

A LEADER'S
GUIDE TO
SUPPORTING
TRANSGENDER
EMPLOYEES

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 the diversity movement

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For many transgender people, the deeply personal decision to transition is tied to freedom – the freedom to live their lives authentically, in expression of their true selves. Transitioning is not a single event, but an ongoing process that looks different for each person.

[According to the Human Rights Campaign website](#), transitioning is the complex process that some transgender people undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. Transgender people may choose some, all, or none of the following approaches:

- **Social transition**, such as changing one’s name and/or pronouns.
- **Medical transition**, which may include hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries.
- **Legal transition**, which may include changing one’s legal name and sex on government identity documents.

This guide provides information to help senior leaders, team leaders, and human resources administrators create policies that promote a workplace culture that supports trans employees and addresses issues around gender identity and expression.

One way to model inclusive behavior in the workplace is to be aware of, and use, inclusive language.

Say “**transgender**,”
not “transgendered.”

Say “**pronouns**,”
not “preferred pronouns.”

Say “**life**,” not “lifestyle.”

Understanding some of the most common things transgender people must navigate when transitioning can help guide your organization when adopting trans-inclusive policies. Common challenges include bathroom access, dress codes, and correct pronoun and name usage.

When your organization creates a culture where transgender employees feel safe and supported to explore and express their gender identity, you’re sending a potent message that you see them in their humanness – not just as a human resource.



GUIDELINES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

As a senior leader, modeling trans-inclusive behavior on a visible and consistent basis is crucial to creating a supportive environment for transgender employees. When authority figures set the stage in this way, support from the top ripples through the entire company, changing the perceptions and actions of its employees.

1. Transgender Representation

To effectively cultivate a trans-inclusive culture, it's important to have transgender representation throughout the organization. The presence of trans voices on a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) team helps guide inclusive policies and training by including the intimate knowledge of lived experiences. But having employees that identify along the trans-identity spectrum in an organization's leadership roles – beyond the DEI team – goes further. It sends not just a message of support, but one of empowerment. If you don't currently have any transgender employees who want to serve in this capacity within your company, you may consider asking a member of another organization to serve as an adviser to your leadership team or DEI committee.

2. Show Up With High Visibility

Creating impactful trans-inclusive policies shouldn't be the only way transgender employees are supported; it's a mindful, ongoing process. Senior leaders can and should be visible advocates in a variety of ways. They can immediately identify and correct microaggressions, share their own pronouns, or advocate for trans inclusion on their personal social media channels. Attending, and – when possible – presenting at, conferences about trans-specific issues also sends a highly visible message about the commitment at an organization's highest levels.



3. Champion Trans-Inclusive Restroom Usage and Dress Code Policies

Employee manuals and onboarding practices are a great place to establish trans-inclusive policies. Senior leaders should have the organization’s current manuals audited to ensure that the policies and expectations are trans-inclusive. A quick win is replacing any instances of “he or she” within your policies and manuals with “they.”

Ensuring access to employee facilities like restrooms and locker rooms is a key way to demonstrate a trans-inclusive culture. In those workplaces that already have single-use restrooms, making them gender neutral is an easy way to implement a nonbinary approach to bathroom access. If the workplace has restrooms that accommodate several people, the employee manual should state that all employees should have access to facilities that align with their gender identity.

Dress codes also directly impact transgender employees. If your company has a dress code, it should not be gendered. Guidelines should be written broadly so they apply to all gender identities and expressions.

4. Be Vocal About State Legislation

Legislation on transgender issues throughout the U.S. continues to evolve. Take steps to ensure the entire organization understands the current state legislation, and how it impacts transgender people. If the company does business nationally, how is each trans employee affected by the legislation in their home state? How is a trans employee traveling to another state impacted?

Be vocal and clear about the organization’s stance on trans issues. When company leaders speak up against anti-trans legislation, they’re not taking a political stand. They’re taking action to protect human rights and assure the wellbeing of their employees.

