

***Skeletons from the Closet***  
**Coming out as a Deadhead in the Workplace**  
***By Jill Matlow, Wall Street Dead aHead Family Member***



*Images by: pixabay.com*

The whispers, the laughter, the snickering...seems like just yesterday many of us experienced that in the workplace. “Did *you* know?” could be heard by the water cooler. Silence when we walked into a room followed by some giggles in the corner.

Sound familiar?

Do you remember when you “came out” as a Deadhead in the workplace? Did you refrain from telling people out of fear of being ridiculed or judged or were your colleagues relieved to hear that they weren’t the only ones “on the bus” listening to that crazy music?

It's one thing to reveal to your parents and friends that you're a Deadhead, but to your colleagues—now that's a slippery slope and a whole other ballgame. I remember at work when word got out that I was a Deadhead—it was 1988—and I was working at a healthcare consulting firm, where most of my colleagues weren't into “that music”. Even though I went to Dead shows frequently during that time, I never suspected that anyone knew of my secret life. Much to my surprise, when I was getting ready to change jobs, my supervisor Nancy sent out a memo to the staff joking that I was leaving “*to join Jerry Garcia on tour*”. I guess they knew all along!

I think we've come a long way since those days when we had to keep it hush-hush that we were Grateful Dead fans, especially in our place of business. Let's be honest here, there is a certain negative stereotype of a Deadhead—whether it's quitting their jobs to join tour while selling burritos and grilled cheese sandwiches in the parking lot or smoking pot in the shadows—these generalizations do not reflect the majority of Deadheads, many of whom are professionals and respected members of society.

Yet, I'm sure there are many among us who still remain tight-lipped and in the closet at work about being a fan.

A few months ago, I was on a business call and had to give the caller my email address, which is [scarletfire60@gmail.com](mailto:scarletfire60@gmail.com). Most people hear ‘Scarlet’ and make a *Gone With the Wind* reference. But this woman, without missing a beat said: “*Are you getting ready for the ‘Cold Rain and Snow’?*”, a seamless Grateful Dead reference. We instantly bonded!

Such bonding is reminiscent of Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events® (WSDaH)—our beloved networking group connecting members through their mutual love of the Grateful Dead. Deborah Solomon, the Founder of WSDaH, has created a judgment-free zone, where like-minded professionals can be comfortable in their Deadhead identities. If only this group existed back in 1988!

As a Family Member, WSDaH reinforces what I already knew. I can be myself and don't have to worry that someone will be judgmental or critical of my love for the Grateful Dead. Since WSDaH's inception, I've seen other professional groups also appealing to this demographic. It does seem that we're setting a positive example and making great strides in being taken more seriously.

Outside of WSDaH, I often wonder if the Grateful Dead stigma varies across different professions or whether certain industries are more forgiving than others upon discovering such music preferences.

I decided it was time for me to poke around and find out that answer once and for all. What better place to begin my research than asking WSDaH Family Members about their experiences coming out in their workplaces. Here's what they had to say:

*"I am a litigator. I did not get along with opposing counsel on a fundamental level in connection with a particular case I was handling, which is unusual for me since I tend to develop some kind of rapport with all my adversaries, even in hotly contested litigations. Nevertheless, about 2 years into the lawsuit, we're in Court one day and going over our calendars with the Judge to schedule a future trial date. Opposing counsel says he would not be available in the middle of June because he's away for several weeks. Knowing that Dead and Company would be touring at that time, I asked him where he was going. He said he was going to see some shows of his favorite band. Well, suffice it to say this led to a 30-minute discussion about the Dead, during which the Judge even chimed in about her thoughts on John Mayer!*

*Since then, this lawsuit has dragged on and on, but he and I have developed a mutual respect for one another and we always talk about the Dead when we see each other. He even invited me to join him and his crew for the Camden NJ show this summer. Gotta love it. Goes to show, you don't ever know..."*

[Adam M. Levy](#), Attorney, Adam Michael Levy, P.C.

*"The insurance business is an extremely conservative environment in which to work, and it's closed-mouth, button-down attitude was always a challenge to me. Very few people knew I was a Deadhead and, aside from a small dancing bear or postcard of Jerry's beaming smile, my "secret" was safe. In the Spring of '95 I bought tickets to one of the NYC shows of the Fall tour and was eagerly awaiting the boys' visit to town.*

*Needless to say...*

*Fast forward to 2015. I had bought a tour poster, framed it and hung it in my office. I was a managing director of an insurance brokerage, and although it's colorful and unusual office decor, unless you were a fellow Deadhead, the poster was pretty unrecognizable as such. My firm had been acquired and the CEO—my new boss—was in our offices for the first time. He paid me a visit, two guys in our late 50s - early 60s, all Brooks Brother-ed from head to toe, and sat down in my guest chair. He looked around my office, spied the poster and without skipping a beat, shook his head and told me he had tickets to the Boston shows. I told him about my NYC tix and we commiserated, swapped stories and reminisced for about a half hour. It wasn't quite the last scene from Casablanca, but it was the start of an interesting relationship”.*

[Jay Brodsky](#), Corporate Insurance Risk Manager, AmTrust Financial Services, Inc.

*“I started with my current company one year ago. The company, Regulatory DataCorp (RDC), collects information on individuals and businesses that our customers (mostly financial institutions) need to screen against for due diligence and regulatory compliance. Examples would be sanctions and watch lists, human trafficking, money laundering and a host of other crimes. In my first couple weeks at RDC I was asked to develop a content set that tracked Marijuana Related Businesses (MRB)—such as dispensaries, testing labs, manufacturers, and transporters (seed to sale). Due to the conflict between federal and state laws, most banks have chosen not to do business with MRBs. So I needed to have special access to cannabis-related websites, directories, etc. and it became a bit of a joke that I was the drug czar of the company. A couple weeks in, I was taking time off to go to Mexico to see the Dead and dance on the beach. In a meeting with my boss (COO), the CEO and various other senior folks, it came up that I was going to be out. The CEO asked where I was going, I said Mexico, he asked why, and I explained. There were a lot of jokes, about "field research" and reporting back. Now, with the secret out there, I wore my dancing bear sweater for "ugly sweater day" and hung up my dancing bear holiday lights. Turns out our company lawyer who I work closely with loves the Dead and I met a "next gen" Deadhead who just got into it over the last couple years. I may be going to a Tedeschi Trucks concert with a couple people from work in Philly later in February. It's now part of who I am there, as opposed to my last job, that after 10 years, only a few close friends knew of my Deadheadiness. So I am out of the Dead closet.*

*Life without music is really no life at all. It binds people together regardless of faith, culture or politics. I am grateful for all of the new friends (like you!) I have met since meeting Deb and joining WSDaH and look forward to helping grow that family”.*

[Bonnie Liggett](#), Director Content Acquisition, RDC

Are you a “dire wolf” in sheep’s clothing still in the closet at work, or do you wear your “foolish heart” on your sleeve revealing your authentic self to your colleagues about your love of the Grateful Dead? What’s your “greatest story ever told”? Do tell!