



CHECK OUT THESE TIPS FOR:

# WORKING WITH TRANSGENDER COWORKERS

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Transgender people are employed in every industry and profession throughout the country and deserve a safe and inclusive workplace.

Although an increasing number of states have passed laws prohibiting employment discrimination based on gender identity, many transgender people still face pervasive harassment and unfair treatment in the workplace. Helping to ensure that your workplace is free of discrimination and harassment can be straight forward. The following tips can help you comply with the law while making your workspace safe and welcoming for all employees.

# 1. DEMONSTRATE RESPECT

***Transgender coworkers do not expect any special treatment.***

They simply want their identity to be respected. This often means they want to be addressed by the name and pronoun that reflects their gender identity. Most often transgender women want to be referred to with the pronouns she and her and transgender men want to be referred to with the pronouns he and him. If you are unsure of what pronoun to use, you can politely ask your coworker how they would like to be addressed. Also, just like all coworkers, transgender people do not want other employees talking about them behind their backs or making fun of them. Treat your coworkers the way you would want to be treated at work.

# 2. RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE

***Between your personal values and the community values of your workplace.***

Some people have political, cultural, and religious objections to someone being transgender. Being polite and respectful to a transgender coworker does not require abandoning these beliefs. Instead, being polite simply requires that these beliefs are not acted upon in the workplace. After all, transgender and non-transgender people alike want to be treated respectfully; the best way to do that is to separate out private values from workplace conduct.

### 3. RESPECT PRIVACY

***Be sure to respect your co-workers privacy and confidentiality.***

Many non-transgender people have a lot of questions about their transgender coworkers' gender transition. However, it is inappropriate to ask a coworker questions about their private medical history. Certainly, friends talk about things that coworkers don't, and some coworkers will feel comfortable enough with one another to discuss private issues. Regardless, it is important that you do not assume that your transgender coworker will want to discuss their private health care matters with you. Instead allow your coworker to initiate any conversation about their transition if they so choose.

### 4. HELP EACH OTHER

***Try to help co-workers who are having trouble with another employee's transition.***

Sometimes one of your non-transgender coworkers may have difficulty showing respect to their transgender coworker. The person may mistakenly use the transgender coworker's old name out of habit and may need to be gently reminded about the new name or pronoun. Other times, the person may have trouble separating their personal values from the community values of the workplace. In those instances, consider talking to them about how their behavior affects not only your transgender coworker, but you as well. This will help them understand that their actions have larger consequences than they may know.

## 5. CALL YOUR EAP

***Remember that your Employee Assistance Program is a resource that can help.***

Your personal reactions to changes are normal. A trained professional is available to help you process your thoughts and feelings to promote healthy relationships.



# KEY TERMS:

## **GENDER IDENTITY—**

A person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being male, female, something other, or in-between. Everyone has a gender identity.

## **GENDER EXPRESSION—**

An individual's characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

## **TRANSGENDER—**

An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity or gender expression is different from their birth assigned gender. Many transgender people identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). People who transition from female to male may be referred to as FTM or transgender men. People who transition from male to female may be referred to as MTF or transgender women.

## **GENDER NON-CONFORMING—**

Gender non-conforming people have, or are perceived to have, gender characteristics and behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations.

## **TRANSITION—**

The process of changing genders from one's birth-assigned gender to one's gender identity. There are many different ways to transition. For some people, it is a complex process that takes place over a long period of time, while for others it is a one- or two-step process that happens more quickly. Transition may include coming out (telling one's family, friends, and coworkers); changing one's name and sex on legal documents; accessing hormone therapy; and possibly accessing medically necessary surgical procedures.

*Resource: Transgender Law Center. Tips for working with transgender coworkers.*

*Retrieved and adapted, September 26, 2019, from <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/>*