5. Implement Trans-Specific Diversity Training

DEI training can take many forms and addresses a variety of issues. While organizations may choose to group some trans-inclusive training within a broader DEI program, it is important to also include trans-specific diversity training. A [comprehensive program](#) that addresses trans issues will include:

- General training on gender-identity topics
- LGBTQ+ terminology
- Information to help cisgender employees become impactful, active allies

6. Be Proactive About a Trans-Inclusive Culture

Organizations that wait until a trans employee comes out before establishing a plan of advocacy and support puts the burden on the employee to carve out space for conversations about their transition. It can be scary to be the first to act, because they don't know what the companywide reaction will be.

Having an existing framework is crucial for educating employees throughout an organization on trans issues. Implementing and creating awareness about comprehensive strategies does more than aid those who are already transitioning. It proactively creates a culture that supports trans employees who may be weighing whether to be open about their transition in their work environment.

A positive and supportive reaction is great, but proactively advocating and supporting inclusion is better.



GUIDELINES FOR TEAM LEADERS

Successful team leaders understand and accept the responsibility of supporting transgender employees and show it by educating themselves about the needs of the people who report to them. They take initiative to work with their human resources team to ensure the process is helpful and seamless.

1. Prioritize an Employee's Needs

For many trans employees, transitioning at work can be a stressful and scary process. Help them protect their mental and emotional health by encouraging them to prioritize personal well-being. Work with them to establish a process and timeline, and be flexible if they need to adjust it.

Team leaders can further demonstrate their support by assuring the employee of their ability to take days off, planned or unplanned, for doctor's appointments or mental wellness days. When evaluating time off across the entire team, be aware of each employee's workload during this time. If unexpected issues for the trans employee lead to unplanned time off, the team leader should try to maintain sufficient bandwidth for other employees to step in where needed.

2. Set Expectations with the Team

Depending on the privacy wishes of the trans employee, the team leader may or may not be at liberty to talk about the person's transition. It is still, however, necessary to have a plan in place to ensure the employee's coworkers are using the correct name and pronouns of their coworker. The team leader should work closely with the employee and a human resources (HR) representative to determine how this is implemented.

3. Be Flexible with Onsite and Remote Protocols

Some aspects of a person's transition may not impede their ability to work, but an employee may feel the need for more privacy on certain days. As mentioned above, transitioning is a process. This means that someone transitioning may present more masculine or feminine depending on the day and their stage in their journey, or having a more fluid gender expression may be most authentic for them. Allowing an employee to work from home and letting them know it's okay to have their camera turned off during video calls can help alleviate some of the anxiety they may experience.

4. Cultivate Supportive Relationships Among the Team

Even the most well-intentioned colleague can feel nervous about their ability to show support for a coworker going through transition. Effective team leaders can help guide both the transgender employee and their coworkers through a successful experience.

Let the trans employee decide when and how announcements and discussions, if any, will take place with their coworkers. The transitioning individual may want to have one-on-one conversations with coworkers; they may want to make an announcement in a group forum with their supervisor's support; or they may ask HR to have the conversation for them. Whichever route they choose, make sure they know they have your full support.

With the trans employee's permission, emphasize to their coworkers the importance of showing sensitivity and acting in ways that affirm the gender identity of their colleague. You'll want to train the team on proper pronoun usage, what to do if they say the wrong thing, and how to stand up against microaggressions if they see others commit them.

Remember, inclusive actions by a leader serve as a blueprint for individual contributors to follow. If there is resistance on your team, one way to navigate that is to remind team members that inclusion of all employees helps the company achieve its mission, because people do their best work when there is mutual trust and respect.

5. The Question of Questions

When it comes to questions, it is entirely up to the transgender employee to decide what level of comfort they have in answering questions.

Some people may be open to respectful questions from coworkers and may see the conversations as an opportunity to build relationships and allyship. Others may prefer that questions be fielded by a team leader or HR administrator. Still others may not be comfortable with any level of discussion that is specific to their experience. Have a private conversation with the employee to determine a plan that best suits their needs and wishes. The bottom line: The person transitioning has the sole right to choose how much information to share, what type, when, how, and with whom.



