

September 17, 2021

A week ago we had the Wilkes Barre Town Hall discussing our return to the office and vaccine registration protocol. Many people had questions and concerns for which there were no answers. Although none of the comments cast dispersions on vaccines or questioned their efficacy, HR's [REDACTED] made statements (seemingly in response to the comments) that it wasn't "the place to debate the vaccine." I was confused when she went on, saying "they've stated loud and clear how they feel . . . they've been heard, this is not the place, we're not going to debate vaccines or anti-vax" . . . I reviewed all comments and could find none that invoked such a debate, it seems only possible that other concerns were conflated with anti-vax positions.

Over the past week I've thought deeply about the situation before us and am confident in my position that we are clearly NOT being heard. I'm sure I don't speak for everyone. I also expect that some, maybe many, will be outraged by this message that I'm sending to all colleagues who were invited to that meeting. I take this bold move as it seems well within proportion to the gravity of the situation before us. Since [REDACTED]'s August 10th e-mail when he first indicated that vaccines would be mandatory for our return to the office, I've been gripped with empathy and concern about how ugly this was going to get. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has actually cried over this, I'm not the only one who has been stopped in my tracks trying to determine if I will do what I think is right or do what I have to do to keep my job. I'm empathizing with the apparent target of such mandates like anti-vaxxers, but they're not the only ones suffering under this pressure. Some of our colleagues have tolerated rude behavior relating to this topic, others are concerned about the risk a breakthrough Covid case would pose to their family, we also have colleagues worrying about the slippery slope of this impingement on our rights of privacy and autonomy. If there was any appreciation for what [REDACTED] is putting its employees through, they'd thank us for our restraint.

Allusion was made that only 40% of Wilkes Barre employees have registered their vaccination status, perhaps because more than half of us disagree with this tactic for one reason or another. That sentiment reaches much farther than the swing-state of Pennsylvania, as a LinkedIn survey revealed more prefer autonomy over mandatory vaccines in the workplace¹. Many people who oppose the registration are, themselves, vaccinated; if that surprises you then you must not realize how the rhetoric and posturing has passively stifled free expression & honest conversation. Fascist-minded self-appointed health police are trash-talking unvaccinated people with impunity. Managers are making assumptions about whether their employees are vaccinated and feel no obligation to speak to them civilly on the topic.

We can apply for exemption, and I'm sure some contemplate submitting an insincere application, compromising personal integrity for the sake of a just outcome. People who've had Covid now hope and pray that [REDACTED] approves of their preference to rely on natural immunity over the vaccine. Will those who qualify for an exemption be shamefully obligated to prove that they're not anti-vaxxers? How much of their personal feelings or private medical issues must they bare to secure their position on the "right" side of "us and them"?

[REDACTED] hasn't set a return date and claim they'll delay until case rates are within the acceptable range. To those who don't want to return because vaccinated people are still getting sick and spreading the virus², the push for vaccine registration raises concern that [REDACTED] will force a

return to the office before they're comfortable doing so. If safety was truly the top priority, then we'd simply continue working from home or enact an "at your own risk" policy.

I'm dismayed by the trend to dehumanize anyone who is different to the extent that you don't even understand what they're saying to you, biases are overlaying the messages we attempt to deliver. Dehumanizing people diminishes any compassion you might have for them, making it easier to deny them healthcare or their right to earn a living. Let us not forget that the progressive movement of anti-Jewish sentiment used science to protect German citizens from the "biological threat to the nation's health."^{3 4} These parallels disturb some of us to our core.

This is not the only way to address the problem before us. This is bad for our [REDACTED] culture of which I used to be so proud, and it's bad for society in general. I value personal liberty and believe everyone should have a choice about what is put into their body. I accept that others believe things with their whole being that I think are foolish, I know others are preoccupied with fear over things that I dismiss out of statistical unlikelihood. I also know I'm not special. I will not register, and I will not show my vaccine record for the privilege of admission to the office. I will not contribute to a system posturing to economically punish anyone for their beliefs about personal health and safety. I believe that "anti-vaxxers" are the intended target, and I'm afraid of what is next. What happened to [REDACTED] culture of inclusivity and acceptance of diversity? If "those people" aren't welcome back into the office, then I'm standing outside with them.

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1 – LinkedIn.com, LinkedIn News, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/linkedin-news_as-companies-continue-to-reopen-the-decision-ugcPost-6833761714698240000-qkMB

2 – CDC.gov, COVID-19 Vaccine Breakthrough Case Investigation and Reporting, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/health-departments/breakthrough-cases.html>

3 – Encyclopedia.ushmm.org (Holocaust Encyclopedia), Anti-Jewish Legislation in Prewar Germany, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/anti-jewish-legislation-in-prewar-germany>

4 – USHMM.org (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), In the Name of Public Health – Nazi Racial Hygiene by Susan Bachrach, Ph.D. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/07192004-nazi-racial-hygiene-bachrach.pdf>