

Stop Confusing Freedom of Speech with Plain Stupidity

Shôn Ellerton, September 20, 2025

You can say what you like, but don't think the freedom of speech will protect you from getting fired.



Young Joey gets a job at a steak house and works there for a few weeks making some much needed money to fund his college education.

Something changed in Joey's mindset. The restaurant also being the local butcher, he watched as the delivery trucks piled in huge carcasses of once living animals to be carefully dissected into what we are familiar as sirloin, chuck, porterhouse, eye fillet, and the rest. He became so obsessed that, in his opinion, eating meat is just all-out plain wrong.

At work, he started to make comments to his co-workers that we should all be eating less meat. None of them really wanted to return an answer as such and slowly began to withdraw from him during staff breaks. All of them needed jobs and none of them were in a position to opine about whether eating meat is a good thing or not.

Ed, the manager of the restaurant, became aware that Joey was having little side discussions amongst his staff on the promotion of vegetarianism, the problems of climate change, renewables, and a myriad of other subjects related to the conversation of the planet. Ed rucked up to Joey during the lunch break and asked if everything is OK. Following that, Ed enquired as to why he is bringing up the issue of vegetarianism with the rest of his staff who, just so, happen to be working in a steak house, as Joey knowingly does.

Patting his back, 'You know, Joey. I like guys with strong opinions, but there is a time and a place for everything. But airing your views during work hours, especially at a venue where our clientele want to eat meat, is certainly not the best place to do it.'

Ed's actually quite a smart guy, and often likes to philosophise with others after hours, especially down at the Midas Bar on Main Street. He's also a proponent of free speech and free expression and often talks about the erosion of free speech in many parts of the Western world, particularly in his old country of England. Not much happens in this little town in the middle of Nebraska but Ed's friends are always interested in having these deep discussions. They're aghast to learn that more than twelve thousand arrests took place in the UK during 2023 because people posted something that is considered hate speech. Some of those who got arrested served many months behind bars along with murderers and rapists. Following in second place quite some way behind is Germany with around six thousand arrests or so. And despite its much greater population, the US had only fifty. You'd have to try pretty hard to be actively arrested in the US for posting something on social media!

These guys would talk about what constitutes hate speech and they all pretty much agree that society better start toughening up and to start growing a thicker skin. Ed mentions the point that the line is crossed when threats to specific people are made or publishing personal information online such as someone's address without their consent and so forth. But as for making deleterious comments about religious groups, gender stuff, illegal immigrants and political parties. There should be no law that prevents one from doing so.

You'd never think it if you saw them at the bar. All wearing worn-out chequered wilderness shirts and faded denim jeans, baseball caps, and looking very much worse for wear. If stereotyping be permitted, by all accounts, they should be discussing the best way to tack sheets of timber on roofs or the best way to despatch a deer.

It's good to have these open discussions, because without them, people become slowly adapted to a society that is gradually being encased by censorship and control. Those in control are more than happy for the masses to be inundated with thousands of sports programs, binge-worthy TV episodes on streaming services, watching cat and dog video shorts on social media, and practically *anything else* which is not conducive in getting together to have a political chat.

I remember when extraordinary measures were taken place during the COVID years in many cities in the world in which it was illegal to have more than three people congregate together in a public space.

Imagine that! Or have we forgotten already?

But who's to blame?

A lot of us. That's who.

This is due to nonchalance and disinterest by largely affluent middle-class people who think that politics is beneath them thinking that their way of life isn't going to change for the worse or think that it's a waste of time.

Those who fit in this category only need to look themselves in the mirror. Then they will go back to their sports programs and endless streaming entertainment leaving the political debates aside because it's boring and seemingly irrelevant to them. I'm not suggesting that sports and streaming entertainment is bad. I watch them too. But not *all* the time.

Well, one day, Joey's invited to the bar and takes part in Ed's little political discussions.

It's after work of course, and Ed raises the issue of Joey's stance on vegetarianism, climate change, and the push for renewables. Anyone familiar with the old Looney Tunes cartoon, *Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog*, may remember how the two cartoon characters break out of their work characters when the punch clock whistles at the end of the shift. Ralph's job is to try to hunt the sheep and Sam's job is to try to protect them. They're funny cartoons for all ages. Ralph tries to sneak up to a sheep wearing a sheep's costume, and there is Sam waiting for him with a sledgehammer when he tries to pilfer the sheep. That sort of thing. But when the whistle blows, both Ralph and Sam punch out at the clock and they both talk civil to each other and say cheerio until tomorrow.

Well. That's what it was like with Joey joining in on the conversation at the bar. It was a safe space to openly talk about subjects without fear of bad consequences. It was almost done very much in humour when the others found out that Joey, a good hard worker at the steak house, just happens to be a hard-nosed vegetarian and animal rights activist. The conversation turned out to be a bit of a heated debate at times, but everyone there respected everyone's right to an opinion.

Knowing that Joey was a bit overzealous with his opinions at the workplace, Ed kindly reminded him to be more discreet and, under no circumstances, ply the customers with his own personal opinions on the ‘evils’ of eating animal flesh.

Unfortunately, Joey didn’t see things that way.

He wanted to be heard *and* he wanted the customers to know that eating meat is a very bad thing. After all, they all talked about the First Amendment and the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression at the bar last night, so surely he could do the same here.

