

Your guide to be a straight ally at work

The struggle for equal rights for individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) is real. Adopt these measures to make your office a more sensitive workspace



Upset with the Supreme Court judgment on Section 377 in 2013, Anushka Sharma tweeted, "So disappointed with the SC verdict. Freedom is such a deceptive term. Rights are an ambiguous mystery... scrap377"

lifehacker.co.in

Your behaviour towards your co-workers from the LGBT community can make them feel excluded, isolated or unwelcome. A study conducted by the Human Rights Campaign in 2014 found that 53 per cent of LGBT individuals remain closeted at work. Even as businesses attempt to provide an inclusive environment, individuals still face the inter-personal risk of bringing their true self to the fore as they fear that it may risk their relationship with their manager, team members or clients. According to HRC's report, less than half of straight employees surveyed felt comfortable hearing an LGBT co-worker discussing their dating life.

It is everyone's responsibility to create a safe and comfortable working environment for the LGBT community. Here's how you can do your bit as a straight ally at work:

Educate yourself on LGBT issues

Know the basic laws in your country for the welfare of the community and know the issues bothering them. Being aware of these issues can help you understand what your co-workers or their friends and family might be going through. Pay special attention to legislation in the works in your state and how it might affect the people you know.

Individuals may also be facing bias or discrimination within your organisation. Read up on your company's benefit packages. Does it offer equal benefits for same-sex spouses or provide health coverage for those going through a gender transition?

Use gender neutral greetings

While it's always a courteous expression to greet your fellow workers, one should be cautious of gender-specific greetings. Get comfortable calling someone by their name or not using a greeting at all. If greetings are really your thing, consider using a term like "friend" instead. The more you use gender-neutral terms, the easier it is to not slip up when you're unsure how someone identifies. When referring to a group of people, using terms like 'folks' or 'team' as opposed to 'guys' can help everyone feel welcome and empowered.

Offer pronoun preferences

Do you prefer to be called "she/he" "he/him" "they/them" or some alternative? If you've never questioned your gender, this might seem strange to even question, but for the gay community, it's an important and sensitive topic. Offer your pronouns when you introduce yourself at meetings and include them on social media profiles.



Radhika Pirmal, Vice-Chairperson, VIP Industries, agrees that certain policies at the workplace can help give LGBT colleagues the crucial support that they need



Parmesh Shahani, the head of Godrej India Culture Labs, says, "Knowing one is cherished as much as other employees, without bias based on one's personal choices, can be liberating"

Speak up for a cause

When you hear unacceptable jokes or conversations, call people out on it directly or talk to HR. The only way to create a safe environment for your LGBT co-workers is when this kind of behaviour won't be tolerated. Even innocent conversations about family or partners can be tricky for people who have faced discrimination because of their orientation or gender.

Transgender individuals are often asked inappropriate questions about their gender or transition process. If you sense a conversation is making someone uncomfortable, help them out by changing the subject.

Encourage their representation

For LGBT rights to be prioritised within a company, members of that community need to have a say. Nominate or invite LGBT individuals to participate on teams that directly impact the workplace. The next step is to ensure that everyone feels comfortable speaking up.



Wendell Rodricks recently said in an interview, "Let us focus on Section 377 being amended so that future generations of LGBTQ children have the freedom to live a wholesome, non-judgmental life"

"I'm proud to be gay", Apple CEO Tim Cook said in an open letter in 2014, supporting equality