

CONFIDENTIAL INPUT 10/3/25

“Confidential” Input Hurts the Marginalized while protecting the Privileged

PB Miles4RET 10/3/2025

Confidential input is often defended as “protecting” those who don’t want to speak openly, which sounds nice in theory. In practice, it **hurts vulnerable people** and slows down real work.

I’ve felt this harm personally, and so have my **marginalized friends at Twin Oaks**. Confidential input makes us **hyper-aware of who smiles at us to our face while in line at the steam table, while also secretly writing input on us that reinforces existing power imbalances and undermines our goals for equity**. It disconnects and isolates us, it leaves us carrying **fear, anger, and dread** while trying to do the right thing. "Carter"

Like online trolls, who **hide behind anonymity to attack and express racism and other abhorrent ideologies without consequence**, confidential input can allow harmful biased attitudes to spread unchecked like toxic mold inside our community.

Confidential complaints **remove accountability**. They can protect the privileged and comfortable, while exposing marginalized members, giving outsized influence to those who can hide. There is a real **emotional cost** to being the recipient of vague, **antagonistic** input. Because it is confidential, there is **no way to clarify or follow up**, making it a frustratingly unhelpful distraction. For a community that talks about **“accountability”** so much, many here are surprisingly unwilling **to attach their names** to input on matters involving racial justice. Asking members to speak openly is NOT censorship AT ALL, it is **integrity and respect**. Twin Oaks surprisingly **lacks any real systemic conflict resolution systems**, and confidential input only **adds fuel to existing tensions**, allowing hidden agendas to distract from structural change like securing land, advancing reparations, and supporting BIPOC-led initiatives. "Holly"

The **only** legitimate exceptions to attaching names are **real, tangible concrete threats** like sexual assault or violence, which must trigger **immediate escalation and active discussion of corrective action**, not circling the drain of the rumor mills. "Holly"

Confidential input might feel safe for the privileged, but for marginalized people, it **feels like a trap**. It allows hidden biased agendas to **carry more weight than courage or principle**, generating **fear, dread, and anger**, and disconnecting us from the community we care about deeply. If we are serious about **equity, reparations, and BIPOC-led initiatives**, we need **accountability, transparency, and direct engagement, now**. Anything less risks **not just the work, but the wellbeing and mental health of those carrying it forward**.

Miles "Carter"

Well put. I have never witnessed constructive confidential input during my tenure at Twin Oaks. It reminds me of "grey faces" on Reddit. Arlo
Holly
"Isaac"

Barring real fears of assault, I don't think a culture of anonymous input helps the community. Personally, if I have a thing I want to tell someone that might make me uncomfortable, I consider that a "me issue" if I don't have it in me to do that.

(Not the issue of the focus person!) - Seya
(Nor should it be made the issue of the focus person!)

I think we should listen to Miles & RET on this issue, and not allow confidential input for Earthly Wilds. Open conflict is hard, but healing white supremacy and seeking racial justice is ^{necessarily} hard. Racism is the biggest open wound this country has and healing it requires discomfort and sacrifice on the part of the beneficiaries of racism. If we, as a community, continue our pattern of not listening to members of color advocating hard changes, and continue to be a community rooted in white-dominant culture, that's going to be the thing most likely to make me want to leave the community. - Ollie

Miles

I agree that asking members to speak openly is not censorship. It's the opposite of censorship.

Twin Oaks' anonymous input tradition comes...

... from members who said they feel afraid & marginalized, and from those who support them in that.' I've been told I "sound like" I'm "trying to shut down a conversation" because I openly voice disagreement. I've never proposed that anyone be disallowed to speak for any reason. I'm not the one who has asked for ("feel I need") a segregated space or closed, hand-picked group in order to speak freely.

I would be interested to see how doing away with confidential input works, what that would look like. I would hope it's not just disallowed for one cause or group but then exception made for another that's now in favor. That's how it started in the first place, and I think that wouldn't fix or change anything for the better.

- Harlock 4 what an open discussion looks like

Thank you, Miles + RET!! I have disliked the practice of confidential input since I was a new member. I have found it to be personally damaging + discouraging. I have stopped volunteering myself for positions of responsibility that require this, because I do not wish to put myself in the position of having to defend myself against accusations that go through a 3rd party for "interpretation." I have gotten feedback this way that has felt cruel, or even incomprehensible. It serves no one to continue the practice of hiding behind a 3rd party. Real change comes from relationships, + strong relationship is the container for feedback. The question we need to ask ourselves is how can ^{"effort"} we form + support healthy relationships?

~ Kelpie

I have a feeling the issue around confidential input and ^{W/RET} earthly words has to do with interactions ^{at} meetings, not written input. I don't ~~write~~ ^{challenge} So

I don't really know why we are having this discussion.

