

Working with a transgendered colleague

Individuals whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth are employed in every industry and profession across the globe. Like all employees, those in the transgender community deserve a safe and inclusive workplace. The following tips can help you contribute to a welcoming environment for everyone at your organization.

Place Respect Above All

It is key to recognize the difference between your personal values and the community values of your workplace. Being polite and respectful to a transgender co-worker does not require changing political, cultural, and religious beliefs. It simply necessitates that those 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 treat every colleague in the same manner.

Offer Confidentiality and Privacy

It is inappropriate to ask questions about any co-worker's private medical history. Certainly, some of your teammates may feel comfortable enough with one another to discuss private issues. Regardless, it is important not to assume or expect that your transgender co-worker will want to share about their health care matters.

Be Intentional About Language

Navigating appropriately gendered language, such as pronouns, may take practice. If needed, you can ask, "which pronouns do you prefer." If in a group setting, be sure to ask that question of all participants to avoid your transgender colleague feeling singled out.

If you misgender a co-worker in conversation, correct yourself quickly and move on. And though it may feel awkward, gently correcting someone else's language is a welcome form of inclusion for your transgender colleague. A simple "{Name}uses they/them pronouns," is all that is necessary.

When it's clear that a team member is struggling with or being overtly disrespectful about language, it can be helpful to approach them privately. Explain that creating an uncomfortable environment affects not only your transgender colleague, but you personally and perhaps the entire team as well.

Educate yourself

It's natural to be curious about experiences that are different from your own. Rather than placing the burden of education on your transgender colleague, a wide variety of books, videos, podcasts and other resources created by trans educators are available. Do your own research rather than asking intrusive questions.