

Adweek Pride Stars on the Changing Face of LGBTQ Inclusion

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This week, Adweek introduced its first-ever award honoring LGBTQ leaders in marketing, brands, media and culture: Adweek Pride Stars.

The 15 people chosen for the inaugural Pride Stars honors have different roles in the industry, but each has worked to push forward LGBTQ inclusion, visibility and equality both by being out in the workplace and by consistently making progress in how LGBTQ people are represented in advertising.

On the Friday just before Pride weekend, several of the Pride Stars honorees joined special guests to discuss the changing nature of corporate America, and how the combination of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement have radically changed this year's experience of Pride.

The Adweek Pride Stars speaking at Friday's event included:

- Rigel Cable, director of analytics and SEO at Astound Commerce
- Kendra Freeman, co-founder at Mendi
- Benjamin Lord, CMO at Mira Beauty
- Shelly McNamara, chief diversity and inclusion officer at P&G
- Michaela Ivri Mendelsohn, CEO at Pollo West Corp and founder at Trans Can Work
- Rachael Rapinoe, co-founder at Mendi
- Allyn Shaw, president and CEO at Recycle Track Systems
- Robyn Streisand-Luppino, founder and CEO at The Mixx and

Titanium Worldwide

- Randall M. Tucker, chief inclusion officer at Mastercard
- Special guest: Ryan Sides, senior director and interim vp of social media at BET Networks

Moderated by GLAAD president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis, the panel kicked off with an introduction by Adweek's editor and svp of programming Lisa Granatstein. BET senior director and interim vp of social media Ryan Sides, who helped create February's #BETQueerAF alongside Pride Stars honoree Empress Varnado, also joined the discussion. Here's what they had to say.

On basic human rights

Allyn Shaw: A friend said, 'Hey, congratulations on the Supreme Court ruling,' and I said, it shouldn't have to require the Supreme Court of the United States to reaffirm that we should never even contemplate terminating someone because of their sexual orientation. Being treated equally is not a favor to our community.

Allyn Shaw

Recycle Track Systems

Ryan Sides: We've arrived at a place with these victories, because they're so hard-fought, where people are just excited for any type of progress. But some of these fights shouldn't

have had to be fought in the first place. I'm very tired of the volume of things we are dealing with at the moment, both on the Black front and the gay front. These are battles that preceded me.

Ryan Sides

Michaela Ivri Mendelsohn: The biggest challenge is properly identifying the problem. The problem [with transgender equality] is not just policy and practice—certainly changing laws are going to help—but so much of it is social and cultural. We've all been forged like a piece of steel in a mill, and we can use that energy now to make change.

Michaela Mendelsohn

El Pollo Loco

Randall M. Tucker: Within the LGBTQ community, right now it's about transgender rights and equality especially around Black and brown trans women. It's a life or death situation—that's where the house is burning.

Benjamin Lord: I'm a gay immigrant man, and I'm going to welcome my first child with my husband in September. It's a little scary to bring a child into this world ... I have mixed feelings about the current situation.

Benjamin Lord

Mira Beauty

Sides: It's also about giving people the tools they need to educate themselves. If you wait for people to come out of the complacency they've been in, they're never going to do that.

On hiring and inclusive workplaces

Shelly McNamara: Who shows up and who's in the room matters a lot. Who leads, and how do they lead? We need more people of color, more multicultural people, more LGBTQ people. Corporate America has to be urgent and take action.

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