The two concepts lack relatability. ^{responsibility} CONFIDENTIAL INPUT ^{is so frequent} ^{it seems} ^{to be a way of} ^{avoiding} ^{responsibility}
- Trout BROUPTHINK

On the whole, I think that confidential input often causes a lot of harm as Miles says. But, I've found confidential input to be very necessary in cases involving sexual assault + sexual harassment. (beyond how this paper defines them)

I faced significant blowback for years after a guest slapped my ass in the tofu hut and I tried to ask his host to make him leave. This guest's host insisted on a follow-up, in-person, private conversation in which they tried to tell me I was making too big of a deal out of the situation and has since tried to block me from multiple leadership positions.

If instead I had gone to CMT, it could have remained confidential, and the community could have received the information that the guest had sexually harassed a member. If confidentiality were abolished, it would be much harder for victims of harassment to take official action without risking the whole community finding out.

Additionally, I've given negative input for visitors who harassed close friends who were, at the time, fairly popular in the community. I can think of one particular case where the people who spoke publicly against someone who had emotionally abused multiple partners lost friendships and became the subject of gossip for months. Most members who joined after 2021 don't know my history, but I was sued by my rapist, and community process around sexual assault/harassment triggers pretty severe PTSD symptoms + court flashbacks. Therefore, confidentiality in these cases gives me the opportunity to have a say without having to be part of any ensuing conflict. (this is also why I stopped giving the consent orecs after designing them and then giving them for ~5 years)

Confidential input has also been used as a tool by both BIPOC + trans members in the last 7 years to address microaggressions by people seeking positions of power in the community.

So all that to say, confidentiality cuts both ways. But, knowing that it's more often leveraged against marginalized members than by them, I would support more limits on confidential input. I'd support a specific list of approved reasons for confidentiality or specific use cases. I don't have a comprehensive list off the top of my head, but I'd be happy to participate in making one.

TL;DR - Miles is absolutely right that confidentiality is weaponized against marginalized members. It's can also be used by marginalized members to address issues of oppression, harassment, and abuse. I think it needs to be limited, but not abolished.

↑ I couldn't have said it better. - Anna



Labor dishonesty at Twin Oaks

I know I am just an Associate, but I really care about Twin Oaks, so upon noticing a significant negative change – I felt I had to speak up. Being here on-off since 2018, I am perhaps more sensitive to the effects of gradual change than members. Before, lying about labor done was grounds for expulsion, and still is in policy today.

However, now it feels ignored. Teams/cos seem uncomfortable calling out or challenging labor dishonesty they see or is put to them. I have noticed members increasingly voice frustrations about this, non-surprised to repeated dishonesty, and helplessness to address the problem. One example has left me demotivated.

My last visit I was a honcho in a work area, and I was told by others in that area that 1 co was no-showing their shifts or regularly doing 30 mins then leaving. Labor database entries didn't match this, so I noted shifts in that area for 1 month to see if they were doing their logged work, which they were not. Felt weird tracking someone's work (first time doing so and first ever O+I post about anything). But I felt people were turning a blind eye, was happening right in front of me, undoubtedly intentional, and I owe everyone at TO being honest with their work. I talked to several teams, managers (and friends) about this co's labor dishonesty. All avenues have now been exhausted and no team or manager has taken any action. There have been no consequences. Reasons given have been reluctance to endure another difficult dishonesty process, not believing it is their role to take this on, and/or not wanting the grief they expect to endure if they publicly take this forward. Which is all understandable

However, to my knowledge this is a new systemic change – devaluing honesty. Labor honesty is debatably the most basic rule in TO, uncontroversially so – as if this was your work area you would take this seriously. Yet just having 1 co immune to the rules infers labor honesty is now optional for membership. We owe a duty of care for such co to better themselves rather than pretend they are ok to avoid awkwardness. It harms personal growth.

I believe the solution to this does not lie in changing the labor system. As in any system dishonesty is not ok. Nor labor accessibility. The work was accessible for the co to do, and no-showing harms accessibility for others (TO could make a labor accessibility manager who matches interests to job areas? but that is a separate issue). Nor the standard we are all afforded. A friend was previously rejected; having an addendum attached to their membership letter explaining solely their labor dishonesty. This was unfair variance in contrast to the earlier cos handling. Without consistency cos may theorize why some are protected, further deepening mistrust.

This problem is likely not going away on its own. TO could instead empower a current team to specifically take on these situations perhaps with extra support. Or create a labor accountability team, formally this time, empowered to sensitively deal with issues. Or pass the active labor transparency paper. Expecting labor hole monitors to deal with this issue is perhaps not sustainable for the grief received around such sensitive issues.

Above suggestions could encourage a consistent dialogue and protect the co who encounters labor dishonesty but maybe feels vulnerable/uncomfortable/lacks rapport, while the other co is protected by process. For both parties it offers alternatives to communication that could worsen the situation. That way people most at risk are not taken advantage of and there are assurances all parties are not victimised or treated inappropriately.

TO is more accepting now than in 2018. But acceptance to speak up against dishonesty has waned. No one wants a return to constant finger pointing. Yet if no one is empowered to act fairly then it becomes a free for all, and all the negatives of a paranoid untrusting community may run rampant. I don't mean to stir the pot, but I care more that TO stays a home where your work is justified knowing we try to make it egalitarian and true. Or at least a home where it remains more comfortable to call out genuine dishonesty than to be dishonest itself.

