

Pride 2021: Why being an ally is more important than ever.

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Acceptance does not equal allyship. There's a colossal difference between showing passive acceptance of the LGBT+ community and being an active advocate for genuine inclusion. Often, passivity is a result of fear – fear of using incorrect terms, saying the wrong thing and causing more harm than good. But, if we avoid difficult conversations – ones which open our eyes to new perspectives, and have the power to open doors for others – we cannot truly drive change.

If we are to create working environments which not only respect individuality, but actively encourage the expression of it, we must be supportive allies. So, how can we, as employees, employers and governing bodies, be better allies to the LGBT+ community?

Understanding adversity

It's vital that we remember 'LGBT+' is an umbrella term for a myriad of sexualities and gender identities, and no two individuals will share the same lived experiences. An integral part of an ally's role is to elevate the voices of those who are part of the LGBT+ community, ensuring there are platforms for each person to voice their thoughts,

opinions and experiences, while listening to the unique challenges faced by each one.

By listening and learning, allies can make better-informed decisions, make adjustments where necessary and implement inclusive policies which are genuinely beneficial for everyone involved. It's important to check in regularly, as well as dedicate time to do your own research too and it's crucial to remember that self-education is key as the burden to educate shouldn't lie with your LGBT+ employees.

Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and networking groups are an excellent way to facilitate open, honest conversations about allyship in the workplace. These create formal channels of communication between employees and senior leadership teams, which allows decision makers to be held accountable in creating LGBT+ inclusive policies and ensuring wider business strategies and agendas are fit for the many identities of this community. Programs such as INvolve's Effective Networks series brings together network leads and committee members from employee resource groups to address the common challenges networks and resource groups face, and is useful to support employees' resource groups across businesses.

Mentoring

Mentoring LGBT+ employees is a great way for an active ally to leverage their influence, extend their professional networks and support LGBT+ talent in their career development. Equally, reverse

mentoring can be instrumental in creating an inclusive workplace, as junior team members bring fresh perspectives to the table, and provide unique insights often helping employers to understand cultural shifts, changing attitudes and the barriers faced by their younger LGBT+ colleagues. INvolve's Global Mentoring Programme is a fantastic scheme to get involved with, and specifically supports high potential diverse talent in their career development.

Diversifying leadership

Audeliss work with global clients to diversify senior leadership teams and level the playing field for diverse talent. Businesses should reflect the societies that they serve and it's vital that decision makers are not only serving as visible role models for their employees, but are in positions of power that allow them to drive change.

It's vital that change is driven from the top down and having a senior leadership team that reflects this and embodies a diverse range of perspectives and insights, is key not just for long-term business success, but entrenching inclusion across all levels of the business. After all, people can't be what they can't see.

Elevating marginalised voices

Where minority groups intersect, experiences can vastly differ. Recent research released by McKinsey reveals that stress levels, feelings of isolation and the pressure to perform increase when a person experiences 'onlyness' – being the only one on a team or in a meeting with their given gender identity, sexual orientation, or race.

LGBT+ women, for example, who are workplace minorities in both gender and sexual orientation, are twice as likely as women overall to report being an 'only,' and they're seven times more likely to say so than straight white men.

According to YouGov, 35 per cent of LGBT+ employees feared discrimination to the extent they would not consider coming out to colleagues – whereas for LGBT+ Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees, the figure leapt up to 42 per cent. Allies must recognise such variances, understanding how to not only amplify the voice of the LGBT+ community as a whole, but, when necessary, shift the focus to specific groups which are being impacted disproportionately.

It is vital for allies to move beyond passivity and be active in their advocacy. In the workplace, allies must speak out against discrimination, support others in sharing their stories, and educate themselves about the invisible barriers faced by their peers. They must leverage their influence to shape policies and thereby create businesses that ensure LGBT+ people can succeed and reach the top. Authenticity in the workplace is crucial to employee performance, happiness and overall creates a healthier work environment therefore it is vital for active advocates to steer their businesses towards a more inclusive and fair future for all.