

Empowering Differences

Tags: [#lgbtq](#) [#diversity](#) [#inclusion](#)

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Dialogue

A lot of people make a lot of assumptions about, for example, not going to college.

Another thing I highlight is that I didn't go to college, not because I did not want to, but because at seventeen life happened. I moved away, working long hours to provide for myself.

You planned to go to college, but life had other plans, didn't it What happened?

As a Jewish, high school educated, mother of two, 6 foot tall trans woman, I made sure to put my differences on the table instead of hiding them, hoping that nobody would notice.

Somebody once asked me why I made the choice to transition my gender. I thought for a moment before I responded. When I did respond, I mentioned that I didn't actually make the choice to transition, I made the choice to survive.

You make the point that nobody would want to choose to give up privilege. You point out that for you, there was a big difference in going from a cisgender presenting white male, to a white trans woman.

You've had people say some awful things to you over the years -- some of them in the workplace. A lot of people are not aware of what that's like. What is it like?

Terminology: cisgender, passing. Let's explore both.

We tend to see the world as binary:

I did not have the slightest bit of confidence when I was starting to understand myself. I was terrified of what people would think of me and my family, and how they would treat me differently when I walked in a room.

What some think --> This doesn't affect my workplace. I don't know anybody.

Key --> Respecting people's pronouns.

Access to basic necessities, like being able and comfortable using the restroom.

Not every trans person feels comfortable using a particular restroom, and trans and non-binary people are already terrified of being harassed in a restroom. There are multiple cases of trans people being thrown out of a public restroom, or being harassed in the restroom by other people. About 60 percent of trans people have avoided using public restrooms because they fear being harassed or assaulted.

Beware of binary thinking:

Expand your horizon on the gender continuum. Understand that there is more to gender than just being male or female, and the way that people are treated in your organization can depend on their gender expression.

Consider that a mention about a spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend for a lot of people can seem normal, but for LGBTQ person, that could be terrifying is the workplace isn't inclusive.

Contributor:

I think the most important attribute of being an ally is not that you understand what it feels like to identify as a minority or to live within an oppressed community, but that you use your voice to amplify their fight and their struggles. Being an ally means you stand up for people who do not have the same platform. That you are there for them in what they need. Being there for them as someone who listens, supports them, and raises them up.

For leaders who wanted to educate themselves, where to start?

What have you changed your mind on?

Quotes

Highlight [page 19]: The traditional career advice has told us to focus on the experiences that we have had in the workplace in order to prove we are the most qualified person for the job. I would like to present you with a wild new concept; highlighting your differences.

Highlight [page 21]: I have gone through my own personal journey of self discovery, and throughout it, I was able to rise from a part-time bank teller to the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion within a short few years. I had to learn about myself and put my differences on the table. As a Jewish, high school educated, mother of two, 6 foot tall trans woman, I made sure to put my differences on the table instead of hiding them, hoping that nobody would notice. I used them as reasons why I should be advancing further in my career. Highlighting my differences and citing my research, I was able to hold my own in critical conversations with my bosses and able to make a lasting impression that allowed me to rise through my career. The same can be said for you. Your differences are what separate you from the rest. They are what you need to

be bringing to the table and what will help you make a case for advancing further up the corporate ladder.

Highlight [page 54]: Another thing I highlight is that I didn't go to college, not because I did not want to, but because at seventeen life happened. I moved away, working long hours to provide for myself.

Highlight [page 94]: If you are a person who has a college degree or higher education, be an advocate for someone who doesn't. It can be extremely hard for people without a higher degree to be recognized and respected by other coworkers who do have a higher education. Be the person who motivates and supports them. Amplify their voice when they present their ideas at a team meeting. Especially if you share a similar background as the person. Motivate and encourage each other to speak up, share your ideas, and support one another whether in team meetings or throughout the workday.

Highlight [page 105]: The most important way of empowering people through gender differences is to make sure that your office space is inclusive of all genders and all people. That means making sure that all people feel comfortable and respected in the office; that everyone has a voice and that their concerns are being heard and addressed. Making sure that people's pronouns are respected and that people have access to basic necessities, like being able to, and being comfortable using the bathroom. Be sure there are policies in place that protect people of all genders from being discriminated against, that no one is denied opportunities from speaking out, or denied opportunities from moving forward in their career because of their gender identity

Highlight [page 108]: For trans and non-binary people, on top of making sure that our gender identities and pronouns are respected by people in the office, one of the larger accessibility issues comes with restrooms. Not every trans person feels comfortable using a particular restroom, and trans and non-binary people are already terrified of being harassed in a restroom. There are multiple cases of trans people being thrown out of a public restroom, or being harassed in the restroom by other people. About 60 percent of trans people have avoided using public restrooms because they fear being harassed or assaulted. Being a cisgender person, the only thing you should be concerned about is if trans people wash their hands before they leave.

Highlight [page 110]: Recounting my story and struggles in applying to multiple positions and careers, I hope to shed light on the fact that it is extremely hard for people of differing genders to gain access into the workplace. I also hope to show that I was able to experience forward momentum through owning my identity, and taking on the role of an educator. Becoming an educator and educating people on my gender identity was part of why I was able to get a job and also rise to a higher position than I had ever thought possible at the time. I've had to learn how to frame my story and my experiences in a way that enlightens others on the benefits

Highlight [page 141]: Don't entirely rely on an LGBTQ+ person to tell you every lingering question that you have about what it means to have certain sexualities, and do your own research. You don't have to know everything that an LGBTQ+ person has to deal with and know every struggle, but have a basic grasp of what it means to be LGBTQ+ and what we struggle through on a daily basis.