This post is not to call on the mentioned co, or any co/team (in incredibly difficult situations), but a common ground; labor dishonesty can be addressed fairly, openly and with consideration for all parties involved.

I hope you can agree, even if you disagree with me or the nature of this letter. I respect people have different opinions, so any private/public expressions won't sour any connection from my side. I love Twin Oaks so much, and it isn't easy, but keeping quiet would feel a personal disservice to a place I owe far more to than it owes me.

– Will

Labor Dishonesty by Will Lad. Oct 2025

1/10/2025

11
10
Pim

Thanks so much for addressing this issue by taking a sensitive and systemic analysis. - Michael (It's totally (I see it, too...))

Thank you for taking the time and emotional energy to write this. I think we lack the tools needed to deal with some difficult situations here (like addressing labor dishonesty). I think the labor transparency paper would have been a great tool to deal with this kind of situation.
-Naomi

If someone is blatantly and objectively cheating our system then call a feedback, present a case to the community.

The argument isn't about supporting dishonesty. The argument is about allowing individuals to point people out and those people are presumed guilty without a case to the community being made. And allowing the community to decide right and wrong and the consequences.

The community has processes for accountability. They have high

hurdles to ensure Affinity groups
are not empowered to go after people
they don't like.

There was a stark contrast in the
content between Sebastian's, Nid's, and
Carter's feedbacks. And that was driven
by a wide spread agreement about the
dynamics in each case.

People ^{seem to} want to privately and in such
channels to call people out. I am
uncomfortable about that and the potential
for abuse.

If you see dishonesty, then call for a
feedback or managerial review. Let the
community decide. I live under a
Trump regime with constant calling

OUT UNNAMED MISCREANTS. I've lived
at Twin Oaks for 30 years. I've heard
lots of rumour and stories.

Even this paper, I'm wondering who
and what you are talking about.

If you think some one is cheating

You are empowered to say so.

But you need to do it not send
3 by 5's to managers or teams. I
don't want to give policing power
to any individual or team. I want
the community to be the
arbiters of right and wrong.

- Tiger // Arlo & Pam

I am unique I guess in that I don't worry
about what every body else is doing, just what
I'm doing. I believe in the honor system

Arlo
Soga

and I acknowledge That in every honor system,
There is some dishonesty. And I don't think The
dishonesty in our labor system makes any overall
difference in The scheme of Things. It just
rubs some people raw. And They can call
a feedback. we have The feedback system for
This. I don't want any more systems. I actually
think we would have a better community if more
people focused on Their own work. ^{"Holy"}

- Trout "Carter" "Seys"
"Baac"
This is Exactly what I've been
trying to say. Thanks Trout
- Tigger

It seems like a problem though when people bring concerns like
this to relevant teams/managers + then nothing happens b/c folks on
those teams/managements are then criticized for trying to come up
w/ ways to handle this type of thing. "open secrets" hurt our community
- B: "Pam"
mac

It would be good to have process team^{to} help with process... ~~have~~ That can be a
stressful, but important, job. - Arlo
↑ Process team is here to help with there and other conflicts. Please come to
us and join the team - Aram

Will, I remember when you left in 2019 you wrote an exit letter and one of the things you said was that we (Oakers) were too hard on each other. That was an interesting reflection about the community!

who? (not Will, the author). Pam

I don't think either devaluing honesty or avoiding confrontation & social rejection are new at Twin Oaks. Really that seems to have been part of the culture for a long time. I do think it's harder to see that when you're new(er) to the community. For most people here, until you or your friends get or feel burned by something or someone(s), you'll still tend to see Twin Oaks as a Utopia in the making. - Harlock 4 the perspective from a couple of steps back

Thank you, Will, for your courage and plain speaking and caring. I agree we are responsible for ~~our~~ maintaining our trust system. When we see something that looks wrong, it is our responsibility to first check out the facts, then speak up, to the manager/labor manager/planners - whoever has responsibility for ^{taking} the next step. And get support. It's hard to stick your neck out alone. I have done it, I know the price. But the price of not speaking up is similar to what we are seeing nationally - ~~the~~ the culture goes downhill and hurts us all, starting with the most vulnerable. So, get support. Pam is offering official support. I am willing to help individuals tackling dishonesty (or other wrongs).

I mostly focus on my own work, but we all need to also pay attention to cleaning and tidying, supporting the sick, earning money, and helping to thrive for the long haul. I generally think 95% of us are doing the right thing 95% of the time. But Will has seen a serious repeated theft (recording hours you didn't work is theft, unfairness)

It can be hard to call a feedback, but many unhelpful members have decided to leave after a feedback is called. Some have stayed and changed their ways.

Calling a feedback does require callers to state their names. That's accountability. Why, oh why, did we allow the people calling for ~~the~~ Downstairs 0 to stop being ~~a~~ space, to remain confidential?

I hope we can improve on accountability, courage and honesty.
Pam