Joey started to wear little badges on his clothes highlighting his concern with animal welfare and vegetarianism. Ed caught him out on the act and gave him a stern warning not to wear these badges at work. Joey grumbled somewhat and explained that surely he has a right of freedom of expression. Ed reminded him that he also has the freedom to make a living and, more importantly, *choose* who he wants to work with him.

Nothing remarkable happened during the next few days. Joey didn’t wear any badge nor did he make any comments about his political and social views. Joey was, indeed, an efficient server, turned up always on time, and Ed didn’t really want to lose him.

But Joey got the itch again.

On serving steak dinners to his customers, he started to make little comments about how much water is used to make that steak, or how inhumane the animals are kept prior to being slaughtered, or even to say that eating too much meat will give you cancer and so on. Blatantly ignoring Ed’s warning, he started to wear those badges again mistakenly thinking that he’d be protected by the First Amendment for choosing to freely speak and to freely express his opinions.

He was summarily fired.

Joey was spellbound and shocked. He got incredibly angry and threatened to take Ed to court for violating the principles of free speech and free expression.

A very disappointed, and frankly surprised, Ed, explained to Joey that if it’s his prerogative to file a case against him, he’s free to do so. However, Ed also explained that he had no sensible choice but to fire him, especially that he had been given numerous warnings.

After doing further research on free speech and expression, Joey decided not to file a case. He was thinking of hypothetical situations which would make the enforcement of free speech or free expression impractical.

For example, if he hired someone to look after his house, for example, a dogsitter. And that person insisted on smoking in the house. Would Joey have the right to fire that housekeeper after he plainly set out the rules that smoking isn't allowed?

Another example, of hiring a kid's entertainer for a birthday party and that entertainer decided to use mature or bad language against the wishes of Joey. Would Joey have the right to kick him out? How would Joey feel if that entertainer rebuked and said that he was only exercising his free speech?

Joey realised that he was *paid* to operate in a steak house and that openly making comments with the customers suggesting that eating meat isn't a good thing could impact the business in a negative way.

In the divisive world of politics, I often come across quite unhinged arguments concerning the erosion of free speech in the United States. Yet, in many other Western worlds, free speech is far more under attack, particularly with the recent spate of arrests and imprisonments that have been occurring in Britain by Keir's Labour Party. Notably, the arrest and imprisonment of Lucy Connolly for posting an offensive tweet regarding illegal migrants and the arrest of [Graham Linehan](#) of [Father Ted](#) fame on arrival at a London airport for making a crude joke about transgenders on the X platform *whilst he was in Arizona some months previous*.

Most recently, a prominent host on America's ABC platform, [Jimmy Kimmel](#), was fired for certain rhetoric he played out following the assassination of [Charlie Kirk](#). What I find so utterly ridiculous is to suggest that Jimmy wasn't allowed his freedom of speech. I won't go into detail as to what or why Jimmy was fired but it is enough to say that Jimmy won't be arrested for what he said. He was simply deemed unpopular enough for ABC to remove him from his post. [Don Lemon](#), [Joy Reid](#), and [Piers Morgan](#) were all let go by their respective platforms because what they said had consequences and their employers no longer wanted them. It is no more unusual than anyone else getting fired from a job which they didn't do properly or to the standard of the business in return for paying out their wages. It has *nothing* to do with the protection of free speech!

Finally, to make this abundantly clear.

Free speech does not make it such that there won't be any consequences. Protection of free speech ensures that you won't be arrested and prosecuted by the law for citing an opinion which could be interpreted as 'hate speech'. However, it does not give someone the right to remain in someone's employment for saying something which that employer does not like.

During the Biden administration, there is no doubt that there have been cover ups and obfuscations of certain truths that were harmful to Trump's election. Likewise, the Trump's administration to cherry pick its news reporters from the White House could be seen as a way to push away the platforms that could be deemed as harmful to Trump's standing. However, is this about free speech? Not really. Scandalous maybe, but an impingement on free speech? I don't think so. Political parties from time immemorial have played out these tactics and it's not going to change in the future either.

However, I am concerned with some of the rhetoric pushed out by [Pam Bondi](#), who openly threatened that the government will go after offenders of hate speech celebrating Charlie Kirk's death. Such hate speech is, of course, abominable, but it should also be protected because prosecuting it sets a very dangerous precedent. Thankfully, she received bipartisan criticism for this bizarre and unwarranted move.

As for Trump's [executive order](#) to prosecute anyone for burning the American flag, I believe this is highly problematic and infringes on the right to freedom of expression. Those burning their nation's flag, an act of defiance, disenfranchisement or disrespect, surely, would face other consequences, usually being ostracised by others within the community. Even doing some other despicable act like flying a Nazi, Hamas, Taliban, Confederate or KKK flag shouldn't be made an offence either. In some countries, you could be in real trouble if you, say, burned an LGBTQIA+ rainbow flag in public, which, like above, isn't a very respectful thing to do anyway. But making it a criminal offence muddies the waters by making it more likely for those committing these acts to double down harder on their convictions. It also takes away the gravity of prosecuting those who commit *actual* crimes as set out by law.

Despite Trump's disappointing decision with respect to flag burning, I believe without Trump, JD Vance, and especially, Elon Musk, the world *would* be in a more dangerous place with regard to free speech.