Highlight [page 147]: If you are a person in a higher position, consider mentoring an LGBTQ+ person. Take them under your wing and teach the techniques that they need to know in order to succeed in their role and in the organization. Teach them the techniques that you have learned through your time working and what leadership lessons you feel would have been beneficial to you when you were in a similar position. You can also be an ally for them, letting them know who you think would be a potential ally, and whom to reach out to. Take the lessons that you will learn throughout this book and impart what you've learned onto them. Build them up, and they will come back to support you and potentially be a mentor for another person as they rise throughout the organization, and in their field.

Highlight [page 171]: Take it from me, I did not have the slightest bit of confidence when I was starting to understand myself. I was terrified of what people would think of me and my family, and how they would treat me differently when I walked in a room. It took me years to come to terms with myself, to say, "I am who I am, and no one is going to take that away from me". I may walk into a room, get looks from the people there, but I am going into that room and I'm going to rock it because that is who I am and I won't apologize to anyone for being the confident person that I am now. If I didn't walk into each and every room thinking that I was the most confident person there, then I would get steamrolled and looked over constantly.

Highlight [page 172]: In order to rise above that negativity, you have to showcase a level of confidence. It didn't happen overnight for me, that's for sure. I think getting negative reactions from people, and having employers laugh at me were, ironically, instrumental in me building confidence internally. I took each negative remark made about me and used it as a building block. Instead of using those building blocks to assemble a wall to protect or hide myself from the world, I decided to use them to build a platform to constantly stand on. This allowed me to mentally be seen as larger than life. One of those comments that I got was, "Are you a drag queen?" Someone actually asked me that while I was working as a teller at the bank. That comment was extremely hurtful to me in the moment, but after that exchange I made it a point to remember that comment and I decided to use it as fuel, as a building block for the future. Everyone that laughed or put me down in any way, I used them all as fuel or those building blocks for my platform to build myself up. I also used those statements in my mind to prove them wrong, that I could perform, and succeed in the role and position I was in. I used their negativity to break the stereotypes that were in their head, and also to prove to myself that I could do it. I could make it in this world, and I was able to go after the dreams that I had, and meet the goals that I had set for myself.

Highlight [page 173]: Just showing up was difficult because I knew that someone was going to say something cruel or demeaning, but I had to take the high road because I knew that if I didn't, and I flipped out on the person and caused a "scene", then that would only sink my career in the long run. I had to swallow all of the negativity that I would receive on a daily basis, and shrug it off. I worked on what I could and that was to focus on myself, and making sure that I was doing all that I was supposed to do in my job function, and so much more. This way, when it came down to it, I was the one the in the organization they looked to when advancement opportunities came up.

Highlight [page 189]: I also have privilege in terms of me "passing" and my hair. Passing is a term in the trans community for how well a trans person looks as either male or female. I know that hair seems like a small item to have privilege about, but there are so many people from my trans community that struggle in the hair department. Plus red hair seems to be highly coveted. For anyone, hair is one of the biggest indicators that we look towards in identifying someone's gender identity. If someone has longer hair, we typically see them as feminine, and short hair as masculine. For trans women in particular, growing hair long is a struggle, and many have to resort to using wigs while their hair grows, or if they are experiencing hair loss.

Highlight [page 189]: Somebody once asked me why I made the choice to transition my gender. I thought for a moment before I responded. When I did respond, I mentioned that I didn't actually make the choice to transition, I made the choice to survive. I knew that this was what I needed to do in order to keep living; to wake up each and every day and feel like it's worth it.

Highlight [page 366]: Expand your horizon on the gender continuum. Understand that there is more to gender than just being male or female, and the way that people are treated in your organization can depend on their gender expression. Call out inequalities when you see them, and make sure that someone isn't overlooked or undervalued because of their gender expression. Be the ally that other people need in situations where they aren't being treated in the same way as a male colleague, or a cisgender co-worker. This is especially important for our non-binary and gender nonconforming friends. They need our support in the mission of gender equality now more than ever. Looping them in with just the trans communities fight is not enough to create change quickly. We have to make sure that when we're having a gender parity, equity, or equality discussion, that these have to include our non-binary friends. Lastly, be aware of your use of pronouns and gender inclusive language, as this will show a huge amount of inclusion.

Highlight [page 369]: Educate yourself and others about a person's sexuality. Work to create an inclusive environment where people feel comfortable and confident in themselves, and expressing who they are. Something as seemingly small as a male co-worker saying, "my husband or boyfriend", can be one of the most terrifying things, especially if they don't know how their co-workers are going to react. Be an advocate and ally for LGBTQ+ people, the person that they know they can go to who is not going

to judge them and who will listen openly and honestly about their concerns. Being an advocate also means making sure that your organization has inclusive policies that don't tolerate discrimination, either from the organization or its employees. Ensure that LGBTQ+ people can't be fired for being LGBTQ+, or that they aren't held back from a promotion or are treated differently because of their sexuality. Having inclusive policies in place ensures that LGBTQ+ people are protected from discriminatory practices, and helps create an inclusive environment.

References