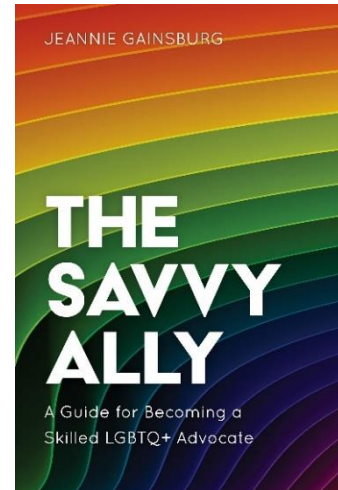


Creating LGBTQ+ Inclusive Workplaces

(Sections of this handout were taken from *The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate*)

This handout was created for employers and employees interested in making workplaces LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus so much more!) welcoming and inclusive. It offers information on why creating an inclusive environment is good for business, best practices for ally action, best practices for ally advocacy, and additional resources.



Relax! It's Not about Sex.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to LGBTQ+ inclusion in workplaces is the misunderstanding that conversations will be about sex. People bring their orientations to work, not their sexual behaviors. Being out in the workplace is about bringing family members to an office party or putting a photo of a partner on a desk. It's not about discussing with coworkers what we do in the bedroom or sharing a great new sexual position we just discovered.

It's Good for Business.

A 2018 Human Rights Campaign study called *A Workplace Divided* showed that almost half of the LGBTQ+ employees in the U.S. hide their LGBTQ+ identities at work. This means that time and energy that LGBTQ+ employees should be spending on work projects and making connections with colleagues are instead being spent on lying to coworkers, being evasive about who they spend their free time with, and/or changing pronouns when they talk about their loved ones. Several studies have shown that when LGBTQ+ employees are able to be their authentic selves in the workplace, their job satisfaction, efficiency, productivity, and retention all increase significantly.

Growing Pains are Common.

Diversity and inclusion efforts are sure to make some employees uncomfortable. People who have never had to hide who they are at work may not understand why things can't remain the way they have always been. They may feel that these diversity efforts are violating *their* rights and beliefs. Having respectful conversations with coworkers about these diversity efforts and allowing people to share their fears and concerns are terrific tasks for an ally. Listen ("Tell me more about how you're feeling"), connect ("I've been confused by a lot of this stuff, too"), reassure ("Please know that no one is asking you to change your beliefs"), and share ("These efforts are happening so everyone can feel safe and included at work").

Four Best Practices for Ally Action in the Workplace

- 1) **Ungender language.** Using ungendered language is a great way to indicate to a client or coworker that you understand that not everyone is straight and cisgender (i.e., not transgender), and that you are open to hearing about them and their loved ones. Use *spouse* or *partner* instead of *husband* or *wife*. Use *they* instead of *he* or *she* if you are unsure of gender.
- 2) **Mirror terms.** One of the simplest and most effective ways to be respectful with our language is to mirror the terms that people use for themselves and for their loved ones. If a coworker tells you that she saw a great movie with her wife, then you have just received valuable information for being respectful. You should now switch from your previous ungendered term of *partner* to *wife*.
- 3) **Ask everyone how you should refer to them.** Regardless of whether someone is part of the LGBTQ+ communities or not, asking everyone how they would like to be addressed is a great way to make all people feel comfortable and respected. Consider offering your information first. For example, “Hi. I’m Beatrice Johnson. Please call me Bea. My pronouns are *she*, *her*, and *hers*.”
- 4) **Visibly indicate your support.** Showing visible support for the LGBTQ+ communities saves lives. Create a safer and more welcoming workplace by wearing a rainbow button or hanging a rainbow sign that says, “All Families Welcome Here.” Keep an LGBTQ+ magazine in your lobby or waiting area. Add your pronouns to your name tag, desk nameplate, and/or email signature. Attend a Safe Zone or Safe Space training and proudly display the sticker you earn!

Helpful Hint

If people always, or almost always, use the correct pronoun when they refer to you, you are likely to find yourself having to answer these questions if you display your pronoun: “Why are you telling me your pronoun? Isn’t it obvious?” What a great educational opportunity! Here are a few suggestions for answering these questions.

“Displaying my pronoun helps normalize this practice and makes it easier for others to do so.”

“Creating a culture where people display their pronouns helps to avoid those embarrassing moments when you aren’t sure how to refer to someone. It avoids having to single someone out.”

“Violence against transgender people is a horrible reality. It creates a dangerous situation for transgender people if they are the only ones displaying their pronouns.”

Four Best Practices for Ally Advocacy in the Workplace

- 1) **Advocate for professional development.** Let your administration know that mandatory LGBTQ+ awareness and inclusion trainings should be included in your workplace diversity efforts.
- 2) **Support ungendered spaces and policies.** Educate others on the importance of ungendered facilities and policies. Give gendered, single-stall restrooms an upgrade with a new all-gender restroom sign. When buildings are being renovated, advocate for the creation of ungendered facilities. Allow people to use facilities that align with their gender identity. Advocate for an ungendered dress code and ungendered workplace social activities.

Pop Quiz

Who should use an all-gender restroom?

- A. Transgender individuals
- B. Transgender, questioning, and transitioning individuals
- C. Anyone

Answer: C

Many people think of all-gender restrooms as “transgender bathrooms.” Some transgender individuals will use all-gender restrooms and others won’t. All-gender restrooms are there for *anyone* to use. This means that if a cisgender employee feels uncomfortable using the same restroom as a transgender employee, then the cisgender employee can go and use the single-stall, all-gender restroom and have their privacy. Ta-da!

- 3) **Educate on the need for inclusive forms and office announcements.** Paper and online forms and records can be extremely limiting and frustrating for LGBTQ+ clients and employees. Think long and hard about what you actually need to know. *Then* look at whether or not the questions on your forms are getting you there. Do you need to know someone’s sex or gender, or do you really want to know how you should address them? Are office announcements inclusive of identities that are not just straight and families that are not just monogamous and heterosexual?
- 4) **Ensure that non-discrimination policies are updated and inclusive.** Workplace non-discrimination policies should include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Statements of inclusion should be posted in highly visible areas at your workplace and added to your service literature.

Resources

For more information on how to be an ally in the workplace, creating inclusive policies and forms, inclusive hiring practices, the importance of all-gender restrooms, best restroom signage, and much more, check out these resources below.

Books

Catlin, Karen. *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*. Better Allies Press, January 2019.

Gainsburg, Jeannie. *The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, March 2020.

Killermann, Sam. *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook*. Austin: Impetus Books, revised and updated 2017. Kindle.

McNaught, Brian. *Brian McNaught's Guide to LGBTQ Issues in the Workplace*. Independently published, November 2017.

Online Resources

Human Rights Campaign: Information on best practices for LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion, transgender inclusion in the workplace, and collecting data at: www.hrc.org/resources/workplace-climate-resources

Out and Equal: Resources for creating and supporting diverse workplaces at: www.outandequal.com

Savvy Ally Action: LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace trainings and consultations, free handouts, and fun 3-minute videos on how to be an ally to the LGBTQ+ communities at www.savvyallyaction.com

