How Agencies Can Foster More Trans-Inclusive Workplaces and Elevate the Conversation

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Being a transwoman can be a daunting challenge. Many of us struggle to find consistent employment at all, let alone one with a living wage.

While we want to believe discrimination is no longer an issue in the workplace, according to the Human Rights Commission nearly 50% of people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual remain closeted at work. While 90% of Americans now personally know someone who is nonheterosexual, there's still enough fear of discrimination that hiding is often preferable to living out and proud in the workplace.

Transgender people often don't have the luxury of hiding in plain sight. Once we come out and transition, we're often easily identifiable by our shapes, sizes or even simply the sounds we make when we cough. When you consider that, according to research compiled by the Public Religion Research Institute, only 24% of Americans claim to personally know someone who is transgender, you begin to recognize a sad truth. Today's culture hasn't been exposed to us enough to consider transgender people as a normal part of society. It's why we're thrown out of the military and why states like South Dakota have worked to criminalize the support and affirmation of trans youth.

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This is why visibility is important, and the marketing industry has the ability to play a major role in that visibility. We can cast trans talent in ads and, more specifically, we can hire transgender employees. Normalizing the trans community makes it more likely that the general public will be supportive and protect trans people from discrimination. This will normalize pronoun usage, the importance of properly gendering a person and our ability to safely use a restroom both in and out of the office.

Truly, though, it’s unfortunate that in 2020 we are still talking about pronouns and restrooms. These should be basic table stakes for operating any business. While less than 1% of Americans identify as transgender, things are shifting. Researchers at the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research are reporting that 27% of California teens no longer identify with their birth gender. The general population is evolving, and the workplace will have to evolve along with it.

It’s time for us to advance the conversation to the next level. It’s time for us to begin talking about inclusive healthcare policies, hiring practices and transition policies that protect and empower employees to help them know they’re protected and that it’s safe to be themselves. Unfortunately, according to MedCity News, only 647 of the more than 100,000 companies with over 100 employees offer inclusive benefits. My company, for instance, has empowered our business resource group to write guidelines for transitioning employees. Every company should be a safe space, and you’ll want to ask yourself: Is yours?

Hiring trans employees is important for a number of reasons, but what often isn’t considered are the trans employees living in the closet that you may already have in your company. I was 33 when I began my transition and already well into my career in the industry. Even though the company worked to show support, many continued to use my wrong name and misgender me.

Often it felt as if they were looking through who I was to see who I used to be. It ultimately meant having to change jobs.

As we can all hopefully recognize, losing talent isn't just hard but it's expensive. The Society for Human Resource Management has reported that it costs, on average, $4,129 to hire a new employee and takes more than 40 days to fill a position. Then you have to consider the lost time spent during onboarding.

At this point you may be asking how to get started. There are a lot of great places. Most importantly, you should consider bringing any trans employees you may already have on staff into the conversation. Their POV will provide perspective to those who have never had to live the trans experience. Another great option is to hire a consultant who is in the community. Many great ones exist and can provide assistance to help you pull together everything you need for an inclusive workspace.

These are all key items that need to be addressed in the ever-evolving workplace. It won't just make a transgender employee feel comfortable within your company, but it'll help create a culture of acceptance for all employees regardless of their minority status. It's what it'll take to help your business go from good to great. It may seem like a daunting challenge, but if transgender employees can face our challenges, then I'm confident that your company can face its own challenges, too.

https://www.adweek.com/agencies/how-agencies-can-foster-more-trans-inclusive-workplaces-and-elevate-the-conversation/