emtrain®

Guide

How to Be an LGBTQ+ Ally at Work

LGBTQ+ Language Guide

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Introduction

Is your organization prepared for the Gen Z wave? The workforce is changing more than ever, and much of that has to do with the advent of Generation Z into the workforce, and growing numbers of LGBTQ individuals coming out of the closet and owning their identities. A number of recent surveys have found that growing numbers of teenagers and young adults do not identify as entirely straight, with some reporting that over half of respondents identify with some LGBTQ identity. Additional studies have found that about half of (48%) Generation Z is non-white. This is the most diverse generation of Americans we have ever seen, and they are calling for equal representation, opportunity, and treatment with voices loud and clear.

What does diversity look like to you? The common conception of a diverse workplace is one with a number of different ethnic and racial groups represented, a space where there is a fair distribution of male and female leaders, and power dynamics that don't revolve around human traits that cannot be changed overnight. While race and male/female dynamics are extremely important to consider when tackling the issue of workplace diversity, there are a number of other characteristics that are often left out of the conversation. Many states are beginning to expand protected characteristics to groups other than those that have historically taken the spotlight: age, disability, gender, race, and religion or belief.

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, tansgender, and queer individuals deserve to feel welcome and comfortable in their workplaces. For this to happen, it's critical that employers educate their teams on gender equality and sensitivity for LGBTQ+ groups. This guide will provide you with the tools you need to educate your team on issues of trans sensitivity, the inclusive use of gender neutral language, discussions of sexuality at work, and generational differences around LGBTQ+ sensitivity.

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Glossary: A Brief Index of LGBTQ+ Language

Term	Definition	Deragatory Versions (Defamatory Language not included)
Gay (adj.)	An adjective used to describe a person who is sexually attracted to their same sex. This is most commonly used to describe men, but can also encapsulate women and bisexual individuals.	• Gay as a noun: ex. "One of the gays..." • Homosexual: The term has a clinical history and has previously been used to stigmatize and persecute gay people.
Lesbian (adj.)	An adjective used to describe female identifying individuals who are sexually attracted to other females.	Lesbianism: This is a pejorative term.
Bi (adj.)	An adjective used to describe any person who is attracted to both men and women.	No specific term, but bi identities are often dismissed as "transitional" or "temporary" labels for people transitioning from straight to gay. This is very offensive.
Queer (adj.)	An adjective that people use to describe themselves if they feel that either their sexual orientation and/or gender identity do not conform to those labels that are commonly used.	Queer was once considered a deragatory term but has since been accepted by the LGBTQ+ community. Although, queer is a term that people adopt, not one which is assigned.
Orientation (n.) **Sexual Orientation (n.)**	A term used to describe a person's sexuality. This term eliminates the connotation that "sexuality is a choice."	The terms "sexual preference," "gay lifestyle," "same-sex attractions," and even "sexual identity" all imply that sexuality is a choice, and have a pejorative connotation.

Term	Definition	Deragatory Versions (Defamatory Language not included)
Gender Identity (n.) **Gender expression (n.)**	A term used to describe their gender. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of their own gender, and gender expression is the way that someone outwardly expresses their gender; these terms are not interchangeable.	• Sexual identity: this is different from gender. • Transgender identity: the term gender identity precludes the need to specify "trans."
Cisgender (adj.) **Cis (adj.)**	An adjective used to describe an individual who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.	
Transgender (adj.) **Trans (adj.)**	An adjective used to describe a person who identifies with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth.	• Trans or transgender used as nouns are derogatory. • "Tranny" and "transvestite" are offensive slurs. • "Transexual" is both insensitive and antiquated. Similar to "homosexual," it has been used to stigmatize and persecute the trans community.
Transition (n.)	"Transition" is the appropriate term to use when referring to someone's change from cisgender to transgender. It does not fixate on the optional surgeries trans people may undergo.	"Sex-change" is an offensive term because a person is changing their gender identity or expression, not their sexuality. "Pre-op/post-op" fixate on a person's anatomy and should be avoided.

| Term	Definition	Deragatory Versions (Defamatory Language not included)
Dead-naming (v.)	The act of calling a trans person by their pre-transition name.	Dead-naming itself is an offensive act and people should take active steps to adjust their actions.
Preferred pronouns (n.)	The pronouns that a person chooses to use and have others around them use in reference to them: ex. he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs	Similar to dead-naming, the improper use of pronouns is seen as derogatory and perpetrators should actively adjust their actions.

SECTION 3

Crunching the Number: Statistics about Gender Identity and LGBT Discrimination

In 2017, the Pew Research Center reported that the number of LGBT Americans is rapidly growing. At the time of the study, 7.3% of young adults ages 18-36 identified as LGBT, while only 3.2% of people 37 to 51 and 2.4% of respondents age 52 to 70 identified themselves as LGBT. This allows us to draw the conclusion that more people are coming out of the closet than ever before. The world we live in has become much more accepting of LGBT identities; Pew points out that LGBT acceptance rose from 51% in 2006 to 63% in 2016. LGBT Americans are coming out of the woodworks, and both employers and policy makers are making adjustments that reflect these changes.

