

# Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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## Transgender Elevator Speech

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You're on an elevator, and someone asks you, "Can you clue me in on what 'transgender' means?"

You can respond, "Transgender literally means 'across gender.' Male or female is our sex. Man or woman is our gender. We don't choose either. Transgender covers all the people whose sex and gender don't fit together as we might expect. That includes transsexuals, who are people born in the wrong body, cross-dressers, who wear the clothing of the other gender, and anyone else whose expression of their gender may seem to blur the lines."

That paragraph, which has been seen and approved by some of the most respected transsexual and cross-dressing people in the country, summarizes in the fewest possible words, what the "T" in LGBT means. It works perfectly, except for some.

In the past week, several transsexual women have written me, strongly objecting to transsexuals and cross-dressers being coupled together under the "T." They resent heterosexual men in dresses coming into their restrooms, and they think that any discussion of it is silly and a waste of time. They want to unlink "transsexual" from "cross-dresser" in political discussions because they feel that cross-dressers are holding transsexuals back from attaining their full civil rights. They would just as soon get rid of the term "transgender" because they insist it confuses the issues.

I do understand their feelings. They are not unfamiliar to me, nor to our civil rights movement.

There are women, heterosexual and homosexual, who don't consider transsexual women to be *real* women, and they don't want them in their restrooms, their music festivals, or their golf and tennis tournaments.

There are lesbians who boycotted Olivia Records, a woman-oriented recording company, until the transsexual woman recording engineer was fired.

There are heterosexual cross-dressing men who do not want transsexual or gay people in their gatherings.

There are intersex people who don't want to be thought of as transgender. There are others who do.

There are intersex people who get angry at other intersex people who opt for gender confirmation surgery.

There are gender queer people who think that transitioning from one gender to another through hormones and surgery is surrendering to society's pressure to conform.

There are gay people who loathe the word “queer.”

There are gay men and lesbians who think there is no such thing as a bisexual.

There are lesbians who don’t want to socialize with gay men.

There are gay men who don’t want to socialize with lesbians.

There are gay men and lesbians who want Congressman Barney Frank and other sponsors to drop the “T” from the proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) because they know the legislation would easily pass Congress, and be signed into law, if conservative representatives didn’t have to get their arms around cross-dressers in their bathroom.

There are those of us who hate the acronym LGBT.

So, what’s a person to do with all of those different perspectives within the umbrella of LGBT? It’s especially difficult when you’re the kind of person who wants every other person to feel that he or she has been heard, and that their feelings have been understood. But then what?

I’m one of those people who keep the elevator door open so that every person standing outside gets in, if possible. I say, “There’s always room. The more the merrier.” That attitude serves our community well. We are all in this together. The people who fear us do so because they don’t think we’re normal -- none of us. It doesn’t help when we start saying, “I’m more normal than he, or she is.”