

Ally Engagement: Conversations at Work

SITUATION	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
<p>“Bisexual? He is just confused!”</p> <p>or</p> <p>“Bisexuals are sexually greedy.”</p>	<p>The idea that bisexuals are just going through a phase, sexually greedy, or not queer are all examples of bisexual myths.</p>	<p>Suggesting that bisexuals are greedy or confused is false and very offensive. Being bisexual is a valid sexual orientation.</p>	<p>Bisexual people are not automatically more promiscuous than any other person, gay or straight. Being attracted to more than one gender does provide more potential partners, but it doesn't increase one's likelihood of physically or emotionally connecting with a potential partner.</p>
	<p>Some people like coffee. Some people like tea. Some people like both coffee and tea.</p>	<p>Just as you don't cheat on your partner constantly because you're attracted to women/men, bisexual people don't necessarily cheat on their partners because of their attractions.</p>	
<p>“He dresses so well, I bet he's gay.”</p>	<p>That remark sounds like a stereotype.</p>	<p>Only gay people have taste? I'm offended.</p> <p><i>(said in a humorous tone)</i></p>	<p>Are you implying that everyone you see dressed nicely is gay? Remember you are judging a lot of people just because of your perception.</p>
<p>“I can't tell if that is a man or a woman!”</p> <p>or</p> <p>“Why does he/she dress so strangely? Are they transgender?”</p>	<p>It's okay to ask them which pronouns they use.</p>	<p>So what, does it make a difference to you? Are you planning to treat them differently based on the answer to that question?</p>	<p>Gender is very complex. Like sexual orientation, gender is a spectrum and not a binary. A lot of folks identify as a gender that falls into the binary of man or woman, but that's not the case for everyone. The way a person looks does not equal their gender, and it's best not to make assumptions based on someone's appearance.</p>
<p>“Why do those people get special treatment?”</p>	<p>Equal rights for others doesn't mean fewer rights for you. It's not pie.</p>	<p>How are they being treated special?</p> <p><i>(opens up discussion)</i></p>	<p>Based on your comments about “those people,” you may not understand the important issues involved. I'd be glad to discuss it with you.</p>



The IC LGBTQIA Affinity Group, colloquially called IC Pride, was formed in 2011. IC Pride fosters and facilitates a more diverse and inclusive workplace within the Intelligence Community by supporting leadership, accountability, educational opportunities, and talent management. IC Pride serves to strengthen the IC by building a more cohesive and diverse community.

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Being a vocal ally is vital in promoting an inclusive environment. How do you educate your colleagues on LGBT workplace issues? Are you able to call out non-inclusive behavior?

WAYS TO OPEN UP A DIALOGUE

Use appropriate humor	<i>Not to be a buzzkill, but...</i>	Gives you an opening to start the conversation without giving people a sense that you're about to climb on your soapbox.
Use facts	<i>A lot of people don't know that...</i>	Helps you focus on the unfunny aspects of the remark.
Make your comments relatable	<i>Growing up, it was really hurtful to me when people said...</i> <i>Wow, I really hope that people at school/work don't say things like that about your kids someday.</i>	Helps people understand the impact of a comment without insulting or minimizing their background; helps refocus the conversation.
Explain why you're having the conversation	<i>I consider myself to be an ally who wants everyone to feel included.</i>	Reveals that you are an ally and why!
Acknowledge the speaker's feelings	<i>I'm sorry you feel that way, but...</i>	Conveys to the speaker that you've heard them.

There is no single best way to respond to a given situation. New allies often find it difficult to speak up or guide the conversation in a positive direction, but it isn't about yelling from your soapbox. This handout is not intended to give you the perfect response but to help you handle work and social situations with humor and gentle corrections—from *beginner* ("I'm a new ally"), to *intermediate* ("I'm comfortable having these conversations"), to *advanced* ("I know my stuff!").

