"Put Up With Inappropriate Office Behavior?

Working for Sony Pictures put me in one of the most casual and relaxed professional environments I've ever experienced. The atmosphere, the workspace, individuals' attitudes, even the dress code encouraged a comfortable, not-at-work feel. Initially, such an environment seemed great; it motivated and kept individuals working hard and it eliminated a lot of the stress that a 'stuffy' work environment can add. Unfortunately, some individuals at Sony pushed the limits of the casual environment a bit too far, and not long after being there I became aware of some of the unethical behavior that occurred regularly. Inappropriate jokes, most often regarding sex and religion, were often passed off as "part of business." Individuals started treating the casual environment as if they were in the comfort of their own homes; disregarding the fact that what they might say or do could offend coworkers. Most surprising, was the fact that others, including bosses and superiors, seemed to ignore such behavior and take the attitude that if there was no obvious, direct impact on business operations then it was not really an issue. Everyone around me seemed to share this attitude --- despite the fact that Sony had required every employee to sign documents saying they had received and understood all materials in the New Employee Handbook; in which such behavior was called out as inappropriate and inexcusable. This bothered me as a Christian but I don't want to be viewed as prudish or a grumpy spoilsport or tattletale. Should I do something? What?
          --Pat

Dear Pat

I am sympathetic to your dilemma. I think first about what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:
> *"Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. . . But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. . . . Therefore do not be associated with them. . . . Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Ephesians 4:29; 5:3-10).*

So your instincts are right in reacting negatively to vulgar, silly, greedy, and insulting talk. Paul's advice is to set a good counter-example by (1) not participating in this kind of thing, (2) proactively "living as children of light": and "speaking truth in love," and (3) "exposing" the bad stuff.

Your good example is important but even with your bosses it is probably not enough to simply point to the Handbook or to your own misery in having to listen to this kind of thing. I would be looking around to see if there aren't others who feel as you do, especially an older colleague or two. Strength in numbers! Second, I would try to build a case that companies that tolerate this can get into trouble, get sued by someone who feels harassed or stigmatized for their race or sex. Your bosses may have no moral compass but their financial one should be at work. This is what "exposing" the "works of darkness" might mean: showing how there could be serious consequences.

Rely on your small group fellowship to encourage and pray with you . . . find some allies at work . . . find and share some business examples of the consequences of toxic cultures . . . share your

concern and offense with your boss and colleagues when that might help . . . pray that God will help you . . . and if all else fails, pray for another job!