At present, 20 states provide full legal protections against LGBT status and gender identity discrimination. An additional 2 states provide some protections for LGBT groups. That leaves 28 states with no LGBT non-discrimination policies. The supreme court is currently in the process of determining whether or not, as it stands, the Civil Rights Acts protects LGBTQ workers. Additionally, many employers and over 200 local jurisdictions have adopted laws or policies that explicitly protect LGBT individuals from harassment or discrimination.

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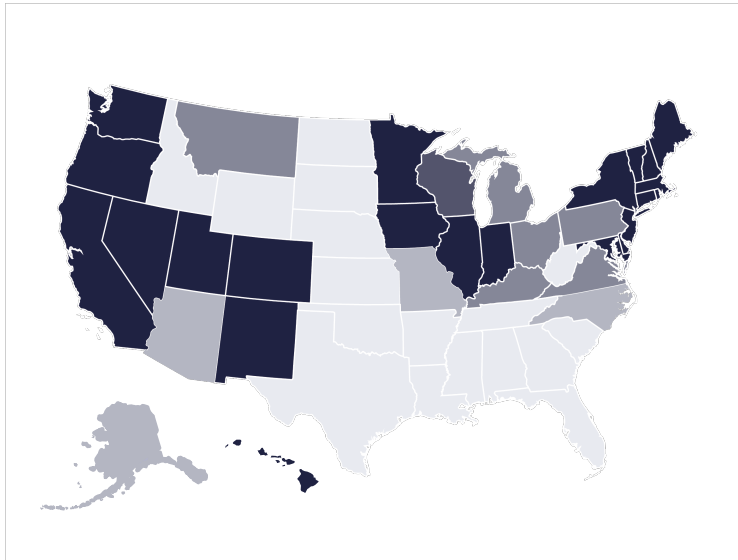
● Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

● Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation only

● Prohibit discrimination against public employees based on sexual orientation and gender identity

● Prohibit discrimination against public employees based sexual orientation only

● No state prohibitions against discrimination based on sexuality or gender identity

We can see a dramatic change on the horizon, but we are still far from a truly inclusive workplace culture. Over one-fourth of transgender people have lost a job due to intolerance, while three-fourths have reported experiencing workplace discrimination due to their gender expression. This number does not include the many trans individuals who do not come forward about these issues.

25%
of transgender people have lost a job due to intolerance.

>75%
of transgender people have reported experiencing workplace discrimination due to their gender expression.

So why is it important that we educate our employees about these issues? Just so your organization can hold itself in good moral standing? To treat individuals differently because of characteristics such as sexuality or gender is akin to racism and equally damnable. People deserve to feel comfortable at work and express themselves freely and authentically; treating everyone as an equal is simply the right thing to do. However, this is not always enough for people.

> If you're focusing on 20% of your energy on being someone that you're not, that's 20% less energy you're devoting to your job duties. That's 20% less time spent meeting deadlines, coming up with new ideas, and contributing to your organization's bottom line.

Look at it from a financial perspective. How can LGBT inclusion benefit your bottom line? Awareness and education will reduce incidents of harassment and thus improve productivity and alleviate the amount of cases that your HR department need address. Eliminating discrimination allows you to recruit and hire the individuals that are most qualified for the job, as opposed to those that match the profile of the rest of the team. Discriminatory and exclusive environments will naturally lead to low employee retention; putting a stop to these issues could potentially save your team from hundreds of hours of offboarding, interviews, onboarding, and other recruitment processes.

How can inclusion and authenticity really benefit productivity. If people are allowed to be their authentic selves, that means they aren't expending effort to pretend to be someone they are not. It sounds simple, but the option for authenticity can improve workplace culture by leaps and bounds. If you're focusing on 20% of your energy on being someone that you're not, that's 20% less energy you're devoting to your job duties. That's 20% less time spent meeting deadlines, coming up with new ideas, and contributing to your organization's bottom line.

SECTION 4

Sensitivity Coaching: How to talk to employees about LGBT inclusion

First and foremost, it's critical that you create a culture that fosters open dialogue between employees. Employees should feel comfortable expressing their opinions in a non-inflammatory, non-accusatory way without fear of retaliation or harassment. That means providing your employees with the tools to do so. Here's a chart that you can use to educate your employees on the skills needed to raise complaints with others about their insensitive words or actions.

Instead of this…	Try this…
"Don't say that."	"Lets try to use this term instead. It offends certain groups when you use that language because…"
"It's just like a man to…"	"Try to look at it from the female perspective…" or "You might be abusing your privilege when…"
"Your generation just doesn't get it."	"I know that things are different than they used to be, but try to view this issue through a new lense."
"Look! It's 2020 you just can't say that anymore!"	"Recently it's become clear that using those words offends people, so we want to try to use this language instead."
"You owe them an apology."	"I think it offended them when you said this… Maybe ask them how it made them feel."
"That's homophobic/transphobic."	"I understand that this isn't something you'd considered, but these groups prefer to be referred to by these names."
"I can't believe you just said that!"	"You may not have realized it, but when you say things like that it makes people uncomfortable."