SITUATION	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Hear a joke or comment that you find offensive? Speak up!	Ouch! or Really? Seriously?	Would you like to rephrase that?	Please think about what you are saying. Your words (or actions) are seen as being disrespectful to others whether or not you intend them that way.

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Hear a joke or comment that you find offensive? Speak up!	Hey, that sounds a little harsh to me.	If you can't say something nice about people, please don't say anything at all.	What you said is not funny—how would you feel if that joke belittled your orientation, race, age, or sex?
	That wasn't a very nice thing to say.	That kind of behavior, comment, or joke is not tolerated in the workplace.	I'm not sure you are aware of this, but what you said is not only offensive to me, it is against agency policy. If you need more information about what behavior is not allowed, I can show you the policy letters or website for reference.
"That's so gay" <i>(meant as a general negative label)</i>	It's 2017. We don't say that anymore, Kevin! <i>(said in a cheerful tone)</i>	You might not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word "gay" to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful.	That phrase is offensive to the LGBT community. In fact, "that's so gay" is one of the most prevalent homophobic slurs these days.
"That transgender employee is using the women's locker room." <i>or</i> "I feel uncomfortable with that transgender employee using my restroom."	Transgender women (pause) are women. Period. <i>(interchangeable when referring to trans men)</i>	I think it takes an incredible amount of courage to transition in the workplace and live authentically. For goodness sake, let them use the restroom!	Transgender people are many times more likely to be assaulted while simply living their day-to-day lives than cisgender people. There are no statistics on cisgender people being assaulted by transgender individuals in restroom and locker room facilities because no documented cases have occurred.
	That person has the right to use those facilities.	The policy is that all employees may use the restroom or locker facility that is consistent with their gender identity.	Our agency follows the OPM and EEO guidelines that state transgender employees are entitled to restroom and locker room access consistent with their gender identity.
	Why do you feel that way?	Denying an employee equal access to a common restroom corresponding to the employee's gender identity is sex discrimination.	Gender-based stereotypes, perceptions, or comfort levels must not interfere with the ability of any employee to work free from discrimination, including harassment.

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<p>“My religious teachings say that homosexuality is wrong.”</p> <p><i>(a discussion surrounding religion may come up, but when you respond, do so in a manner that isn’t hostile and is respectful toward the other person)</i></p>	<p>Many religions accept the LGBT community for who they are. We are all entitled to our beliefs, but at work we need to treat everyone with respect.</p>	<p>That’s what’s so great about this country. We all have different religious beliefs, but we all come together to treat everyone with respect</p>	<p>You’re entitled to your opinion, just keep in mind that the workforce is very diverse—some may agree with you, others will not. What’s important is that we always bear in mind and apply agency core values of respect and teamwork to our conversations and actions at the workplace.</p>
	<p>Nobody is asking you to change your beliefs, just to treat all people with respect.</p>	<p>No one is telling anyone what to believe or think, but we all work for an agency that can better accomplish the mission if it recruits and retains a diverse workforce.</p>	
<p>“They call themselves Queer— isn’t that offensive?”</p>	<p>The term Queer has been reclaimed by some parts of the LGBT community.</p>	<p>Queer is being used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves or their community in an inclusive way.</p>	<p>Although the term Queer has traditionally been a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, today’s younger generations use the term in a positive way to describe their more fluid identities.</p>
	<p>I think it’s up to the people in that community to decide what they feel is offensive. People outside the community should still use caution with that word.</p>	<p>Consider the context in which the word is being used. In this case, the individual is self-identifying as Queer. That is different from someone who uses the term Queer in a disparaging manner.</p>	
<p>“Bisexual? He is just confused!”</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>“Bisexuals are sexually greedy.”</p>	<p>Sexual orientation is a spectrum. Binaries in gender and sexuality are false.</p>	<p>Many people simply can’t fathom a sexuality in which individuals are attracted to more than one gender.</p>	<p>Respected bisexual activist Robyn Ochs describes bisexuality as the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.</p>

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