GUIDELINES FOR HR ADMINISTRATORS

HR administrators are often the key player in communication between the transitioning employee, the employee's team, the employee's team leader, and senior leadership. With effective policies and frameworks in place, the HR administrator plays a crucial role in ensuring the trans employee experiences a supportive and seamless transition in their workplace.

1. Uncomfortable Conversations Require Trust

For many trans employees, the first conversation about transitioning that they choose to have within an organization is with their HR administrator. This first meeting will likely set the tone for the employee's further experience with the process. It should be in a neutral safe space where they can express their questions, concerns, and intentions.

Depending on the needs of the employee at this stage of their transition, the first conversation may address a number of topics. It is, however, of the utmost importance that the employee is asked how the organization can best support them. They may not have the answer yet, but it's imperative to establish an environment of support from the very first contact.

Give the employee space to voice their concerns, while responding in a positive, supportive manner. Remind them that this and any future conversations will remain confidential until, and if, they're ready to share information with others in the workplace.

2. Navigating Gender-Identity Health Care Benefits

Helping trans employees who seek medical transition, such as surgery or hormone therapy, navigate insurance to cover costs can greatly reduce the stress and anxiety of coming out at work. Making sure they have access to the health care benefits they need sends a highly affirming message about the company's commitment to trans-inclusive values.



3. Gather Information to Support a Seamless Process

Some details that the HR administrator should seek to discuss, if the timing seems appropriate, include:

- When and how announcements, if any, will be made
- How and when changes, if any, should be made to their official records

While the employee's records and work-related documents are legally required to remain in their legal name, HR administrators should keep a record of the employee's correct name and pronouns until, and if, they choose to change them legally. Email signatures, business cards, letterhead, badges, and other outward-facing messaging can and should be updated to reflect their correct name and pronouns.

4. Notifying Coworkers, Clients, and Business Partners

If the employee gives permission, HR administrators may want to work with the employee's team leader to send announcements about their new name and pronouns. The emails or letters can be provided as a resource to the team member or sent by the company, HR, or the team leader on the employee's behalf.

Below are some sample letters created by the [North Carolina State University, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Center](#) (NC State GLBT Center). These sample letters have been modified for general business use.

From:

SAMPLE LETTER TO COWORKERS

Dear friends and coworkers,

I am writing to inform you of some upcoming changes. I have come to realize and understand my transgender identity and desire to be recognized appropriately in the workplace. I ask that you honor my gender identity by using my new name, **[New Name]**, and **[she, her, hers; he, him, his; they, them, theirs; ze, hir, hirs]** pronouns when referring to me.

I understand this may be difficult to understand, and I welcome any questions. **[Remove the second part of this sentence if you wish for questions to be handled by supervision]** Additionally, other team leaders in **[Department, Unit, or Division]** have told me they are happy to answer questions, talk through any confusion or curiosity, and discuss how we can better support each other through this transition.

To allow for an adjustment period, I ask that you implement my new name and pronouns by **[date]**. This will give us two weeks to process this change and practice using my new name and pronouns. I will gently correct you when you make a mistake, and I hope you will do the same if I'm not there and a coworker uses my old name or pronouns.

On **[same date]**, IT will change all electronic records to reflect my name and gender identity. I ask that if you notice a place where my name has not been updated that you let me know.

Additionally, it is important for you to know I have the right to use the **[gender of restroom]** restroom, just as everyone at **[organization name]** can use the restroom in accordance with their gender identity.

Best regards,
[New Name]

From:

SAMPLE LETTER TO DEPARTMENTS OUTSIDE OF EMPLOYEE'S TEAM

Dear Employees of **[Organization name]**,

I am writing to inform you of some upcoming changes. Your colleague **[Old Name]** has informed me of **[old pronoun]** transgender identity and desire to be recognized appropriately in the workplace, beginning with a new name, **[New Name]**.

[New pronoun] wishes for us to honor **[new pronoun]** gender identity by using **[new pronoun]**, and **[feminine, masculine, gender neutral (example)]** pronouns when referring to **[new pronoun]**.

