your perspective, what's the most effective way for your members to combat discrimination in the industry?

A. Nearly 20% of our membership is composed of straight allies (those who don't identify as LGBTQ+ but support us). It takes all of us, working in tandem, to continue to provide impactful education to the industry. We need to meet folks where they are and assist them in their journey of understanding that “different” isn't scary or bad. As LGBTQ+ and allied people, we must stand up for equality, equity, and fair housing. Observing discrimination and looking the other way isn't an option. Pacifying someone who makes an offensive or hateful joke or comment or tolerating unacceptable behavior from another professional or a client is nothing more than condoning and perpetuating discrimination. If you see something, say something. I believe education uses situations as a learning experience. This should always be the first approach.

Q. Why is PRIDE important?

A. PRIDE is critical, not just important. Pride month is nice, but the spirit of PRIDE is what matters. No minority segment should be reduced to a single month and celebrated for 30 days, every 365 days. We should celebrate and be celebrated every day, and the spirit of pride allows us to do that. The celebration of pride month acts as a nice reminder to the rest of society that the LGBTQ+ community is present, has worked incredibly hard to stay present, and will not be going anywhere. The other 11 months are there, too. Pride isn't about a campaign on social media, or a parade down Main Street, or a drag show in the park... and then buying your fireworks for the 4th of July, it's about being visible, acknowledging a community largely in the shadows, and understanding why everything I just said is so much bigger than who I am. My challenge to anyone reading this would be to ask yourself, or your organization why not feature an LGBTQ+ CEO in an interview in December or September too? What can you do to turn pride into a culture of inclusion, and extend it beyond 30 days?