

Transgender in the Workplace

By Stan Kimer

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INTRODUCTION

Transgender is an umbrella term for the spectrum of people whose gender identity or expression does not conform to society's expectations of male and female. In some cases, gender expression takes the form of clothing, hair style, voice and body characteristics. In other cases, we are talking about gender identity, which is the way a person feels internally about who they really are.

This means there are people who may have been born as physical males, but deep down inside they feel they are female. And there are people who may have been born as physical females, but deep down inside believe they are truly male. This is an oversimplification since there are wide ranges of possibilities. The most current highly visible transgender person is Chas Bono, formerly Chastity Bono, now the son of Sonny and Cher.

So what does this mean for the workplace? With more visibility given to transgender people, more people desire to go through the gender transition process while remaining in their jobs. Instead of moving to a far away city and starting life all over again, many transgender people now want to continue in the community and company where they have their network of friends and have built professional expertise. And it makes sense that a company would want to support such employees and retain this important talent. What is the business rationale for a company promoting full integration and support of transgender and transitioning employees in the workplace, and exactly how can that be done?

BUSINESS RATIONALE

One of the most important resources a company has is its human capital, that is, its employees. Over time employees build a strong knowledge of the industry base, the customer set, and the enterprise's particular processes and systems. Unengaged unproductive employees who are working far below their capacity are a business liability to companies. Likewise, when a valued employee leaves unexpectedly or prematurely, the recruiting and training cost to replace that employee is often the cost one to one and half year's salary cost.

If a valuable employee is transgender and wants to transition from male to female, or female to male, why would not a company want to support that employee in the process? As an employee transitions from male to female, or female to male, they still retain the those skills and company knowledge that

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make them a valuable employee. In fact, by assisting a transgender employee, a company would more than likely get a highly loyal employee who will be excited to give 110% for the company. In addition, the LGBT community within the company, as well as all others who value workplace diversity would feel great about their employer and become more engaged in their work. And the company could gain a new set of loyal customers who hear about the company's enlightened policies.

SO HOW IS THIS DONE – HINTS AND TIPS

So what actually can a company do to support transgender employees, and especially those who may want to start a gender transition? Here's a short summarized list:

Include "gender identity and expression" in the company's non-discrimination policy

Assure that basic information on transgender is included in the company's management and employee diversity training

Examine adding medical benefits coverage for employees who seek to transition genders

Examine restroom configuration. Are there some gender-neutral restrooms and/or convenient and accessible "single stall" restrooms at the facility?

When an employee approaches the Human Resources department to share their initial plans for transition, an HR case manager who will work with the employee to develop a workplace transition plan should be assigned. The HR professional and the employee should jointly develop the plan; it should not be some rigid roadmap that is dictated to the employee. The resources of an experienced consultant in transgender workplace processes could also be obtained.

Assure that the employee decides with the HR team how and when to announce this news to their management and coworkers. People have different styles – some may want a department meeting, others may want to do it my e-mail, and some one-on-one.

RESOURCES

There are comprehensive materials from many organizations to assist companies in this venture such as [Out and Equal Workplace Advocates](#) and [the Human Right](#)

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[Campaign](#). These two are large LGBT organizations that have a good amount of material about transgenderism and gender identity / expression.

The next three organizations for resourcing are specific transgender-focused organizations:

The National Center for Transgender Equality: <http://transequality.org/>

The Transgender Law Center: <http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/>

The Transgender Law and Policy Institute: <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/>

More for a personal sharing and experiential view, I recommend the new book:

“Left Hand in London, A Field Guide to Transgenders, Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals In the Family, On the Job and In the Pew.” By JJ Marie

Gufreda. <http://www.lefthanderinlondon.com/> Often looking at a personal story or meeting a transgender person in person provides a great personal learning experience.

Finally, there are a host of experienced industry consultants (like myself) who are experienced with helping your company or organization develop and execute a holistic transgender policy.

The valuing of transgender employees in the workplace makes total sense – for the company, for the individual and for our national economy. We should want every citizen to be as productive and satisfied in their vocations and within their organizations.