[New name] understands this may be difficult to understand, and **[new pronoun]** welcomes any questions. **[Remove the second part of this sentence if the employee wishes for questions to be handled by supervision]** Additionally, I'm happy to answer questions, talk through any confusion or curiosity, and discuss how you can better support **[new name]**.

To allow for an adjustment period, **[new name]** has asked that we implement **[new pronoun]** new name and pronouns by **[date]**. This will give us two weeks to process and practice using **[new pronoun]** new name and pronouns.

On **[same date]**, IT will change all electronic records to reflect **[new name's]** name and gender identity. We ask that if you notice a place where **[new name's]** name has not been updated that you report it to me or **[name of contact. Could be the transgender employee, IT contact, team leader, etc.]**.

Additionally, it is important for you to know **[new name]** has the right to use the **[gender of restroom]** restroom, just as everyone at **[organization name]** can use the restroom in accordance with their gender identity.

Best regards,
[Team leader]



From:

SAMPLE NOTE TO CLIENTS OR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Dear **[client or business partner]**,

Previously, **[old name]** served as **[position title]** in **[organization, team name]**. **[Old name]** has asked that **[old pronoun]** transgender identity be honored by using the new name, **[new name]**, and **[feminine, masculine, gender neutral (example)]** pronouns when referring to **[new pronoun]**.

[New name's] new name and pronouns will be used starting on **[date]**.

[New pronoun] will continue to serve as **[position title]** in **[organization, team name]**, and you can expect the same level of service as before. If you have any questions you may ask **[HR Administrator or team leader]**.

Thank you for your cooperation. **[New name]** looks forward to meeting your needs in the future.

Best regards,
[HR Administrator or team leader]

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

When diversity, equity, and inclusion are championed in the workplace, all employees can be happier, more productive and more innovative. And true inclusion can only happen when everyone feels safe to be their authentic self. Leaders are at the forefront of that journey toward a culture of inclusion, demonstrating company values and personal compassion. They also serve as powerful role models for individual behavior throughout the organization.

This guide offers practical advice for leaders, but inclusive actions should be supported by education and understanding. The ABCs of LGBTQ+, a course created by The Diversity Movement, will give you the knowledge you need to feel confident in respecting, supporting, and interacting with your transgender colleagues and associates. If you'd like to be a better ally for LGBTQ+ people at work and everywhere else, sign up today for [The ABCs of LGBTQ+](#).

MORE RESOURCES

Glossary

The following is a brief list of terms and definitions from [the Human Rights Campaign website](#). Use these terms to help facilitate education with your team, but keep in mind that when initiating conversations with a transgender employee, that person has a right to choose the way in which they are referred.

Success Tip

There are some terms that are used among members of the transgender community that you may hear along this journey. While some trans people may consider the terms negative and choose not to use them, it's important to be aware of their meaning. Here are two common terms you may hear:

Dead name – Refers to the name a trans person used before transitioning, usually their birth name. The act of “deadnaming” someone is to intentionally or unintentionally refer to a trans person by their previous name.

Passing – In the transgender community, “passing” is used to describe a trans person who appears to be cisgender by meeting the traditional standard of expression for their identified gender.

Cisgender / Cis – A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender Expression – External appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender Fluid – A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender Identity – One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Nonbinary – This term describes someone who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Instead, a nonbinary person may define their gender identity and experience outside of these binary terms.

Transgender / Trans – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. It’s important to note that a person’s gender expression does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

Helpful sources of information

LGBTQ+ inclusion education in the workplace is a critical and ongoing process. To continue exploring transgender issues and education, here are some additional resources you can review and share.

[Frequently Asked Questions About Transgender People](#)

[Human Rights Campaign Foundation](#)

[National Center for Transgender Equality](#)

[Out & Equal Workplace Advocates](#)

[Transgender at Work](#)

[World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#)



About The Diversity Movement

The Diversity Movement offers a suite of employee experience applications that personalizes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for your organization and delivers real-world business outcomes. Our team of experts provides a customized mix of online learning, tools, events, and consulting services that help our partners create future-focused, employee-centered cultures. Learn more at thediversitymovement.com.