**SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE WORKPLACE**

**IMPACT**

Not being able to bring their whole selves to work can isolate lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees and chip away at their ability to forge valuable relationships with co-workers.

Relevant research suggests this phrase can demean LGB employees, make them feel unsafe and unwelcome, and may lead them to become less engaged at work.

**WHAT TO DO INSTEAD**

Interrupt derogatory language, offensive comments, and “jokes” to let people know that this kind of language is not okay.

**IMPACT**

Depending on the situation, outing colleagues can have serious repercussions on their emotional and/or physical well-being, employment, economic stability, personal safety, and/or religious or family situations.

Research indicates coming out is a deeply personal individual choice and process that rarely happens just once. Approximately three-quarters of all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers hide who they are in the workplace to some extent, with nearly half choosing to be open with some colleagues but not others.

**WHAT TO DO INSTEAD**

Ask colleagues how you can best be an ally for them while respecting their privacy.

**IMPACT**

Over 40% of LGBT employees have experienced some form of discrimination on the job or take actions such as hiding who they are to avoid it.

**WHAT TO DO INSTEAD**

Use inclusive language such as “partner” or “spouse” rather than “husband” or “wife.”

Words reflect workplace culture. Even when we have the best intentions, our words can reinforce negative stereotypes around sexual orientation. We must recognize that our words matter and take action by using words that create inclusive environments where people feel both that they are valued and that they belong.
Stereotyping can exacerbate bias and discrimination and may heighten experiences of “otherness” for LGB employees.

Stereotyping may limit employees’ ability to innovate and perform to their full potential. Stereotypes related to sexual orientation that conflict with prevailing leadership norms may cause LGB employees to be overlooked for opportunities, resulting in downsized aspirations and loss of talent.

“HE’S GAY, SO OBVIOUSLY HE’S NOT RIGHT FOR THIS.”

Over 60% of employees of all backgrounds, including LGB individuals, report actively hiding an aspect of themselves at work. Covering can lead employees to feel unable to fulfill their potential and can damage their sense of self and commitment to the organization.

“CAN YOU TONE DOWN THE GAY?”

Implicitly asking employees to cover or downplay aspects of their personality or presentation to conform to heteronormative standards (i.e., “gender performance”) prevents them from bringing their authentic selves to work.

“CAN YOU TONE DOWN THE GAY?”

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
Focus on objective standards of performance, not assumptions or subjective preferences such as “style” or “fit.”

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Get to know colleagues who are different from you, and engage in courageous conversations to broaden your perspectives.

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FLIP THE SCRIPT

EDUCATE YOURSELF
Learn the terminology and ask LGB colleagues about their experiences.

PAY ATTENTION
Be cognizant of your word choices, assumptions, and level of personal sharing.

DEMONSTRATE ALLYSHIP
Affirm the experiences shared by LGB individuals, and challenge assumptions and behaviors that can lead to prejudice and exclusion.
SOURCES

4. Catalyst, I Am an Ally (June 1, 2015).
8. Catalyst, Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace (2016).