MEMBER 💬 PERSPECTIVES
TO SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS
— *As We Recharge & Recover* —

How can employers support LGBTQ+ professionals in the workplace, not just during Pride Month, but all year long?

In 2018, a study concluded that 55% of Americans were "OK" with gay, lesbian, and trans co-workers. While the study cites this statistic as a sign of progress, this statistic made my heart sink. If 55% of my co-workers are "OK" with my queer co-workers and me, that means that 45% of them still do not embrace who we are and who we love. It is similarly challenging to exist in environments where heterosexuality and binary gender are assumed as the default, rather than a possibility in a broad and beautiful spectrum.

Here are three things your organization can do to combat these defaults and to make queer people feel more included all year long.

First, scrutinize your organization's policies and procedures for binary language. Until recently, the great majority of corporate policies contained binary pronouns ("he/she") and heteronormative relationship terms ("husband/wife"). These policies should be reviewed and updated to adopt non-binary language, such as "they" as a singular pronoun. Not only does this change eliminate the clunky "he/she" or "(s)he" conventions, it, more importantly, embraces people who use "they" as their pronouns.

Second, update your dress code policy to be gender-neutral. If your dress code has one standard for men and one for women, replace those with a single policy that focuses on exercising good judgment in appearance. For a specific policy, designate acceptable articles of clothing for all employees – "slacks, dress pants, dresses, and skirts" or "collared shirts, blouses, sport coats, or sweaters" – and indicate what clothing is not acceptable – "sportswear, jeans, and sandals." Alternatively, you can adopt a generic policy that simply requires dress that "demonstrates common sense and professionalism."

Finally, encourage the use of "partner" in lieu of "boyfriend/girlfriend" (and even "husband/wife"). This may seem like a minor – and hyper-woke – change of language, but it is a very important one. Just like the use of "they" instead of "he/she," this term signals the broad range of possible relationships while also validating the seriousness of long-term queer relationships, many of which do not involve marriage. In addition, this blanket term diminishes the potential for an awkward moment when a gay person is asked about an assumed opposite-sex partner and then is forced to correct the assumption and "come out."

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