

The Workplace Climate and the LGBTQ Community

Much has been written on the topic of (DEI), Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in the workplace. In training programs, we are learning that being aware of DEI is vital to creating and maintaining a successful and thriving workplace and there is no place for discrimination. This focus on DEI was perhaps a significant shift for employees and corporations because we have avoided talking about these aspects in the past. Now, DEI is an integral part of developing a multifaceted workforce.

So too, the conversation about LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) employees is coming to the forefront. Employers are investing resources and human capital to create better workplace cultures, to attract much needed talent with a variety of benefits and measurable advantages for their employees. LGBTQ employees are a part of the social media voices that say they want to be their true and full selves, at work and in society. Despite incredible progress in terms of broad public support for LGBTQ equality, many people still do not feel comfortable being their 'true self' at work. Fear and anxiety about one's acceptance in any group is a part of a developmental growth process for human beings regardless of which personal characteristics they want to be accepted. This is a basic need.



Did you know:

- **20%** of LGBTQ workers felt that they were passed over for job opportunities because they were LGBTQ.
- **45%** of LGBTQ workers agree with the statement that enforcement of the non-discrimination policy is dependent on their supervisor's own feelings towards LGBTQ people.
- **1 in 5** employees have stayed home from work because the workplace wasn't always accepting of LGBTQ people.
- **1 in 5** of LGBTQ workers avoided a special event at work such as lunch, happy hour, or a holiday party.

The persistence of anxiety about acceptance comes at a great cost to all employees, as well as to their workplace. Imagine if you, as an employee, with great skills to offer your employer, still had parts of yourself that you believed you had to keep secret or hide from others – the very people with whom you worked every day! The energy this takes can impede quality and quantity of work; one's focus might be on things other than attentiveness to doing a good job. Even safety problems can be an issue. Concerns about letting someone know who you 'really' are can come across disingenuous too – which can affect the cohesiveness and teamwork of any work group. The adages of 'speaking one's truth' and 'being true to oneself' is becoming more common with today's younger generations.

In another aspect, employees are being required to learn better communication skills to enhance their teamwork competences to include individual characteristics with which they may have not previously considered. As employees' workplaces become more diverse, they require greater awareness and thoughtfulness concerning human interaction and not just a job skill set.

Biases and stereotypes are part of the human experience, but we don't have to act on our biases. They may just be a signal to us that we can expand our awareness. Questions to ask yourself and which may be helpful to reflect on your own biases could include:

- What informed your earliest impressions and beliefs about LGBTQ identity?
- Define respect for yourself and others. How do you demonstrate that in the workplace?
- Evaluate your own personal comfort level with those in the LGBTQ community.

Understanding the concepts of ideological oppression, institutional and interpersonal oppression may bring to light the struggle that the LGBTQ community has experienced. This includes:

- Formal and informal discrimination against transgender people seeking access to healthcare.
- A landlord not renting an apartment to different-gender families.
- An employer refusing to offer a qualified job applicant, who is an LGBTQ applicant, a job.

Recognizing every day, subtle microaggressions, intentional – or oftentimes, unintentional interactions, that communicate some sort of bias toward a historically marginalized group, such as the LGBTQ community, is a necessary awareness employees must build to develop the inclusive workforce of today.

Pride month, in June, can be a time to learn how to support employee equality, to help build positive working relationships, and to become more mindful of the behaviors which foster collegial teamwork.

- Don't assume anyone's identity based on their gender expression.
- Not everyone uses the pronouns you might assume they use. Some people add pronouns to their email signature.
- Learn listening skills without the impulse to cut someone off or interjecting your opinion.
- Become more aware of your own limiting attitudes, stereotypes, and assumptions towards other employees.

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