5 Built-in Bias —Transition to a Gender Neutral Language with this Cheat Sheet

Gender-bias language is everywhere, and it affects more than just trans and other LGBT individuals. Gendered language is anything that unnecessarily differentiates between women and men. What do you picture when you read these words or phrases: mankind, businessman and manpower, and "hey guys, we need to man up."

Most people picture men when hearing the above words, and over time this has developed an unconscious bias that someone who portrays masculine qualities is the right fit for certain roles or that men carry some intrinsic value.

As a business communicator, company leader, or respectful colleague, it's crucial to communicate clearly and effectively, and that includes being conscious of the impact of every word you choose.

This cheat sheet identifies words or phrases you should swap out for more inclusive alternates. The most basic of these is switching gendered pronouns like "he" and "she" for the singular "they." This is often met with eye-rolls, but Merriam-Webster has deemed the singular "they" as preferable, and the organization has been around since 1828. If it can change, so can you. This chart is not exhaustive, and your team should keep a living document to add to as more problematic terms arise, but this is a solid foundation to kickstart your awareness.

Gender-Neutral Language Cheat Sheet

Instead of using this	Use this
businessman/businesswoman	business person, business professional
chairman/chairwoman	chair, chairperson
"Don't get your panties in a bunch.	"You sound like you may be stressed or feeling overwhelmed; is there anything I can do to help?"
fireman/firewoman	firefighter
he/she, him/her, his/hers	they, them, their
"hey guys"/"how are you guys doing?"	Unless it's a group of just men, say "hey everyone" or "how are you all doing?"
mailman/mailwoman	mail carrier
"man up"/"are you man enough?"	"Are you up for the challenge?"
mankind	humankind, humanity
manning	staffing
manpower	team, workforce
Mr./Ms./Mrs./Miss	Don't use them. If you do, default to Mr. or Ms. if you are positive about someone's desired pronoun.
"nut up or shut up"	"We'll need all hands on deck for this, do you think you can support?"
policeman/policewoman	police officer
"Put on your big boy/girl pants."	"Let's work through this together."
"right man for the job"	"right person for the job"
salesman	salesperson
steward/stewardess	flight attendant
waiter/waitress	server

Specific areas where you should employ gender neutral-language include:

- **Job Ads or Descriptions:** For prospective employees, a job ad or description may be the first impression of your company culture. Avoid gendered pronouns in your language, as well as gendered-charged words or phrases. At a minimum, you can use this Gender Decoder for a quick sweep, but you want to ensure the phrasing is as inclusive as possible.
- **Company Mission/Values:** Your company mission and values are the foundation of your business, and you should review the language in them to ensure inclusivity.
- **Office Signage & Decor Elements:** Anything posted in your office carries a subliminal message of what is acceptable for workplace communication. Avoid gendered language in any signage, even if it's just a temporary communication or announcement.

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Oops! How to Recover from a Slip-Up

We all understand that no one is perfect, and people make mistakes. If you have known your colleague to be Greg (he/him/his) for the past five years, and one day the request that you refer to them as Jennifer (she/her/hers), that may be a difficult adjustment. Nonetheless, a concerted effort is required to call everyone by their preferred name and pronouns.

Dead-naming is considered extremely offensive to trans people, and should be treated as a derogatory action. If you accidentally call someone by their dead-name, take a minute to sincerely apologize and correct yourself. Adjustment periods are natural, but if these "slip-ups" persist and no visible effort is undergone on the part of the dead-namer, it may be time to bring the issue to HR. When someone tells you their name and pronouns, that is final, there is no room for adjustment, negotiation, or error.

When is it okay to ask a person for their preferred pronouns?
Encountering an individual who's pronouns you are uncertain of can be a difficult issue to navigate. When this happens, consider these steps:

- Wait and listen. Allow someone who is more familiar with the person to offer their pronouns: "She and I just went for coffee." or "They're one of the funniest people I know."
- Give them the chance to tell you. Many trans people are both very accustomed to and very comfortable with offering their pronouns without prompting.
- Use they/them/theirs pronouns. If you are unsure of a person's gender, it is always acceptable and a safe bet to use gender neutral pronouns. Many individuals use gender-neutral pronouns to refer to everyone.
- Ask yourself: Do I need to know? If it is not of crucial importance that you know someone's gender identity and preferred pronouns, accept that and continue using neutral language. If it is imperative that you know someone's gender, (maybe you would like to properly introduce them to a coworker for example) then politely ask "What are your preferred pronouns?" This will likely be appreciated and met with gratitude and understanding.

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That's a Wrap!

Cultivating a positive workplace culture requires a number of different perspectives, and the knowledge about how to navigate difficult issues such as trans sensitivity and LGBT equality. The workforce is changing, and LGBT numbers are growing, that means the rest of your workforce needs to adapt just as fast as your HR Department. Disseminate this guide amongst your team now; don't wait until you hire a trans individual or someone in your workforce comes out as trans. Taking preemptive action is what diversity and inclusion is all about. Be proactive when it comes to issues of human rights, not reactive.

Reach out to learn how Emtrain can further your DEI goals and help you build strong teams.